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A table of contents for the *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* can be found here:

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# Proceedings

OF THE

## Wesley Historical Society

*Editor:* E. ALAN ROSE, B.A.

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### EARLY METHODISM AND THE FRENCH PROPHETS: SOME NEW EVIDENCE

#### Introduction

In his journal entry for January 28, 1739 John Wesley relates how he went with four of five colleagues to the house of a woman commonly called a 'French prophet'.<sup>1</sup> The identity of this woman is not clear, though it is probable, as Curnock suggests, that it was one Mary Plewit to whom John refers in a later entry.<sup>2</sup> Wesley records how the woman spoke 'as in the person of God, and mostly in Scripture words' regarding 'the fulfilling of the prophecies' and the imminent coming of Christ. Her testimony was characterised by sighings and physical contortions, so much so, in fact, that the woman could scarcely put a half-sentence together.

John's dealings with this particular French prophetess was not the only experience he had with the group. On June 6, 1739 he visited Mrs Cooper, another French Prophetess.<sup>3</sup> This woman he found to be a good deal less extreme than 'Mary Plewit', though the difference between the two women seems to have been one of degree rather than kind. Again, it seems, the matter of the imminence of the coming of Christ formed a focal part of the discussion. John found Cooper's words 'good', but was not moved by her speech. Consequently, as in the earlier case, John suspended

<sup>1</sup> *Standard Journal*, 2: pp136-137 hereafter cited as *JJW*.

<sup>2</sup> *JJW* 2: pp 214.

<sup>3</sup> *JJW* 2: pp 213-214.

judgement, presumably on the basis that 'if it be not of God, it will come to nought'.<sup>4</sup> At some point over the course of the next few weeks, however, John seems to have abandoned this 'wait and see' policy, for on June 22, 1739, he was in Bristol actively warning his followers to avoid 'as fire' the French Prophets 'who do not speak according "to the Law and Testimony"'.<sup>5</sup>

From these accounts it is apparent that the early Methodist movement was not unaffected by the activities of the French Prophets; both Plewit and Cooper, both of whom are identified as 'French Prophets', obviously had some association with the emerging Methodist movement, and it was on account of this association that their cases were brought to the attention of John Wesley. Similarly the fact that John felt it necessary to warn the followers in Bristol to avoid the French Prophets suggests that their influence had already been felt in that location. In fact the interaction between the French Prophets and the early Methodists was not limited to the few instances to which we have so far referred; several further references to this group are found among early Methodist sources.<sup>6</sup>

It is apparent also that some Methodists not only knew of, but accepted the claims of Plewit, Cooper and others. Indeed, even John himself once commented favourably on the work of French Prophet John Lacy.<sup>7</sup> Further, though John himself was unconvinced of Plewit's prophetic office, 'two or three of our company were much affected, and believed she spoke by the Spirit of God'.<sup>8</sup> John refers also to 'one [Whitehead] who "did run well," till he was hindered by some of those called French prophets'.<sup>9</sup> The apparent willingness of

<sup>4</sup> JWW 2: p 137 (cf. Acts 5:38-39).

<sup>5</sup> JWW 2: p 226.

<sup>6</sup> See further Hillel Schwartz, *The French Prophets: The History of a Millenarian Group in Eighteenth-Century England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. 207 n. 34, who notes, among other references, Wesley's comments in the *London Magazine* (1760):652 and in *Standard Letters*, 2, p 24. The two sermons to which Schwartz refers are found in *The Works of John Wesley*, 14 vols. (1872) [Hereafter cited as Wesley, Works], 5:405-413; 467-478. (Schwartz actually refers to sermon XXVII, but this should be XXXVII). John refers again to individuals 'who are called Prophets' in JWW 3, pp 49-50, 239, and to 'two persons ... who think themselves inspired by God' in JWW 2, p 130.

<sup>7</sup> Schwartz, *French Prophets* p. 207; the reference is to JWW 3, p 490.

<sup>8</sup> JWW 2: p 137.

<sup>9</sup> JWW 2: p 226.

some associated with the early Methodist movement to accept as genuine the French Prophets' claims to divine authority is testified to also by Charles Wesley. He records how, on December 11, 1738, he lodged in Wycombe with 'Mr Hollis', a man apparently connected to the Methodist society with whom John met on several occasions.<sup>10</sup> It was Hollis' belief that the French Prophets were in no way inferior to the prophets of the Old Testament.<sup>11</sup> Hollis was himself a rather strange fellow, for as he prepared for bed, writes Charles, Hollis 'fell into violent agitations, and gobbled like a turkey-cock'. A few months later Charles refers again to the prophetic group and this latter encounter seems to have been much more significant than his brief and rather bizarre meeting with Mr Hollis.<sup>12</sup> Both John and Charles, then, came into contact with the French Prophets on more than one occasion and the evidence is that the group was attractive to some in the early Methodist communities.

Despite this apparently active encroachment of the territory of the early Methodist societies, however, relatively little research into the interaction between early Methodism and the French Prophets has been carried out. Knox refers extensively to both the French Prophets and Methodism, but makes little of the interaction between the two movements.<sup>13</sup> Schwartz has more, but even he does not go beyond the sporadic accounts of the Wesleys' dealings with the French Prophets mentioned in their journals. The most extensive discussion on the topic is that offered by Clarke Garrett.<sup>14</sup> Garrett's concern is quite broad, for it is his contention that early Methodism and French Prophetism (like a host of other eighteenth-century religious-isms) both gave vivid expression to 'popular' religion, an experience which in the eighteenth century was characterised by spirit possession (both divine and demonic). Garrett has little

<sup>10</sup> Schwartz, *The French Prophets* p. 205 identifies Hollis as a former Baptist who had become a French Prophet. That Hollis was closely associated with the early Methodist movement is strongly suggested by the fact that he was visited on several occasions by both John and Charles Wesley (See JJW 2, p. 76, 84, 93, 130; 440; 474; Thomas Jackson, ed. *The Journal of the Rev. Charles Wesley, M.A.* 2 vols., [1849], 1, p. 138, hereafter cited as JCW).

<sup>11</sup> JCW 1, p. 138.

<sup>12</sup> JCW 1, p. 152.

<sup>13</sup> R.A. Knox, *Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion*, (1950), pp. 356-371, 463.

<sup>14</sup> Clarke Garrett, *Spirit Possession and Popular Religion: From the Camisards to the Shakers* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1987), see especially pp. 74-104.

difficulty in arguing his case, for examples of spirit possession and subsequent ecstatic behaviour are not difficult to find in early Methodist sources. On the extent to which there was *direct* overlap between early Methodism and French Prophetism, however, Garrett's work is far from precise. This is not surprising, for pertinent primary materials are in short supply. Consequently, Garrett, like Schwartz, is largely dependent upon the published journal of John Wesley and a few other published sources for his information on the interaction between Methodism and the French Prophets. It is the purpose of the present short study partly to fill that gap by drawing scholarly attention to the existence of a lengthy and hitherto unnoted report on the activities of one particular French Prophetess (Mary Lavington).<sup>15</sup> The report is in the hand of Charles Wesley and dates from 1739.<sup>16</sup>

### The French Prophets <sup>16</sup>

The French Prophets, as their name indicates, originated in France; however, in the context of the period and geographical location with which we are concerned, the ethnic extraction of those termed 'French Prophets' was predominantly English.<sup>17</sup> The movement arose during the latter part of the seventeenth century, and was born of persecution and rebellion. It is hardly surprising, then, that the movement was staunch in its millennialism.

