Wesley and Ourselves.

JOHN WESLEY'S scholarship was wide, his travels apostolic, his industry astounding, his organising capacity rare, and his vision universal. Dr. Tyerman wrote in the last paragraph of his biography: "In the case of a man like Wesley panegyric is out of place." If so there has been much misplaced eulogy. The stream of praise has run in spate recently. Mr. Gladstone said that, in the Roman Catholic Church, Wesley would have been a saint. I gladly hail Wesley as a hero; I would approve his canonisation—the Calendar needs revision; but the apotheosis of the man I deplore.

John Wesley's life almost covered the eighteenth century, 1703-1791. Before the era of steam he crossed the Atlantic, travelled in Germany, visited Scotland twenty-two times, toured Ireland twenty-one times (including Wales on the way), and his journeyings reached an aggregate of nearly a quarter of a million miles. In the pen-and-inkhorn age he wrote two hundred and thirty-three books and pamphlets, helped with a hundred more, and founded a magazine, contributing largely to its pages. Hundreds of books he read as he rode. His collected *Letters* fill eight volumes. He preached forty-six thousand sermons—I have read only one hundred and fifty of them.

> Alike to him was time or tide, December's snow or July's pride;
> Alike to him was tide or time, Moonless midnight or matin prime.
> Steady of heart and stout of hand . . .

HIS JOURNAL.

Wesley began to keep a careful record of his life during his University days in Oxford, on the advice of Bishop Jeremy Taylor in his *Holy Living and Dying,* and he continued the practice until October 1790.

This *Journal* was an elaboration of a diary written chiefly in Byrom's shorthand, but with figures, ciphers, cryptics and mysterious hieroglyphics of his own invention, some still untranslatable. The *Diary* was in amazing detail. He rose at four every morning, but early rising was not unique in those days. Many entries are amusing—

11.0 a.m. Haircut.

9.0 a.m. Played upon the flute for half an hour.

In morning read Mystics, after dinner shaved. Drank chocolate; coffee; tea (hundreds of times).

Dr. Nehemiah Curnock edited the *Journal* splendidly in eight volumes. Dr. Workman claims that "it is one of the most human documents of any age, indispensable for all who would understand the England of the eighteenth century." Dr. Alexander Whyte urged his Scottish students, "Keep John Wesley's *Journal* always lying open beside your study Bible." It certainly is a remarkable book.

ANABAPTISTS.

Wesley nearly always referred to our ancestors as *Anabaptists,* only a few times did he call them *Baptists.* He knew that the Anabaptists were mentioned in Article XXXVIII., and the word was a reproach. Why did he perpetuate the stigma? It stands permanently in his *Sermons* and the *Journal.* Dr. Whitley emphatically declares, "Our ancestors shared practically nothing with them." Wesley knew that. Cromwell wrote of his troops, "I have a lovely company . . . they are no Anabaptists; they are honest, sober Christians." But he had an increasing number of Baptists. Major-General Thomas Harrison and Major-General Robert Lilburne were strong Baptists. Wesley knew that; everybody did. Anabaptists were most of them pacifists and communists; British Baptists were neither!

In Bristol many Baptists were known to him, inevitably. Of Broadmead's history he could not be ignorant, nor of its strength as a Church—there were two hundred and fifty members in 1774; and the Pithay Church nearby was vigorous too. Further, he knew Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress,* for he read it, and a biography of Bunyan; presumably also *Grace Abounding* interested him. He quoted Dr. John Gill; he dined with Dr. Gifford; he read Dr. Taylor's *History of the English Baptists,* and Dr. Calamy. But yet he persisted in the use of the term *Anabaptist.* Indeed, in his very last reference, only three years before he died, he wrote *Anabaptist* in his *Journal.* It was inexcusable—but what was the reason?

