

# Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society

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## CONTENTS

### *Articles*

James Erskine's critique of John Wesley on Christian Perfection <i>Randy L Maddox</i> .....	39
John Milton and Charles Wesley: A Study of Influence <i>J R Watson</i> .....	54
John Wesley's <i>Journal</i> : The Mystery of 'Clare Hill' <i>Paul Cheshire</i> .....	68

### *Notices*

Notes and Queries .....	67
Wesley Historical Society Conference 2014 .....	71
Annual Meeting 2013 .....	78
Membership .....	78

### *Book Reviews*

Royle (ed.), <i>Yorkshire Methodism: Essays to Commemorate the Jubilee of the Wesley Historical Society (Yorkshire)</i> by Ronnie Aitchison .....	73
Hargreaves and Hilary Haig (eds), <i>Slavery in Yorkshire, Richard Oastler and the campaign against child labour in the Industrial Revolution</i> , by Philip Bee .....	74

### *Cover Illustration:*

Mrs Mary Wesley (1705 - 1781) nee Goldhawk. Wife of Rev John Wesley. Previously married to Mr Anthony Vazeille (1706-1748) a merchant who lived in Fenchurch Street, London.

The Wesley Historical Society Proceedings, volumes 1 to 55 and the Indexes, volumes 1 to 50, may be viewed and searched at:  
[http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_whs\\_01.php](http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_whs_01.php)

## James Erskine's Critique of John Wesley on Christian Perfection

In the October 2012 issue of the *Proceedings* I published an inventory of the correspondence between James Erskine and John and Charles Wesley that is held at The National Archives of Scotland.<sup>1</sup> The archive holds only a list of the items, with short descriptions, rather than the actual manuscripts. I noted at that time that the current location (and full content) was known for only two of the items, both acquired by David Laing, a Scottish antiquary, and donated to Edinburgh University Library.

Shortly after this inventory appeared in print, I discovered the location of one of the most intriguing items on the list. It is an extended set of reflections by James Erskine on a sermon he heard John Wesley deliver on 1 January 1749, at the West Street Chapel in London, using as his text Genesis 17: 1; 'I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect'. Wesley apparently devoted the sermon to defending the possibility of Christian perfection in this life, leading Erskine to focus his reflections (filling nine legal-size pages in manuscript) on contesting this possibility. Wesley does not mention this occasion in his published *Journal*, but he records preaching on Genesis 17: 1 at West Street on this date in a manuscript sermon register.<sup>2</sup> There is a similar record for the use of this text in 1746, 1753, and 1755 - all on 1 January, which suggests that it was a favoured text for New Year's Day. We have no record of Wesley's use of Genesis 17: 1 as a text between 1755 and 1787 (records are sketchy in this period). However, starting in 1787 Wesley used it several times a year, throughout the calendar.

Wesley never published a sermon using Genesis 17: 1 as his text. Neither did he comment on the focus of sermons on this text in his *Journal*. Thus, Erskine's reflections are of interest in part because they give some detail of Wesley's argument on this occasion. The reflections are also of interest in demonstrating how Erskine, while sympathetic to the work of the Wesley brothers, understood his Calvinist convictions to rule out the possibility of Christian perfection in this life (or limit it to the instant of death).

I located Erskine's manuscript reflections among a set of Uncatalogued Wesleyan related items in the Manuscript and rare Book Library of Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia.<sup>3</sup> The transcription which follows adapts Erskine's original in three ways: it follows modern rules of capitalisation and punctuation, corrects misspellings and archaic spellings, and expands all contractions.

<sup>1</sup> Randy L. Maddox, 'Correspondence between James Erskine and John and Charles Wesley', *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, vol. 58, no. 6 (October, 2012), 264–75. Readers can find biographical details on Erskine and his relation to the Wesley brothers in this essay.

<sup>2</sup> For this and following citations, see the register of Wesley's preaching compiled by Wanda Willard Smith: <http://www.divinity.duke.edu/initiatives-centers/cswt/research-resources/register>.

<sup>3</sup> To be distinguished from their catalogued set of Wesley Family Papers (MSS 100); this manuscript was in their Wesleyan Collection (MSS 101), Box 1, Folder 1. My transcription is published with permission of the Manuscript and Rare Book Library of Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia.