The arrival of the movement on English soil may be traced back to 1706 when three French Prophets, Durand Fage, Jean Cavalier of Sauve and Elie Marion, arrived in London and there began the work of establishing the movement. The message of the Prophets was largely eschatological; this world is shortly to come to an end when Christ himself comes visibly to rule his people. Marion prophesied

My Kingdom is at hand; my kingdom upon the earth. I will come to reign visibly before Men. I will descend in a visible Form before my People.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Charles Wesley, 'Lavington's Case' n.d. [June, 1739]. John Rylands University Library of Manchester (hereafter JRL) ref. MAB DDCW 8:12.

<sup>16</sup> The classic study is that of Schwartz, *The French Prophets*. A shorter description and history of the movement is found in Knox, *Enthusiasm*, pp. 356-371 and in Robert Southey, *The Life of Wesley*, rev. ed. (London and New York: Frederick Warne and Co., 1889), pp. 146-150. See also Garrett *Spirit Possession* pp. 13-85.

<sup>17</sup> See the detailed list of all known French Prophets, which includes information regarding nationality, in Schwartz, *French Prophets* pp. 297-315

<sup>18</sup> *ibid* p. 78.

Quite how quickly and how extensively the French Prophets spread is unclear, but at its zenith the movement was not an insignificant one. In particular, as we seek to show here, the French Prophets had an impact among some in the earliest Methodist societies. Such an impact has been hinted at before, but the new document which we here survey indicates fairly clearly that the French Prophets were a real threat to the stability of at least some of the societies with which they came into contact. Indeed, according to Anne Graham, whom Charles Wesley interviewed on the matter, not only she, but 'many of our brethren and sisters' were much taken with the activities of one French Prophet (Ms Lavington).

This latter point is particularly interesting, for the obvious question to ask is how representative of early Methodism those attracted to the message of the French Prophets were. The French Prophets were not only eschatological, but in a more general sense 'enthusiastic' and believed in the dramatic and direct intervention of God in the affairs of this world in general and in the actions of the human soul in particular. Such enthusiasm manifested itself in a number of ways including shouting and screaming, physical contortions, miraculous healings, visions and ecstatic prayers and utterances. It was manifest also in the claim to perfection on earth.<sup>19</sup> On many, if not all, of these points the French Prophets and the early Methodist societies overlapped.<sup>20</sup>

It is then hardly surprising to discover that there was some fairly significant attraction to some early Methodists in the teachings of the French Prophets and conversely some significant interest on the part of the French Prophets in conducting missionary activity

<sup>19</sup> *ibid* pp. 17 - 22, 206 *et passim*.

<sup>20</sup> On miraculous healings in early Methodism see especially Henry D. Rack, 'Doctors, Demons and Early Methodist Healing', *Studies in Church History* 19 (1982): pp.137-152. On ecstatic worship and attempts to raise the dead see Kenneth G. C. Newport, 'George Bell, Prophet and Enthusiast', *Methodist History* (forthcoming). As Rack points out (*Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism*, (1989), pp. 194-195), visionary experiences were also known among early Methodists, and we might note further the letter from William Briggs to Charles Wesley, November 10, 1762, in which Briggs mentions a group of '7 at the other end of town who meet in a dark room to see visions'. This same group, says Briggs, sought to heal a lame man and restore sight to one who was blind. This letter is uncatalogued, but may be found in the JRL in a folio of letters entitled 'Letters Chiefly addressed to Charles Wesley', vol. 6 no. 11.

among the Methodist societies. Even the eschatological aspects of the message of the French Prophets might well have been appealing to early Methodists for they too, it seems, were somewhat prone to such speculation. This is not the place to argue this case extensively now, but we note that evidence for a very definite and distinctive eschatological thread within early Methodism is not lacking.<sup>21</sup> This study, then, perhaps adds further weight to this hypothesis.

### The Case of Mary Lavington

We have noted above that Charles Wesley came into contact with the French Prophets on several occasions. The most detailed account of this interaction is centred upon the case of Ms Lavington, a French Prophetess whom Charles met in June 1739. Charles' journal account indicates that he met Lavington at the house of J. Bray on Thursday June 7. On the Friday and Saturday of that week Charles set about making further inquiries into the case of Lavington, and on the Sunday, writes Charles, 'I read the Society my account of the Prophetess'.<sup>22</sup> It is in all probability a slightly expanded version of this same account that is held in the Methodist Archives.<sup>23</sup>

Charles' account begins by linking Lavington to 'one Wise, a French Prophet', with whom, it seems, Lavington is living in adultery. This detail is found also in the journal account.<sup>24</sup> Charles first heard of Lavington from a former Quaker, who, says Charles, 'is now baptised into the visible Church of Christ'. The name of this individual is given by Charles, but in the MS has been deleted by some unknown hand. Why this deletion should have occurred is unclear, but it may be indicative of a general sensitivity regarding the interaction between the French Prophets and early Methodists prevalent in later Methodist circles.

<sup>21</sup> See J. C. Downes, 'Eschatological Doctrines in the Writings of John and Charles Wesley' (Edinburgh, PhD 1960); Kenneth G. C. Newport, 'Charles Wesley's Interpretation of Some Biblical Prophecies according to a previously unpublished letter dated April 25th, 1754', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* (forthcoming).

<sup>22</sup> *JCW* 1, p. 152

<sup>23</sup> The manuscript report includes material which came to Charles' attention on June 11-12, 1739. It is clear, then, that the report as it now stands could not have been the one read to the society on June 10. However, the report that Charles read to the society and the report in the JRL no doubt overlap considerably.

<sup>24</sup> *JCW* 1, p. 153.

It is interesting to note that Charles' initial reaction to the report of Lavington's activities was not dismissive. Rather, writes Charles, 'I thought it my duty to inquire farther; "Not to believe Every Spirit, but to try the Spirits whether they were of God"'. In this policy Charles reflected the approach of his brother who similarly thought it wise first 'to try the spirits, whether they are of God' (cf. 1 John 4:1).<sup>25</sup> It would seem, then, that neither Charles nor John excluded the possibility that the claims of the French Prophets might be justified.

During the course of his investigations into the Lavington case, Charles soon came into contact with Anne Graham who told Charles that she

was at first greatly taken with her [Lavington], as were the strongest of our Brethren and Sisters, who flocked after her, some or other of them, continually, and received her Prophecies as uttered by Immediate Inspiration.

Clearly, then, Lavington had had a major impact upon a number of Anne Graham's acquaintances. As the report develops the names of several individuals appear, only two of which (J. Bray, Mrs Sellers) are mentioned also in Charles' *Journal*. The susceptibility of such individuals to the acceptance of the probably eschatological and certainly enthusiastic claims of Lavington is suggestive of a particular kind of religious sentiment. As noted above, eschatological fervour was not absent among early Methodist societies, though the extent of such thinking has perhaps hitherto been underestimated. That early Methodists were also enthusiasts has, however, been better documented.<sup>26</sup>

It is apparent from Charles' report that many of Lavington's prophecies were loosely tied to the book of Revelation. This is hardly surprising, for it is the strange apocalyptic symbols of that book which have frequently provided rich source material for those who wish to confirm their prognostications from the biblical text. According to Anne Graham's report, Lavington promised those who listened 'thou shalt be married to Christ' and 'thou shalt receive a white stone'. Both references are taken from Revelation (cf. Rev 19:7;

<sup>25</sup> *JW* 2, p. 136.

<sup>26</sup> See for example Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast* pp. 333-342.



2:17), and, both, in all probability, were taken by Lavington as promises of eschatological deliverance. Lavington's message (and it must be remembered that Anne Graham's report relates directly to the activities of Lavington among the early Methodists) was evidently well received for, says Charles, 'after every Prophecy her audience express their approbation by crying out 'The Lord speaketh good things! Glory to the Lord'. Later in the report Charles refers to how he observed 'Mrs S.' and others in raptures and kneeling down before the prophetess as she spoke. Again, the audience is almost certainly at least partially Methodist. This is, then, an interesting picture of very early Methodist enthusiasm among the rank and file.