In his lecture on Wesley, Dr. Alexander Whyte said, "Shreds of his High Churchism hung about Wesley and hindered his movements for long." Did he ever shake them off? He always insisted that he was a Priest of the English Church. Even when he preferred to use the word Presbyter it was but old priest writ large. He wrote Presbyter in his Certificate to Dr. Coke appointing him Superintendent for America, and did not scruple to ordain him, claiming that Bishops and Presbyters were one Order. He had abandoned the theory of Apostolical Succession, though his renunciation might be due to his experience of episcopal opposition to his work at least

as much as to his historical research. Although that change had come, Wesley had not cast off much more. Dean Hutton, in his biography, states, "Wesley observed Lent, used mixed chalice, prayed for the faithful departed, kept festivals and feasts, enjoyed Cathedral services, and rejoiced when he could have the Lord's Supper daily, an emblem of the primitive Church." It was not until his last days that he relaxed the rule forbidding Methodist meetings during canonical hours, and he did so reluctantly and with restrictions. Shreds of his High Churchism hung about him to the end.

BRISTOL PRINCIPALS AND STUDENTS.

Our College Presidents and their students[1] understood all this fully. Principal Bernard Foskett trained sixty-four men from his appointment in 1720 to his death in 1758. Hugh Evans succeeded him, and began what S. A. Swaine called, "The Augustinian Age of the College." He was followed by his son Caleb, who had assisted his father for some years. Caleb Evans died in 1791, and Joseph Hughes took charge for two years; then John Ryland ruled the College until 1825.

Our men during the Wesley period included some of the "most distinguished alumni, *Faithful Men of Bristol College,*" as Swaine styled them, and his book. (It should be revised and brought up-to-date.) They included John Sutclif, Samuel Pearce the Seraphic, Steadman the first Principal of Rawdon College, William Staughton, who contributed a borrowed half-guinea to the immortal first collection for the B.M.S., Joseph Hughes, the Founder of the Bible Society and the Religious Tract Society, Robert Hall and John Foster, Benjamin Beddome, Robert Day, Dr. John Ash, John Reynolds, Dr. Thomas Llewellyn, Morgan Edwards, a great Baptist in America later, and Dr. John Rippon. All the men must have known about Wesley. Tutors and students must have seen and heard him. How was it that they were not captured by his eloquence, nor caught in the wave of enthusiasm? The triumphant Methodism did not fascinate them. Ambitious young orators, they were not drawn away by the chance of popularity.

Our solid Principals studied the Wesley movement thoroughly, discerned its weaknesses, witnessed its effects as at Kingswood, and criticised it psychologically and ecclesiastically. They sympathised with its purpose, admired Wesley's energy, but they stood firm. All of them must have read sections of his *Journal.* Through so long a period many entering our College had personal acquaintance with the Revival in all its aspects, and their correspondence would keep them keenly interested con-

[1] Read to Annual Conference, Bristol Baptist College, 1938.

tinuously. And they would certainly feel wrathful over Wesley's repetition of the scornful word *Anabaptist*. Under Foskett, Hugh and Caleb Evans, they had received and developed a strong dislike and distrust of all sacerdotalism. They were trained to form a balanced judgment. Amid spreading excitement they "saw life steadily and saw it whole." I wonder whether any of those "Boys of the Old Brigade" dared to sum up the hysterical elements of the Revival as a writer in *Johnson's England* has done, who says, "The more intellectual members of the earlier Dissenting congregations derided the Wesleyan enthusiasts as throw-backs to an earlier and less civilised age."

I feel sure they were kinder in their severest criticisms.

DR. CALEB EVANS AND WESLEY.

In Dr. Caleb's time there were exciting days in the Old College. The dining-room rang with the clash of debate and cheers for the Doctor, for Caleb's name resounded over the whole country.

Here, Bliss was it then to be alive, and to be young . . . !

In 1775 Dr. Johnson wrote his *Taxation, No Tyranny,* denouncing the American Rising. Wesley, changing his mind upon the subject, rushed into print plagiarising or popularising Johnson's work. This roused Caleb Evans, and a most tremendous tourney began.

Dr. Tyerman's description of our famous Principal is worth quoting:

> "Rev. Caleb Evans was in the thirty-seventh year of his age, a man of good sense, a diligent student, a faithful pastor and extensively useful, but a rampant advocate of what was called Liberty, and therefore a well-wisher to the republican rebellion across the Atlantic."

