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# Proceedings OF THE Wesley Historical Society

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## CHARLES WESLEY'S PRODUCTIVITY AS A RELIGIOUS POET

**P**ERHAPS I have in part helped to promulgate a myth about Charles Wesley's limited productivity of high-quality verse by speaking of "the classic hymns" of Methodism. It is true, of course, that the volumes of poems published jointly by John and Charles Wesley during the period 1739-46 contain a very high proportion of their most popular hymns. They also contain, however, many humdrum compositions, and a large number of poems which are known only through small selections, such as "O for a thousand tongues". Relatively few such unwieldy pieces were written (let alone published) after 1750. It needs stressing, however, that for the last forty years of his life Charles Wesley (1707-88), having secured independence from his brother's publishing, continued to write and publish verse at an equally rapid pace, and that a very high proportion of his output continued to be of excellent quality, although a far smaller proportion found its way into print and into popular use. After his publication in 1762 of **Short Hymns on Selected Passages of the Holy Scriptures** he printed very few of his great accumulation of manuscripts. Fewer than 15 per cent of the five thousand written during his last quarter of a century were published. Yet modern producers of hymn-books continue to search for — and easily to discover — relatively unknown but excellent hymns by Charles, though they usually find it extremely difficult to persuade their committees to publish them, because Methodism is already embarrassed by the riches of its published heritage.

With the multitude of hymns which have been enumerated in Julian's **Dictionary of Hymnology**, and the thousands of modern hymns which are increasingly clamouring for entry, why is it that the richest cache of potentially great hymns in the world remains unused except by a few discerning scholars? The facts of their

writing, their limited publication, and their gradual unveiling before the public, need to be studied before any reply should be attempted.

The classical period of Charles Wesley's hymns undoubtedly began with his spiritual awakening — "The Day of Pentecost", as he headed in large script his journal for Sunday, 21st May, 1738. This almost immediately transformed Charles Wesley's already great talent for translating Latin verse into decasyllabic couplets to an outpouring of religious lyrics. On 24th May John Wesley and a troop of friends from the Aldersgate gathering broke in upon the sick Charles, declaring, "I believe." Charles's journal continued: "We sang the hymn" — Charles's first fruits, still not identified with absolute certainty — "with great joy, and parted with prayer."

This epochal event led to the series of **Hymns and Sacred Poems** published over the names of the two brothers, in 1739 (with three editions that year), 1740, and 1742. John also included a batch of seventeen "Poems . . . by the Revd. Mr. John and Charles Wesley" in Volume 3 of his **Collection of Moral and Sacred Poems** (1744), and the two brothers issued jointly **Hymns on the Lord's Supper** in 1745 and **Hymns of Petition and Thanksgiving for the Promise of the Father** in 1746. Altogether from 1739 to 1746 about five hundred hymns were published jointly by the two brothers, with no indication of their individual authorship. These constitute the "classical hymns" of Methodism. Were they in fact mainly by Charles? The answer is a resounding "Yes". Did these hymns exhaust Charles Wesley's religious muse? The answer is an equally resounding "No"!

If we are to fully envisage Charles Wesley's fecundity, however, we need to combine his production both of printed works and of unpublished manuscript poems. We shall, of course, count those poems only in their primary sources, ignoring the many duplications in collected hymn-books. We note that some of the manuscript poems were left unfinished, or are found in more than one version. Although in the nature of the case such statistics can only be approximate, it is clear that we have a total approaching nine thousand, or about 180 per year for the fifty years from 1739 to 1788. It is certain that the rate of production was not even, though it is impossible to document the details, for many poems were not published until years after their first draft was written. Similarly, although we have Charles's own endorsed dates for his major collections of manuscript hymns on the Gospels and Acts, we cannot be sure that no earlier compositions were incorporated, and those volumes underwent seven thorough revisions between 1774 and 1787. Charles remained constantly at work with his poems,

both old and new. During the last five years of his poetical career (1784-8) he appears to have produced almost exactly the same number of poems as during the first (1739-43) — over three hundred. The amazing high point of his productivity was 1762-6, when he wrote no fewer than 6,248 scriptural hymns — an average of 1,250 a year!

More important, of course, is the quality. Here it is difficult to apply a reliable yardstick, except their public use within Methodism. We must accept the fact, of course, that this public is in general conservative, and cannot be expected to warm to a hymn, no matter how excellent, to which it has not become accustomed, and especially if the words are not firmly wedded to a popular tune. Every individual, every congregation, every denomination, has its saturation-point, which is often surprisingly low, even with the Methodists who were “born in song”. Unfortunately, as merit or fashion may encourage the use of a new hymn, one of the old ones is almost certain to become disused and die — though a few live on for ever. This hymnological law it was, not the intrinsic excellence of the hymns themselves, which prevented Methodism from ever absorbing the overflowing cornucopia of Charles Wesley's genius, and eventually transformed the massive production of printed verse into an even more massive accumulation of neglected manuscripts. This law also it was which dictated that through the generations, in spite of regular attrition, the older favourites continued to form the basic nucleus of the popular repertoire of hymns.

The committee which chose the 823 hymns of the latest Methodist hymn-book, **Hymns and Psalms** (1983) was both ecumenical and adventurous, but of necessity still subject to the demands of tradition. The number of Wesley hymns which they chose for inclusion clearly reflects the steady decrease in popular usage from the high point of the 1876 hymn-book, when out of a total 1,026 there were 724 by Charles Wesley. In 1904, of 981 hymns 446 were credited to Charles Wesley. In 1933 this was reduced to 243 of 984. **Hymns and Psalms** in 1983 has 156 out of 823. All this undoubtedly reflects the proportion of Wesley hymns held in wide esteem among Methodists, and may furnish a touchstone, if not of literary excellence, at any rate of appreciation by church leaders at different periods who were in touch with the tastes of their congregations. By studying what they have chosen we can gain a fair estimate of the hymns which continue in popular use 250 years after the spiritual awakening of their composers.

It is no surprise to discover that the Wesley hymns chosen for **Hymns and Psalms**, as for other hymn-books of all denominations,

are heavily weighted in favour of those which were produced and became popular during Charles Wesley's first decade, 1739-48. Out of the 156 chosen in 1983, no fewer than 96 come from this period, whilst there are 35 from the second decade, 1749-58, and 25 from the third decade, 1759-68. This means that approximately 60 per cent were chosen from the first decade, 22 per cent from the second, and 16 per cent from the third. None at all have come into continuing popular use from the fourth and fifth decades.

We shall make no attempt to refer to all these hymns, of course, but will simply select some of the better-known ones from specific publications drawn on during each decade. In all instances the first line will be followed within parentheses by the number assigned in **Hymns and Psalms**. This should at the very least demonstrate that wide acceptance persisted for selections from Charles Wesley's hymns throughout his first three decades. After that we should turn to the far more limited utilization of the publications and accumulating manuscripts of his closing two decades, of which only a few slowly filtered into the hymn-books, and thus reached the attention of the general public.

Printed from the **Hymns and Sacred Poems** of 1739 we have "And can it be that I should gain" (216), "Christ the Lord is risen today" (193), and "Hark! the herald-angels sing" (106), with George Whitefield's 1753 alteration of the opening couplet from Wesley's original, 'Hark how all the welkin rings/Glory to the King of kings'. From the 1740 book with the same title come "Christ, from whom all blessings flow" (764), "Christ, whose glory fills the skies" (457), "Come, Holy Ghost, our hearts inspire" (469), "Jesu, Lover of my soul" (528 — with Wesley's "Jesu" changed in **Hymns and Psalms** to "Jesus", in American style), and "O for a thousand tongues to sing" (for the first time in a major Methodist hymn-book not numbered 1, but 744, represented by eight of the original eighteen verses). Charles Wesley's 1741 anti-Calvinist manifesto on universal salvation—**Hymns on God's Everlasting Love**—furnishes "Father, whose everlasting love" (520 — five of its seventeen verses). From the **Hymns and Sacred Poems** of 1742 come "Arise my soul, arise" (217), "Come, O thou Traveller unknown" (434 — no fewer than twelve of the original fourteen verses), "O for a heart to praise my God" (536), "O what shall I do my Saviour to praise" (569), and "Soldiers of Christ, arise" (719 — seven of the original sixteen verses, divided into two parts).