The account continues with a list of three specific pieces of advice which Lavington gave, apparently to the Methodist movement as a whole. These were that men and women should not be separated 'in the societies', but sit 'shoulder to shoulder', that marriage was absolutely required in all cases and that Psalms should not be sung. To this general advice, she instructed Anne Graham further that she should 'dress as fine as she could' and marry whomsoever she could find. Lavington also advised several members of the society against going to the sacrament which, Charles learned from John Choney, Lavington called a 'Beggary Element'. Indeed, according to Lavington the sacrament was a 'crutch', which it was the duty of her followers to do without. It is hardly surprising that Charles reacted against this particular item on Lavington's prophetic agenda. Indeed, he describes what Lavington said on this matter as 'blasphemous' and 'horrid'. It is, however, quite plain from the report that Charles' views were not shared by all. We have already noted Anne Graham's remark that the views of Lavington were accepted by a number of the brethren and sisters, and Charles even supplies a few names of those who seem at one time to have been under Lavington's sway; these include, in addition to Anne Graham, John Choney, Anne Ellis, Mary Cades, Mrs Sellers, M. Biddle, M. Rigby and J. Bray.

Lavington was clearly a woman of extreme religious conviction and emotion. Armed with her belief that she was directly inspired by God, she did not hesitate to dismiss the biblical counter arguments with which Charles confronted her with the words 'away with the apostles'. Thus, for example, when presented with the words of 1 Corinthians 7, where Paul holds up the unmarried state

as one most in accordance with God's will, Lavington said simply 'I do not believe S. Paul there'. The Prophetess claimed even to be able to call angels and archangels, even Christ himself, down from heaven. Indeed, Lavington told Charles that God himself on occasions appeared to her either in the form of a dove or an eagle. Lavington's religious life, then, was punctuated by visions and revelations and when her prayers were answered, Lavington said, she always saw a vision of a little angel on top of a ladder with a cap and a feather. She apparently convulsed, screamed and gave out, at least on one occasion a 'hellish laugh' which she found it difficult to control.<sup>27</sup>

As we have noted, neither Charles nor John were in the first instance prepared to dismiss the claims of the likes of Lavington. However, having tested the spirit to see if it was from God and concluded that it was not, Charles did react very negatively. Indeed, Charles deals quite directly with the matter and, unlike his brother, appears not to have been ready to accept, even for a short time, the 'wait and see' approach. In this the Lavington incident resembles the later Maxfield-Bell crisis of 1763, where once again John was extremely reluctant to condemn out of hand the extravagances engendered by the movement.<sup>28</sup>

Like Charles, Anne Graham also concluded that Lavington was a fake and her testimony regarding how it was she came to this conclusion is illuminating. The seeds of Graham's misgivings regarding Lavington's prophetic office were sown upon her realisation that Lavington was living in an unmarried state with Mr Wise. God then drew Graham's attention to the message to the Church in Thyatira as related in Revelation 2:18-29, which includes the words

Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.

Graham came to the conviction that the reference to Jezebel in this passage was a reference to Lavington and hence, in Charles' words, saw immediately that 'it was all a Delusion of Satan' (cf. Revelation 2:24). When the satanic plot was discovered, Graham set about

<sup>27</sup> JCW 1, p. 152.

<sup>28</sup> Newport 'George Bell'.

warning others and trying to avert that scandal that would certainly come upon the society should Lavington succeed in getting more firmly entrenched than she was. Graham, then, is meeting Lavington on her own ground; the book of Revelation, from which Lavington drew much, is seized upon by Graham and used against the prophetess. In the message to Thyatira Graham evidently saw a picture of her own situation. This is an interesting detail, for it demonstrates that the book of Revelation was being read by some in the early Methodist communities as a work which reflected their own particular historical situation. Both Lavington and Graham agreed that the book of Revelation was a work of prophecy and that the prophecies of that book related to their own day. The details of their respective interpretations differed significantly, but both apparently approached Revelation with a common expectation. Both looked to the book for prophetic pronouncement and in the strange symbolism both looked for a confirmation of their own respective viewpoints.

Within the broader context of the general activity of the French Prophets, Lavington's convulsions, ecstatic utterances, prophecies and extreme certainty in divine favour were far from unusual; the intriguing question is, however, why were so many members of the early Methodist societies apparently drawn to such forms of religious expression? This is of course a complex question and to answer it properly would require a study beyond the limitations of this short report. We note however, that early Methodists and the French Prophets shared much common ground. It is easy to track down numerous Methodist accounts of healing miracles (even supposed or promised resurrections from the dead)<sup>29</sup> and visions.<sup>30</sup> Even the cataclysmic eschatological message of the Prophets is not totally foreign to early Methodism.<sup>31</sup>

The evident ease with which some early Methodists accepted the teachings of the French Prophets indicates that such similarities were more than skin deep. The French Prophets, like

<sup>29</sup> G.C. 'Thoughts on the Work of Sanctification', *Arminian Magazine* (1790) p. 42; *JW* 5 p. 472; Rack, 'Doctors and Demons', pp. 140-141; Newport, 'George Bell'.

<sup>30</sup> See above n. 19.

<sup>31</sup> See above, n. 21.

the early Methodists, were convinced that God was not distant, but one who acted in the lives of individual men and women. Faith was experiential and justification by faith an experience, not a doctrine. Both movements shared a basically supernaturalist outlook.

The similarity between the French Prophets and early Methodism is seen especially in the area of perfectionism. In fact this was the precise issue which Charles chose to raise with Lavington (and Wise) when he met with her at the house of John Bray. The meeting is recorded both in the *Journal* and more fully in the manuscript report.

Charles went to Bray's house on June 9, 1739 and straightaway became involved in a discussion on the possibility of human perfection. Charles' view was 'if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the Truth is not in us' (1 John 1: 8) .<sup>32</sup> At this the prophetess groaned and Charles commanded her 'in the Name of Jesus' to speak what was on her mind. Lavington replied 'My children look for Perfection; I say for absolute Perfection: you may attain to absolute sinless perfection'. She then went on, says Charles, to amass several texts in support of 'that arrogant Doctrine of Devils'.

As is well known, Charles' views on perfectionism were by no means shared by all in the Methodist societies. This is a well researched area and need not be entered into here. What we do note, however, are the obvious parallels between the dispute between Charles and Lavington (who was backed up by Wise and J. Bray) alluded to above and the controversies which were to erupt in Methodism at a later stage. One is again reminded of the Maxfield-Bell movement which broke out in 1760s London, but the issue was a general one which runs throughout the eighteenth century. Again, then, the doctrinal distance between some early Methodists and French Prophets seems slight and the consequent attraction of the message of the French Prophets to some early Methodists understandable.

### The Nottingham Case

<sup>32</sup> According to Charles, at a meeting on June 12, 1739 the prophetess also referred to this text. However she altered it to read the exact opposite, that is, 'if we say we have no sin we *do not* deceive ourselves, but the truth *is* in us'.