Caleb thought Wesley's production was sheer plagiarism. Dr. J. Wesley Bready says, "Wesley's sub-conscious and traditional Toryism re-asserted itself"; and again, "Perhaps his attitude on America was his weakest spot." Caleb sharpened his pen; he wrote of the "shameful versatility and disingenuity of this artful man." Fletcher of Madeley joined the fray. The minister of Broadmead preached a special sermon on British Constitutional Liberty. Wesley wrote to the *Lloyds Evening Post,* and Caleb wrote in the *Gazetteer* an epistle which Wesley called "an angry letter"; then he sent Dr. Caleb a personal letter, which he copied in the *Journal,* where you may read it. A glorious logomachy! Dr. Curnock notes in his edition of the *Journal* that on some matters of detail and fact Wesley's

memory was failing; really it never was fully reliable; this Dr. Evans could not possibly know, or he would have dealt more gently with Wesley.

I have no documentary evidence for this, but I believe that one night in the Older College the noisy joy was so uproarious that the Senior Student opened his door and called out, "Study Hours, Gentlemen."

What excitement for the men of the House! One day the Doctor, "rampant advocate of Liberty," returned from a London visit with £400 for the library. And into these days came northern news, incalculably important though temporarily thrilling: a young Methodist in Yorkshire had become a Baptist, Dan Taylor, the new Apostle of the North; Saint Dan Taylor, as Dr. Clifford honoured him long afterwards. Golden days they were in the Older College!

Later, as Wesley's literary works circulated in wider areas, our own two famous men, Hall and Foster, wrote voluminously and preached characteristically for years, but revealed no sense or sign of inferiority, neither complex nor simple. They stood staunch and steady. They knew Wesley thoroughly.

Dr. R. W. Dale ventured to say: "Methodism is simply anxious to make men Christians; Congregationalism is anxious that men who are Christians should realise, in their Church life, Christ's own conception of what this Church life should be; and we believe that only by restoring the true conception of the Christian Church is there any chance of christianising the English people." This conception of the mission of the Church our men received under the sound and strong guidance and training of the virile Principals here in Wesley's time. And they "took leave of these dear halls" to evangelise and teach, to proclaim a complete Gospel and to develop Christian character in Church membership. No shred of High Churchism hung about them as they went forth.

THE OLD CURRICULUM.

Swayne preserves Dr. Caleb Evans' fine address to his students, and his *Catalogue of a few Useful Books,* a copy of which he gave to every man—Hebrew Bibles, Septuagint editions, Greek Testaments, Lexicons, Expositions, Apologetic and Systematic Theologies, Histories, Biographies, Miscellaneous—"*cum multis aliis,* which perhaps I may mention when you have read all these; for the present, adieu!"

The men were called by a bell at six a.m. "Rise at five," said Dr. Caleb. (Joseph Kinghorn did rise at five—so he stated in 1784.) Mr. Crisp used to lecture at seven. Bristol discipline was Spartan. And our well-drilled predecessors departed to

industrious ministries, to set a grand stamp upon the Churches of labour, piety and intelligent evangelism.

> In OUR halls is hung Armoury of the invincible knights of old,
> In everything WE are sprung Of earth's first blood
> Have titles manifold.

I cannot trace the exact curriculum in Foskett's Presidency of the College, but twelve years after his death the course was wide and thorough, and it is no wild guess that under him it was equally so, and a number of names decorated with University degrees is good proof. Our men were excluded from Wesley's Oxford for a full century longer. He had left Oxford with proficiency in the learned languages and logic, and he had studied metaphysics, natural philosophy, oratory and divinity. Not vastly superior to our men in intellectual equipment. He acquired German from the Moravians sailing to America, and added Spanish while there. These modern tongues might be among Dr. Caleb's *multis aliis*. Perhaps they even excelled in some qualities, for I doubt whether any one of them (Foskett's boys), could be correctly described as Dean Hutton delineates Wesley in Georgia—"intolerant and autocratic, impetuous and indiscreet." Wesley returned to England a much-humbled man, greatly changed even before the 24th of May, 1738.