[Page 1]

**Some Observations on Mr. John Wesley's Sermon Preached by Him  
1 January 1748/9 on Genesis 17: 1<sup>4</sup>**

I having not only heard but seen, and I humbly hope have in some measure felt, that the power of God has accompanied and still accompanies his ministry and his brother's, Mr. Charles, I cannot but have much respect and love for them. And this cannot but incline me to listen favourably to what they deliver in their office as ministers of the New Testament. And all this has for several years produced more intercourse between them and me than I have had with several other clergymen of my acquaintance. Yet they maintain some opinions, and use some expressions and ways of speaking and explaining, which hitherto I have not seen good ground for. And no esteem or favour for any men whomever can persuade me to receive their opinions or modes of speaking or explaining, but only the evidence of truth as it shall humbly appear to me on due examination in the presence of God. And I know that these thy<sup>5</sup> friends expect no more, and would as much as any blame the person who should receive anything as true and right because said by them. They preach, or earnestly in public and private urge home on the conscience, the great and essential doctrines of the gospel, and labour therein incessantly with more than ordinary success. Why then should I take offence at some differences, even as to material points? And how can I, notwithstanding thereof, but honour, love, and endeavour through grace to profit by them, whom I see the Lord honours to bring many to receive Jesus Christ as offered to us in the gospel, and as they have received him so to walk in him? And nothing that to me appears sinful is required to hold communion with them in the ordinances of the gospel; their administration whereof I have often known attended with great grace and power from on high as aforesaid.

I am only here to make my poor observations on that part of the aforesaid sermon which was about the attainableness of what he calls sinless perfection in this life, which is one of his opinions that I have not yet seen ground to embrace.

At hearing the sermon, he seemed to me to talk of this point more intelligibly than he formerly used to speak or write of it. I cannot tell whether it might not have partly proceeded from this, that he came not to particulars in the explication of it. But supposing an opinion intelligible, yet for all that it may be insufficiently proved, and I was not then satisfied that the arguments he used for it were good. I have since considered deliberately that which, according to the best of my apprehension and memory, he then said on this subject. And I write my humble thoughts [so] that I may lay them before him, that if he pleases to oblige me so much, he may give me his own

<sup>4</sup> Erskine wrote in the margin: 'Written very soon after hearing this sermon.' The manuscript is a group of five leafs; on the back (page 10) is written: 'Observations on the sermon preached by Mr. John Wesley, at the chapel in West Street near the 7 Dials, London, the 1st of January 1748/9, on Gen. 17:1, written very soon after hearing this sermon preached'.

<sup>5</sup> Ori., '~~my honoured~~' changed to 'thy'. [There are scattered instances where text has been marked out and replaced. I note only those which are more than corrected mistakes or mere alternative wording.]

farther thoughts on the question and what he delivered about it in that sermon.

He seemed to allow that the greatest saints in the patriarchal and Jewish states of the church did not attain to sinless perfection; and proved it as to the first by Job, and as to the other by Hezekiah and David. Job is expressly called a perfect man, and yet he sinned grievously under his severe afflictions. So did Hezekiah, who is said expressly to have been the best of all the kings of Judah, and particularly in his great unwillingness to die when Isaiah from the Lord bid him set his house in order. And David, expressly called a man after God's heart<sup>6</sup> (what can be stronger?), sinned much and greatly, and even at his death showed a spirit of revenge against Shimei—to whom he had sworn not to put him to death, and yet in his last instruction to Solomon bid him bring down Shimei's hoary head to the grave with blood.<sup>7</sup> And it not appearing that David had any special warrant for this (as some without sufficient evidence say he had), if a professed Christian should now at his death show such a spirit of revenge, it would be a great stretch of charity to think well of him. Yet none who reads the Scriptures can doubt that David on his death was conveyed to Abraham's bosom.

Here then Mr. Wesley allows that a man's being expressly called 'perfect', or by some appellation equivalent, does not prove that he was sinlessly perfect, but that the words must be taken under some limitation, though they be not restrained in the text. And it being allowed that none under the Old Testament could be sinlessly perfect though expressly called perfect, then the command in the text,<sup>8</sup> and other such, though expressly and unliedly<sup>9</sup> given, must be restrained to such perfection as they could attain to, since they could not arrive at sinless perfection. Or else they must be understood (as some other divines do) for what they ought, though they could not in this life be; for what they ought incessantly to press after, and come near to as they can, though in this life they never can fully attain it. If it be thought that there are other such texts in the Old Testament which are not to be restrained, it is incumbent on Mr. Wesley to produce them, and the reasons for excepting them from the general case. For the words of Scripture are not to be taken now this and then another way *ad libitum*.<sup>10</sup> Till that be done, no argument can be

[Page 2]

brought by him from the Old Testament for his opinion of sinless perfection.