In 1753, in a publication designed to discredit Methodism, the Rev Richard Hardy notes that one of the chief errors of the Methodists is their confident assertion that

the *Millennium* is at hand; and that the *Saints*, or (in other Words) their *Dear Selves*, shall live in *Peace* and *Plenty*, like *Earthly Princes*, after they have had the *Satisfaction* of cutting off the *Wicked*, or Those who oppose themselves, with the *Sword*.<sup>33</sup>

This is an intriguing criticism and needs some explanation. Perhaps Hardy was out to discredit the Methodists and repeats here as fact what is actually hearsay and rumour. The rumour itself, however, can be traced back a little further, for Hardy gives one example of this particular Methodist error, namely the report given by 'Academicus' of an incident which took place 'lately' in Nottingham. In the context of criticising the Methodists for their hope of material reward '*when the saints come to inherit the earth*', the author notes in particular one remarkable expression of this hope which

is said to have happened lately in the neighbourhood of Nottingham. The Elect were taught to expect some extraordinary acknowledgement of their cause, and visible interposition in their favour. Swords were to come from heaven, with which, like Joshua, they should conquer the devoted people, and divide their land. By some management a day was inadvertently fixed upon for the accomplishment of these great things. The day came, but no heavenly weapons were sent, no supernatural appearances seemed to favour the attempt. It past, and nothing was done. By-standers began to laugh, the doubtful and wavering revolted, the faithful themselves were many of them disconcerted, and *went away sorrowful*, for though they had not, they expected *to have had, great possessions*.<sup>34</sup>

Again this may be groundless negative rumour, but it is perhaps worth exploring the possibility that it has some basis in fact. If so, we might speculate, the parallels with the earlier activities of the French Prophets (or Camisards as they were then known) are striking, for they too were prone to religious violence and indeed had risen up in open and extremely violent revolt during the period

<sup>33</sup>. Richard Hardy, *A Letter from a Clergyman, to One of his Parishioners who was Inclined to turn Methodist* (1753 [JRL ref. G.A. 349]), p. 73.

<sup>34</sup>. 'Academicus', *The Principles and Practices of the Methodists Considered in some Letters to the Leaders of that Sect*, 2nd ed. (1761 [JRL G. A. 294]), pp. 24-25.

1702-1704.<sup>35</sup> Violence and eschatological speculation, including date-setting, were part of the Camisard legacy, and it is possible that in the strange account of the Nottingham Methodists given by Academicus we see that legacy in action.

### Conclusions and Observations

The French Prophets, then, as the Lavington case clearly shows, made some significant inroads into Methodism. Indeed, one might speculate that had Lavington not touched Charles on two such particularly raw nerves, the sacraments and perfectionism, she might have succeeded further in her missionary endeavours among the early Methodist societies. However, in Charles she had a determined opponent and his strength of mind seems to have limited the extent of Lavington's incursions. Charles' journal account of the matter ends on a note of triumph: 'All agreed to disown the Prophetess'.<sup>36</sup> This may well have been the end of Lavington's influence, but the numerous other references to the activities of the French Prophets, and in particular to John's meetings with them, indicate that the Lavington case was not the last chapter in this particular story.

In more general terms it is difficult to assess the impact of the French Prophets on the development of early Methodism. In the Nottingham case to which we have referred above, there may be some evidence of direct causal influence, however it is probably more helpful to see both movements as parallel expressions of a common religious experience than to become entangled in a discussion of the extent to which one influenced the other. To be sure, there were things about the French Prophets that many Methodists did not like just as some aspects of Methodism were unpalatable to the French Prophets. However, beneath such minor disagreements one can detect the movement of the same religious spirit at work. This spirit is engendered by an uncompromising belief that this world is under the direct control of God and open to supernatural intervention. The boundaries between the finite and the infinite are blurred by visions, ecstatic utterances and divine healings. The individual who is perfect is very much 'in the world,

<sup>35</sup> Schwartz, *French Prophets* pp. 22-31.

<sup>36</sup> JCW 1, p. 153.

but not of the world' and the fact that some can be brought back from that ultimate barrier, the grave, further narrows the distance between the celestial and the mundane. This world and the spiritual world coexist and at certain flash points become mingled; however, the two tracks are not parallel, but are rather on a collision course. The French Prophets clearly accepted such a view of things and expected the crash to occur at any moment. It is apparent that some of the early Methodists shared this expectation too, though the extent and intensity of this belief is as yet far from clear.

#### KENNETH G.C. NEWPORT

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*Sainthood Revisioned*, edited by Clyde Binfield, (Sheffield Academic Press, 1995, £25.00) is a wide-ranging symposium, subtitled 'Studies in Hagiography and Biography'. Of particular interest to our readers will be the editor's chapter: 'An Optimism of Grace', a study of those Wesleyan Forsytes, the Pocock family, in particular, their female members. It should be read in conjunction with Dr Binfield's article on R. M. MacBrair in *Proceedings* 49, pp 29-43 and his 'Architects in Connexion: Four Methodist Generations' in J. Garnett and C. Matthew (eds), *Revival and Religion since 1700. Essays for John Walsh* (1993). Garth Turner's contribution on Anglican biography since 1945 raises issues which are equally pertinent in a Methodist context.

#### Correction

The address of the Secretary of the Scottish Branch of the WHS was incomplete as given on p 114 of *Proceedings*. It should read: Mr G. W. Davis, 6 Gowan Park, Gowan Street, Arbroath, Angus, DD11 2BH. The Lincolnshire Methodist History Society have a new Secretary: Mr A. Griffin, Tanglewood, Barrowby High Road, Grantham, Lincs, NG31 8NR.

#### 4: THE HISTORY OF THE WESLEYAN METHODIST MISSIONARY SOCIETY<sup>1</sup>

**F**INDLAY and Holdsworth's *History of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society* (henceforth 'the History') is an irreplaceable monument, directly to Wesleyan Methodist work overseas, and indirectly to British Wesleyan Methodism in the period in which it was written.

A monument, first, in its comprehensive scope. A brief article cannot begin to do justice to its five volumes and more than 2700 pages. The project was originally intended as part of the celebration, in 1913, of the supposed<sup>2</sup> centenary of Methodist missions. It grew to such dimensions under the direction of its first editor, the New Testament scholar Dr G. G. Findlay, that publication by the target date was soon abandoned; a brief history by Findlay, entitled *Wesley's World Parish*, was all that could be published in time. W. W. Holdsworth was co-opted, first to bring the project within a measurable compass of space and time, and later, following Findlay's long illness and his death in 1919, to complete it, with the help of associates whose contributions are duly acknowledged in the prefaces to the various volumes.

Publication, once started, went fairly briskly, according to an outline set out at the beginning of Volume 1: Volume 1 itself, published in May 1921, covers the formation and development of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (henceforth WMMS) itself, and work in North America; Volume 2, devoted to the West Indies, and Volume 3, on Australasia, appeared together two months later; Volume 4, on Africa and Europe, was published in

<sup>1</sup> The writer is indebted to Prof. Andrew F. Walls for comments on a draft of this review.

<sup>2</sup> The date is disputed by N. Allen Birtwhistle, 'Methodist Missions', in Rupert Davies *et al.* (ed.), *The History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, 3.1-116, here 2-5. Birtwhistle prefers to date the launching of the Methodist Missionary Society from John Wesley's letter of March 1786, commending Thomas Coke's project impressively entitled *An Address to the Pious and Benevolent, proposing an Annual Subscription for the support of Missionaries in the Highlands and adjacent Islands of Scotland, the Isles of Jersey, Guernsey, and Newfoundland, the West Indies, and the provinces of Nova Scotia and Quebec*.



The breadth of vision evidenced in the Introduction is maintained throughout the *History*. To take an example almost at random, the last chapter written by Dr Findlay, that on Sierra Leone, begins with three pages of geographical and historical background, before opening its account of Methodist involvement in the country (4.73-76).

Perhaps even more important is the authors' constant awareness that they are writing, not just history, still less a would-be presuppositionless record under the *wie es eigentlich gewesen* motto, but church history, Christian history, one might almost say salvation history, written 'from faith to faith'.

This shows itself, as it were in an outer circle of the dartboard, in the careful and relatively enlightened treatment of other religions. The language sometimes tends to conceal this: for example, the summary of developments to 1863 is presented under the headings '(1) Colonial Methodism', '(2) Barbarian heathenism'<sup>5</sup>, '(3) the civilized heathenism of Asia', and '(4) the Missions in Christian Europe' (1.116-120). But, at least in respect of the third category, the *History* bears the mark of several missionaries who made a major contribution to the study of world religions. The account of Wesleyan missions in China begins with a chapter of 'Prolegomena' which discusses the place of Christianity in a nation based on Confucian ethics, supplemented by Buddhist and Taoist religion.