OUR CHURCHES AND THEIR PROBLEMS.

Why did we not produce a Wesley? Is genius ever produced? Oxford did not produce Wesley any more than it produced his great contemporary, Dr. Samuel Johnson. Why were not our Churches the vehicle or channel or instrument of the Evangelical Revival? I feel there are two answers. One is Zophar's question, "Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?" The other is our Master's own word, "The wind bloweth where it listeth."

John Smith, the Se-Baptist, is dated 1609. Within fifty years Baptists had become a religious and political force. Dr. Wheeler Robinson says, "the militant Puritanism of that age was largely Baptist." Baptist thought was vigorous enough to generate two branches, General and Particular, Arminian and Calvinist. And Baptist polity was not wildly individualistic. Dr. Whitley proves that our Associations go back to the seventeenth century. There was a General Assembly in London in 1689, twelve Associations participating. The Meetings of the Northern Association are recorded in 1699. Hexham Abbey had a Baptist lecturer in 1653, sent there by the Mercers' Company in London. Barnoldswick, on the edge of Yorkshire and Lancashire, had fifty-six members in 1698. The first Baptist Church in Norfolk, at Pulham, was founded in 1645, and Norwich had

five licensed Baptist preachers in 1672. The first Baptist hymn-book appeared in 1663, and in 1691 another book of three hundred hymns. Watford has a list of deacons from 1707, though Baptists were there sixty years earlier. Western Churches sent representatives to meet in Wells in 1653, and the Berkshire Churches were organising in the year before.

After the collapse of the Commonwealth and the accession of Charles II., persecution began, which threatened the very existence of our Churches. They survived, although their influence upon national life was sadly reduced. Dissent was in decline. Our Associations were enfeebled. And unfortunately persecution was not the sole cause of the period of decline. Dr. Whitley discerns "a hypnotism by certain theological problems, Christological and ethical, and the growth of a censorious spirit." Professor Elie Halévy declares, "Dissent lost all capacity for propaganda." That is terrible! Dr. Whitley entitles a section, "A sterile fifty years at home." And he remarks, "Arrogance and criticism are poor substitutes for evangelistic zeal."

But in the very darkest days there were gleams of light. In 1763 Dan Taylor passed like a flame of holy fire through the West Riding. In the tiny village of Hamsterley, in Durham, a new chapel was built in 1715, and a valiant young minister arose named David Fernie. In 1745 he baptised a young northerner named Christopher Hall, and a few years later Hall's brother Robert, who was called to the ministry at Arnsby in Leicestershire, and his son, another Robert, was our Bristol Chrysostom. The Baptist Board arose in 1723, and the Associations woke up from Northumberland to Kent, from Lancashire to Cornwall. Baptists had not lost all capacity for propaganda. When Wesley died in 1791 William Carey was minister at Harvey Lane, Leicester, preparing his immortal sermon, which was to begin the Baptist Missionary Society. Propaganda by Baptists was not due to Wesley's campaign, it was not an extinct capacity, it had only suffered a lull. And through all that period our men were toiling on, all their work being based upon the granite foundation of Faith in the Church.

WESLEY'S THEORIES.

Wesley did not *anglicise* his converts by thousands; they were members of the Methodist Societies. Our men rejoiced in his success, and they saw its weakness, its lack of Church foundation. His maintenance of Infant Baptism was a barrier; he said repeatedly that Anabaptists were welcome to the Societies, but our men were not cajoled.

At the foundation-stone laying of City Road Chapel in 1777, Wesley said, "What is Methodism? It is the old religion,

the religion of the Bible, the religion of the primitive Church, the religion of the Church of England." But it was not; the bitter opposition of the clergy everywhere demonstrated that it was not; and the frequent discussions on complete Separation from the Church in the Conferences confirmed that it was not; he certainly strove valiantly to make it so, but vainly.

And his insistence rendered capture of our folk impossible, it invigorated them. Wesley notes that at Tipton (proverbial for sharpening wits) Baptists had been making havoc of the flock. April 8th, 1766, at Bingley and Haworth, so many of the Methodists were perverted to the Anabaptists. March 16th, 1768, Cheltenham, "the Anabaptists and the Rector both have blown the trumpet with all their might." Our Bristol men were neither idle nor silent, and the capacity for propaganda was rising.