There follow (still from this first decade) a number of hymns from smaller sources: "Ye servants of God, your master proclaim" (278) from the 1744 **Hymns for Times of Trouble and Persecution**;

“Behold the servant of the Lord” (788), from John Wesley’s **Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion** (1745); two from the 1745 **Hymns on the Lord’s Supper**, “Jesu, we thus obey” (614 — changed to “Jesus”), and “Victim, divine, thy grace we claim” (629); “Come, thou long-expected Jesus” (81), from **Hymns for the Nativity of our Lord** (1745); “Father of everlasting grace”, from **“Hymns of Petition and Thanksgiving** (1746); “Rejoice! the Lord is King” (243), from **Hymns for our Lord’s Resurrection** (1746), whose popularity was certainly enhanced during the nineteenth century by the tune **Gopsal** which Handel wrote for it. We close with four selections from Charles Wesley’s 1747 publication, **Hymns for those that seek and those that have Redemption in the Blood of Jesus Christ**: “All praise to our redeeming Lord” (753), “Come, sinners, to the gospel feast” (460 — six out of twenty-four verses), “Happy the man that finds the grace” (674), and “Love divine, all loves excelling” (267).

The major product of the second decade (1749-58) was Charles Wesley’s two volumes entitled (again) **Hymns and Sacred Poems**, published by subscription in 1749 to demonstrate to the anxious parents of his young bride, Sarah Gwynne, that in his poetry he had financial resources with which to support her. Many of them had been transformed from courtship poems into hymns of Christian fellowship. Volume 1 contained 209 numbered items; Volume 2, 266. From these we note a few of those included in **Hymns and Psalms**: “Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go” (381), “Give me the faith which can remove” (767), “Meet and right it is to sing” (781), “My God, I am thine” (563), “See how great a flame aspires” (781), “See, Jesu, thy disciples see” (763, using “Jesus”), and “Thou God of truth and love” (394 — a former courtship poem). Two examples from Charles’s **Hymns for New Year’s Day, 1750**, have come into general use: “Come, let us anew/Our journey pursue” (354), and “Sing to the great Jehovah’s praise” (360). To this period also belongs “Lo, he comes with clouds descending” (241) from **Hymns of Intercession for all mankind** (1758).

The big publishing event of the third decade (1759-68) was the appearance of the two volumes of **Short Hymns on Select Passages of the Holy Scriptures**. Because they were indeed “short”, sometimes a group of single-verse hymns on contiguous scriptural texts, these volumes between them contained 1,478 numbered hymns on the Old Testament, followed by 870 on the New Testament, a total of 2,348. The period opened, however, in 1759, with a second volume of **Funeral Hymns**, of which the opening hymn was one of Wesley’s personal favourites still remaining in **Hymns and Psalms**: “Come, let us join our friends above” (812); gone, however, in a new age, are the lilting anapaestic favourites

from the volume of **Funeral Hymns** published during the first decade (1742) to celebrate those old Methodists whose reputation was to "die well" — "Rejoice for a brother deceased", which had been present in 1933, but joined the outdated "Ah! lovely appearance of death", which had disappeared even in 1876. Several **Short Hymns** survive from 1762: "A charge to keep I have" (785), "Be it my only wisdom here" (786), "Captain of Israel's host, and Guide" (62), "Lord, in the strength of grace" (800), "O Thou who camest from above", "Thou Shepherd of Israel, and mine" (750), and "Thy ceaseless, unexhausted love" (62 - changed from the original "causeless" by John, in the second edition of the 1780 **Collection**). "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild", which had been published as early as 1742, was revised in 1763 for **Hymns for Children**, and in 1983 appears with five out of the original fourteen verses, opening with verse 13, "Loving Jesu, gentle Lamb" (738 — with "Jesus" for "Jesu"). The flood-tide of the middle sixties, as we have seen, was responsible for more than half of Wesley's lifetime production, from whose manuscript riches one out of a handful which was included in 1983 may be noted: "Stupendous height of heavenly love" (462) was inserted from Charles Wesley's manuscript hymns on Luke, written in 1766; this was first introduced to Methodism in the 1831 Supplement to the 1780 **Collection**. From **Hymns for the use of Families and on various occasions** (1767) comes "With glorious clouds encompassed round" (184).

None of the **Hymns and Psalms** of 1983 come from works printed by the Wesleys later than this of 1767. During Wesley's fourth writing decade, 1769-78, there was a temporary slackening of his pace, a total of under two hundred poems — his least productive decade. Noteworthy was **An Elegy on the late Reverend George Whitefield, M.A.** (1771), **Preparation for death, in several hymns** (1772), and several miscellaneous manuscript collections of "Funeral Hymns", "Preparation for Death", "Hymns for Love", "Hymns of Intercession", and a number of satirical poems on political themes.

Strangely enough, Charles Wesley's closing decade, 1779-88, was far more productive than that preceding, in political satire as well as in religious verse. He published several small works: **Hymns written in the time of the tumults** [the Gordon riots] (1780), **The Protestant Association. Written in the time of the tumults** (1781), **Hymns for the National Fast, Feb 2, 1782**, **Hymns for the Nation in 1782**, and **Prayers for Condemned Malefactors** (1785). He also prepared and revised masses of manuscripts, on the American War, on his son Samuel when for a time he became a Roman Catholic, on his brother John's ordinations of preachers for America, and hymns for the Methodist preachers, as well as more scriptural hymns and miscellaneous hymns, with over five hundred new and original items.

Henry Moore, who was a preacher in his middle thirties, recalls vividly the eccentric poet during the period 1784-6, when he himself was stationed in London:

When he was nearly fourscore . . . he rode every day (clothed for winter even in summer) a little horse, grey with age. When he mounted, if a subject struck him, he proceeded to expand, and put it in order. He would write a hymn thus given him on a card (kept for the purpose) with his pencil, in shorthand. Not infrequently he has come to our house in the City Road, and having left the pony in the garden in front, he would enter, crying out, "Pen and ink! Pen and ink!" These being supplied, he wrote the hymn he had been composing. When this was done, he would look round on those present, and salute them with much kindness, ask after their health, give out a short hymn, and thus put all in mind of eternity.<sup>1</sup>

Three or four years later he dictated his last poem to his wife "when he came in faint and drooping from taking an airing in a coach", a few days before his death:

In age and feebleness extreme,  
Who shall a helpless worm redeem?  
Jesus, my only hope thou art,  
Strength of my failing flesh and heart,  
O could I catch a smile from thee,  
And drop into eternity!<sup>2</sup>

John Wesley salvaged none of the hymns from these last two decades for his 1780 **Collection**, nor even for the two **Pocket Hymn Books** of 1785 and 1787 — and probably did not even attempt it. Eight months after the death of Charles on 29th March, 1788, however, his eighty-five year old brother John spent the better part of two weeks working through — and editing — his brother's manuscripts, especially those on the Psalms, and on the Gospels and Acts, the latter comprising "five volumes in quarto, containing eighteen or nineteen hundred pages." He reported the results of his exploratory survey on 10th December, 1788:

Many of these are little, if any, inferior to his former poems, having the same justness and strength of thought, with the same beauty of expression; yea, the same keenness of wit on proper occasions, as bright and piercing as ever.

After completing the exercise he was a little more critical:

Some are bad, some mean [i.e. average], some most excellently good. They give the true sense of Scripture, always in good English, generally in good verse; many of them are equal to most, if not to any, he ever

<sup>1</sup> Henry Moore: **Life of the Rev. John Wesley** (London, for Kershaw, 2 vols.), ii, p. 369.