The distinctively Christian purpose of the *History* appears most explicitly in its first part, devoted to the 'Formation and Development of the Society'. The interest of the Wesley family in overseas missions is traced back to John Wesley's grandfather and namesake, who in the mid-seventeenth century offered for missionary service in Surinam; and to his father Samuel, who unsuccessfully proposed a plan to engage the British East India Company in mission. The theological link between Arminianism and mission is illustrated from Charles Wesley's hymns:

<sup>5</sup> The distinction between (1) and (2) is recognised as fluid: 'The West Indies are colonial also, but in these tropical islands Europeans are not likely to be more than a ruling caste, and Methodism is preponderantly the Church of the negro' (1.117).

Look into Him, ye nations, own  
 Your God, ye fallen race.  
 Look, and be saved by faith alone,  
 Be justified by grace.<sup>6</sup>

So also is the Wesleys' concern for scriptural holiness. As the *History* puts it, in a style typical of the preacher not ashamed of the gospel:

The Christian sanctification never terminates with the sanctified man; it is consecration to a mission - to the world - mission of the Redeemer Himself; it is the soul's invitation to 'the fellowship of God's Son.' The passion for holiness which breathes in Charles Wesley's hymns 'For Believers seeking Full Redemption,' and which signaled the middle period of John Wesley's ministry in Methodism, was the prelude to the outburst of missionary enthusiasm in the next generation (1.34).

One is reminded that the *History* was written at a time when Methodist scholars of the calibre of W. F. Lofthouse and J. A. Findlay, not to mention the Primitive Methodist A. S. Peake, were in their creative prime. The proper corporate self-confidence which initiated the *History* is reflected in the work itself: a confidence such that it feels no need to conceal or play down setbacks and controversies, such as the general and damaging criticism of the Society's Indian missionaries in 1888-89 (1.138-154). As the *History's* Preface puts it,

The story of the spirit in which the Wesleyan Church went forth under the influence of the Evangelical Revival to fulfil her Master's commission, and to 'make disciples of all the nations,' was seen to be one which was far more than a record of the activities of a Society within the Church. It was part of the religious life of the Church universal... (1.5-6).

<sup>6</sup> The *History* describes this verse as the culmination of 'the hymn that stands first in the [Wesleyan] Methodist Hymn-book' (1.30). Allen Birtwhistle, *op. cit.*, 39, is still just able to state that 'O for a thousand tongues to sing' has stood first in every major collection of hymns published for Methodists', but regrets the omission in the 1933 hymn book of a verse which 'completely changes the merely personal application'. Alas! the 1983 *Hymns and Psalms*, while restoring another verse omitted in 1933, also misses the missionary dimension of the hymn, placing it under the heading 'Growth in Grace and Holiness' and incidentally relegating it to no. 744.

Yet a monument is a paradoxical thing. On the one hand, it is built to last, and the *History* has certainly worn well, and well repays re-reading. But on the other hand, a monument is inevitably erected at a particular time, and reflects the circumstances of its construction; the *History* is no exception.

It was written long after the period of British Methodism's greatest proportionate expansion, in the first half of the nineteenth century; also after the late Victorian boom in the construction of church buildings. In the 1920s, Methodist church membership was still rising in absolute terms, though no longer as a percentage of population<sup>7</sup>. Confidence among the free churches generally was high. Methodist union was already on the agenda. It is difficult to detect in the *History* any sense that Methodism at home might have passed its peak; in any case, there were 150 years of solid, almost world-wide achievement to be recorded, since Thomas Coke's *Plan of the Society for the Establishment of Missions among the Heathens*. The writers of the *History* had reason to be proud of their assignment.

Yet the qualification 'almost' points to an aspect of the *History* which, to our eyes, belongs most clearly to the period of its composition. This is the close, though far from complete, association of mission with empire. The *History* is outspoken in its attacks on commercial companies' refusal to allow missionary activity in areas under their control or influence; by contrast, and at least by implication, it sees colonial government as a liberating rather than a constricting force. The authors make a thought-provoking comparison which deserves extensive quotation without comment, other than the highlighting of certain noteworthy expressions.

The normal [!] history of Christian Foreign Missions may be compared to that of a British colony, with its four phases of progress [!] variously graduated and combined. There is, first, the stage of *private adventure*, under which Dr. Coke's voyages might be classed; secondly, the stage of *joint-stock enterprise*, recognized and encouraged but not administered by the State... to this semi-political organization most of the English Missionary Societies<sup>8</sup> present an analogy in their relations to the Church; thirdly, the status of the *Crown Colonies and Dependencies*, under the full control of Parliament and the Colonial Office in London, but with extensive powers of

<sup>7</sup> J. M. Turner, 'Methodism in England 1900-1932', in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, 3.309-361, here 340.

<sup>8</sup> The writers exclude Methodist missions from this category.

local administration - such is the position, broadly speaking, of the Methodist and Presbyterian Missions on heathen fields; and fourthly, the stage of full-grown nationhood within the Empire [!] which four groups of British Colonies have attained (Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa). In the same regions the Church order of Methodism had previously [!] reached a parallel development, through its 'Affiliated Conferences,' which became self-governing as they were self-sustaining [!], and remain bound to the mother church [!] by the ties of spiritual kinship and tradition (1.63-64).

Elsewhere, the writers, in the context of a discussion of the rise of British power following the Napoleonic<sup>9</sup> wars and especially the first World War, comment, apparently without any *arrière-pensée*:

It is noticeable how closely Methodism has followed, or in some instances preceded, the expansion of the Empire. Even to-day the Missions we have lying beyond its borders [even including China] are comparatively few and small (1.84).

We have already noted the writers' distinction between '*Colonial Methodism*' and 'the fields of *Barbarian Heathenism*' - and also their admitted inability to sustain the distinction. The missionary motive is traced back to the beginnings of Methodism, since 'heathen England was a veritable Mission Field to Wesley and his preachers' (1.164); but there is no suggestion of even residual heathenism in the Britain of the 1920s, and the authors can speak without blushing, indeed with ecumenical inclusiveness, of 'Christian Europe'. The expression 'Greater Britain' is used more than once; most notably in an account of what the writers call a 'friendly collision', at a Cambridge degree ceremony in 1859, between W. E. Gladstone and Sir George Grey, recently returned under a cloud of controversy from the governorship of Cape Colony.

Both were earnest Christians... But [Grey] represented the Greater Britain, and he knew how limb is bound to limb in the parts of a mighty empire (1.130).

<sup>9</sup> In a rare misprint, spelt "Neapolonic" at 1.14.

It would however be unfair to close this review on a note which strikes a discord with our own presuppositions, which are also relative. True, the *History* does not show the same degree of critical distance from events as that displayed, for example, in Allen Birtwhistle's account of Methodist Missions, referred to above. John Wesley's own initial reluctance to engage in overseas mission<sup>10</sup> is not mentioned, though the pros and cons of the connexional system are frankly discussed<sup>11</sup>. Between the journals and correspondence which form the major original sources, the missionary magazines and annual reports of the period, and the *History*, there is inevitably at times a process of progressive smoothing.

Yet the writers are scrupulous and generous in their use of those original sources; fresh in their style of writing; and generally possessed of that prime qualification of historians, a sense of what is vital. The next history of British Methodist mission will be very different from Findlay and Holdsworth, but will not supersede it.

PAUL ELLINGWORTH

<sup>10</sup> Birtwhistle, *op. cit.*, 4-5

<sup>11</sup> *History*, 1.61-63.

