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# Proceedings OF THE Wesley Historical Society

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Volume XLVII

October 1989

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## GOOD RED HERRING<sup>1</sup> Methodism's relations with Dissent

*The Wesley Historical Society Lecture 1989*

**T**HE tercentenary of the Toleration Act is certainly an event of significance to others besides Nonconformists, and I am glad to have this opportunity to make a Methodist contribution to it. What I have in mind is not so much a dissenter's eye view of early Methodism (though that will have at least a minor place), as an attempt to look at it afresh against the background of Protestant Dissent. Methodism's Anglican origins, the process by which it became separated from the Church, and the way in which it later moved into the Nonconformist camp, have all been extensively examined. But less than one might expect has been written about the relationship between early Methodism and eighteenth-century Dissent.<sup>2</sup> With that as my starting point, I will then briefly consider how the existence of Dissenting congregations affected the proliferation of Methodist causes both during and after Wesley's lifetime.

<sup>1</sup>The following abbreviations are used in the footnotes: CWJ: *The Journal of the Rev. Charles Wesley* edited by Thomas Jackson, 1849; HMGB: *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*; JWJ: *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley*, edited by Nehemiah Curnock, 1909-16; JWL: *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley*, edited by John Telford, 1931; *Works Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* (formerly the *Oxford Edition*). Wherever possible, references to Wesley's writings are to the new *Bicentennial Edition*.

<sup>2</sup>Duncan Coomer, *English Dissent under the Hanoverians*, 1946, is still useful, with a chapter on "The Impact of Methodism". More recently, Geoffrey Nuttall, "Methodism and the Older Dissent: some perspectives" in the *Journal of the URC History Society*, Vol.II, October 1981, pp.259-74, throws light on "the dark period of Dissenting history immediately before the Evangelical Revival" and asks what features of Methodism were found to be objectionable by the Dissenters. See also note 6 below.

I begin with a pamphlet published within twelve months of John Wesley's death. In it Samuel Bradburn, one of the most influential of the itinerants, who claimed a particularly intimate acquaintance with Wesley himself, addressed the most urgent issue facing the people called Methodists at that moment in their history. Embedded in his title page was the question: "Are the Methodists Dissenters?"<sup>3</sup>

While this was far from a new question, Wesley's death had brought it to a head and given it a new urgency. Bradburn's judicious (though not disinterested) treatment of it shows how complex an issue it had become. Having traced the origins and development of the Methodist movement, he focused on the crucial events of 1784 and drew this conclusion:

We are not Episcopalians; we cannot be. We are not Independents, we will not be; because it would destroy the Itinerant Plan, which is, in one sense, the very life of Methodism, and which we are determined to perpetuate. Therefore we must be *Presbyterians*, whatever we may chuse to call ourselves.<sup>4</sup>

In support of this conclusion Bradburn cites Wesley himself as chief witness:

The question is, What is the Methodist Constitution? And I shall give the answer in Mr. Wesley's own words; which, though I am not sure that they are printed, yet I am willing to go into eternity declaring that he said them to me; . . . his words were, 'As soon as I am dead, the Methodists will be a regular Presbyterian Church.' And he did not mean that we should become such by making any alterations in our Government, . . . but that *his death would make us such*.<sup>5</sup>

Bradburn's point, of course, is that by 1791 events had developed to a point at which Wesley was the only remaining link between the Methodist people as a body and the Church of England within which it had originally taken root. Without him, they were effectually cut adrift: even if the majority still leaned towards the Established Church "in their judgement and affections", constitutionally they had become "mild Presbyterians".

From the outset, it is true, both sympathetic and critical observers found it difficult to "place" Methodism in the ecclesiastical spectrum, however insistent the Wesleys may have been that they were loyal Anglicans. Bradburn may have hit on as good a description as any. I therefore make "mild Presbyterianism" my starting point and propose now to explore several parallel but interrelated considerations which may support or illuminate the phrase.

<sup>3</sup>Samuel Bradburn, *The Question, Are the Methodists Dissenters? Fairly Examined. Designed to remove prejudice, prevent bigotry, and promote brotherly love*, 1792. References below are to the 2nd edition, 1793.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid, p.19

<sup>5</sup>Ibid, p.18

By way of prologue, a word must be said about the state of Dissent in the early eighteenth century. Such direct contact as John Wesley may have had with Dissenters during his early years was with a movement in decline, showing all the symptoms of a spent force. Repeatedly thwarted in their hopes for further reform of the English Church, the Dissenters had been exiled to the periphery of social and cultural life; to a large extent out of touch with the common people, yet barred from circles of political power; and increasingly influenced by the eighteenth century "spirit of reason", rather than the "Spirit of God", so that "their zeal flagged and their congregations dwindled".<sup>6</sup> The very title of the pamphlet Doddridge published in 1730 — *Free Thoughts on the Most Probable Means of Reviving the Dissenting Interest. Occasion'd by the late Enquiry into the Causes of its Decay* — is evidence of the state of affairs. Doddridge accepted the "decay" of Dissent as a fact, and a long-standing one at that, citing Bishop Burnet's verdict, back in 1692, that "the Dissenters had then in a great measure lost that good character and strictness of religion which had gained them their credit."<sup>7</sup> The only questions to be debated, therefore, were the cause and the possible solutions of this decline.

Doddridge himself is a reminder that there was another side to the picture; and we must be careful not to overstate the decadence of eighteenth century Dissent, any more than we should underestimate a Church capable of giving birth to the Wesleys. But we can at least say that Protestant Dissent, as it existed in the England of Wesley's young manhood, scarcely offered a viable alternative even to a Latitudinarian Church.

There were, nevertheless, aspects of early Dissent in which Wesley might have found foreshadowed some features of the movement in which he was about to play so important a part. Let me highlight the middle way proposed by Henry Jacob and his followers in the early years of the seventeenth century. Jacob held that "a gathered church need not renounce communion with the parish churches of England" but might co-exist with, or even within, the Establishment.<sup>8</sup> Such a *via media*, though rejected by both Anglican and Separatist extremes, looks remarkably like what Wesley attempted a century later with his network of semi-independent religious societies within the Anglican fold.

Another example is the evangelical venture undertaken by Richard Davis from his base in Rothwell, Northants, where he was minister of the Congregational Church. As with Wesley's later activities, this aroused the hostility of Dissenting minister and

<sup>6</sup>Michael Watts, *The Dissenters*, Vol.1, 1978, p.392

<sup>7</sup>Op. cit., p.7. Doddridge is quoting from Burnet's *A Discourse of the Pastoral Care* (1692)

<sup>8</sup>Watts, op. cit., pp.50-6, 100

Anglican clergy alike, not only because he itinerated over a wide area and so "trespassed" on their domain, but also because he made use of theologically unqualified laymen as preachers and by calling for emotional conversion encouraged hysteria and "enthusiasm".<sup>9</sup> Here again the parallel with early Methodism is obvious.

I So I revert to Bradburn's "mild Presbyterianism". We should note at the outset that Bradburn was by no means the first to equate Methodism with Presbyterianism. Reacting against the 1784 ordinations, Charles Wesley expressed his fears that the Methodists were becoming "a new sect of Presbyterians".<sup>10</sup> But it was more than a matter of presbyteral ordination. After all, John Wesley's method of ordinating preachers for America had been irregular from an orthodox Presbyterian as well as from an Episcopalian point of view. In any case, the Methodist/Presbyterian equation can be traced back well beyond 1784. From the outset Wesley's churchmanship clearly puzzled his contemporaries. For example, in October 1743 his preaching on the need for inward holiness provoked a lively discussion among the people of Wensleydale as to "what religion" he was of. Some thought he must be a Quaker or an Anabaptist; but one came up with the novel if understandable conclusion that he was a "Presbyterian-Papist".<sup>11</sup>

Preoccupation with doctrinal differences between Calvinist and Arminian may hinder us from seeing similarities that were easily visible to Wesley's contemporaries. Grass-roots religion, after all, sets little store by matters of theology. Visible and tangible factors are of more immediate concern to the man in the pew or in the open-air crowd. So a local example may help here.

The Isle of Purbeck is a relatively remote and isolated part of southern Dorset, an area in which the Established Church went largely unchallenged. For nearly forty years it was free of Methodist influence. There was no society nearer than Salisbury, and such rumours as may have reached the local population were of distant events unrelated to their daily experience.

But in October 1774 the minutes of the Dorset Quarter Sessions record a sudden crop of applications for places of worship to be registered. All are described as "Presbyterian", but there is no doubt that they relate to the arrival of Methodism in the area. Earlier that year one of the Salisbury Circuit itinerants had visited Purbeck at the invitation of local residents. The three registrations were for the very places — Swanage, Corfe Castle and Langton Matravers — where we know societies had recently been formed;

<sup>9</sup>Ibid, pp.292-3. For earlier use of "mechanic" preachers, especially among the Levellers, see *ibid*, pp.80, 82, 117, 122.

<sup>10</sup>Letter to Dr. Thomas Bradbury Chandler, April 28th, 1785 (HMGB, iv, p.206).

<sup>11</sup>JWJ, iii, 110. For evidence that the idea was not confined either to the early years or to the British Isles, see Thomas Coke's *Journals* 1816 edition, p.58.

and most of the signatories can be identified as Methodists from other sources. Finally, the applications occur just one week before Wesley himself visited the area for the first — and almost the last<sup>12</sup> — time, and clearly they were part of the local preparation for that visit.

Why, then, the term “Presbyterian”? I do little more than hazard a guess. The doctrinal resonances which linked Presbyterians and Independents in the eighteenth century in our own time have brought about that curious ecclesiastical hybrid, the United Reformed Church. But they would have been less evident to the Purbeck “locals” than external features such as organisation. In terms of church government Wesley’s nationwide “connexion” of societies grouped in circuits had more in common with the Presbyterian system than with Independency. It may well be that these Dorset villagers were recognising and endorsing in advance Bradburn’s “mild Presbyterian” formula. But another possibility is that by “Presbyterian” they meant no more than “someone who takes his religion seriously”. Gordon Rupp quotes Richard Baxter to the effect that “any man that was for a spiritual, serious way of worship... was commonly called a Presbyterian...”<sup>13</sup>; and the people of Purbeck may have been harking back to this seventeenth century usage.

2 Secondly, consider Wesley’s Puritan ancestry. This has been thoroughly researched by John Newton and others as something he absorbed with his mother’s milk.<sup>14</sup> (Though we must not overlook the fact that along with it he also imbibed the spirit of the Non-Jurors.) From the Puritan tradition stem several aspects of his thinking and teaching; for example, the centrality of Scripture, and his high moral seriousness. In John Newton’s words, “Methodism in its formative stages clearly bears the imprint of the Puritan tradition, in its theology, worship, pastoral oversight, and its rigorous ethical outlook.”<sup>15</sup>

All this is widely acknowledged. The important point to be clear about is that Wesley’s indebtedness to the Puritan tradition of the seventeenth century distanced him from the Independents (and *ipso facto* the Baptists) of his own day. As early as the reign of Elizabeth there was an important distinction to be made between Puritan and Separatist. In the event, English Presbyterianism failed to become the established form of religion in England and so was forced into

<sup>12</sup>In September, 1774, Wesley came in response to an invitation (JW], vi, p.41). His only other visit was an unintended one, as a result of a storm while he was returning from the Isle of Wight in 1787 (JW], vii, p.311).