<sup>2</sup> Frank Baker (ed.): **Representative Verse of Charles Wesley** (London: Epworth Press, 1962), pp. 375-6.

wrote; but some still savour of that poisonous mysticism with which we were both not a little tainted before we went to America. This gave a gloomy case, first to his mind, and then to many of his verses: this made him frequently describe religion as a melancholy thing . . . and [he was] strongly persuaded in favour of solitude.<sup>3</sup>

In spite of his theological criticism, John realized that here was a new task for his closing years. In the monthly issues of his **Arminian Magazine** from March 1779 to March 1783 he had reprinted eighty-six items from his brother's insufficiently-known **Short Hymns on Select Passages of the Holy Scriptures** of 1762. He decided that he must follow a similar course in drawing attention to the treasure buried in his brother's manuscripts. In posthumous tribute he launched a new monthly feature in the **Magazine**, a numbered section of "Short Hymns" from his brother's Scripture manuscripts. These began in the issue of May 1789, preceded by a similar tribute to their high quality: "Many of these are in no way inferior to those that have been already published." It seems clear that he made sufficient preparations in advance of his death so that they continued to appear (with a gap during the years 1793 to 1796) until July 1802. These comprised selections from Matthew 1 to 8, and Psalms 6, 16, 19-23, 25-28, 30, 37, 40, 43, 48, 60-63, 68, 70, 84, 91, 98, 117, 119, 129, 138, 146, and 149 — including in Psalm 119 poems on each of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet.<sup>4</sup>

This was a mere drop in a bucket, however, and did not affect the basic content of the hymn-books. For forty years after Charles Wesley's death the reprinting of the 1780 **Collection** and the 1787 **Pocket Hymn Book** based on Robert Spence's pirated edition became more and more chaotic, with a rash of uncoordinated and often unsupervised editions of very varied merit. The death of John Wesley in 1791 had removed his still firm editing hand from the control. By that time Charles had almost been forgotten by the Methodist majority.

Charles Wesley's manuscripts might so easily have been lost — journals, letters, hymns and sacred poems. He had voluntarily though reluctantly slipped into the background of Methodist administration, complaining (for the most part privately) about his brother John's experimental formation of a society which was rapidly bursting the bonds of the national Church, no matter how revered: the preachers, he felt, were proving too powerful not only for him but for John. His widow survived long after his death, until 1822, financially supported in large measure by a Methodist

<sup>3</sup> **Journal**, 10th-23rd December 1788, with diary.

<sup>4</sup> See Baker, *op. cit.* pp. 383-4; for manuscript poems first printed in the **Magazine**, see pp. 244-5, 252-3, 295-6, 296-7, 376.

Conference loyal to brother John's promises of sustenance from their published works, though aided also by altruistic friends such as William Wilberforce. Their two surviving sons had both been musical prodigies: Charles (1757-1834), magical at the organ keyboard, unfortunately had no firm grasp of worldly matters; Samuel (1766-1837) had in effect given up Methodism for music, surrounded by a large brood of children, some by his wife, more by his mistress. Sarah Wesley (1759-1828), was a woman of creative intelligence and literary gifts, who had broken off an early romance, and remained in charge of the household which eventually comprised her aged mother and unmarried brother. By her naive will in 1827 she appointed her older brother Charles her sole executor and residuary legatee — no mention was made of her father's manuscripts.

Fortunately for Methodism their Connexional Editor from 1824 to 1842 was Thomas Jackson (1783-1873), a voracious reader with a sense of history and an enormous capacity for hard work. He had become a close friend of the Wesley household in their "genteel poverty" — his words — and speedily overcame Sarah Wesley's initial reticence as she displayed some of the father's literary treasures. Sarah died in 1828, but Jackson comforted and guided her brother Charles in such a kindly and responsible way that he was able to negotiate the sale of the Charles Wesley manuscripts to the 1829 Conference — of which some members did not seem sure that they really wanted them, for immediate funds to purchase them were refused by the Book Steward, so that Jackson assumed personal responsibility for borrowing the money, and thus preserved the possibility of their purchase for Methodism.<sup>5</sup>

At least a few Methodist leaders saw in this acquisition an opportunity to put Methodist worship on a sounder footing by means of an officially sponsored Supplement to the 1780 volume utilizing some of the new Wesley material. The Conference agreed, reimbursed Jackson, and appointed him to prepare the Supplement in conjunction with Jabez Bunting, his predecessor, and Richard Watson. In their deliberations, Jackson noted that both Bunting and Watson favoured more hymns by Isaac Watts, though he personally preferred more by Charles Wesley:

I thought that . . . the space occupied by some of [Watts's] compositions would have been better occupied by terse and spirited productions of Charles Wesley's genius. My associates judged otherwise; and two to one were formidable odds.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Jackson: *Recollections of my own life and times* (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1873), pp. 227-30.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p. 231.

Eventually the Advertisement to the Supplement (dated 9th November, 1830) announced that they had included "several . . . hymns . . . selected from the papers of Mr Charles Wesley", and warned potential pirates that these hymns had been copyrighted at Stationers' Hall. Altogether the 208 hymns in the Supplement inserted nineteen from Wesley's manuscripts. Of these three survived into the 1983 volume: "Great is our redeeming Lord" (No. 438 in **Hymns and Psalms**)<sup>7</sup> "Jesus, the word bestow" (768),<sup>8</sup> and "Stupendous height of heavenly love" (462)<sup>9</sup> the first of these, it will be noted, may well have taken its cue from John Wesley's tribute to his brother in the **Arminian Magazine** rather than from the manuscripts themselves.

The greatest hymnological adventure in utilizing Charles Wesley's manuscripts, however, came as a direct result of George Osborn's collected edition of the Wesleys' **Poetical Works** (1868-73), almost half of which (volumes 8-13) was given over to the **Short Hymns** of 1762, interspersed with manuscript scriptural hymns. The Conference of 1874 appointed a Committee to prepare a new hymn-book. Although this was in part to supply the varying needs of changing times, the Preface to the 1876 **Collection** reveals a major aspect of its preparation:

Many poems of Charles Wesley . . . which up to a late period only existed in manuscript, are now presented for congregational use; and by the force and sublimity of thought, the depth and tenderness of feeling, and the spirit of fervent piety displayed in them, will fully vindicate the judgement of John Wesley respecting his brother's poetical remains.

This 1876 volume, like that of 1831, did some revising of the 1780 contents, but is chiefly remarkable for its huge Supplement, Hymns 540-1026. No fewer than 58 were incorporated from Charles Wesley's manuscripts, in addition to No. 153, which replaced one moved from the main hymn-book. In addition to the three already noted as having first been printed in 1831, the following four appeared in 1983 after their first printing in 1876: "Jesus the good shepherd is" (263)<sup>10</sup>, "Omnipotent Redeemer" (440),<sup>11</sup> "Thee will I praise with all my heart" (14)<sup>12</sup>, and "What shall I render to my God." (703)<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Psalm xlvi, **Arminian magazine**, 1797, p. 614; **Poetical Works**, viii, pp. 111-14.

<sup>8</sup> MS., Acts xix. 20, p. 389; **Poetical Works**, xiv, p. 22. This was dropped in 1933, restored in 1983.

<sup>9</sup> MS., Luke i. 78, pp. 20-1; **Poetical Works**, xi, pp. 114-15.

<sup>10</sup> Psalm xxiii, **Arminian Magazine**, 1800, p. 242; **Poetical Works**, viii, p. 46.

<sup>11</sup> MS., Acts xxi. 20, pp. 431-2; **Poetical Works**, xii, p. 387.

<sup>12</sup> Psalm ix, **Poetical Works**, viii, p. 17 (first).

<sup>13</sup> Psalm cxvi, Part 2, **Poetical Works**, viii, p. 202.

The manuscript sources used in 1876 were quite varied, but mainly the New Testament volumes, fifteen items from Matthew, two from Mark, five from Luke, two from John, and sixteen from Acts. There were seven from the "Scriptural Hymns" of 1783 (four from the Old Testament, three from the New). There were two from "Miscellaneous Hymns", two from "Preparation for Death", four from manuscripts of the Psalms, two from the Richmond manuscript, and two others from other sources. It is important to note, however, that none of these hymns appear to have been drawn from the original manuscripts themselves, but all from Osborn's collected edition of the **Poetical Works**.