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Late in the day, we draw attention to two lectures published in 1994: *The Necessity of God*, *The Message and Ministry of Leslie Weatherhead* by John Travell (£2.00 from Caroon House, 14 Farringdon Street, London EC4A 4DX) and John Walsh's fine study of John Wesley (£2.00 from Dr Williams's Library, 14 Gordon Square, London WC1H OAG)

'People called Methodists' is the title of a new series of short illustrated biographies published by the Methodist Publishing House at £2.50 each. Titles so far include *Jabez Bunting* by Kenneth Greet, *John Fletcher* by Peter Forsaith and *The Countess of Huntingdon* by Peter Gentry. More are planned for 1996.

The Charles Wesley Society's latest facsimile reprint is, appropriately, *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*, to mark the 250th anniversary of the first edition. This edition includes Brevint's Preface and an introduction by Geoffrey Wainwright. Copies, price £8.00, can be obtained from 26 Roe Cross Green, Mottram, Hyde, Cheshire, SK14 6LP. The Methodist Sacramental Fellowship have also published a selection from *HLS*, edited by Donald G. Rogers. Copies are £3.50 plus postage from 70 Sweetbrier Lane, Exeter, EX1 3QA.

## Methodist Archives: Manuscript accessions, Autumn 1994-Autumn 1995.

Ms. letters from R. Gibson to Samuel Stratford, 1836; Luke Wiseman to John Finch, 1850.

Rattenbury Papers: including:

Diary of H. M. Rattenbury, during Presidential year, 1949-50; letters to his wife, E. M. Rattenbury; letters to Emily Ewins (later, Mrs Rattenbury) re. Chinese Revolution (with editorial notes), 1911-12.

Rupert Davies Papers: - Correspondence and associated papers of Rupert E. Davies, former President of Conference (d. 1994). Deposited by his widow, Margaret E. Davies.

A separate deposit from Margaret E. Davies, comprising:

Letters from South Africa by E. L. Morgan, 1898-1902; items re. Anglican-Methodist conversations, 1958; documents re. ecumenism, etc.

Misc. Ms. notebooks of Alan Percy Plowman (local preacher), 1901-54.

Ms. letters of John Wesley to unnamed correspondent, 1759; to Samuel Furly, 1757.

Sermon registers of H. L. Herod (P.M. minister), 1915, 1925.

Hartley Victoria College items: - Disciplinary Committee minute book, plus a packet of letters to the Committee, 1905-13.

Large collection of minute books, magazines and other papers re. to the Wesley Guild.

Parcel of early 20th century letters & photographs of Rev. W. H. Armstrong, President of Conference (c. 1940).

Xerox copies of the Charles Wesley-John Langshaw correspondence.

Class lists re. to John Turner, 1805-6.

2 volumes of chapel building applications, 1842-46, 1846-50.

Printed diaries of Thomas Brocas. Transcribed and annotated by Doreen Woodford.

P. NOCKLES

## BOOK REVIEWS

*The Letters of John Pawson (Methodist Itinerant, 1762 - 1806)* edited by John Bowmer and John A Vickers, Volume 1: To the Conference of 1794. (WMHS Publications 1994, pp. vi, 175pp. £15.00. ISBN: 1 85852 0185).

John Pawson's claim to fame lies in his having attended forty consecutive Wesleyan Methodist Conferences between 1762 - 1801. This first volume of his collected correspondence contains some 105 of his letters written by him between 1764 - 1794 to sixteen different people. The bulk of the correspondence, some 63 letters, is addressed to Charles Atmore and one of the delights of reading these letters is in working out the stratagems used by the able and ambitious Atmore to evade the secondary role of being regarded merely as the protege of Pawson. Another twenty letters are addressed to Joseph Benson. These letters, as the editors claim, do provide us with insights into 'the everyday reality of Early Methodism' and with 'glimpses of its *dramatis personae*'. Amongst many other things of perennial concern to the itinerant Preachers we are provided with a discussion on the role of marriage in the life of a Travelling preacher, descriptions of the degraded conditions of life in Scotland, the disquiet of Pawson with the Preachers' sole responsibility for the management of the financial affairs of the Connexion, and of his disgust with malicious, unco-operative colleagues. We learn that Fletcher of Madeley's preaching was marred by his thick foreign accent and that Adam Clarke was in 'every way a wonderful man... so kind, so condescending and yet at the same time of such extraordinary abilities'. Trying to provide a comprehensive review of the various topics that are present in the letters would be like trying to describe an old fashioned patchwork quilt.

Reading the letters which deal with the machinations of Pawson, Mather, Coke and the others to impose a *coup d'état* upon the Conference of 1794 makes for dramatic, but ultimately, depressing reading for it becomes clear that ministers who play at ecclesiastical politics in any era of church history are diminished by the experience - except in their own eyes, and in the eyes of their fellow politicians. Pawson says many uncharitable things about the people who pursue policies inimical to his own, and in the excitement of playing the ecclesiastical conspirator and powerbroker, all allusions and exhortations to the pursuit of Entire Sanctification which so dominated his earlier correspondence vanish - except in a letter of encouragement to a young George Marsden in May, 1794.

The footnotes relating to the various controversies mentioned by Pawson like the disputes involving the preaching house at Dewsbury and Alexander McNab at Bath could have provided more helpful background historical information than they do. Nevertheless the volume is a valuable addition to the historical literature on Methodism, and all those

people who cannot get to the Methodist archives at Manchester and elsewhere ought to be deeply grateful to the dedicated labours of Drs. Bowmer and Vickers for having provided them with this collection of engrossing primary material.

C. H. GOODWIN

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*James Wheatley and Norwich Methodism in the 1750s* by Elisabeth J. Bellamy (WMHS Publications, 1994 pp. 210, £15.00, ISBN 1 8582 033 9)

Early Methodist Preachers do not have much written about them these days, and it is a joy to welcome a book about one, especially when it is as well written and researched as this. James Wheatley is not a particularly sympathetic character, having been forced out by Wesley in 1751 as a result of his antinomian doctrines, his manner of preaching, and finally his 'horrible practices' with seven women in Bradford-on-Avon. In the same year Wheatley started to preach in the open air in Norwich. Norwich, though the third city of the country in point of size, had not previously been visited by the Methodist preachers. He preached four or five times every day. His preaching led to major rioting in which many were injured and a number of buildings damaged. He opened a preaching house in Norwich called the Tabernacle. Whitefield came to the official opening in April 1753.

Elizabeth Bellamy's account of the riots is interesting because she attempts to analyse the motives and organisers of the opposition to Methodism in the city. The chief motives she suggests are jealousy and financial loss for the clergy, and the guardians of law and order seeing Wheatley as a provocative trouble maker. These 'Church and King' riots continued for two years. She also analyses the support for Wheatley, as found in a list of 56 of his supporters, and what is known about them. This is a 'faces in the crowd' approach, first made famous by George Rudé on the storming of the Bastille. Wheatley's supporters seem young (50% being under 25) and as might be expected for Norwich, mostly working in the cloth trade.

The author goes on to the lengthy court case (1754-59), with its appeals, in which John Towler accused Wheatley of immorality with his daughter and others, at the end of which he was found guilty. This was much more successful than the mob in ending his Norwich ministry. The Wesleys only intervened in Norwich when this scandal was brewing. John sent a preacher first in Nov 1753, and followed this up with both brothers visiting in July 1754. Charles stayed on to build up a society at the Foundery on Orford Hill, again facing riotous opposition as Wheatley had done. Charles was careful to demonstrate his loyalty to the Church by worshipping with them. Charles was followed by a succession of itinerant preachers to care for the society.