<sup>13</sup>E. Gordon Rupp, *Religion in England, 1688-1791*, 1986, p.108

<sup>14</sup>Eg John A. Newton, *Methodism and the Puritans*, 1964; Robert C. Monk, *John Wesley, his Puritan Heritage*, 1966

<sup>15</sup>Newton, op. cit., p.19

nonconformity; but it was reluctantly nonconformist. Wesley's maternal grandfather, Dr Samuel Annesley, like all those deprived of their livings at the Restoration, was not a Separatist but a Presbyterian who had looked for, and striven for, the further reform of the English Church from within. A man of principle and integrity, in his eviction from the living of St. Giles Cripplegate he was as much the victim of circumstances as a martyr to his convictions. (There seems, in fact, to have been a power struggle between rival factions within the parish, with the supporters of another claimant to the living, Bruno Ryves, winning the day.<sup>16</sup>) There is little doubt that Annesley would have preferred to remain within the Established Church, if only because he could have served more effectively as a parish priest than as a nonconformist minister thrust to the periphery of society. But the terms of the Restoration settlement gave him no option.

In this reluctant nonconformity he was one in spirit with his grandson, though circumstances (including the attitude of those in authority) had changed between the later seventeenth and the mid-eighteenth century. Like the Puritans before them, the Methodists looked for reform and spiritual renewal within the Church of England. But the Wesleys shrank from schism and the separatist spirit. They admired the non-sectarian spirit of men like Richard Baxter and Philip Henry, who, far from separating from the Church on principle, "continued therein till they were driven out whether they would or not." "I cannot [Wesley says] but tenderly sympathise with these; and the more because this is, in part, our own case."<sup>17</sup> In other words, the early Methodists found themselves in a situation in some ways similar to that of the Presbyterian clergy after the Restoration — those "near two thousand burning and shining lights" . . . put out at one stroke", as Wesley calls them elsewhere.<sup>18</sup> They recognised in them kindred spirits.

3 Despite this Puritan virus in his system, Wesley grew up with a strong prejudice against Dissent in any form (Catholic as well as Protestant), reinforced by his very limited contact with individual Dissenters. Late in life he looked back on his youth as a time when he was "not only a member of the Church of England, but a bigot to it, believing none but the members of it to be in a state of salvation".<sup>19</sup> He dates the beginning of his change of heart to the year 1729, though without any indication of what may have begun the process. It is clear, at any rate, that the change was a gradual

<sup>16</sup> W. Denton, *Records of St. Giles Cripplegate*, 1883, pp.45, 51-4

<sup>17</sup> *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, iii.8 (*Works* Vol.11, 1975, pp.319-20)

<sup>18</sup> "A Short History of the People called Methodists", 1781, section 30 (*Works*, Vol.9, 1989, p.440). On Presbyterianism within an episcopalian framework, see E. Gordon Rupp, *op. cit.*, pp.108-10.

<sup>19</sup> Letter to the printer of the "Dublin Chronicle", June 2, 1789 (JWL, viii, p.140)

one. His Anglican bigotry persisted not only through the Georgia years, but into the period after May 1738. To explain his "catholic spirit" as a direct effect of the Aldersgate Street experience is therefore too simple and does not do justice to the element of continuity before and after that event.

It may well be that the ministry in Georgia, in contrast to the more circumscribed and parochial life of Oxford, was the most important factor in widening his outlook; in particular, his encounter with the Moravians. This had a twofold effect. On the one hand, and more immediately, it opened his eyes to the possibility of genuine Christianity outside the confines of the Established Church. On the other, and in the longer term, it seems to have reinforced his conviction that the Church of England, for all her blemishes, was "nearer the scriptural plan than any other in Europe".<sup>20</sup>

One measure of his changing attitude towards Dissent is the stance he (and his brother Charles) took on the question of non-episcopal baptism. This amounted in their eyes to lay baptism. Was it invalid, or merely irregular? The question clearly exercised their minds and on the answer depended their response to dissenting converts who asked to be rebaptized. To the later Wesley this would have seemed very much a matter of secondary importance (or perhaps we should say, one whose importance was pastoral rather than theological). But in the days of Oxford Methodism and for some time afterwards it was clearly a matter of real concern.

In the summer of 1735, only weeks before the Wesleys sailed for Georgia, we find George Whitefield writing to ask for advice on the rebaptism of a young man who had been brought up as a Dissenter. Whitefield wanted to encourage him to present himself for confirmation and to receive the Sacrament; but there was a prior question to be determined: Was the baptism he had received from the Dissenters valid or not? And if not, why not?<sup>21</sup>

Unfortunately, we do not have Wesley's reply to this pastoral enquiry: but the fact that it was asked is significant in itself. Moreover, it is clear that both in Georgia and after their return the Wesley brothers still had doubts about the validity of dissenting baptism and were prepared to administer conditional or "hypothetical" baptism to converts from Dissent who requested it. Indeed, they did so in spite of episcopal disapproval. On Friday, October 20th, 1738, the two brothers had an interview with the Bishop of London, in the course of which John asserted, "If a person dissatisfied with lay-baptism should desire episcopal, I

<sup>20</sup>Letter to Sir Harry Trelawney, August 1780 (JWL, vii, p.28)

<sup>21</sup>Ms letter from Whitefield to John Wesley, Gloucester, July 11th, 1735, in the Frank Baker Collection at Duke University.

should think it my duty to administer it.”<sup>22</sup> On this occasion, and again during a later interview with Charles alone, the Bishop made clear his disapproval, dismissing it as “irregular”. Despite this, Charles administered “hypothetical baptism” to a Mrs. Bell two days later; and a year later we find him planning to rebaptize Baptist converts in Bristol.<sup>23</sup>

How long this attitude persisted is difficult to say. It may be significant that when he came to publish the third extract from his *Journal*, in 1742, John Wesley passed over this interview with the bishop in silence. Does this point to a change of heart, at least on the question of rebaptism? One further piece of evidence may be noted as at least curious. In 1758 Wesley turned to his father’s “Short Discourse of Baptism” and abbreviated it as part of his *Preservative Against Unsettled Notions*. As Albert Outler has noted, Wesley at first included in his draft manuscript an introductory statement about the three essentials of Christian baptism, one of which was “an episcopal [ie episcopally ordained] administrator”. In the event, this passage was left out of the published version.<sup>24</sup> Which is significant — its original inclusion or eventual omission? That I must leave as a matter for surmise, adding only this note of query: Could there be here an indication that even in 1758 Wesley had not entirely discarded his reservations about non-episcopal baptism?

4 Although the first Methodists, especially in Wesley’s Oxford days, were all fellow Anglicans, it was not long before Dissenters began to be drawn into the movement, though they were received at first with some hesitation. In April 1739 there was some doubt among members of the Bristol bands about whether to admit a woman Dissenter, despite the fact that she was “a holy woman of deep experience”. In typical early Methodist fashion they resorted to bibliomancy and to drawing lots, before finally passing the buck by referring the matter to their fellows in London. The outcome is not recorded, unless (as seems likely) the woman concerned was Lucretia Smith, a Quaker who was baptized and then admitted to one of the bands a few days later.<sup>25</sup>

As Methodism developed its own life and organisation, former Dissenters remained a minority, but provision *was* made for them. As Wesley told Henry Brooke half a century later, “If any Dissenter

<sup>22</sup> CWJ, i, p.133, under the date Saturday, October 21st. There is no reference to the interview in John Wesley’s *Journal*, but according to his Diary the correct date was Friday the 20th.

<sup>23</sup> CWJ, i, pp.135-6, 192-3, under the dates November 13th, 1738 and October 30th, 1739.

<sup>24</sup> Albert C. Outler, ed., *John Wesley*, 1964, p.318

<sup>25</sup> John Wesley, letter to James Hutton, April 16th, 1739 (JWL, i, p.298). For her baptism, see *ibid*, p.300 and JWJ, ii, p.180.

desired to unite with them, they had no objection to his attending that worship to which he had been accustomed."<sup>26</sup> The "General Rules" of the United Societies made no specific provision for this, but Wesley later added his own gloss to the sixth rule: "One of our original rules was that every member of our society should attend the church and sacrament, *unless he had been bred among Christians of any other denomination.*"<sup>27</sup>

The Wesleys were here taking over something from the earlier Religious Societies on which the Methodist groups were modelled. Although they were originally Anglican in composition, some of these societies were prepared to admit individual Dissenters. In Wales at least, there were similar societies among the Dissenters, and some were open to Anglicans and Dissenters alike.<sup>28</sup> The Fetter Lane society in London, as C. J. Podmore has recently shown, was of this type, open to both Anglicans and Moravians — and presumably other serious-minded Dissenters.<sup>29</sup>

The minimal requirement for admission into the Methodist societies involved neither correct "opinions" nor conformity with any form of worship, but simply "a desire to flee from the wrath to come". Recalling this in 1788 as "quite peculiar to the people called Methodists", Wesley wrote: "Let them be Churchmen or Dissenters, Presbyterians or Independents, it is no obstacle."<sup>30</sup> Thirty years earlier, insisting to Dr. John Free that the Methodists had always been and still were Anglicans, he added, "But we acknowledge as 'brethren' all Dissenters (whether they are called Methodists or not) who labour to have a conscience void of offence toward God and toward man."<sup>31</sup>

The mature Wesley recoiled from any suggestion that there was no salvation outside any particular Church. "Will you aver in cold blood that all who die in such a separation [from the Church of England or any other national Church], that is everyone who dies a Quaker, a Baptist, an Independent or a Presbyterian, is as infallibly damned as if he died in the act of murder of adultery? Surely you start at the thought! It makes even nature recoil. How then can you reconcile it to the love that 'hopeth all things'?"<sup>32</sup>

5 Here and there in his writings we can find evidence that Wesley did not lump all the Dissenting denominations together, but drew distinctions between them. His *Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and*

<sup>26</sup>Letter to Henry Brooke, June 14th, 1786 (JWL, vii, pp.331-2)

<sup>27</sup>Sermon, "On Attending the Church Service", 1787 (*Works*, Vol.3, p.466)

<sup>28</sup>A. H. Williams, *John Wesley in Wales, 1739-90*, 1971, pp.xvii-xix

<sup>29</sup>C. J. Podmore, "The Fetter Lane Society, 1738", in *Proceedings*, xlvi, pp.125-53

<sup>30</sup>"Thoughts upon a Late Phenomenon", *Arminian Magazine*, 1789, pp.46-9 (*Works*, Vol.9, 1989, p.536)

<sup>31</sup>"A Second Letter to the Rev. Dr. Free", August 24th, 1758 (JWL, iv, p.29; *Works*, Vol.9, p.326)

<sup>32</sup>*Farther Appeal*, iii, 30 (*Works*, Vol.11, p.312)

*Religion*, published in 1745, bracketted the Presbyterians and Independents as "those who are at the smallest distance from us". Next in this scale of values he placed the Baptists, with the Quakers bringing up the rear. Wesley was quite explicit about the yardstick he was applying. How far was each of the denominations concerned to dispute over what he considered to be peripheral or incidental — matters of opinion or external details of ceremony and organisation — rather than with the *essentials* of religion? His verdict was that in this respect each of the dissenting groups fell short.

At one extreme the Quakers, believing themselves to be "sent of God to reform the land", set about doing so by an "open, avowed, total separation from the Church" and by vehemently attacking both "her doctrines and the whole frame of her discipline". Wesley criticized them for "spending their main strength in disputing about opinions and externals, rather than in preaching about faith, mercy and the love of God".