Yet a further century of attrition has reduced these 59 hymns from Charles Wesley's thousands of manuscripts in 1876 to 27 in 1904, and then to eleven in 1933 and seven in 1983! Surely a pathetic posthumous tribute! Does this imply an adverse comment on the spiritual and poetical value of those manuscripts? Had Charles Wesley slipped through over-production? We do not think so. Nor can we blame the loss wholly on an impoverished taste in Methodist congregations. The strange and somewhat saddening phenomenon is, we believe, chiefly the almost inevitable result of the lowering saturation-point even of Methodist congregations.

This can be stated in another way. Only great hymns survive beyond their own generation. And a great hymn demands three elements: a clear spiritual message, craftsmanship of the highest order, and an indefinable something which we may term familiarity, or even luck. Charles's message was the many-faceted offers of God in the Bible, constantly renewed through all generations and cultures; probably 80 per cent of his poems are firmly grounded in the Scriptures, as direct exposition or clear application, many of them versified outlines of Matthew Henry's famous **Commentary**. Of Charles's craftsmanship there can be no question, even though he occasionally nodded. The more we study him, the more we marvel at his blend of stolid Anglo-Saxon and imaginative multi-syllabic Latin, of figures of speech, of repetitive and interwoven patterns of thought, of rhyme and onomatopœia, of rhythm and modulation. Throughout half a century he continued to write many thousands of potentially great hymns and sacred poems, liberally sprinkled with memorable phrases and choice verses. But he wrote too many for a large proportion to become truly great by frequent congregational use. To be published and popular, however, was in one sense irrelevant. The primary need was that he must write. It was his major God-given talent, and when inspiration struck, he must develop in verse God's word to him, and leave the eventual results of that writing to God.

One of John Wesley's original intentions for his 1780 **Collection** (noted in his Preface, section 8) was that it should not only be used in public worship but in private devotion, and this has been widely fulfilled by the Methodist people:

I would recommend it to every truly pious reader: as a means of raising or quickening the spirit of devotion, of confirming his faith, of enlivening his hope, and of kindling or increasing his love to God and man. When poetry thus keeps its place, as the handmaid of piety, it shall attain, not a poor perishable wreath, but a crown that fadeth not away.

Similarly the penultimate paragraph of its continuation in the 1876 **Collection**, with its garnered grains from the rich harvest of Wesley's manuscripts, was even more specific:

The people called Methodists were supposed by their Founder to have many uses for good hymns besides singing them in public assemblies . . .

Here also will be found some adapted to personal and private, rather than to collective worship.

Even while the number of Charles Wesley's hymns appearing in hymn-books is being reduced, the number of devotional anthologies featuring his hymns increases: as I write there are on my desk three valuable ones for 1987.<sup>14</sup>

Doubtless the speedy appearance of three more large volumes containing the hitherto unpublished manuscript poems of Charles Wesley will be speedily followed by the addition therefrom of items in further anthologies, thus adding them to the common currency of the spiritual life. There is at least some consolation for those who lament the neglect of many hundreds of Charles Wesley's best hymns, first printed in his own day or in ours. Lovers of his verse continue and will continue to "discover" in their private reading gems of inspiration, and occasionally share them in greeting cards, in hymns printed for local worship, in anthologies. Thus Charles Wesley still proclaims his searching spiritual message in memorable words, if not to the congregation at worship, at least in the sacred silence of the study.

FRANK BAKER

<sup>14</sup> John Lawson: **A Thousand Tongues: The Wesley hymns as a guide to scriptural teaching** (Exeter: Paternoster Press); S. T. Kimbrough: **Lost in wonder: Charles Wesley, the meaning of his hymns today** (Nashville, Tennessee: The Upper Room); Timothy Dudley-Smith: **A Flame of Love: A personal choice of Charles Wesley's verse** (London: SPCK) (cf. **Bulletin** 173 (The Hymn Society of Great Britain and Ireland, October 1987, pp. 258-9, "Adventures in anthologizing Charles Wesley").

## TWO METHODIST FAMILIES

(continued from Volume xlvi, page 96)

**T**HE Rev. James Osborn (1809-1882) began his ministry at Diss (Norfolk) in 1836, where the Superintendent in 1836 and 1837 was the Rev. Francis Derry, my mother's grandfather. As so often in Methodism, these two ministers found their paths crossing again later on, when Francis Derry was a Supernumerary in Hull and James Osborn was a circuit minister there. I have a number of letters written by James; three are worth mention. The first describes an interesting journey he made in 1833 when he was 23 years old. The second letter, written in 1837 to his brother George (and his wife) in Manchester, says that Mr. Derry "has bidden me preach a sermon on Sunday next" on the late King William, and asks urgently for something to say! The third letter, in 1843, refers to a prophecy that the end of the world would come during that year. He married Eliza Killick of Dover, whose lovely portrait hangs in our dining room; they had twelve children. I will comment on six.

The eldest of these, Ellen, kept a Girls' School at Alton, Hampshire. Late in life she married the Rev. James Nicholson, an ex-Ceylon missionary. One son, the Rev. George Killick Osborn, was a dedicated Wesleyan minister, who never accepted invitations to circuits, but travelled mainly in country circuits as directed by Conference. One of his congregation said of him "He was not a great preacher, but he was a great practiser". He regarded the time from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. as belonging to the circuit. On a Superintendent's salary of £120 p.a. he brought up two sons who went to Kingswood, one of whom was a local preacher in the Dorchester area and the other was killed in Palestine in 1918 during the First World War while bringing in a wounded comrade, and received a posthumous citation for valour. My uncle's many fund-raising schemes always began with 'G.K.O. £2'. Was he always so deadly serious? . . . In the pulpit, Yes. But I have a vivid memory of an occasion when he read aloud to us from a book entitled 'Wee Macgregor' by J. J. Bell, about a Glasgow urchin who always got into amusing scrapes; tears of laughter rolled down his cheeks and he could not continue. Another daughter, Maria, lived at Shirley, Southampton; she was a charming little lady, a saintly class leader, totally blind and beloved by everyone.

Three sons, Henry, Herbert and John started a tool merchant's business in Southampton. Later Herbert, my father, and John left and started as 'Osborn Bros.' in Portsmouth. Later still, John left and bought the business of Charles Nurse & Co. in London. Henry moved to Newcastle; he was a local preacher, despite being stone deaf. John attended the Wesleyan Church in Walworth for a time, but could not accept the gospel preached there. He tried several other churches with the same result; so, finding a redundant church building for sale, he bought it, called it 'Brother John's Church' and preached there himself. I have no clear recollection of the result, but cannot think that the experiment lasted very long.

**Henry Osborn (1851-1917)** married Elizabeth Baxter (Lizzie) and had eight children, two of whom died in infancy; the six others each worked for a time in the Newcastle tool business. Later the eldest, Arthur, went to Canada and began farming. Rothwell went for a time to my father's business in Portsmouth, then set up his own business near Bristol; he married Eunice Nott Osborne and they had four children; he was an active local preacher all his life. He retired to Kent and died in 1980.

Sidney (1889-1961) qualified as a doctor in Edinburgh and married Jane Coupland Aitken; they went as missionaries to Rhodesia in 1913. I well remember the vivid letters he sent home describing his pioneering work there. They had to return to Britain during the First World War owing to Jane's health. After the War they settled in East Anglia and he had a medical practice there for many years. He was also a Scout Commissioner and a Methodist local preacher. He later took orders in the Church of England and on retirement did both medical and clerical locum work. When his hearing became impaired, he qualified too as a dental surgeon. Their daughter Joyce, (b. 1918) became a veterinary surgeon and a J.P. She married Richard Phillips, who is also a veterinary surgeon, and settled in Ipswich.

Harold, the next brother, became deaf, emigrated to Canada and died at an early age, after his mind had become afflicted. Leonard was an insurance executive in the U.K. and in Canada, and at one time was a Newcastle City Councillor. He married Janet Ross Pearson and had two daughters, Joan and Margaret. Margaret was Headmistress of Stevenage Girls' School for some years before retiring in 1976. The youngest brother, Percy (1900-1956) married Lillian Smith, and they had no children. He worked all his life in the Newcastle business.