John Wesley himself came at least once a year, and on one of these visits (1758) had the irony of being visited by the disgraced Wheatley and being offered the Tabernacle. The congregation there was reduced and divided and had also been very hostile to Wesley. However in 1758 he preached



there four times over Christmas. Buoyed up by this success, he took over the lease. This was just the start of a period of much effort by Wesley in Norwich trying to merge the two societies and bring the members of the Tabernacle under Methodist discipline and to accept Methodist doctrine. William Cudworth, another former Methodist preacher, was also invited to the Tabernacle pulpit. The society remained difficult, and in 1764 Wesley wrote 'James Wheatley (the jewel) has given me warning to quit the Tabernacle in the spring'. The expression 'jewel' presumably refers to the fact that Wesley welcomed this solution to his problems in Norwich. John Wesley moved his own society back to the Foundery and continued quietly to build up the Methodist society there. The Tabernacle became a dissenting society and eventually joined the Countess of Huntingdon's connexion. In the long term Wheatley's larger Tabernacle society died out, and Wesley's smaller Foundery society became the ancestor of modern Norwich Methodism.

James Wheatley was a preacher of strong personality, a persuasive man of questionable morals who encouraged the emotional response which he received. He also attracted the mob. By remaining in Norwich, unlike the always itinerant Wesleys, he remained a focus for hostility. Wheatley seems to have gone to Bristol in the 1760s before returning to Norwich, this time as a surgeon from 1769 to 1773. He died at Bristol in 1775.

This is an important study not only to those interested in Norwich, but to a much wider audience, those interested in early Methodist history. The author, now a supernumerary minister in Norwich, knows the area and the sources well, and makes good use of them.

JOHN H LENTON

*The Making of Methodism*, by Barrie W Tabraham (Epworth Press, 1995, pp 130, £9.95, ISBN 0 7162 0499 1)

This book has all the advantages and disadvantages of its aims and format. It is the first in a series *Exploring Methodism* in which the Epworth Press are, encouragingly, fostering a greater interest in the history, theology and ethos of Methodism.

Barrie Tabraham, brings his skills as an adult educator and one involved in open learning to provide an overview of Methodist history, concentrating on the origins and early development of the movement. He uses extensively material well tried in his distance learning unit on Methodism, with some re-drafting of order and some additions and corrections. The strength of the publication is the attractive and accessible format of the book, with extracts from sources incorporated into the text for easier reference.

At the end of each of the chapters, there are questions for discussion, assuming that this is a book for house-group consumption. Some questions

invite the readers/group to put themselves in the shoes of eighteenth-century Christians in ways which are sometimes unrealistic. How are we to judge whether religious toleration was fair/unfair as Methodists surveying a period of persecution yielding to grudging toleration? And are we given sufficient evidence for a proper basis for surmising why 'John had so many apparent problems with women'? The author assumes that we can leap from dealing with topics in a historical context to the contemporary scene, eg. 'John Wesley was a reluctant convert to open-air preaching. How effective do you think it is today?' Sometimes we need to do rather more work on the different and distinct contexts in which we operate.

The notes in the final section and the suggestions for further reading display a weakness in failing to alert readers to more recent work on the Wesleys and Methodist history, particularly in the *Proceedings, Methodist History* and in American Methodist research publications. I searched in vain for the valuable work done by scholars such as Dick Heitzenrater, Russell Richey, Ted Campbell and Randy Maddox on the Wesleys in their social context and aspects of Methodist polity and theology, or S. T. Kimbrough on the contribution of Charles Wesley, or the work of Dorothy Graham and Paul Chilcote on women in Methodism.

But this is a general overview, and it is hoped that later books in the series can deal with these important topics in greater depth. The problem with works of such a general kind and length is that we cannot have the space to elaborate on or defend our generalizations. Would Wesley really be looking down on the bureaucracy of the Methodist Church amidst restructuring and smiling with favour on our ability to adapt and change (p92)? Or might he be asking rather more pertinent questions about the ministry and mission of a Church preoccupied with structures, physical and institutional?

This is a useful starter for the Methodist history novice, though one which does not bear the scrutiny of closer examination for finer detail of analysis and interpretation. It would be a good present to give to someone new into Methodism who wants some idea of its history and development. Or could readers of these *Proceedings* offer to lead a group in their churches to look at specific aspects of our history? This book is a useful tool for teaching in such a context.

TIM MACQUIBAN

*Durham Colliers and West Country Methodists, The Story of the Bible Christian Mission in County Durham, 1874 - 1910*, by Colin C. Short. (priv published, 1995, pp. 251, £8 + £1.50 p&p obtainable from the author, The Manse, 212 Sutton Park Road, Kidderminster, Worcestershire, DY11 6LD).

This book provides a much needed and very welcome account of Bible Christian history in County Durham from its tenuous beginning in 1821 to its final contribution to Methodist Union in 1907.

In 1821 William O'Bryan was still engaging young men and women as itinerant preachers and directing them to plant Bible Christian societies where he thought advance was possible. It was all in the manner of John Wesley, his mentor, but O'Bryan was not always willing or able to guarantee their financial support when they got there.

One of them, Mary Ann Werrey, was appointed to the Scilly Isles and then to the Channel Islands and, in 1823, - 'with the consent of Mr O'Bryan' she sailed from Guernsey to Northumberland where she was joined in the following year by William Mason (Bible Christian President in 1828). They found a small group of Bible Christian societies around Belford, already in existence: there is some evidence that one of them, Lowick, had been founded in 1821 following the preaching of an unnamed young woman from Devon of whom there is no later record. Mystery also surrounds Mary Ann herself of whom there is no further trace except in a press report that she was in Edinburgh in May 1825.

So close to Holy Island, Mary Ann Werrey might have found her niche as the Bible Christian St Hilda but that was not to be, for her societies were little more than a memory when the Durham Mission was founded thirty years later. The Mission owed its beginning not to an outreach from Northumberland but to the prompting of a Bible Christian minister, James Hender, of the Barrow Mission who in 1873 urged the denomination to give direct support to the handful of surviving Bible Christian societies. Richard Edgcombe was appointed pastor but despite his later optimistic report that 'large numbers of our friends from Devon and Cornwall having settled down in these northern counties we believe that the time will come when we shall be planted in the North just as we are in the South and West..', Edgcombe's work and that of his successor, the energetic Enoch Rogers, went into decline and only two of the societies in the Durham Mission were left to enter into Methodist Union in 1907. The causes of the decline and fall are carefully considered in chapter eleven, the author inclining to the view that they were mainly due to the economic depression and the trade union struggle for fair wages, and that in Durham, as well as elsewhere in the industrial North, far from their rural heartland the attempt was never going to succeed anyway.

There is a strong West Country flavour about this book, as its title leads us to expect, not least in chapters six and seven which discuss the emigration/immigration and settlement while the biographical dictionary of chapter ten becomes almost a portrait gallery of preachers and people. The detailed and annotated material which Mr Short has gathered will repay the attention of researchers into Bible Christian history, Methodism in mining districts, the West Country Methodist diaspora and local history around Durham.

*Commemorations. Studies in Christian Thought and History*, by Alan P. F. Sell (University of Calgary and University of Wales Press, 1993, pp. xi, 394, £19.95. ISBN: 0 7083 1229 2)

Professor Alan Sell, now at Aberystwyth, is the most prolific of Free Church scholars with ten books in the last decade! This book presents fourteen studies from his period at Calgary in Canada. The range is great but a controlling feature is the contribution of the Reformed traditions of many kinds and the recurring problem of authority. So in the first part we have Newman, Spurgeon and Martineau on authority, Richard Baxter sparking off contemporary thought on unity; Fox and Wesley on experience and evangelism (a neat piece this) and the Independent Martyrs of 1593 who raise questions of church, state and religious freedom. We then look at persecution and toleration in England and among the Waldensians, the Quaker theologian Robert Barclay, the Erskines who had influence on George Whitefield, theological debate in the nineteenth century in Britain and America especially in Presbyterianism (Mercersburg) and also Unitarianism. The largely unknown story of Harley College impinges on the story of Cliff College in its early days. Finally we have a notable study of Lovell Cocks of Bristol - a fine scholar whom many will remember - with a final reflection on Congregationalism which had such a vital role in the development of Dissent.