The Baptists, similarly, had chosen to take their stand, not on any of the "vitals of Christianity" but on "the manner and time of administering one of the external ordinances of it". We are reminded of the remarkably liberal stance Wesley took in a letter to the Baptist minister, Gilbert Boyce, in which he denied that even baptism itself — much less the mode of administering it — is "necessary to salvation": "If it were, every Quaker must be damned, which I can in no wise believe." And he adds, "I hold nothing to be strictly speaking necessary to salvation but the mind which was in Christ." By the same yardstick, even the Presbyterians and Independents fell short, though to a lesser degree. But individual nonconformists like Philip Henry were accorded honourable mention as exceptions, because they "abhorred contending about externals".<sup>33</sup>

This same principle Wesley applied to himself. During half a century in the public eye he was often drawn into controversy and never shirked an argument if vital truths were at stake. But I think we may safely believe him when he disclaims any taste for controversy. In this respect he had learned from the advice of his father. "A thousand times," he says, "I have found my father's words true: 'You may have peace with the Dissenters, if you do not so humour them as to dispute with them; if you do, they will outface and outlung you, and at the end you will be just where you were in the beginning.'"<sup>34</sup>

But the younger Wesley's aversion to controversy, whether with Dissenters or his fellow Anglicans, rested on more positive foundations than mere prudence born of rueful experience. Above

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, iv, 7-8 (*Works*, Vol.11, pp.319-20)

<sup>34</sup> Letter to James Clark, September 18th, 1756 (JWL, iii, p.202)

all was the need to recognise where the heart of the matter lay. Nothing else was, in the last analysis, worth disputing about. As he wrote to the Rev. Thomas Adam, the evangelical vicar of Winttringham in Cambridgeshire, "I advise all over whom I have any influence steadily to keep to the Church. Meanwhile, I advise them to see that the kingdom of God is within them; that their hearts be full of love to God and man; and to look upon all, of whatever opinion, who are like-minded, as their 'brother and sister and mother'.<sup>35</sup> Or as he put it at the end of his letter to Gilbert Boyce: "For me it is not [worth while to dispute these points with you]. I am called to other work, not to make Church of England men or Baptists, but Christians, men of faith and love."<sup>36</sup>

6 There is evidence, too, that both Wesley brothers were more at ease with individual Dissenters than with Dissent as such. For John Wesley this was notably so in the case of Philip Doddridge, who stood head and shoulders above his contemporaries both theologically and spiritually and in whom Wesley recognised a kindred spirit. It was no small loss to eighteenth century Dissent when Doddridge died in 1751 at the early age of 49 and just as Methodism was emerging from infancy into vigorous youth. He had at least occasional contacts with Methodism from the earliest days of the revival and watched its development with sympathetic but not uncritical interest. Some of its more extravagant manifestations gave him cause for concern, in which he no doubt spoke for most of his fellow Dissenters.<sup>37</sup> But for Wesley himself he had a warm regard and their relationship was cordial. Wesley called on him in Northampton in 1745 and was invited to expound the Scriptures to his students. Later Wesley sought his advice on authors of "practical divinity" to be included in his *Christian Library* and he replied in careful detail.<sup>38</sup>

Similarly, with Charles, though he was, and remained, the more rigid Churchman of the two. Like his brother, Charles showed another, more positive attitude towards individual Dissenters, especially in the heady early days of the Revival. His *Journal* records an encounter with "a good Dissenter near Bath, who seems to have the root of the matter in him"; and a little later, meeting the devout layman, Joseph Williams of Kidderminster, he comments, "Of what denomination he is, I know not; nor is it material: for he has the mind which was in Jesus."<sup>39</sup> In course of time, however, this

<sup>35</sup> Letter to Thomas Adam, July 19th, 1768 (JWL, v, pp.98-9)

<sup>36</sup> Letter to Gilbert Boyce, May 22nd, 1750 (JWL, iii, p.37)

<sup>37</sup> Eg. His guarded advice to Richard Witton, June 8th, 1743 (HMGB, iv, pp.66-7) and his reference to the danger of "extravagant reveries" in his 1746 letter to Wesley (see next note)

<sup>38</sup> Letter to John Wesley, June 18th, 1746. *Correspondence and Diaries of Philip Doddridge*, ed. J. D. Humphreys, 1829-31, Vol. iv, p.484

<sup>39</sup> CWJ, i, p.180, p.187, under the dates September 25th and October 8th, 1739.

openness was overlaid by growing anxiety at the signs that the Methodist people were loosening their Anglican moorings and in danger of drifting into the perilous waters of Dissent.

7 Another measure of the relationship between Wesley and the Dissenters in the later years of his ministry is his willingness to accept the offer of their chapels. The evidence of the *Journal* is no doubt incomplete in this respect and there were surely invitations given and accepted on other, unrecorded, occasions. Nevertheless, the first thing to be noted is the *infrequency* with which this happened. Skevington Wood lists only twenty-three cases in forty-four years between 1746 and 1790; far fewer than the corresponding occasions on which he had access to the parish church.<sup>40</sup>

A closer examination of individual examples reveals some interesting features. In no fewer than twelve of the cases (four of them in Ireland) the offer was of a Presbyterian meeting-house. Independent chapels (eight in all) accounted for most of the others. There is only one occasion on which he was invited to use a Baptist chapel. The only case involving the Quakers, at Skircoat Green near Halifax, may in fact have been a private house.

Wesley does not appear ever to have *asked* for the use of a dissenting meeting-house, as he did in the case of parish churches, but responded to an invitation, usually from the local minister or the proprietor of the premises. On one occasion, at Sandwich in Kent, he was offered both the Presbyterian and the Baptist chapels, and chose the former as more commodious. While he often preferred to preach in the open air, he had three reasons for accepting these invitations: bad weather, the need to accommodate larger numbers than the local Methodist preaching-house would hold, and, on occasions, the refusal of the use of the parish church.

To John Bennet he wrote in 1749: "I have no objection to your preaching in any meeting-house. The *place* does not make the *Dissenter*."<sup>41</sup> But he felt — whether justifiably or not — that a congregation largely made up of Dissenters was likely to prove stony ground. And when it came to permitting dissenting preachers to use the Methodist chapels, he was adamant:

Dear Tommy, [he wrote in 1779 to Thomas Carlill in the Oxfordshire Circuit] I think it is the safest way not to permit any Dissenting teacher to preach in any of our preaching-houses. We have suffered so much by this already that we ought to beware of it for the time to come.<sup>42</sup>

So the goodwill was, it seems, scarcely mutual.

<sup>40</sup> A Skevington Wood, *The Burning Heart: John Wesley Evangelist*, 1967, p.135. One of these cases, Wesley's regular use of the "Bull-and-Mouth Meeting" in London, should probably be discounted as too problematical to be categorized.

<sup>41</sup> Letter to John Bennet, January 9th, 1749 (JWL, ii, 171)

<sup>42</sup> Letter to Thomas Carlill, June 13th, 1779 (JWL, vi, p.346)

We may say, then, by way of a summary, that although Wesley moved a long way from the bigotry of youth, his attitude towards Dissent (as towards Roman Catholics) remained equivocal. His admirably "catholic spirit" did not preclude criticism of the Dissenters for their hostility to the Established Church, or their proclivity to dispute over secondary matters. He deprecated what he called "their formal extemporaneous prayers" and "what are vulgarly called gospel sermons" — the latter not just because the term was "mere cant", but because, he claimed, the Methodists "know no gospel without salvation from sin".<sup>43</sup> And when it came to taking advantage of the Toleration Act in order to protect both his preachers and the preaching-houses, he hesitated for a long time out of a deep aversion from being described as "dissenting from the Church of England".

They for their part had definite misgivings about Methodism, not only because of its Arminian theology, but because of its grassroots emotionalism and anti-intellectualism, especially after Wesley's influence was removed. Two well-informed and intelligent observers from the dissenting camp, David Bogue and James Bennett, while praising the evangelistic zeal of the Methodists, concluded that "the want of competent knowledge in the great body of their preachers, has nourished error and enthusiasm among the people, and too fully justified the heavy censure which has been passed upon this communion, as containing a greater sum of ignorance of the Scriptures than was ever found in any body of protestants since the reformation."<sup>44</sup> It was to be many years before political and cultural pressures drove the still reluctant Wesleyans into the Free Church camp — with about as much half-heartedness as a Thatcherite government going into Europe; and by then they had at least removed one badge of reproach by providing for an educated ministry.

\* \* \*

Meanwhile, one further aspect remains to be considered. The England into which Methodism was born had not only a long-established parish system, providing, at least in theory, local pastoral care, but also many dissenting congregations. The question arises: Given the early relationships and attitudes which I have tried to elucidate, what effect did this have on the growth and distribution of Methodism? In this final section I shall offer few answers, and those only very tentative ones. My purpose, rather, will be to define the issues that need and deserve further attention, and to suggest some lines of possible investigation.

<sup>43</sup>Letter to Mary Bishop, October 10th, 1778 (JWL, vi, pp.326-7)

<sup>44</sup>David Bogue and James Bennett, *A History of the Dissenters*, Vol. iv, 1812 (HMGB, iv, pp.339-40)

My own work on the Evangelical Revival in parts of southern England furnishes some examples of the interaction between Methodism and Dissent.<sup>45</sup> As late as 1791, when Wesley died, there was still only a handful of Methodist societies scattered throughout Hampshire and Dorset and southern Wiltshire, a wide area which only a year before had still been a single circuit. Dissent in this part of the country was almost entirely confined to the towns, so cannot be held responsible for the absence of Methodist causes in the villages. But there is little doubt that where Dissenting congregations existed, they did impede the advance of Methodism. For example, there was no permanent Methodist presence in Southampton until the end of the 1780s, and, even then it was a day of small things. The existence of a reinvigorated Independent congregation under the leadership of William Kingsbury at the Above Bar Chapel deprived Methodism of the support it might have had from the lower middle class shopkeepers and small businessmen. The members of the first little society were mostly domestic servants and its existence was precarious. This situation was repeated a decade or so later in Romsey, where the Wesleyans found themselves in competition with the Abbey Independent Chapel during the ministry of James Bennett, one of the shining lights of Dr. Bogue's Academy at Gosport. There is some evidence of similar circumstances in Dorset: at Poole, Christchurch, Dorchester and perhaps Weymouth.

At Gosport, David Bogue's arrival in 1774 brought a new lease of life to the Independent cause, which traced its origins back to 1662. This again had an inhibiting effect on the attempts to introduce Methodism even into a town where the Church of England was lamentably weak and continued so until the incumbency of Samuel Wilberforce in the 1840s.

Conversely, there is some evidence that where Methodism *did* establish an early bridgehead this could adversely affect local Dissenting causes. The Old Presbyterian Meeting at Shaftesbury passed through several changes of fortune, becoming an Independent congregation in the process. There is some reason to think that the opening of the first Methodist chapel in the town (by John Haime in 1753) depleted its congregations. In a town of not many more than 2,000 inhabitants, three quarters of whom could be accommodated in the three parish churches, and where there was an element of vociferous popular hostility towards any evangelical activity, Methodism could only advance at the expense of its rivals.

Most recent investigations of the inter-relationship between the denominations have focused on a rather later period and have

<sup>45</sup> Unpublished thesis, *Methodism and Society in Central Southern England, 1740-1851*, University of Southampton, 1987

made use of the statistics provided by the Census of Religious Worship in 1851. This has the advantage of providing a substantial and nation-wide body of material. Also, by 1851 Methodism had spread to most parts of the country; so that its pattern of distribution — including those areas in which it still had not established itself — becomes significant in comparison with other denominations.