**Herbert Osborn (1858-1940)**, my father, held a number of Church offices, including Society Steward and Missionary Treasurer, and as Trust Secretary he was closely involved in establishing the Methodist Church at Copnor, then on the outskirts of Portsmouth — now the only one remaining in the town. As a tool merchant he was much respected, and he was particularly proud one year to earn high commendation in a nation-wide window-dressing competition, open to all trades in the country. A reserved man; one of the delights of his life was to do good by stealth. For example, the minister never knew who had arranged for the delivery of the welcome Christmas turkey. He married Kate Elizabeth Derry (see p. ??) in 1886, and had two children. I was born in 1890, and my sister, Olive Eliza, who was born in 1894 died in infancy.

**Herbert Derry Osborn (b. 1890)** I went to Portsmouth Grammar School, and won a scholarship to the Leys School, Cambridge, where I was senior sub-prefect and for two years chess champion, and used to play chess with W. H. Balgarnie, then a housemaster (immortalised by James Hilton as 'Mr. Chips'). In 1910 I entered the Inland Revenue Department. After a training period in Bromley (Kent), Margate and two Districts in Glasgow, I took charge of a District in Leeds and stayed in that area for 10 years. During part of that time I had temporary charge of districts in Accrington, Walsall, Portsmouth, Scarborough, Pontefract, London (Kingsway) and Leeds, before moving to Nottingham. After only a few months in Nottingham I went to London to be Private Secretary to the Senior Deputy Chief Inspector at Somerset House. This was perhaps the most interesting period of my career. My work involved dealing with some of the most awkward cases of Income Tax liability sent up from Districts in many parts of the country. I left to take District charge at Hampstead. Among the interesting 'clients' in that District were Ramsay MacDonald when Prime Minister; Frank Salisbury the Methodist artist; John Galsworthy, who had the most penetrating eyes; J. H. Thomas, General Secretary of the N.U.R. (who was used to speaking at Hyde Park Corner and addressed me similarly); and the Chinese author of the play 'Lady Precious Stream'. There were also several interesting people I didn't meet in person, such as the 6th Earl of Clarendon, one-time Governor General of South Africa; J. B. Priestley, Gracie Fields and the Woolworth heiress. The famous public house, 'The Old Bull and Bush' was also in my District. My last two Districts were London (Finsbury) and Greenock. I received the O.B.E. in 1950 and retired later the same year.

In 1912, at a Methodist Missionary Summer School at Swanwick in Derbyshire I met Margaret Frances Barron whose father, John Webb Barron, like the Osborn family, came from Northampton. For many years he lived in Tottenham, and worked in the City in the leather trade. He never earned more than £3 a week, but managed finances skilfully, and on retirement he and his wife went round the world, visiting relatives in Australia. They were both very musical and sang in church and other choirs; he was also a choirmaster and organist. Margaret and I were married in June, 1916. Margaret was a teacher, trained at Southlands, was a Sunday School teacher, and had planned to go to China as a missionary. She retained her keen interest in missionary work throughout her life and for some years was District Treasurer, and later President, of Women's Work in Scotland. We were in the London area throughout the Second World War, went to live in Gourrock in 1945, and stayed for 32 years. Margaret died in 1977. In 1978 I came to live with my daughter Olive in Yorkshire.

Second, we come to the DERRY family, the ramifications of which are less complicated.

**Robert Derry (1729-1801)** was born at Wymondham, Leicestershire. He became a shoemaker in Grantham, and was a well-respected citizen, but unfortunately he suffered for many years with a large goitre. He is said to have been a friend of John Wesley; however that may be, certain it is that it was from the yard or paddock behind Robert's house in Swinegate that Wesley preached on one occasion and it was in his house that Wesley took refuge from the mob.

Robert's son **Francis Derry (1772-1849)** entered the Wesleyan Ministry in 1802. A glance at the list of his 24 circuits throws an interesting light on ministerial life in the early years of the last century. He stayed three years in one circuit (Malton); in eleven circuits he stayed for two years and in eleven circuits he stayed only one year; he was in one circuit twice. Remembering the difficulties of travel in those days when travel was almost entirely by horseback or coach, and the state of the roads which was for the most part desperate, often dangerous, it is surprising to see what distances were covered. Not only did he serve in the South, at Plymouth Dock, Portsmouth, Chatham, Canterbury and Guernsey; he was also at Swansea, Birmingham, Lowestoft, Diss and Gainsborough, and in the North at Bingley, Otley and Todmorden. His wives and children must have found the

frequent changes very hard to accept, for example, in the matter of making friends either within the Church or outside it. He married four times, but all his eight children were by his second wife Elizabeth (1785-1823), daughter of John Kingston of Jersey, one of the first Methodists and one of the first local preachers in the Island; Wesley is said to have stayed with him. The two youngest children were Caroline (1820-1897, 'Aunt Carrie') and Thomas (1822-1892) my grandfather. Caroline married (first) John Binner, a lay schoolmaster who went as a missionary to Fiji. I remember being taken, as a small boy, to see her in Southsea; she used to tell of one occasion when her husband was away inspecting schools in another part of the island, and the natives (still practising cannibalism) arranged to have a feast. Some of them came in one night, felt and pinched her, but found her too thin for their purpose, so went away to get someone more suitable for their pot. After Binner's death she married the Rev. Charles Churchill; he had served for twenty-five years as a Wesleyan Methodist missionary in Eastern Canada (including six years as Editor and Book Steward) before returning to Britain in 1862, where he ministered at Oxford Place, Leeds, for three years, followed by nine further years in other English circuits. They had no children.

Francis Derry's youngest child was the **Rev. Thomas Derry (1822-1896)** whom I remember as a kindly patriarch, with a long flowing white beard and always a twinkle in his eye. His Conference obituary describes him as an assiduous and sympathetic pastor, "carrying sunshine wherever he went", and "a keen observer of men and things, overflowing with humour and high spirits." He regularly rose at 5 a.m. to give himself time for study. He married Olive Buxton and they had nine children, seven of whom survived infancy.

The eldest of these seven was Francis (Frank) who set up in business in Manchester; he married twice and had four daughters by his first wife, one of whom Emily Kate (Kittie), after giving invaluable help to various other members of the family, came in the mid-20s to help my parents in Portsmouth and stayed until my father died in 1940. The next child was Kate Elizabeth, my mother; she was a teacher at the school at Alton, Hants, kept by Ellen Osborn (see p.13) and it was there that she met Ellen's brother Herbert, whom she married in 1886 (see p.14). After her parents died, it was my mother who kept in regular correspondence with her brothers and sisters, and this kept the family together. a devoted class leader for many years, she was a representative to the Lincoln Conference of 1909.

Thomas Derry's other children were: John Kingston, who went to South Africa as a missionary, and later went into business there; Olive Annie, who went to China as a missionary nurse and married an Anglican missionary, the Rev. Thomas McClelland (he later became a Deputation Secretary with the Church Missionary Society); William Thompson, a Wesleyan Minister in Home circuits; Thomas de Gruchy, an analytical chemist, who lived in Bombay and married Bessie Lambert, one of seven sisters (after her husband's death she joined her sisters in Los Angeles and lived to be nearly 103); and Louisa Charlotte, who married a Yorkshire business man and emigrated with their large family to Canada.

A further note must be included about my uncle, the **Rev. W. Thompson Derry, M.A. (1862-1919)**. Apart from three years in Cardiff he served chiefly in northern circuits — Glasgow, Derby and three in Lancashire. He first married Edith Kernick and had a daughter, Alice, who became an assistant mistress at Merchant Taylors' School for Girls, Liverpool. Later he married Mary Proctor Bush — a niece of the Rev. Joseph Bush whose wife, Jane Osborn was a cousin of my father's (see *Proceedings*, xlvii, p94). The two sons by his second marriage were Warren Derry, M.A. and Kingston Derry, Ph.D., O.B.E. I have happy memories of holidays spent with this family in Derbyshire, including such delights as falling in the River Derwent, farmhouse teas, and being driven back in the farm cart.

These brothers were each in turn Senior Prefect at Kingswood School, Bath, and went on to Oxford — Warren as Demy (Scholar) of Magdalen College, and Kingston as Bible Clerk (Scholar) of Queen's. Later, Warren was a master at Edinburgh Academy for six years and Headmaster of Wolverhampton Grammar School for 27 years. He published a life of Dr. Parr and edited two volumes of the Letters and Journals of Fanny Burney. He married Lorna Ferrard of Oxford; they have three children. John is a Quantity Surveyor, Antonia is on the travelling staff of 'Save the Children Fund' and Celia is working in Educational Administration in Suffolk.