Wesley's view on Baptism was, I think, very confused. In Georgia he "baptised according to the custom of the first Church, and the rule of the Church, by immersion." So he wrote, and so he said. His rigid persistence on this was one of the charges against him which caused his flight from America. March 21st, 1759, he notes in the *Journal*, "I baptised seven adults at Colchester, two of them by immersion."

In one sermon he asked, "How many are the baptised gluttons and drunkards, the baptised liars and common swearers, the baptised railers and evil-speakers. . . . Lean no more on the staff of that broken reed, that ye *were* born again in baptism. Who denies that ye were then made children of God, and heirs of the kingdom of Heaven?"

This seems to me very confused, almost contradictory.

In a sermon on the New Birth he said, "Baptism is not the new birth; they are not one and the same thing. Many indeed seem to imagine that they are the same; at least, they speak as if they thought so; but I do not know that this opinion is publicly avowed by any denomination of Christians whatever. Certainly it is not by any within these kingdoms, whether of the Established or dissenting from it. . . . Nothing is plainer than that, according to the Church of England, Baptism is not the New Birth."

Well, Article XXVII. reads, "Baptism . . . is a sign of Regeneration or New Birth, whereby, as by an instrument they that receive Baptism rightly are grafted into the Church." And the Baptismal Service states, "This child is regenerate." The Priest later gives thanks that "it hath pleased Thee to regenerate this infant with Thy Holy Spirit." And in the Baptismal Service for those of riper years, the Prayer of Thanks includes this petition, "Give Thy Holy Spirit to these persons that being born again and made heirs of salvation . . ."

All these authoritative words seem plain and free from ambiguity. Methodist doctrine was not the doctrine of the Church of England on this subject, and Wesley himself was confused. And our people generally, and our own men here, and in the ministry, understood all this fully.

THE ESTABLISHMENT.

Loyal son of the Anglican Church to the end, Wesley must often have felt very embarrassed. Concerning Henry VIII. he said, "Sextus Quintus, a hog-driver who became Pope, was full as far from being a Christian as Henry VIII. or Oliver Cromwell." Queen Elizabeth he declared as "just and merciful as Nero, and as good a Christian as Mahomet." Respecting Charles II.: "Oh, what a blessed Governor was that good-natured man, so called, King Charles II.! Bloody Queen Mary was a lamb, a dove, in comparison of him." And again, in a sermon, "King Charles II., one of the most dissipated mortals that ever breathed." Each of these monarchs was the Supreme Head of the Church of England. When George II. died Wesley wrote in the *Journal,* "When will England have a better Prince?" Did he not know the moral tone of his Court?

In a sermon on *Former Times,* he said: "Constantine, calling himself a Christian, and pouring that flood of wealth and honour on the Christian Church, the Clergy in particular, was productive of more evil to the Church than all the ten persecutions put together. From that time . . . vice of all kinds came in like a flood, both on Clergy and laity." So *Establishment* was an unmitigated curse, but Wesley was in an Established Church! It must have troubled him terribly sometimes.

Wesley neither anglicised his followers nor moulded the English Church. The Evangelical Movement in the Church gathered force, but was never dominant. It only flourished with a struggle. John Foster said the Established Church could not live more than forty years. But another Oxford Movement arose, and grew, and captured the English Church.

Wesley's movement was evangelical and ethical; Anglo-Catholicism is hierarchical and mediaeval. Wesley's attempt to save the Church failed, but he had founded another destined to occupy his World-Parish in more magnificent service than he dreamed. In his work he did eventually provide the Church foundation which our men in his time discerned to be lacking.

Some day a Christian Plutarch will arise in the Church of Jesus Christ, able to compare perfectly all the cherubic splendours who have shone in the Divine Kingdom, and I believe he will find parallels with John Wesley in Bunyan and Spurgeon, Carey and Clifford.

ARTHUR B. ALNWICK.