The conclusion most frequently put forward is a twofold one. Firstly, that the older Dissenting bodies were strongest in areas where Anglicanism was also strong; and secondly, that in contrast to this Methodism flourished mainly where the Church of England was at its weakest (for example, in Cornwall and the industrial north) — areas, that is, where Dissent too was under-represented.<sup>46</sup> In other words, Methodism, like a certain brand of lager, refreshed those areas which other denominations failed to reach.

Any examination of the denominational pattern in 1851 involves at the outset a number of problems, of which we do well to be aware. These include questions about the accuracy and reliability of the Religious Census — both of the original returns and of the statistical tables in the published *Report* — and further questions about how the statistics are to be interpreted. There is a need to define what we mean by denominational “strength” and “weakness” and to decide on the criteria by which we will measure them. Which is more significant, the percentage of the population attending each or all of the churches in a given locality, or the denominational share of total attendances?

None of these issues can detain us here, but they cannot be ignored in any serious attempt to use the Census as a basis of comparison between different denominations, different localities, and different types of community.

It is equally important to determine what is the most significant geographical unit for the purposes of comparison. John Gay's study of the “geography” of English religion<sup>47</sup> used the county as its basic unit of comparison, and its value, in my view, is seriously limited by that. For one thing, county boundaries are largely irrelevant in this context. Brian Coleman's survey of the Religious Census in southern England<sup>48</sup> covers all the counties from Cornwall to Kent, but breaks down the figures by Registration

<sup>46</sup>Eg. Robert Currie, in *Proceedings*, xxxvi, p.68; David M. Thompson, “The Religious Census of 1851”, in *The Census and Social Structure*, edited by Richard Lawton, 1978, p.261. But cf. A. D. Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England*, 1976, pp.117-21, where he argues on the basis of accommodation figures that not just Methodism but Nonconformity as a whole flourished most where the Church of England was weak.

<sup>47</sup>John D. Gay, *The Geography of Religion in England*, 1971

<sup>48</sup>Brian I. Coleman, “Southern England in the Census of Religious Worship, 1851” in *Southern History*, Vol.5, 1983, pp.154-88

District. He found that the region falls into five "zones", cutting across the county boundaries. The county is too large a unit for meaningful comparison, since the significant variations are to be found at a much more local level. In Alan Gilbert's words, although "county patterns of denominational strength do contribute to the explication of Nonconformist growth processes... they also obscure the existence of crucial local variations of religious adherence."<sup>49</sup> The work of Alan Everitt and others on the types of rural community most conducive to Dissent shows how much more complicated the situation was than any survey at county level can reveal.<sup>50</sup>

The evidence from southern England confirms that the closer we get to the local situation, the more clearly we begin to see the factors that were actually at work. It is not easy to find any coherent pattern at the level of the Registration Districts. In some (such as Whitchurch and Fordingbridge) Methodism seems to have flourished in conditions that were favourable to *all* denominations. In others (like Stockbridge) it was having a measure of success where others languished. On the other hand, Methodist attendances were unimpressive both in Districts like Lymington and Christchurch where there were strong Dissenting congregations, and in Alverstoke, where the combined attendances for *all* denominations were the lowest recorded anywhere in Hampshire or Dorset.

Adjoining Districts, or even parishes, sometimes show markedly different characteristics. Paradoxically, it is when we take a parochial view that we begin to identify more general trends and features. Size and shape of parish, size and distribution of population, patterns of land-holding (varying from the estate parish to those divided among numerous freeholders), social and economic composition and other features of the local community go a long way to explaining why Dissent and/or Methodism succeeded in gaining a footing in one place, but failed elsewhere. Even in communities where the level of churchgoing was high (usually the market towns and the more compact, nucleated villages), the demand for one brand of religion or another was limited.

Even this brief sampling confirms Currie's conclusion that we need "micro-analysis" at the level of individual parishes and chapels to complement the "macro-analysis" of the sociologist.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup>A. D. Gilbert, *op. cit.*, p.116

<sup>50</sup>Alan Everitt, *The Pattern of Rural Dissent: the Nineteenth Century*, 1972. David Thompson in his unpublished thesis, *The Churches and Society in Leicester*, Cambridge, 1969, uses similar categories, derived from an article by Dennis Mills in *Amateur Historian*, Vol.vi, 1963-65.

<sup>51</sup> Robert Currie, *op. cit.*, p.73

But we must also heed David Hempton's reminder that "A helpful environment facilitated growth, but did not produce it."<sup>52</sup>

Here is a whole field of enquiry that is ripe for further investigation. I am sure that real progress will be the result of collaboration between historians working in different parts of the country and co-ordinating their findings. A number of regional studies already exist as contributions to this venture.<sup>53</sup> There is ample scope for more of these, to undergird the connexional histories and bridge the gap between them and the local histories that abound in Methodism. So my final word is a plea for further attention to be given to this aspect of our past. If that plea is heeded, then although Methodism may have been neither Anglican fish nor Dissenting flesh, at least my chosen topic will not prove just another red herring.

JOHN A. VICKERS

<sup>52</sup>David Hempton, *Methodism and Politics in British Society, 1750-1850*, 1984, p.16

<sup>53</sup>Eg. B. Greaves, *Methodism in Yorkshire, 1740-1851*, unpublished thesis, Liverpool, 1968; James Obelkevich, *Religion and Rural Society: South Lindsey, 1825-1875*, 1976; and D. M. Thompson's thesis mentioned in n.48 above.

## NOTES AND QUERIES

### 1425. A MEMORIAL PLAQUE IN TRURO

On May 7th, 1988 a plaque was unveiled in Boscawen Street, Truro, by the Vice-President of the Conference (Mr. Derek Burrell, M.A.) to mark the main site of Wesley's preaching in the town. The plaque is on the wall of the TSB Bank in Boscawen Street which stands on the site of the Coinage Hall which Wesley mentions several times in his Journal.

The inscription reads:

HERE ON THE SITE OF THE COINAGE HALL

JOHN WESLEY PREACHED

27th AUGUST 1776

AND ON OTHER OCCASIONS

'Ye are saved through faith'

Wesley's comment after that sermon was, 'I doubt the Antinomians gnashed on me with their teeth; but I must declare the whole counsel of God.' The reference was to the followers of Samuel Walker, the former curate of Truro, who by that time had become the first Truro Congregationalists. The Cathedral window nearby shows Walker sitting at the feet of John Wesley!

THOMAS SHAW

## TUTOR TO THE HILLS: THE EARLY CAREER OF JOHN FLETCHER

**J**OHN Fletcher of Madeley was one of the most revered of eighteenth century Methodists. The first of his early biographers was John Wesley, who had hoped that Fletcher would be his successor; several other clergymen wrote memoirs; Benson published Fletcher's *Works* in eight volumes, in 1838; and there have been more recent studies. But one aspect of his life has not been closely looked at — the decade when he was a tutor to the sons of Thomas Hill. During this period he came to Methodism, was ordained, and finally came to be vicar of Madeley. It is therefore a period of considerable interest.

Jean Guillaume de la Fléchère was born in Nyon, in Switzerland, on 12th September, 1729; he was educated at the university in Geneva and tried various ways of life; but from early days he was religiously inclined. In a letter to John Wesley, written when he had been in England for several years, he outlined his early life: "When I was sixteen the Lord shewed me it was not possible to serve two Masters . . . I began to look about me, to strive in earnest to grow in holiness and for eight months I think I walk'd as became a follower of Christ . . . The time was come when I was to chuse a way of life; my friends would by all means have me an officer . . . I yielded to their importunities as wanting both gifts and grace to carry me thro the dutys of a Clergyman . . . setting out for Germany I spent a year there to learn High dutch and fortification." This effort came to nothing because peace came and the corps of engineers he was to join was disbanded. Another scheme, to go to 'Brasilia' was frustrated by an accident. "When I was cur'd an oncle [sic] offered me a commission in the Dutch service upon which I set out for Holland, where I stayed some months waiting for what he had promised me, till seeing too much of a military life to like it and tired out by the promises of deceitful men, I resolv'd to go to England, for six years."<sup>1</sup> His first year in England was spent in Hertfordshire, at the school of a Mr. Burchell; then he went to London where there was quite a numerous Swiss community. In the autumn of 1751 he was recommended by a Mr "Des Champs" as tutor to Thomas Hill.

Hill was a wealthy man of business, living at 3 Cleveland Court, St James's; he possessed an estate in Shropshire, and was one of two MPs for the town of Shrewsbury. His wife, Susanna Maria, was

<sup>1</sup> a copy of this letter, dated 10 May 1757 — MAM P11 Fletcher volume p.95

daughter of William Noel, lawyer and MP for Stamford. The Noels were allied to the aristocratic family of Wentworth; the Hills were a younger branch of the Hills of Hawkstone, in Shropshire. There were four children: Susanna, Maria, Samuel and Noel, born between 1741 and 1745. It was Hill's second marriage; one daughter by his first wife was still at home. Hill's own education had been mainly mercantile — he had been apprenticed for eight years to a banker in Amsterdam. He felt it was important to learn French, and perhaps Dutch or German, but he would have put his sons to school if it had not been for his wife. In April 1751 he wrote to his cousin Samuel, of Shenstone in Staffordshire: "I am much oblig'd to you for the friendship by enquireing after the schools of Burton and Ripton but they are at too great a distance and out of the line. I had a design to put my Boys under the care of Dr Croftes at Fulham but when I came to Town I found he was declining that business; and that Mr Cox at Kinsington was grown past his usual attention to his young Scollars. My Wife would not hear of sending her Boys to Eaton or Westminster yet awhile . . . She had learnt it from Mr Poyntz [probably Stephen Poyntz, tutor and diplomat] to prefer a private education; for the sake of grounding youth in the principles of Religion and Honor which he was used to say were rarely or never to be truly fixt afterwards."<sup>2</sup> John Fletcher (he had anglicized his name for convenience) thus suited all the requirements and moved to Cleveland Court that autumn.

On 7th March, 1752, he wrote to his father with news of his life in London, and described the Hills.<sup>3</sup> "I am happily fallen in a house where my kind of life far from scandalising is sooner imitated than ridiculed. I continue to be quite well regarded by all the family." Fletcher lacked confidence (in the letter to Wesley already referred to he said he had always been looked on as odd because he kept his thoughts to himself and shunned company) but he apparently felt comfortable in the household. 'Mr d'Hill' aged 60 — he was actually 58 — was a plain and unpretentious man, caring little for brilliance and consequently showing little aptitude for human relationships. He was mainly occupied with business and when at home usually had a book in his hand — "10 contre un, c'est une grammaire". He wanted French spoken at supper, but Mrs Hill raised her eyebrows at anything not English; so Fletcher "played the Carthusian" and kept silent. 'Mme d'Hill' (in her thirties) was still handsome, and rather grand — she could seem proud and was prone to take umbrage, but Fletcher had not crossed her. Indeed he seems to have courted her favour, showing an interest in her shell collection (one of her passions) and teaching her French. She was the dominant

<sup>2</sup> a copy of this letter in Thomas Hill's letter-book S.R.O.112/22

<sup>3</sup> a copy of this letter Methodist Archives, MAW F1.31 I would like to thank Mrs Claude Coulton for confirmation of certain points of translation.

partner, and was even able to persuade her husband to spend money despite his passion for economy. The third adult was Margaret, Fletcher's own age, twenty-two; he described her as ugly, good-natured with a fortune of her own from her mother. He avoided her, having learned caution when in Hatfield, where a young lady had misinterpreted his completely innocent attentions — the English evidently did not understand foreign gallantry. Their father's mania for things French had nearly ruined his sons, Fletcher said: they had been entrusted to someone "aussi debauché qu'ignorant", probably a French servant, who had had a bad influence; but he hoped that their tender years and good nature would allow him to lead them back to the path of truth. They had made more progress with him in four months than they would have done in eighteen at some great school.