Kingston was History Master at Repton for nine years and then Headmaster of Mill Hill School for two years; he joined the Political Investigation Department of the Foreign Office in 1941 and was seconded to S.H.A.E.F. and served in that capacity in France. After war service he became Senior History Master at Marylebone Grammar School and held this position for the next 20 years. He has written a number of books, including the

official history of the Norwegian Campaign, and some school text books, mainly dealing with English and European history. He married Gudny Wesenberg of Oslo, and they have lived in Oslo for many years; he received the O.B.E. and later was made a 'Knight of St. Olaf' (Norwegian equivalent of an O.B.E.) They have no family.

## CONCLUSION

Having covered the fortunes of both OSBORN and DERRY families over the years, this story now comes to an end. I conclude with a reminder and a quotation. The reminder — when a sound standard has been built up over a long period, it may very easily be thoughtlessly, or selfishly, damaged — even destroyed; to maintain or possibly strengthen it may be difficult . . . but infinitely worthwhile. The quotation — From Hymn No. 604 in the 1904 **Methodist Hymn Book** — is a verse which was a favourite of my father's, and epitomises his attitude to the practical outworking of the Christian faith . . .

Their earthly task who fail to do,  
Neglect their heavenly business too;  
Nor know what faith and duty mean,  
Who use religion as a screen;  
Asunder put what God hath joined,  
A diligent and pious mind.

Charles Wesley

H. DERRY OSBORN

[This article was written in May, 1983. Derry Osborn died in 1987]

## LOCAL HISTORIES

Tingley (Westerton Road) Methodist Church: *150th Anniversary* (8pp): copies, price 50p plus postage, from C. Broadbent, 58 Solway Road, Soothill, Batley, West Yorkshire WF17 6HH.

*A View from the Pew, Trent Vale Methodist Church, 1888-1988* (52pp): copies, price £2.30 post free, from Mrs P. A. Cartwright, Park House, Munster Terrace, Penkhill, Stoke-on-Trent ST4 5HH.

*Greenacres Gleanings, Greenacres Independent Methodist Church, Oldham, 1837-1987* (118pp): copies, price £3.00 plus postage, from R. A. Jackson, 625G Ripponden Road, Oldham, Lancashire OL1 4JU.

*The Story of Porthkerry Road Methodist Church, Barry 1889-1989* by C. R. Croome: copies from the author at 1 Peterwell Road, Barry, South Glamorgan CF6 8NB, no price stated.

## BOOK REVIEWS

*A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain* Volume 4, General Editors, Rupert Davies, A. Raymond George and Gordon Rupp. (Epworth Press, 1988, pp. 838, £35)

This fine volume provides a worthy conclusion to the official history of British Methodism. The 800 pages of text come in two parts. The first 649 consist of a rich compilation by John Vickers of primary sources for the history of Methodism between 1738 and 1932. The remaining pages are devoted to a bibliography drawn up by Clive Field of works on Methodist history published up to 1985. The period since Union is included and the emphasis is on secondary sources.

The documentary section is arranged very largely in chronological order. Most branches of British Methodism are to some degree represented, and there is material on many different aspects of Methodist life, ranging from theological controversy to anecdotes about prominent personalities, and from chapel architecture to political campaigning. Particularly welcome are the views from outside — some, like the satirical observations of Horace Walpole, entertainingly malicious, and others, like the more cautious strictures of Charles Booth, genuinely thought-provoking. Classic passages from John Wesley's *Journal* and the inevitable quotations from such familiar figures as Clowes, Bourne, Hughes and Lidgett, are skilfully intermixed with more obscure sources, many of them now in American archives. While the book will probably be used mainly as a work of reference, it can be enjoyably read as a history of Methodism, in which the argument is only implied, but the illustrations are suggestive and absorbing.

The history is divided into three periods. The first, from 1738 to 1791 is dominated by the Wesley brothers, and most of the documents are about the process of defining the distinctive identity and role of Methodism. The major themes are the relationship between Methodism and the Church of England (the differences between Charles and John on this issue being well highlighted) and doctrinal debate with Methodism's Calvinist, High Church, Dissenting and rationalist critics. The documents from the second period, 1791 to 1851, present a somewhat inward-looking Methodism, pre-occupied with its internal divisions. The numerous schisms of this period provide the main focus, and such issues as the role and composition of Conference, tensions between itinerant and local preachers, the ban on camp meetings, and conflicts between the followers and the critics of Jabez Bunting accordingly play a major part. The third period, that from 1851 to 1932, receives somewhat less space, but at least initially the picture is a brighter one. In the second half of the nineteenth century the volume of polemics and personality clashes diminishes and Methodists are shown to be taking interesting initiatives in such fields as evangelistic methods, education, provision of leisure facilities, and the challenging of social injustices. Interest in overseas missions also reaches a peak in this period, and accounts of Methodist missions in such places as south-west China provide an added ingredient of colour and drama. However, the last quarter century of divided Methodism appears in these pages as something of an anti-climax and dominated by the approaching Union.

The most controversial aspect of this selection of material is perhaps that there is very little relating directly to the 'Halévy thesis'. Vickers no doubt feels, and justifiably so, that the preoccupation of so many historians with the theme of 'Methodism and Revolution' has led to a distorted view of early nineteenth century Methodism in which many issues of equal or greater concern to contemporaries have been neglected. I do nonetheless think that the extreme social tensions of the early nineteenth century are insufficiently reflected in these pages. There is indeed a powerful attack on the Whigs by George Loveless, the Tolpuddle Martyr, and a criticism of Methodist conservatism by William Cobbett; but references to such topics as Luddism, Peterloo and Chartism are otherwise very scanty. In this instance editorial policy may well be justified by the fact that many of the major sources are already so well known. I was more strongly disappointed by the fact that there is little about Methodism's middle class laity. There are excellent passages relating to Methodist miners and farm labourers, but in spite of a number of references to the growing wealth and respectability of Methodism, there is little about the people themselves — employers, mayors, M.P.s, and, indeed, the tens of thousands of ordinary lower middle class families that made up the hardcore of the membership of increasing numbers of chapels during the Victorian era. From a cursory scanning of the documents, one might conclude that all Methodists were ministers, missionaries or miners. One other more tentative criticism: the Wesley brothers so far dominate the first section that we are left with only rather hazy impressions of the other itinerants and of the 'people called Methodists' themselves. For instance, the documents selected make it clear why Charles Wesley opposed and John Wesley discouraged separation from the Church of England; but they provide a less clear view of the pressures from below that were pushing the Connexion in that direction.

Most readers of the documents will find some points where they might have changed the emphasis a little. But equally, most readers will make delightful new discoveries. Among the unexpected pleasures for me were a marvellous diatribe delivered by the Principal of the Wesleyan Training Institution in 1862 against the narrow approach to working class education of the then government and its system of paying teachers 'by results'; a series of missionary reports from the Gold Coast, India and China, which are of special interest whether because of the unusual degree of heroism sometimes required of the missionaries or because of the important issues of strategy that the reports reveal; and (alongside the many more formal Conference reports) a somewhat jaundiced account by an American visitor who attended in 1846. All in all, John Vickers has done a very good job and placed in his debt all those with an interest in Methodist history.

The same must be said of Clive Field, whose bibliography is characteristically thorough and wide-ranging. The entries are listed under numerous sub-headings, with about a dozen branches of Methodism and about fifty notable individuals meriting their own section, as well as such themes as 'Spirituality', 'Polity and Mission' and 'Social Aspects'. Articles in periodicals and theses (many of them American) receive particularly ample coverage. Inevitably there are occasional unexpected omissions. My impression is that books get through the net more easily than articles, and that relatively minor works which are exclusively concerned with

Methodism are sometimes included in preference to more substantial contributions to Methodist history that are contained within books that also concern themselves with other religious bodies or with the more general life of a particular locality. As an example of the former tendency: the editor of the *Proceedings* is well represented by articles in periodicals, but there is no mention of his important series of books on north-western Methodism — **Methodism in Dukinfield** (1978), etc. As examples of the latter, it is rather surprising that there was no room for volume I of Elie Halévy's **History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century** (English translation 1924) or M. R. Watts, **The Dissenters** (1978), and though less surprising, still a pity that there is no mention of such significant local studies as Robert Colls, **The Collier's Rant** (1977) or Gail Malmgreen, **Silk Town** (1985). This is only to say that this bibliography, like any other, has its biases, and that the potential user should have some idea of what the biases are.