And since such express appellations and precepts in the Old Testament are to be restrained, it is also incumbent on Mr. Wesley to show why they are not to be so

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<sup>6</sup> Acts 13: 22; 1 Samuel 13: 14.

<sup>7</sup> 1 Kings 2: 9.

<sup>8</sup> i.e. in Genesis 17: 1.

<sup>9</sup> The spelling is fairly clear in the text; the meaning is less clear - perhaps something like 'not open to error'.

<sup>10</sup> 'at one's pleasure'.

restrained in the New. The language of God in both is much the same, though in different tongues. And his commands in both, when applicable under both of these his dispensations, are the same; and when otherwise to be taken in the New than in the Old, when abrogated or enlarged or limited, I suppose we are expressly told so in the New Testament, or have it by good consequences from what we are plainly taught in the New Testament, and not left to grope or wander in the dark after our own conceits and suppositions, and from thence to infer a different meaning of the New Testament words from the like in the Old. And till this be done, I do not see how Mr. Wesley can argue from such appellations or precepts, or other such expressions, in the New Testament any more than in the Old. And this the rather because, so far as I remember, there is not any mere man called perfect in the New Testament. What is said of Zechariah and Elizabeth (Luke 1:6) comes nearest to it. They are said to be righteous before God, and walking in all his commandments and ordinances blameless. But though this be said in the New Testament, it is said of two that were under the legal dispensation, which was not then abrogated and succeeded by the gospel. And therefore, according to Mr. Wesley's own acknowledgment, it is to be limited. And indeed it must be limited from the text, for notwithstanding of this testimony for Zechariah, he then sinned by unbelief, and for that was struck and remained dumb several months (*ibid.*, v. 26 and v. 64). And it may be considered whether our Lord's rebuking the ruler for calling him good, though he knew him not [to] be God but took him for a mere man,<sup>11</sup> does not show his disapprobation of giving such appellations to any mere human creature. But to speak particularly to this text would lead me farther than my present business requires. And it is fitter for me here to notice these farther parallels between the Old and New Testament as to this matter. In the Old we read of the sins of the most eminent saint; so do we in the New. In the Old we are expressly told that all are sinners; so are we in the New. And whatever method be taken to restrain these texts will, I humbly conceive, afford the like for restraining such as may be adduced on the other side. I do not here enter on the consideration of any of those texts, because that were to enter on the question itself and my intention here is only to consider what Mr. Wesley delivered on it in that sermon.

But as to the limiting such texts in the Old yet not in the New Testament, as spoken to above, it will be said that there is a strong reason of the difference—namely, that no saint before Christ could be so great as the saints under the full revelation of the gospel. Answer: I will not dispute this, but it requires some explication to avoid mistakes. For our Lord says (Matt. 11:11) 'Among them that are born of women there has not risen a greater than John the Baptist; notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.' He that is least under the gospel fully revealed by Christ and those he employed to preach and write his doctrine, and has it in his mind and heart, is greater than John the Baptist. But nothing follows from this for Mr. Wesley's opinion, unless it could be proved that one could not be greater than John [the] Baptist in what our Lord calls 'the kingdom of heaven' if he attained not to sinless perfection. But this cannot be proved, and seems not to be true. There are many

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<sup>11</sup> Erskine wrote in the margin: 'Mark 10' and 'Luke 18'.

degrees between these two, and by no reason nor logic can it follow that he is not greater who really is so by one or several degrees, if he be not greater by the highest. And a concession of Mr. Wesley's own, which we shall presently see, shows the contrary—for he allows that everyone in the kingdom of heaven is not sinlessly perfect, yet it is plain by our Saviour's words that even such are greater than John [the] Baptist.