His duties as tutor ended at eight and he could devote the rest of the evening to study, or he could visit his friends. Other leisure was enjoyed when the children went walking, riding, or to dancing lessons, with their mother. He had been invited, but he treasured time to himself (although he did go to dancing lessons himself). After these first few months with the family in London, Fletcher was looking forward to going into the country with them — to see a new part of the countryside and to bathe in the Severn. They would be there until Parliament sat again in November. That year they left Town early because smallpox was rife. So Fletcher made his first acquaintance with Shropshire. It was a world of country squires, some families established since the Conquest, and most bound to each other by marriages somewhere in the various lineages. Thomas Hill's country estate was based on his home in the parish of Atcham, a few miles south-east of Shrewsbury, by the confluence of the Severn and the Tern. Tern Hall was a very modest house, built in 1701 (it was enlarged in the later 1750s under Mrs Hill's aegis). The River Tern flowed near it, in its grounds, and also near it was a feature which may have surprised Fletcher, who seems to have envisaged a country idyll. Tern Works, run by ironmaster Joshua Gee, was a constant annoyance to Hill, with its forge hammers, waggons, and unruly children from the colony of 40 or so workforce. He was relieved when Gee left before the lease was up — the Works was pulled down in 1757. The Shropshire estate was managed by the steward at Tern, a north country man named Thomas Bell. He looked after all the horses including those of the "young gentlemen" and took the boys riding and coursing. There were also friends to receive and to visit, occasions when Fletcher could retire to his own books and devotions. It was early in his time as tutor, possibly even on that first journey, into Shropshire, that Fletcher had an encounter which was to change his life.

Again we can turn to the letter to Wesley for Fletcher's own

account of what happened at St Albans. "The family had baited [stopped for refreshment] and while they drank tea I went to take a walk and get out of the way of the world: I soon met a poor woman who seem'd to be in distress, and asking her what was the matter I soon saw that she was a Christian; the pleasure and the profit I found in her conversation made me forget that I was upon a journey, and when I returned to the inn I found that I had been left behind. However, taking a horse, I overtook the family and told the reason why I had stay'd behind. Don't go says [Mrs Hill] talking to old women people will say that we have got a Methodist and when she had told me I said that I would be one of them if there was really such people in England." Learning that 'Methodists' were devoted to prayer, Fletcher must have been reminded of the tiny group he had belonged to briefly when a student, but one of the group became a Deist and it broke up. Mrs Hill was able to tell him about Methodists not only because there was a certain notoriety in London about Lady Huntingdon and her 'set', but because one of her old friends was Sarah Gwynne of Garth in Breconshire; Susanna Hill had spent some time there in the summer of 1748, the year when Charles Wesley made more than one visit, to preach and to see Sally Gwynne, whom he married in April 1749. So Mrs Hill's pleasantry was based on closer knowledge than might have been expected. She was not, however, sympathetic to Methodists, as we shall see later.

As soon as he was back in London, in the autumn, Fletcher sought out the group in West Street, near Drury Lane; formerly a Huguenot chapel it had been used by the Methodists since 1743; Charles Wesley conducted his first Watchnight Service there in 1747; and the Countess of Huntingdon worshipped there.<sup>4</sup> Now Fletcher found a religion which answered his needs; he had fellow-devotees; and he joined the class of Richard Edwards. In an undated letter to his brother Henri he described his faith since his conversion: "I formerly thought that I had a knowledge of religion, but I have since felt that I was ignorant of even its first principles . . . I daily make new discoveries in the Holy Scriptures . . . religion consists in loving God above every other thing. True love to God can only be founded in a lively faith in Jesus Christ. This faith can only have firm root in a heart broken and penetrated with a sense of its misery."<sup>5</sup> Fletcher was to experience much misery in the next few years. He felt his own unworthiness and had a long spiritual struggle ahead of him. At Tern he was almost solitary in his faith, although there were anecdotes of his leading some of the servants in prayer, and praying with the husband of one servant in the fields

<sup>4</sup> see J. H. Martin, *John Wesley's London Chapels* (1946)

<sup>5</sup> translation of this letter from *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine* 1827, p.378

and meadows. He himself tells us of his nights of anguish, before he felt able to make his Covenant with God. This is dated August 1754: "Having spent the greater part of my life in the service of Satan, by the gracious impulse of thy mercy, torn from the world, the devil and myself, myself to thee my Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier, I resolve to consecrate wholly and forever . . .<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile he had his duties as tutor: one bill survives for school books. He was paid £1.7.6d for obtaining a Greek grammar, and Abridgment of Greek and Roman history, a dictionary, maps of Europe and the World, two French Common Prayer Books and *Comus*.<sup>7</sup> His increasing devotion made him more unworldly, and more eccentric by worldly standards, but he was still treated kindly by the Hills. When he was seriously ill early in 1756 Mrs Hill was very concerned; she paid a doctor's bill of eight guineas on 21st May<sup>8</sup> At Tern on 19th October Fletcher wrote to Richard Edwards: "Dearest Brother, This is to let you know that I am very well in body and pretty well in soul; but I have few friends here."<sup>9</sup>

On 24th November Fletcher wrote to John Wesley for advice. "I think it necessary to let you know, Sir, that my patron often desired me to take orders, and said he would soon help me to a living; to which I coldly answered, I was not fit, and that besides I did not know how to get a title." It was required of an ordinand that he had a 'title' — that he could support himself when in orders. "The thing was in that state when, about six weeks ago, a gentleman I hardly knew offered me a living, which in all probability will be vacant soon; and a clergyman I never spoke to gave me, of his own accord, the title of curate to one of his livings. Now sir, the question which I beg you to decide is, whether I must and can make use of that title to get into orders." Fletcher was not interested in the other living (we do not know where this was, but it was probably a Shropshire living where Hill had influence). "I have no mind to it because I think I could preach with more fruit in my native country, and in my own tongue."<sup>10</sup> At this time, therefore, Fletcher, was concerned only as to whether he should take orders — he did not intend staying in England for ever. The curacy was at Madeley: the clergyman who offered it was Hill's kinsman, Rowland Chambre, and the patron of the living was Hill's nephew Edward Kynaston. Fletcher was in the world of English patronage, although he seems not to have appreciated this. Back in London he must have been reassured by Wesley (who wanted Fletcher to join him in itinerant work) for he was ordained in March 1757 and immediately began to

<sup>6</sup>two copies of the Covenant, French and English — MAM P4d 14 and 15

<sup>7</sup>undated bill S.R.O.112/37

<sup>8</sup>S.R.O.112/37A

<sup>9</sup>quoted in Rev. L. Tyerman, *Wesley's Designated Successor* (1882) p.23

<sup>10</sup>quoted in *The Works of the Rev. John Fletcher* (1838) vol.8 p.148

help Wesley in his preaching in London. By the end of May, however, he had to return to Tern — it distressed him that he had to travel on Whit Sunday.

Now he returned to Shropshire as an ordained priest, but his troubles did not disappear — they multiplied. He was invited to preach at Atcham: one story is that he chose as his text ‘Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity against God?’ In the small church of St Eata, filled with Hills, their friends, neighbours and tenants, this was hardly an appropriate opening. Eyebrows would certainly have been raised, and umbrage taken. He also offended the clergy at Shrewsbury Abbey and Wroxeter, where he preached — and Rowland Chambre at Madeley. For over two years he was ostracised in the county. Added to this he converted the Hills’ cousin Richard, eldest son of Sir Rowland. He became a notable evangelical and three of his brothers became preachers (Rowland, Robert and Brian). Richard Hill was seeking spiritual comfort, fasting, praying, meditating, reading the Scriptures, when he wrote to Fletcher from Shrewsbury. “What I wanted was a skillful physician for my soul . . . I recollected, however, that once, if not oftener, the Rev. Mr Fletcher, then tutor to two neighbouring young gentleman . . . had in my hearing been spoken of in a very disrespectful manner, for things which seemed to me to savour of a truly christian spirit.”<sup>11</sup> This is added testimony to the ill-feeling towards Fletcher at this time. For the next two years he responded to Richard Hill’s appeals for help, though it brought hostility at Tern Hall. There were still attempts to get Fletcher into a living: at the end of 1758 he was offered Shenstone (Hill had recently inherited this estate from his cousin), a pleasant place with £80 a year for life, Hill pointed out; it was declined. Hill conferred with his wife and another proposal was made: Hill was patron of a living in Chester — Thornton — which he had promised to Chambre, when the aged incumbent, his cousin Edward Harwood, died. When that happened, Fletcher could have Madeley. Mrs Hill pressed him for an answer, assuring him that he could resign the living at any time, should he want to return home. He at last agreed, but the prospect was not immediate.<sup>12</sup>

During the winter in London the Hills grew more concerned that their tutor might influence their sons, as he had done their cousin: “on tremble que je ne corrompe ses deux cousins et que toute la

<sup>11</sup>Richard Hill’s own account is given in Rev. Edwin Sidney, *The Life of Sir Richard Hill* (1839) p.23

<sup>12</sup>these details are given in a letter to Charles Wesley 26 December 1758 — MAM P11 F1. vol. p.2. The version usually printed is drawn from the *Short Life of the Rev. John Fletcher* by John Wesley (1786); the facts there are slightly inaccurate

famille ne soit ruinée par cette peste de Methodistes.”<sup>13</sup> Mrs Hill was particularly hostile. In fact, the boys were sent away — although they were very young they were entered at St John’s College, Cambridge in April 1759. At this time Charles Wesley was Fletcher’s confidant, and we can trace events through letters (mainly in French) written from Tern that summer, and from London in the autumn. When the boys came home from Cambridge they rebelled against their tutor; it was Sam who undoubtedly led Noel. Their behaviour was so bad that their parents began to repent of having sent them among the wolves to escape the dog — Fletcher himself. He was beset by self-doubts and the behaviour of his pupils aggravated his torment. He returned with the Hills to London at the beginning of November 1759 and told them of his wish to leave their household; Mrs Hill took this very much amiss. Fletcher explained to Wesley that he felt himself useless to the Hills, a burden, that he felt a kind of slavery in his position, and he could no longer support the manners of his poor pupils.<sup>14</sup> Wesley counselled patience, and the Countess of Huntingdon advised him to speak to Mrs Hill. This proved good advice, for although Mrs Hill chided him for his religious practices, and his failure to profit from their offered patronage, she made it clear that he would be welcome to their home and to eat with them, even though he was taking a room of his own in London. Mr Hill thanked him for his services and said he could use Cleveland Court as his address. It is good to know that Fletcher and Mrs Hill were reconciled, for within two weeks she was taken ill and died, on 14th February 1760; Fletcher wrote to Tern to inform Bell. We do not know what took place in the final days, but Fletcher must surely have offered Mrs Hill comfort and prayer. For her part, she had wanted him to go to Tern with them the following summer, and still promised him Madeley. The latter possibility he was leaving to Providence to decide, but he did accompany Hill into the country in June.