With a price tag of £35, the book is likely to be bought mainly by librarians. That is a pity, as it offers very good value for money, and if it is seen as four substantial books in one, the price is not as exorbitant as it at first appears.

HUGH MCLEOD

*The Pitmen of the Northern Coalfield: Work, Culture and Protest 1790-1850*, by Robert Colls. (Manchester University Press, 1987, pp. xv, 386, £35)

In a previous book (**The Collier's Rant**, 1977) Dr Colls covered part of the same ground as he does here, but in a more youthful, exploratory and provocative fashion. His interpretation of Methodism as a force which emasculated the rough and rugged pitman, one of the more extraordinary theses of that lively book, has now it seems been abandoned. But what remains constant is Colls' strong and indeed passionate longing to come to terms with the major influences which formed and moulded the traditional north eastern working class among whom his family roots lie. The sense of personal involvement in what he writes, and the way he writes it, is still very evident. Certainly the book as it stands could never have been written without it.

Colls' main concern is to understand how the typical north-eastern pit village community of the later nineteenth century came to take on its essential character. This task involved understanding the miners' relations with their employers, their politics and Union organisation, their self-image as well as the way society viewed them, their extraordinary commitment to Methodist faith and life-style, and the role of their women folk in village life. To find his answers Colls looks back to the decades from the end of the eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth, and endeavours to show how in this turbulent and dramatic epoch a new society was forged, to appear in its fully-developed form in the mid-Victorian period. Colls ends therefore, where Robert Moore (**Pitmen, Preachers and Politics** 1974) began, a fact which makes his book and Moore's complementary to each other. The north-eastern mining community (including its Methodism) is fortunate in having these two major studies into its social evolution and character.

It has to be said that **The Pitmen of the Northern Coalfield** is not easy reading. This is partly due to the division into three major parts (Work, Culture and Protest) each covering the same period and inevitably repeating some of the same material. But the main factor is the way the author constantly uses detailed examples and quotations, often darting backward and forward from decade to decade, in order to illuminate his themes and draw conclusions. A briefer and more synoptic method would help the reader, and yet it would also detract from the impact made by this book. The living sources have obviously fascinated Robert Colls and he has accumulated them with diligence and enthusiasm. There is much highly quotable material in the evidence he sets forth.

Part one of the book is devoted to the miners' experiences as workers and employees, to the technicalities of the Bond system, to new work disciplines, and to the changing image of the pitmen held by their employers, the public, and the miners themselves. Part three explains the evolution of patterns of protest from older direct action (apparently threatening but also in a sense stylised) towards a politicised and disciplined unionism. In part two the author explains at length the social influence of Methodism (mainly Primitive Methodism) on mining communities and on the social features outlined in the rest of the book, especially in part three. It is this middle part which I suspect most readers of this journal will turn to with greatest interest; it certainly is to me the high point of the book.

Robert Colls does not (I believe) write from within Methodism nor is he always fully at home with religious matters. (On page 177, he quotes part of Psalm 19 thinking the words to be those of James Everett, and unfortunately compounds the error by calling them 'rhetoric!'). Yet he has, by dint of study and sympathetic imagination, entered into the heart and mind of early Primitive Methodism in a remarkably impressive fashion. He is moved to some splendid writing and there are passages which cry out for quotation (see for instance pages 171-172). There must be many who have been waiting for such an informed, sympathetic, and thoughtful analysis of grass roots Primitive Methodism in its pioneering days. Any criticisms one might have made of **The Collier's Rant** are not applicable here. Minor blemishes there may be, but Methodism is in no sense distorted or diminished, and its remarkable (if enigmatic) achievement in nurturing highly able trade union leaders is given full recognition.

This is a book to be strongly commended, partly on the grounds set out above, but also because of the sense of a historian feeling his way into genuine historical problems, accumulating his evidence, testing his theories, and painstakingly but undogmatically working out his conclusions.

GEOFFREY E. MILBURN

*John Wesley: Contemporary Perspectives*, edited by John Stacey with an introduction by Frank Baker (Epworth Press, 1988, pp. 242. £9.50 paperback).

Many books have been written about 'Aspects of John Wesley' and many no doubt have still to be written, at least the flood of literature on this subject shows no sign of abating, but this one written by twenty contributors, some of them acknowledged Wesley scholars, helps us to take a close view of Wesley in which we can see the trees without losing sight of the wood.

During Wesley Year many people must have wondered just what sort of a person John Wesley really was. A small three-year old granddaughter of one of the many impersonators of John Wesley who were seen last year was overheard to say when John Wesley was mentioned 'Of course that's really grandpa you know'. But who was really John Wesley? These separate studies help us to recognise the real Wesley and at the same time realise that only the whole book represents, though not entirely, the whole Wesley. The elephant may indeed (from one angle) look like a tree but it also looks like a wall and a rope!

Dr Frank Baker, points out in his introduction that 'Whether we realize it or not, welcome it or not, most of us have multiple personalities' and goes on to show that this was markedly true of John Wesley.

It would be as invidious to attempt to assess the importance of the contributions made to this book as it would be to list in the order of importance Wesley the preacher, the organiser, the apostle of Social Holiness, the evangelist, the writer and communicator, the sacramentalist and the catholic (there is no contribution on Wesley the Puritan). The contributions on Wesley and Women and of his concern about health and healing are both in their way revealing, and the chapter on Wesley and Death is certainly not as peripheral as at first sight it might appear. Most of the contributors, as we might expect, are Methodists, British, American and Swedish, and one from New Zealand, but the Anglican, Roman Catholic and Salvationist contributors have been able to write with their own special insights.

Professor Heitzenrater's study of Wesley and his private Diary is inevitably a study of Wesley the private man, and he whets our appetite by his comment that once the diaries are more widely accessible biographers and theologians will have 'a unique resource to help them understand Wesley . . .'

One question — why does the cover illustration show a ceramic John Wesley standing on a map of the Midlands between Coventry and Leicester contemplating British Rail train services and InterCity Savers? Is it meant to suggest another aspect of Wesley not covered in this book, Wesley the Traveller? Or is it meant to illustrate the sub-title 'Contemporary Perspectives'?

Read this book while 1988 is fresh in the memory, and read it again when the next Wesley year dawns, in 1991.

THOMAS SHAW

*Established Church, Sectarian People. Itinerancy and the Transformation of English Dissent, 1780-1830* by Deryck W. Lovegrove. (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1988. pp. xii + 254 £27.50)

The title of this excellent book derives from the fears of conservative Anglicans in the early nineteenth century that the rapid growth of dissent would leave the establishment an empty shell, confronted by a sectarian people, a thing which actually happened not in England, but in Wales and Ulster. Dr Lovegrove's study is devoted to one aspect of that great wave of itinerant preaching which is set in the late 1790s and continued for about a generation, and seemed likely to produce the feared result. His story will not surprise Methodist ordinands, but it has not been told before with the wealth of detail the author produces, and it is unlikely that much will be added to the material he here presents. Itinerant preaching was as foreign to the traditional order of dissent as it was to that of the Church; but a new generation of dissenting academies worked a revolution for a period by sending their young men out on preaching rounds as part of their training, and keeping the succession of preachers going until permanent congregations were created. This was indeed unfair competition so far as the Anglican parochial ministry was concerned, and it could hardly be contended that the Toleration Act had ever been intended to cover anything of the kind. A great agitation was put on for the repeal of limitation of that act, in the forefront of which was Jabez Bunting, not at that stage prepared to imagine the existence of a hot line between Conference and Canterbury. The two blemishes upon this admirable book are that the author's own scholarly caution has a somewhat flattening effect upon his style, and also upon his treatment of wider questions such as why colleges and congregations became very concerned at what they had so successfully done within a generation. But of what it treats it is the definitive treatment and no one concerned with its period can afford to miss it.