Hitherto we have only examined Mr. Wesley's concessions. But I humbly conceive it has also been shown that these concessions go farther than perhaps he intended, and wound his cause very deep.<sup>12</sup> Let us next consider his other concession just now hinted at, and then state the precise point of difference between his opinion as delivered in that sermon and the doctrine of the Church of England and almost all other Protestant (i.e. not popish) churches, and lastly humbly examine the arguments he brought in that sermon for his opinion. I say almost all other not popish churches because the Quakers among us, and I suppose some Mennonites and Anabaptists abroad, maintain<sup>13</sup> this doctrine of perfection even to a higher degree than Mr. Wesley seems to do. And several of the popish monastics, and mystics, and quietists seem to do so too. And the Socinians and high Arminians do also maintain that a Christian may in this life perfectly fulfill God's law. A strange mixture of <protégé<sup>14</sup>> to be for the same opinion concerning sinlessness here! But their agreement therein, I humbly appeal,

[Page 3]

may be accounted for by their agreement in other points not so obviously observed (for extremes often meet), which it is not my present business to attempt. I beg leave only to observe that (except it be Dr. Gill, a learned London minister before the Restoration) I do not know any but Mr. Wesley and some of his friends who thoroughly maintain and strenuously urge the doctrine of grace in the substantial thereof, and yet maintain this opinion of perfection; which none else that I know of do maintain but such as are reckoned Pelagians or else enthusiasts, or near to one or other of these seeming extremes. Therefore Mr. Wesley is not for this to be reckoned like any of the two, but to maintain their opinion on better principles, and principles which appear more adapted to support it; which nevertheless I have not yet seen that they do, but much rather the contrary. But leaving this short digression, I proceed to the matter in hand.

Mr. Wesley seemed to allow (and from daily and common experience it must be allowed) that under the gospel new converts, and such as are not yet grown up to the full stature in Christ, may and do sin. But he said that 'fathers in Christ' might attain to live sinless. If they sought after it in faith and in faith prayed for it, the want of will

<sup>12</sup> Ori., '~~to the Heart~~' changed to 'very deep'.

<sup>13</sup> Ori., '~~seem to maintain~~'.

<sup>14</sup> The word is indistinct, at the bottom of the page; this seems the most likely match to visible letters.

is the reason they attain not to it.

Then those who have not yet arrived to be fathers in Christ, though greater than any Old Testament saint, yet in this are much in the same case with them—they sin, they are not sinlessly perfect. And as to fathers in Christ, it strikes me with amazement to hear Mr. Wesley say the reason why so few of them do attain to sinless perfection, when yet they might, is that they do not seek after it and pray for it in faith. Is it possible that such as may deservedly be called ‘fathers in Christ’ can be so negligent and lazy, so cold and unconcerned, in a thing so eminently for the glory of God in his gospel and for the higher benefit of his own soul that it could partake of on earth, as not to seek after it and pray for it? Is it possible that such can seek after and pray for it, but not in truth, though his great rule is to do everything by faith, and in faith his joy and confidence is that his life is hid with Christ in God (Col. 3:3) and that the life he now lives in the flesh is by faith in the Son of God?<sup>15</sup> Can such a man be so reluctant to act faith for the most important of all things in this life? One would rather incline to think so unhappy a person scarcely a real Christian, or at best but a weak infant, a very bruised reed or smoking flax not yet well kindled. But some reason must be thought of why, since advanced Christians may attain to sinless perfection, we neither read nor see such as did. We read of none such in the New Testament, and the contrary of the greatest, as Paul, Peter, etc. And to suppose that others of whom the contrary is not said were sinlessly perfect is *gratis Dictum*,<sup>16</sup> and against all probability, since we know no good reason to prefer them so highly to men more eminent in the gospel than they, and at least as eminent. Suppositions are not proofs, which I wish the perfectionists did not so often forget. Can we expect instances of it now, where we read of none in those times?

But supposing that we had instances of it then, how comes it that we see none now? We still, to the praise of his glorious grace, see instances of his grace and of his divine power in his gospel ordinances, confirming to us the truth and reality of such things we read in the New Testament, and that were beforehand prophesied and foretold by the Spirit of God, by whose effectual working they were brought to pass. Is his hand shortened? Is the efficacy of gospel grace? Are the operations of the Holy Ghost in working and carrying it on? Are they ceased, as many say all miraculous operations are? It surprized us to hear this asserted lately by a bishop in a Christian church, and asserted in order to condemn the Methodists; but surely Mr. Wesley, who among others has confuted that bishop, will not say so.<sup>17</sup> Mr. Wesley gave a reason, which for what I have already said I humbly think is not good, why so few attain to it. I have neither seen

<sup>15</sup> Erskine wrote in the margin: ‘Col. 3:17’ and ‘Gal. 2:20’.