Fletcher’s future was still undecided: he did not want to be parted from the Methodists, hoping that he might work with Charles Wesley. There was another offer of a post as tutor, to a nephew of Lady Huntingdon, but he wrote to Wesley on 14th September: “J’ai si mal reussis dans l’education des jeunes gens . . . que j’ai concu une espece d’aversion pour le metier de precepteur” — having failed once he would not undertake the education of young Mr Ingham.<sup>15</sup> Just at this point his situation altered, through the combined workings of Providence and Thomas Hill. The story is

<sup>13</sup>letter to Charles Wesley 22 March 1759 — MAM P11 F1. vol. p.81; other letters to C.W. are on subsequent pages

<sup>14</sup>this letter is dated only 10 November, “de la Fonderie” — it must belong to 1759 — MAM P11 F1. vol. p.66

<sup>15</sup>MAM P11 F1. vol. p.11

best told in Fletcher's own words, in a letter to Lady Huntingdon on 26th September — a copy was included in his letter to Charles Wesley:

The light I expected from our friend at Bristol is come, though from a different quarter. A fortnight ago, the Minister of this parish [Atcham] with whom I have had no connection for these two years, sent me word (I know not why), that his pulpit should be at my service at any time, and seems now very friendly. Some days after, I ventured, without design, a visit of civility to the Vicar of a neighbouring parish, who fell out with me three years ago for preaching faith in his church; he received me with the greatest kindness, and said often he would have me take care of souls some where or other. Last Sunday, the Vicar of Madeley, to whom I was formerly curate, coming to pay a visit here, expressed great regard for me, seemed to be quite reconciled, and assured me that he would do all that was in his power to serve me; of which he yesterday gave me proof by sending me a testimonial unasked. He was no sooner gone than news was brought that the old Clergyman I mentioned to your Ladyship died suddenly the day before; and the same day, before I heard it, Mr Hill meeting at the races his nephew who is patron of Madeley, told him that if he would present me to Madeley he would give the Vicar of that parish the living vacated by the old Clergyman's death. This was immediately agreed to, as Mr Hill himself informed me in the evening, wishing me joy.<sup>16</sup>

In all this Fletcher saw the "leadings of Providence". One wonders whether news of Edward Harwood's death had in fact reached Chambre before his visit to Tern, and to what extent Hill prompted the friendly advances of neighbouring clergy. The meeting at Shrewsbury Races was a typical example of how gentlemen used such social occasions to transact business; Ned Kynaston would have agreed readily with his uncle, and Hill was clearly pleased that he could at last help John Fletcher (there may even have been an element of Mrs Hill's influence still).

Fletcher still feared opposition, from the Bishop of Lichfield and the chaplain of the Bishop of Hereford, but he was summoned to Hereford to be instituted before his Lordship left for London, and all passed smoothly, on 7th October, 1760.<sup>17</sup> He stayed at Tern until Hill left for London (he had apparently made this promise) which also gave Chambre time to move to Thornton — this was one of a plurality of livings and previous vicars had not resided there. Fletcher preached at Madeley for the first time on 26th October. On 19th November he wrote to Lady Huntingdon: "next Friday I shall venture on an evening lecture for the first time. I question whether I shall have above half-a-dozen hearers . . . The weather and

<sup>16</sup>quoted in Rev. Melville Horne, *Posthumous Pieces* . . . (1791) pp.104-105

<sup>17</sup>MAM P4d 9: James, Bishop of Hereford, admits John Fletcher to the vicarage and parish of Madeley . . . by the cession of Rowland Chambre . . . presented by Edward Kynaston, patron, 7 October 1760

the roads are so bad, that the way to the church is almost impracticable; nevertheless all the seats were full last Sunday. Some begin to come from adjacent parishes, and some more (as they say) *threaten* to come when the season permits... Should the Lord vouchsafe to plant the Gospel in this county, my parish seems to be the best spot for the centre of such a work, as it lies among the most populous, profane and ignorant."<sup>18</sup> His life's work, among the colliers and forgemen of Madeley had begun.

There were a few more contacts with the Hills. The first was the most unhappy: Sam Hill had become quite dissolute — a time spent in Holland had followed his stay of little more than a year at Cambridge. His desperate father had even asked Fletcher to accompany his son to Switzerland in April 1761, but the offer was declined with polite thanks.<sup>19</sup> The following October, at Madeley Wakes, he encountered a drunken Sam who boasted of having got through 302 bottles of wine in 23 days at the Hague. Fletcher was horrified, as he wrote to Charles Wesley, at his "brutalité et son Atheisme... je doute si Angleterre peut produire un monstre si complet de son age: il a justement 18 ans."<sup>20</sup> (Sam died in March 1766). Fletcher had never been able to see Noel apart from his brother and was very surprised when, in 1775, he was asked to become tutor to his son, not yet five. In a letter dated 8th August Fletcher told Charles Wesley: "I am going to see Mr Hill my quondam pupil who is now member for this county, and who wants me to educate his son. I thought he had had enough of me. I go to put off the unwelcome charge."<sup>21</sup> The Tern Hall he visited on that occasion was much finer than the one he had first known, and Noel Hill was a person of some consequence. It is to be hoped that Fletcher realised that one of his pupils had appreciated his worth, and turned out well after the years of his tuition. Finally, in September 1781, when Fletcher wanted to marry Mary Bosanquet of Cross Hall in Yorkshire, he wrote to her uncle to propose the match. He had waited some twenty years to take this other serious step! After explaining that he had lived chiefly at Madeley "sequestered from the world", he named "creditable persons" who would vouch for him. First was Thomas Hill (he was nearly 88), "the old gentleman in whose house or neighbourhood I have lived very near thirty years." Second was "his son, Noel Hill, Esq., member for Shropshire, the gentleman to whom I was tutor." It was just thirty years since, as a young man only a year in England, he had joined

<sup>18</sup> quoted in Tyerman, op. cit. p.59

<sup>19</sup> letter to Charles Wesley 27 April 1761 MAM P11 F1. vol. p.13

<sup>20</sup> letter to Charles Wesley 12 October 1761 MAM P11 F1. vol. p.84

<sup>21</sup> MAM P11 F1. vol. p.84

TUTOR TO THE HILLS: THE EARLY CAREER OF JOHN FLETCHER 103  
the Hill household as tutor — a momentous decision which was to  
bring him to Methodism and to Madeley.<sup>22</sup>

BARBARA COULTON

Barbara Coulton has recently published a biography of Noel Hill A  
*Shropshire Squire* and is the author of a study of Louis MacNeice.

<sup>22</sup>the letter to Claudius Bosanquet is dated 22 September 1781; it is quoted in  
Tyerman, op. cit. p.488-489

**Sources:**

The main sources for this study are the Attingham Collection in the  
Shropshire Record Office (S.R.O.112) and the letters of John Fletcher in  
the Methodist Archives Manchester (MAM P11). My thanks are due to the  
archivists and staff at the Shropshire Record Office and John Rylands  
Library, Manchester. Other sources are cited in the notes.

## LOCAL HISTORIES

*The Ely Methodists 1774-1932* by Eileen Jakes (118pp): copies from the  
author, 48 St John's Road, Ely, Cambs CB6 3BE, price £3.75 post free  
Trinity Methodist Church, Ancoats, Manchester, *Silver Jubilee Brochure 1964-  
1989* (44pp): copies from Miss E Gledhill, 568 Edge Lane, Droylsden,  
Manchester M35 6JQ, price £1.75

*Sandtoft (Lincolnshire) Methodist Church 1839-1989* (12pp): copies from the  
Rev. Mollie Greenwood, 2 The Paddocks, Crowle, DN17 4HB, price £1.20  
post free

*From Barn to Chapel: The Story of the Stockton Heath Independent Methodist  
Church* by John Dolan (iv, 128pp): copies from the author, 5 Brackley Street,  
Stockton Heath, Warrington WA4 6DY, price £3.50 post free

*Ross-on-Wye Methodist Church — a brief history* (2pp): copies from G. J. Hurst,  
Ariconium, Weston-under-Penyard, Ross-on-Wye, Herefordshire HR9  
7NX, price 10p plus s.a.e.

*Embsay Methodist Church 1839-1989* (21pp): copies from Ian Patrick, 14  
Brackenley Lane, Embsay, Skipton BD23 6NP, price £2 post free

*Rushton Methodist Church (Staffs) 150th Anniversary* (15pp): copies from Mrs K  
Cope, Post Office Cottage, Macclesfield Road, Rushton, Macclesfield,  
Cheshire, price £1.00 post free

*Cockfield Methodist Church 1888-1988* by Colin Short, (22pp): copies from the  
author, The Manse, Garden House Lane, Cockfield, Bishop Auckland  
DL13 5EF, price £1.00 post free

*The Building of a Horsforth Community: 150 Years of Methodism in Woodside  
(1839-1989)* by Christopher Townsley (21pp): copies from Rev. R Standing,  
3 Birch Hill Rise, Hawksworth Road, Horsforth, Leeds LS18 4SG, price  
£1.70 post free

*Change, Decay and Restoration: Church and Chapel in Upton-cum-Kexby 1750-  
1901* by Harold Jubbs (30pp): copies, price £1.75 post free, from the author  
at 3a Church Road, Upton, Gainsborough, Lincs DN21 5NR

Grove Green Road Methodist Church, Leyton, London E10: *Centenary  
Booklet* (72pp): copies, price £2.00 post free, from Mr D Goring, 57 Oakdale  
Road, Leytonstone, London E11 4DJ

## ANNUAL MEETING AND LECTURE

**T**HE East Midlands Branch of the Wesley Historical Society graciously provided the Members' tea, which preceded the Annual Meeting and Lecture, on Monday, 26th June, 1989. Thanks were extended to them and to members of Leicester Forest East Anglican Methodist Church by the President, the Rev. A. Raymond George.

### Annual Meeting

The Annual Meeting, chaired by the President, approved the minutes of the last meeting; remembered in prayer thirteen members who had died during the past year and re-elected the Executive Committee. In the course of the reports the Registrar pleaded for a recruiting drive as the most effective way of keeping down the subscriptions rate; the Treasurer's report and accounts (see page 105) were presented by the General Secretary in the unavoidable absence of Mr. Wilkinson. The meeting agreed to an increase in subscriptions to take effect from 1st January 1990; that back numbers of the *Proceedings* should cost £2.00 to members and £2.50 to non-members; that an appeal for donations should be sent to Life Members in 1990. Mr. A. A. Taberer presented the Editor's apologies and report — the *Proceedings* were returning to schedule; he had established a good relationship with the new printers; the Annual Bibliography, being very extensive due to the 250th celebrations, was being printed separately and would be sent out with the October issue; a considerable number of longer articles were in hand, but some smaller items would be very welcome. The General Index was making progress. The Librarian circulated a written report and expressed his thanks to Mrs. Banks for all her work. The problem of the loss of some books was being monitored. The Publishing Manager reported a steady sale of publications and back issues of the *Proceedings*. The Rev. William Leary stated that the exhibition 'Damnable Barngoers' staged at Newarke Houses Museum during Conference was more a celebration of the tercentenary of the Act of Toleration than a specifically Methodist one. As the Rev. T. S. A. Macquiban was detained at Conference Dr. Graham gave details of the residential conference planned for Easter 1991 at Westminster College, Oxford. Mr. R. F. S. Thorne sent his apologies and stated that his report of the Local Branches was as printed in the May issue of the *Proceedings*. All the members of the Executive Committee were thanked for their work. It was agreed to affiliate to The Chapels Society.