As one reads these essays one senses the brooding spirit of P. T. Forsyth who was the mentor of Lovell Cocks and has clearly deeply influenced Sell. Many issues are raised here. I would want to argue with Dr. Sell about Luther's 'Two Kingdoms' theory especially in the light of Cargill Thompson. A minor point - Dr. Sell, quoting the hymn 'And Can it be?' claims one line to be heretical - 'That Thou my God shouldst die for me'. Charles Wesley is surely using the Patristic device of the 'communicatio idiomatum', whereby what is predicated of Christ's humanity can also be attributed to his divinity thus *avoiding* Patripassionism. So Luther, Wesley, Moltmann and Wainwright!

All in all this is a stimulating and wide ranging book, lecture spin-offs mainly of Dr. Sell's researches. We do well not to lose the Independent view of the congregation as the fellowship of Christ with all the dangers, balanced in Methodism by the idea of the Connexion. A well-produced book with (hurrah!) footnotes rather than end notes.

JOHN MUNSEY TURNER

*A Wesley Family Book of Days'* compiled and edited by Susan Pellowe (Renard Productions, Aurora, Illinois; 1994, \$12.00 ISBN 0 9623507 1 0)

Susan Pellowe (named by her father after Susanna Wesley) reminds us in these pages of what is so easily overlooked: that John and Charles Wesley were members of a family, and a large family at that. The author takes us

through the year with a selection of quotations and snippets culled from four generations.

Much of the material here may be familiar, and a great deal inevitably from John's pen. However, the choice of text and illustrations has been made, not only with care, but as a labour of love. Susan Pellowe (who has degrees in Speech and Theatre which she uses in a dramatic presentation of 'Susanna') considers re-presentation of the roots of Methodism as a ministry. A sense of drama in these pages includes Sarah Wesley's caricature of her father coming from preaching, Samuel Wesley's eulogy to tobacco, and Susanna's prayer to 'overcome habitual levity in my thought's - one never knows quite what is over the page.

Errors are few, and quibbles minor: there is no pagination; some extracts (from John Wesley's *Journal* in particular) are left undated. One is left with the impression of a book with a difference, about a family with a difference. Here is laughter and tragedy; the mundane and the unexpected; quarrels and rapprochement; births, weddings and deaths. But beyond that is a family who were considerably gifted, and with all their wide differences, were bound to each other and bound also to God. A welcome sight of the Wesleys in a fresh way.

PETER S FORSAITH

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## LOCAL HISTORIES

*Marple Methodist Church 1795-1995* by D. H. Davies (36pp). Copies, price £2.25 from the author at 19 Links Road, Marple, Stockport, Cheshire, SK6 7NX.

*Burn Methodist Church, Centenary Booklet* (44p). Copies, £2.50 post free, from Mrs B. Phillipson, Shaldon, West Lane, Burn, Selby, YO8 8LR.

*Seaford Methodist Church Centenary 1894-1994*. (24pp). Copies, price £2.00 from J. B. Colebourne, Avoncroft, Eastbourne Road, Seaford, East Sussex, BN25 4NT

*Along the Way: Sixty Years of Methodism in Patcham* by Nanette Buck (36pp). Copies, no price stated, from the author at Retreat Cottage, Nep Town Road, Henfield, West Sussex, BN5 9DX.

*Emerging to life: the history of Tranent Methodist Church 1870-1995* by Neil H. Marshall. (53pp A4). Copies from Rev D. A. Innes, 20 Bankpark Crescent, Tranent, East Lothian EH33 1AS.

*The Church in Sussex Road [Haywards Heath]* by Wyn Ford. Copies, £4.00 plus post, from K. H. Savage, 5 Gander Green, Haywards Heath, West Sussex, RH16 1RB

(A further list will appear in the next issue)

## NOTES AND QUERIES

### 1488 SOURCE OF A WESLEY DOXOLOGY

In response to Note 1486: If we may trust G. Osborn, ed, *Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley*, Vol. III (London 1869), p.100, the doxology, 'To Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,/Who sweetly all agree....' occurs in the 1741 *Hymns on God's Everlasting Love*, in the second, unnumbered, (Bristol) volume, as No. VI in the appended section headed, 'Gloria Patri' (This is of course not to be confused with the distinct volume entitled, *Gloria Patri, or, Hymns to the Trinity* [Osborn, PW, III, 343ff]). As to the origin of the sentiment, and of the notion of the Three Divine Persons 'sweetly agreeing' to save us, we must look back to the Trinitarian hymns of Samuel Wesley Jr., which appeared in 1734 in William Webster's *Weekly Intelligencer*, from which John derived them for his 1737 Charlestown *Collection of Psalms and Hymns*. (John's text agrees with the 1734 version, not with his elder brother's 1736 *Poems on Several Occasions*). The particular, emotive, imagery of this doxology seems to me to be more typical of Charles than of either Samuel Jr. or of John; though such an observation is admittedly highly subjective.

DAVID H. TRIPP

*United Methodist Parsonage, Wolcottville, Indiana.*

### 1489 FRANK O. SALISBURY (1874 - 1962).

I am researching into the life and works of this prolific Methodist painter and stained glass artist. Religious, royal and political figures from Europe and the United States sat for him, his glass appears in chapels, cathedrals, churches and schools, and he illustrated various Christian books. I would appreciate members informing me of the location of any of his works (paintings, stained glass, book illustrations), as well as memories that members may have of him or of Sarum Chase, his Hampstead home.

NIGEL McMURRAY

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### 1490 THE REFURBISHMENT OF WESLEY'S HOUSE

John Wesley moved into the house in the courtyard of his New Chapel in 1779. This was where he spent the winter months when the weather was too bad to tour the country. After his death the house continued in use as a manse but by the 1880s was welcoming pilgrims from all over the world to see the 'relics', as Wesley's personal possessions had become known. In 1898 one floor of the house, Wesley's living accommodation, was put aside

as a museum. Since then Wesley's House has undergone many refurbishments. In 1992 it became obvious that the present arrangement of the house, although charming, was no longer answering the needs of visitors or caring properly for the 'relics'. A pilot survey was prepared by Crispin Paine and in 1993 Drivers Jonas were appointed as contractors.

For the first time, a thorough history of the house was produced and careful research carried out into the house when Wesley lived there. Architecturally the house is little changed but it seems likely that some time after the house was built Wesley added an extra block at the rear creating an extra room on each level. The documentary evidence reflects a busy and bustling manse. As well as Wesley living in the house there would have been three or four preachers, one of whom brought his wife as housekeeper. There would also have been servants. Charles Wesley and Martha Wesley Hall often stayed.

For the first time the basement has been opened to the public for the display of the 'relics' in environmentally controlled conditions and arranged in themed displays. The other rooms have been returned to their original uses and displayed in eighteenth-century style with interior decoration of the period. Ian Bristow, an historic interior design expert, took paint samples from the stripped pine panelling and advised on period style. The samples showed that the internal woodwork was painted stone white. Much of the surviving furniture is associated with Wesley.

Visitors are offered an audio guide which puts Wesley in context and even mentions his broken marriage. He is shown not only as a great religious leader but also a real person.

The house was re-opened by HRH The Duchess of Kent in March 1995 and has been very well received by this year's visitors.

ALISON TAYLOR

1491 JOSEPH AGAR BEET

I am researching the life and theological thought of Joseph Agar Beet (1840-1924), Wesleyan Methodist minister and theologian. While his main theological works are still accessible, there seems to be no significant biography of Beet, nor have I yet come across any substantial archive of letters or materials relating to his life. I should be very grateful if anyone who is in possession of such material, or knows where it is to be found, could contact me. Likewise, I should be very grateful to hear from anyone who has material describing Beet and any aspect of his life.

DAVID CARTER

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