W. R. WARD

*John Wesley's own Choice: the Heart of True Spirituality. Volume 1: Selections from William Law; Volume 2: Selections from Thomas à Kempis, Pierre Poirret, Jean Duvergier de Hauranne and Jacques Joseph Duguet*, with Introductions by Frank Baker. (Francis Asbury Press, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1985, pp. 112, 93. \$4.95 each. ISBN: 0.310.39621.2, 0.310.45101.9)

*Milton for the Methodists. Emphasized extracts from Paradise Lost selected, edited and annotated by John Wesley*. With an introduction by Frank Baker. (Epworth Press, 1988, pp. xvi, 90, £5.50)

Wesley's reading, both at Oxford and throughout the busy later years of his life, has long been a commonplace. What is needed at this late stage is not just another rehearsal of its extent and variety, but more critical and analytical examination of his reading and its effect on him and his mission. Dr. Outler's new edition of the Sermons has already provided a wealth of material for this purpose. These three volumes edited by Frank Baker are a further contribution, to be welcomed by all serious Wesley scholars.

Dr. Baker has hit on the idea of republishing those passages highlighted by Wesley himself as being 'most worthy of the reader's notice' — and therefore reflecting their influence on Wesley himself. The two volumes from the Francis Asbury Press (now a subsidiary of Zondervan) provide an annotated text of some of the spiritual classics which influenced him and which he republished in abbreviated form. William Law was an obvious choice. Of the authors in Volume 2 only Thomas á Kempis is now a familiar name, but the others all had their influence and earned the accolade of being edited and reissued by him.

That this welcome series appears to have come to a premature halt will be regretted by all involved in Wesley studies. The version of **Paradise Lost** now made available by the Epworth Press, though rather an odd contribution to the 1988 celebrations, is to be hailed as an addition to the series and it is to be hoped that further volumes will appear, under whatever imprint, to provide working tools for the student of Wesley's intellectual, spiritual and cultural background.

JOHN A. VICKERS

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*The Country Chapel* by J. Hibbs (David and Charles, 1988, pp. 160, index, illus. £9.95)

Any book on chapels produced in the same year as the formation of the Chapel Society should be welcome, but Dr Hibbs barely deserves two cheers. He writes with high good humour and delightedly discovers quaintness and simplicity at every turn but this well produced book seems strangely formless. What is a country chapel anyway? The reviewer who has preached in dozens of them and has visited hundreds more in the South West has his own idea and views as inexplicable perverseness the waste of valuable space by the inclusion of photographs of three chapels in Bridport in West Dorset, a charming place but a *town and port* with an industrial past.

In such a book text is far less important than photographs and the publishers should have insisted on illustrations of much higher technical quality not to mention interest. A harvest festival at Meshaw captioned "... there is even the traditional marrow ..." is so blurred as to be useless, yet a minimum of effort at the appropriate season could have obtained a proper photograph. (It is, of course, worthy of comment only if a marrow is not seen at such an event.) Some illustrations are acceptable but others seem to be the author's holiday snaps (he likes Devon and West Dorset) and this is not good enough. I will accept that the pen and ink cartoons are a matter of taste but they are not to mine.

The author is unfortunate as this book (a sequel to his **The Country Bus**) falls to be compared with Christopher Stell's magisterial first volume in the series to be published by RCHM. The next to be published covers the South West and anyone wanting to know about country chapels would be advised to save up for that rather than purchase the subject of this review.

ROGER THORNE

## NOTES AND QUERIES

### 1418. HOLLOWAY CHAPEL, MATLOCK

May I correct Dr Beckerlegge's statement in Note 1403 that Holloway (near Matlock in Derbyshire) appears on no UMFC plan. It certainly figures on the Matlock UMFC plan of May to July 1875 and later on the Matlock UM plan of May to July 1913; it also figures on two 'Wesleyan Methodist Reform' plans of 1855 which preceded the creation in 1864 of the Cromford UMFC circuit, later to become the Matlock UMFC circuit in 1873. Holloway chapel was built in 1852 by John Smedley, the local hydropath who was a generous benefactor to the Methodist Reformers in the area and subsidised the building of six Reform chapels in the area. The chapel is described on page 47 of Christopher Stell's **Inventory of Nonconformist Chapels in Central England**.

To return to the point on female preachers; on the two plans I have, which list 53 and 61 preachers respectively, there is only one female, a Miss Wagstaffe, who is an auxiliary on the 1913 UM plan.

DAVID BARTON

### 1419. GIFTS TO RETIRING PRESIDENTS

I have seen a chair which was presented to the Rev. John G. Tasker on his retirement as President of the Wesleyan Conference in 1916. It has an inscription recording this fact. The question which it poses is: Was it customary to present the retiring Wesleyan President with some tangible token of his year's work and if so, does anyone know of similar gifts to other Presidents? I have not found anything in reports to indicate that this was a common practice.

WILLIAM LEARY

### 1420. METHODISTS AND THEIR BOOKS

Wills which provide full lists of testator's books are extremely rare and John Preston deserves congratulations for publishing in the **Bulletin** of the North-East Branch of the WHS the long will of Joseph Cownley (1723-92), three-quarters of which is devoted to a list of his books. Quite apart from the Methodist interest of his paper Mr Preston has made a contribution of significant value to the documentation available for the study of literacy in past times.

May I ask if any reader knows of any other detailed list of this kind or can direct me to accounts of personal reading in the biographies of Methodists? Please write to 162 Church Road, Frampton Cotterell, Bristol BS17 2ND.

JEFFREY SPITTAL

### THE ANNUAL LECTURE

will be delivered in

St. Andrew's Anglican/Methodist Church,  
Leicester Forest East

on Monday, 26th June, 1989, at 7.30 p.m.

by Dr. John A. Vickers B.A., B.D.

### 'Good Red Herring: A Dissenting View of Early Methodism'

Chairman: Mr. Pat W. Welch B.A.

The Lecture will be preceded by TEA for members at 5 p.m.  
and the ANNUAL MEETING at 6 p.m.

Those who intend to be present at the Tea should send their  
names to Dr. E. Dorothy Graham, 34 Spiceland Road,  
Birmingham, B31 1NJ, by June 9th

### ROUTE FROM DE MONTFORT HALL, LEICESTER TO ST. ANDREW'S ANGLICAN/METHODIST CHURCH, LEICESTER FOREST EAST

By car:

Leave car park and continue straight ahead into Regent Road. At third set of traffic signals turn left into Waterloo Way. At next set of traffic signals turn left into Welford Road, move to right hand lanes and take first right into Almond Road keeping to right hand lanes. At traffic signals turn right into Aylestone Road and take up left hand lane! At next traffic signals turn left into Walnut Street\*, continue and over river bridge. At next traffic signals cross over main road (busy junction) at the next set of traffic signals turn right into Fosse Road South then at the next traffic signals turn left onto the A47 Hinckley Road. Continue along road for about 1½-2 miles. Just before the road forks right for Kirby Muxloe, St. Andrew's, Leicester Forest East, Anglican Methodist Church is on the right.

Return to Conference Centre:

Reverse route to \* on-coming to T-junction traffic signals at the end of Walnut Street turn left and take up right hand lanes, at traffic signals (about 150 yards) make a right turn into Welford Road and take up centre lanes. **Do not take first left turn or next right turn** carry on until road narrows and at top of hill at traffic signals turn left into University Road, then at next traffic signals turn right into Regent Road. Hall and car park at end of road.

By bus:

Leave Conference Centre and walk along Granville Road to London Road (150 yards) Bus 29 or 29A required for City Centre to Charles Street. Leave bus and enquire for Clock Tower and Haymarket (150 yards). A Fox Cub bus Route 63 for Hinckley Road, Leicester Forest East and Kirby Muxloe leaves from the Haymarket outside Visionhire. Ask for St. Andrew's Church Leicester Forest East just before the Kirby Muxloe turn.