### Annual Lecture

The Annual Lecture, chaired by Mr. Pat W. Welch, B.A., a past Vice-President of Conference, was given by Dr. John A. Vickers, B.A., B.D., who took as his subject: 'Good Red Herring: A Dissenting View of Early Methodism'. Following a very carefully and widely researched paper Dr. Vickers answered many questions. The lecture is printed in this issue of the *Proceedings*.

E. DOROTHY GRAHAM

## WESLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY — FINANCIAL STATEMENTS, 1988

### Income and Expenditure Account for the Year ended 31st December 1988

INCOME.	£
Subscriptions (Note 1) ... ..	2,963
Donations ... ..	34
Irish Branch ... ..	182
Sales of <i>Proceedings</i> (back numbers)	273
„ other Publications, etc. ...	235
Library—Tickets, Donations, Sales	49
Grant from Southlands College ...	500
Annual Lecture Collection ( $\frac{1}{3}$ -share)	30
Advertisements ... ..	144
Bank Interest ... ..	182
War Stock Dividend ... ..	8
	4,600
EXPENDITURE.	£
<i>Proceedings</i> and distribution	2,799
Other Printing ... ..	48
Library ... ..	1,448
Annual Lecture ... ..	105
World Methodist Historical Soc.	36
Administration Expenses	266
Insurances ... ..	25
Advertising ... ..	71
	4,798
<b>Excess of Expenditure over Income</b>	<b>£198</b>

### Balance Sheet as at 31st December 1988

ASSETS EMPLOYED (Note 2)		£
3 $\frac{1}{2}$ % War Stock (at cost) (Note 3)		225
Current Assets—		£
Sundry Debtors ... ..	764	
Income Tax recoverable	270	
National Savings Bank... ..	1,244	
Trustee Savings Bank ... ..	1,206	
Midland Bank (Deposit A/c)	533	
„ (Current A/c)	516	
Cash in hand ... ..	126	
	4,659	
Current Liabilities—		
Sundry Creditors ... ..	831	
Subscribers paid in advance	2,375	
	3,206	
<b>Net Current Assets</b> ... ..	<b>1,453</b>	
	<b>£1,678</b>	
REPRESENTED BY		
Balance at 1st January 1988 ...	1,660	
<i>Deduct</i> Excess Expenditure over Income	198	
	1,462	
Conference Fund Surplus ... ..	216	
(Signed) RALPH WILKINSON,	<b>£1,678</b>	
<i>Honorary Treasurer.</i>		

### Notes to the Accounts

1—SUBSCRIPTIONS	£	£
Unexpired Subscriptions at 1st January 1988 (estimated)—		
Ordinary Members ... ..	1,974	
Life Members ... ..	450	
	2,424	
Received during year* ... ..	2,823	
Income Tax recoverable ... ..	91	
	5,338	
<i>Less</i> Unexpired Subscriptions at 31st Dec. (estimated)—		
Ordinary Members ... ..	1,975	
Life Members ... ..	400	
	2,375	<b>£2,963</b>

\*No account has been taken of subscriptions in arrears at 31st December 1988, whether or not recovered since, but any previous arrears received during the year are included in the above figures.

2—ASSETS EMPLOYED  
The Library and stocks of Publications have not been valued, and are not included in these financial statements.

3—WAR STOCK  
Market value at Balance Sheet date ... **£76**

**AUDITOR'S REPORT**—I have audited the financial statements in accordance with approved auditing standards. The amount of subscriptions paid in advance by members includes estimates based upon a reasonable interpretation of the available data. No account has been taken of possible arrears of subscriptions. Other assets and liabilities have been independently verified.

Subject to the matters mentioned above, in my opinion the financial statements give a true and fair view on an historical cost basis of the state of affairs of the Society as at 31st December 1988, and of its deficit for the year then ended.

Barron & Barron,  
Bathurst House, 86, Micklegate, York, 16th June 1989.

(Signed) W. B. TAYLOR,  
Chartered Accountant.

## BOOK REVIEWS

*John Wesley 1703-91* by John Pollock (Hodder and Stoughton, 1989, pp.256, £7.95)

Mr Pollock is already well known as a fluent and readable biographer of a gallery of illustrious evangelicals, most notably, perhaps, a well-documented life of Wilberforce. In John Wesley he is tackling an altogether more complicated character for whom there is so much information and so many secondary works and biographies that one is always challenged to justify yet another. Mr Pollock guesses that the completion many years hence of the elaborate new Bicentennial edition of Wesley's *Works*, may provoke a new 'definitive' life of Wesley. His own aim is more modest — to produce a straightforward book which will display something of Wesley's humanity, faith and achievement without descending into detail about all aspects of his work. The result is a lively and picturesque narrative which improves on other treatments of this type by incorporating some of the recent work on Wesley's early life. As in many Wesley biographies a good deal of space is given to the story up to the conversion in 1738 and a good deal more to the period up to the 1750s, the later part of his life being dealt with more cursorily. Choosing to stick mainly to narrative, Pollock by-passes the problem of how to work in more analytical material though brief comments are made on Wesley's diverse activities as writer, polemicist and political commentator, with a chapter on his social concerns. There are also indications about Methodist organisation though the lack of a direct explanation of the details of the perfectionist groups within the society leads to a rather confusing reference to there being only sixty members of society in Manchester in 1781 (p.239). He probably means the 'select band' of perfectionists as the ordinary membership must have been several hundreds at that date.

This confusion may also reflect a tendency to gloss over the peculiarities and distinctiveness of Wesley's branch of the Evangelical Revival and the theology with which he tried to infuse it. Pollock does recognise the divisions in the Revival and in particular rightly emphasises the importance of the split with Whitefield and other Calvinists as being responsible for weakening its impact. He also recognises that Wesley's perfectionism was a source of difference. But he takes the traditional view of the conversion in 1738 as determinative of Wesley's theology and assimilates him as far as possible to a common evangelical front. This does not really do justice to the extent to which Wesley drew on Catholic theological and spiritual sources and, especially in his later years, subordinated justification to the achievement of progressive perfection and created deep-rooted suspicions among his critics that he was sliding back into salvation by 'works'. The division between the Methodists and Evangelical Anglicans over doctrine, methods and the role of the laity were much deeper than is implied here.

On Wesley's personality, Pollock rightly brings out the differences between the tense, inward-looking and rule-bound character of Wesley's earlier years and the more relaxed and apparently genial old man of the 1780s. But I am not sure that he has quite faced up to the challenge posed by Vivian Green's acid assessment of Wesley's self-absorption and the hard core of a personality which he described as 'granite in aspect'; nor indeed to

the old charges of 'ambition'. Pollock is candid enough in his account of Wesley's tortuous love-affairs and disastrous marriage though he tends to accept Wesley's private accounts of them and he does not probe the psychological problems raised by these and his affectionate correspondence with his female friends.

As to Wesley's place in the religious history of England, we are spared the usual caricatures of the state of the Church of England though Pollock clearly takes a triumphalist view of the success of the Revival, Wesley's part in transforming England and his contribution to the formation of 'Victorian values'. But it would be unfair to demand of an author more than he has set himself to give. As a lively narrative of Wesley's life-story from an evangelical standpoint and an appreciation of Wesley's character in its most benevolent aspects this is an attractive biography. Some readers may, however, have their enjoyment spoilt by the dedication to Mrs Thatcher. A man must be allowed to choose his own dedications but to describe the Prime Minister as 'In the Wesley Tradition for the Future of Britain' is propaganda rather than history, even partisan or anachronistic history, unless it refers to a tendency in both characters to be autocratic and to believe that they know what is best for other people! As a social and political comment it is very wide of the mark as a reading of Pollock's chapter on Wesley's social teaching makes clear. Wesley's injunctions to gain and save only for the purpose of giving and his remarkable dislike of the rich and love for the poor, make him very odd as the advocate for the virtues of capitalism that some have taken him to be.

HENRY D. RACK

*Companion to "Hymns & Psalms"* edited by Richard Watson and Kenneth Trickett. (Methodist Publishing House, 1988, pp.x, 661, £18.50)

*30 Hymns of the Wesleys* by David and Jill Wright. (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, pp.64, £1.95)

*"Our Hymns": A Commentary on Methodist Hymnody, 1737-1988* by Kenneth Mankin (duplicated transcript, pp.60.4, £1.50 or by post £2.00, from the author at 39 Sharp's Lane, Ruislip, Middlesex HA4 7JG)

*Hymns of the City: A Collection of new Hymns from and to Contemporary Urban Churches* compiled by John J. Vincent (Sheffield: Urban Theology Unit, pp.28, £1.00 or by post £1.25)

Five years after the publication of *Hymns & Psalms*, on which four years of concentrated effort had been spent, we now have the promised Companion volume — a monumental work in every respect, and reflecting enormous credit upon the compilers, Professor Richard Watson and Mr. Kenneth Trickett, and a dedicated band of helpers, who between them have carried out an immense amount of research and presented it in an eminently readable form. The notes on the hymns and tunes themselves occupy 430 pages set in double column, and in addition there are learned and informative articles on hymnody itself and on the Psalms and Canticles, detailed indexes occupying 51 pages, a frank account of all that it took to produce *Hymns & Psalms* (an account which those who served on the three committees will read with happy recollection of the fellowship engendered during their many meetings, and more than the occasional chuckle!), and most comprehensive biographical sections relating to both authors and composers.

It is hardly to be expected that in a work involving such detailed historical research there will not be the occasional error, and indeed some few slips have occurred which we may hope will be corrected in a future edition or by the publication of a list of errata. The proof-reading, though, has been of a high standard and in 500 pages read by this reviewer the number of "literals" could be counted on the fingers of one hand.

Members of our Society, whether hymn-specialists or not, however, will turn with interest to the "Wesley" entries in the biographical section, and here it is unfortunate to have to record the continuance of some old fallacies. The founder of Methodism is listed as "WESLEY John (Benjamin)" — implying that he had a second Christian name which he did not choose to use. (He himself mistakenly thought this to be so). There was indeed a John Benjamin Wesley, born in May 1701 as twin brother to Anne, but who died in December of the same year. The only one of his parents' children to be given a double name, his names memorialized a "John" and a "Benjamin" born as twins in 1699, these also dying by about the end of 1700. Inaccurate recollections by the rector of Epworth and his wife, and the destruction of some family records in the rectory fire in February 1709, led to this confusion, which was only resolved in 1948 when Dr. Frank Baker visited the Lincoln Diocesan Archives and studied transcripts of parish baptismal records from both Epworth and South Ormsby. Readers having access to the American magazine *Methodist History*, xxvi, pp.154-62, may pursue an article by Dr. Baker which concludes with a table listing relevant details for the whole family from birth to burial.

The reference to John Wesley's mother also repeats the old error of spelling her name as Susannah instead of Susanna — the spelling used on the certificate of her marriage to Samuel Wesley on 12th November 1688. Finally, it is surprising to find an allusion to Luther's Commentary on *Galatians* which John Wesley heard read on 17th May 1738 as contributing substantially to his evangelical conversion and yet at the same time no mention of Luther's Preface to the *Epistle to the Romans* which was to prove such a decisive factor a week later in Aldersgate Street.

All the same, this *Companion* is a mine of information, and must set a standard for works of this nature which it will not be easy to surpass.

"Thousands of Christians who are seeking a deeper spirituality will value this little book. In the hymns of John and Charles Wesley they will find Christian discipleship presented with a power, breadth and intensity that have never been surpassed." So runs the blurb on the back of the attractive cover of *30 Hymns of the Wesleys*. It is indeed a collection intended for use in personal devotion and not in gatherings, unless perhaps in the "house groups" which flourish in many places today.

Some of the hymns are not found in either the *Methodist Hymn-Book or Hymns & Psalms*, but refer back to John Wesley's 1780 *Collection*. Many include verses from the original which we no longer sing, such as verse 2 of "Love divine, all loves excelling" and verses 2 and 3 of "Ye servants of God, your Master proclaim". Facing pages are devoted to each hymn: the text on the left, with an historical account below; and on the right-hand page an exposition of the hymn with copious references to scripture.

Methodist and other Free Church readers will be surprised at the statement in regard to "Christ the Lord is risen today" that "the most familiar tune to this hymn is called *Savannah* [the tune set in A & M

Revised]”, and once again we have the mother of the Wesleys named as Susannah.

In *Proceedings*, xliv, pp.115-16, we noticed Mr. Mankin's previous essay under the title of “*Our Hymns*”, and now have to record that he has produced a considerably expanded version, with the date extended to 1988. This gives evidence of an immense amount of research into not only all the titles of the hymn-books and tune-books produced by all the branches of Methodism, but even to the dating of the many editions through which a number of the titles passed. Certainly nothing like it has previously appeared. Separate consideration is given to the collections published by the various denominations in historical order, and occasion is taken to include informative notes on how they each came to be established and their relationship to the Methodism of the Wesleys.

To produce a completely accurate and inclusive list of all the hymn-books, tune-books, and hymn-and-tune books put forth by all the branches of Methodism from 1737 to the present day is, one feels, an ideal that is unlikely to be realized, but Mr. Mankin in his introduction says in thanking his many helpers that he would welcome further comment and information. It would be good to see such a work in a printed form, with distinctive headings to the various sections, a list of contents, and completely consistent treatment throughout; but, alas! could such a project be financed?

Inevitably there are mistakes in typing, but if there are errors of fact we can forgive even these in a work of such complexity. On page 28, however, under date 1860, it should be noted that there was in fact a denomination in Ireland with the name of the Primitive Wesleyan Methodist Church, dating from 1818. These people insisted on remaining closely linked with the Anglican Church, as the Wesleys themselves had done, and in particular declining to countenance the idea of administration of the sacraments by their own preachers. After Irish disestablishment in 1869 they drew closer to the Wesleys, with whom they united in 1878. (See *Proceedings*, xliii, pp.77-85).

Referring to hymn-books used by Welsh Methodists (Mr. Mankin's page 32), the *Atodiad* [ie Supplement] to the *Llyfr Emynu a Thonau* (1929) was published by the Calvinistic Methodist Book Agency, Caernarvon, in 1986. A large proportion of the hymns are translations from English — “Blessed assurance”, “To God be the glory” and the like, and inevitably “In the name of Jesus”, set to its twentieth-century tune.

The booklet *Hymns of the City*, compiled by Dr. Vincent, contains 31 hymns, mostly couched in “inner-city” phraseology and reflecting very much the character of the work among deprived and underprivileged people in which he has been engaged for most of his ministry. The writers include a number whose contributions to hymnody in the twentieth century are of a standard which no editorial committee could think of ignoring, and also several whose names, though known to many present-day Methodists, have not previously appeared in a work of this kind. In addition — and here the adjective “new” in the booklet's sub-title has to be overlooked — there are a few hymns from the *Methodist Hymn-Book* (1933) which found no place in *Hymns & Psalms* (1983), such as “These things shall be”, by John Addington Symonds, and Ebenezer Elliott's “When wilt Thou save the people?”. One would scarcely have expected Charles Wesley to be

represented, but Dr. Vincent has found for us a hymn from John Wesley's 1780 *Collection* which has not been available to us since the 1876 book — "My brethren beloved, your calling ye see" (though with the first line altered to "My dearly beloved, your calling you see" and with "this" for "His" in verse 2 line 1, and "stops" for "stoops" in line 4 of the same verse, albeit one suspects these may be slips in copying).

No music is printed, but well-known tunes are suggested in each case — at times giving the singer a vague sense of incongruity! This is clearly an interesting collection, despite some imperfect rhymes and scansion. But will someone please tell us why in the printing of books such as this all the lines of the hymns must needs be ranged level at the left whatever the rhyme-scheme or metre, instead of having the classic indentations? Attention to this, and the printing of the hymn-numbers in a larger and bolder-faced type instead of the same size as the page-numbers, would have improved considerably the appearance of the pages.

ALFRED A. TABERER

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*United Methodist Bibliographical Series: 1. The Methodist New Connexion* by O. A. Beckerlegge and E. A. Rose, pp.43. 2. *The Bible Christians* by O. A. Beckerlegge, pp.32. 3. *The Wesleyan Methodist Association and other branches* by O. A. Beckerlegge, pp.52. 4. *The United Methodist Free Churches* by O. A. Beckerlegge, pp.35. 5. *The United Methodist Church* by O. A. Beckerlegge, pp.23. (Gage Postal Books, 1988, £2.00 each)

It is almost twenty-five years since *Proceedings* confirmed its belief in Methodism after Wesley by publishing Dr Beckerlegge's bibliography of the Bible Christians. To the reviewer as he began to collect Bible Christian printed material it was a revelation. It divided material into classes, it included rare and common titles, it indicated the main collections, it wrestled with the intractable problem of the Bible Christian hymnbook, it served both as a checklist and as a model of a denominational/topographical bibliography. No better choice was possible for the subject of that pilot bibliography than the Bible Christians since they were the smallest of the major Methodist denominations, concentrated geographically and possessing a limited body of literature which was relatively unexplored.

To a lesser extent these factors are also true of the other constituents of the United Methodist Church and Oliver Beckerlegge and Alan Rose have now produced this series for these. They are to be congratulated, as are the typist and publisher, for completing a laborious task and producing the series at a price which should encourage purchase of the set instead of odd volumes.

However in the compilation of a bibliography pitfalls and problems abound and this series has not avoided all of them. The listings are based on the compilers' own collections but more could have been done to correct and extend them. In the Bible Christian list a major modern item by J. H. B. Andrews, 'The Rise of the Bible Christians' is given no proper reference yet the reviewer can provide details of three periodicals in which this has appeared in variant guises. Unlike the original list, with its classified sections, these lists are divided only between Official and Other items with some scanty indexes at the end. Perhaps this is dictated by economy and it does follow the example of Rowe, even so it is not as well

done as it should be. In the MNC list there are periodicals and minutes listed under 'Others' although it would seem that they should be under 'Official'. An inexplicable and serious lapse is that some items without author are listed by place although the introductions state that only author or title are used and these items are not then included in the very thin Index Locorum at the end of each list. Accepting these and other inadequacies we are grateful that so many titles have been brought together so cheaply and we look forward to fuller, annotated editions in the future.

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R. F. S. THORNE

*The Story of John Wesley's Sisters or Seven Sisters in Search of Love* by Frederick E. Maser (Academy Books, Rutland, Vermont, 1988, pp.viii, 119, \$14.95 hardback, \$9.95 paperback, plus \$3.50 p&p)

It would be a pity if the relative obscurity of the publisher and the impotence of the trans-Atlantic book trade, coupled with a strong dollar, prevented this new study of the Epworth family from being widely read over here. Dr. Maser writes — as he speaks — compulsively and there is no rival account of the Wesley sisters either in or out of print. Neither of the Wesley parents comes out of the account with flying colours (shades of Maldwyn Edwards!) but the research is thorough and the interpretation defensible. If anyone has difficulty in obtaining the book, I shall be pleased to help.

JOHN A. VICKERS

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### SHORTER NOTICES

*Reader-Preacher: A lay-ministry ideal* by George Lawton (Churchman Publishing, 1989, pp.286, £8.95) is not primarily an historical study but 75 pages are devoted to a useful survey of the Local Preacher from Wesley's day to the present. There is a shorter section on the Anglican office of Reader and some attempt to set the two in a wider historical context. Dr. Lawton's familiarity with both Anglican and Methodist traditions make him a reliable guide in this field.

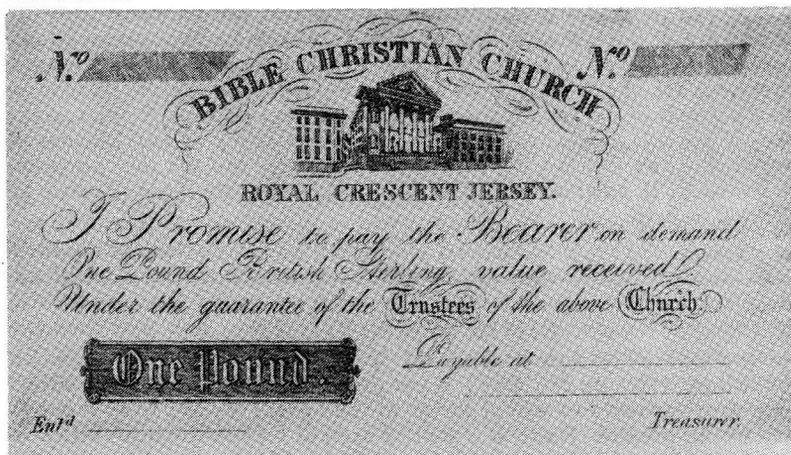
*Through Wesley's England* by T. E. Dowley (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1988, pp.126, available from the Methodist Publishing House, £4.95). This is an attractive pocket-sized guide to the major sites associated with the Wesleys: Epworth, London, Oxford and Bristol are given detailed treatment, while there is a briefer account of some minor sites mostly in Yorkshire and Cornwall. It is profusely illustrated in colour with a combination of modern photographs and familiar prints, sometimes effectively juxtaposed as on page 99 in a section on Gwennap Pit. Short extracts from the *Journal* and the Hymns are given at appropriate points. It can be commended as an up-to-date and accurate guide (although Mancunians might dispute the claim on page 111 that Hugh Price Hughes and not Samuel Collier was the founder of inner city missions and central halls) which does not quite supersede Frank Baker's classic *Methodist Pilgrim in England*.

E.A.R.

## NOTES AND QUERIES

### 1424. A METHODIST BANK NOTE

Most members will no doubt be aware of the custom in the early part of last century of building chapels on the share-holding principle. Members and others, presumably, lent a sum to the chapel at the time of its projected erection and received a share certificate as if the money had been lent to a commercial firm; when all the Trust's accounts had been settled for the year any balance was intended to be distributed as dividends. Very often no dividend was paid and equally often shareholders were invited after a time to surrender their claims to dividend and repayment of the loan. This practice seems to have been peculiarly prevalent among the Wesleyan Association — see my *United Methodist Free Churches* p.63 and illustration.



Presumably the same idea lay behind the issue, in connexion with Royal Crescent Bible Christian Chapel, Jersey, of bank notes. The note, of fine quality deckle-edged paper, has a vignette of the fine colonnaded chapel, surrounded by the name, followed by 'I promise to pay the Bearer on demand One Pound British Sterling, value received. Under the guarantee of the Trustees of the above Church. Payable at ...' with a line for the Treasurer's signature. Unfortunately my copy is an unissued copy, with neither bank note number nor signature added.

The question arises: was this just another form of share certificate, or was it a bank note allowed to circulate on the island and used as currency? Are other copies known, particularly signed copies? What records has Royal Crescent chapel of these shares? Are other chapel bank notes known?

OLIVER A. BECKERLEGGE

[Royal Crescent chapel was opened in 1869. It seated 1200 and was described as 'the finest Chapel in the Bible Christian Connexion' — see R. D. Moore: *Methodism in the Channel Islands* (1952) p.89 EDITOR]