<sup>16</sup> A ‘free’ or ungrounded assertion.

<sup>17</sup> Erskine is almost certainly referring to Richard Smalbroke’s *A Charge Delivered to ... the Clergy* (London: Knapton, 1744), pp. 7–10; to which Wesley replied in *A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion*, Pt. I (1745), V.4, in Frank Baker (ed.), *The Works of John Wesley*, vol. 11: *Appeals* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), pp. 141ff.

[Page 4]

nor heard nor read of any who could on solid grounds be thought to have attained to it. I have heard of some, who I suppose are still alive, that pretended to be such to their Christian acquaintances and friends. Persons of knowledge, judgment, experience, and really gracious had not that opinion of them, and thought they were inferior to others who were far from pretending so high. I know too that some who have been Quakers, but now are with Mr. Wesley of the Church of England, say they know instances of such. But so far as I know they have never produced these instances and showed them to be indeed such. O that I ever had known or now did know any really such! It would rejoice my soul. Since it is quite otherwise, I cannot but earnestly wish that all who think they have known such would seriously lay to heart whether their own sentiments of the heart of man in this life, and of the extent and spirituality of God's Word, and of perfect holiness, be not exceeding imperfect.

Yet I humbly hope I have known those who, in the Apostle John's sense in his first epistle, were indeed 'fathers in Christ'; though they neither thought themselves, or by other real and friendly Christians were thought to be, sinlessly perfect. I cannot doubt but such persons did always in faith earnestly seek after and pray for all holiness, and still for more and more, and never stopping at any degree but always going on, as we read the Apostle Paul did (Phil. 3:12, 13, 14). If it be said that yet they have not expressly in faith endeavoured and prayed for sinless perfection, since they did not attain to it; I answer, I may well suppose, and with reason, that they prayed and endeavoured for all holiness, and for the most part without reflecting on or thinking of any distinction, because so do all the real Christians I have ever been acquainted with. They pray in faith against all sin, and as in the Ambrosian hymn called *Te Deum*: 'Vouchsafe O Lord to keep us this day without sin.' Such prayer offered up in faith, though not expressly for sinless perfection, I humbly conceive none will venture to say but they may accept it and answer it to the full, and even more than was expressly asked or thought of. And that such prayer, and particularly as to being kept from falling and being established in the gospel, may and will be accepted, heard, and granted, humbly appear to me from Eph. 3:20, Rom. 16:25, Jude 24, see also Isa. 65:24. But perhaps it will be said that, supposing sinless perfection was not expressly excluded in the time of such prayer, yet the person not believing it attainable, it was not included nor at all prayed for. I answer, such a saint praying earnestly and in faith to be kept from all sin and for all holiness, and sinless perfect holiness being the restless longing desire of his soul which can never be satisfied till attained unto, though he thinks it not attainable till death and fully in heaven, where on that as on other accounts he earnestly longs to be, yet it would be rash to venture to say that, for the mistake of his judgment and not knowing that this earnest desire of his soul might be now obtained, these his prayers may not be answered above what he could expressly ask or think of, and he obtain (if it could be obtained) in this life that sinless perfection he so much pants after. That he might and would is agreeable to the foresaid texts, and to the infinite goodness and bounty of God in Christ in other such

cases; and to deny this would involve us in great difficulties and mistakes in many cases in practical Christianity and the life of faith.

I shall add but one other observation on this. Since it is not at all credible that first-rate Christians do not in faith seek after and pray for sinless perfection in this life, if they believe it attainable; and it being as little credible that the prayers of faith of such Christians have not been heard and granted in such a matter; yet it being owned that very few (and as far as I know, none) have attained to it; how can we but conclude that either it is not at all attainable or that such Christians have not in faith sought and prayed for it because they found

[Page 5]

not a divine warrant for such faith, and a divine warrant is necessary for divine faith. This is the most charitable and reasonable construction that I see can be put upon it. But it reduces the number of first-rate Christians that ever were or now are of Mr. Wesley's opinion to be very few or none.

I should next, according to what I above proposed to do, state the precise point of difference. But that will better appear after stating his arguments. And these were two.

1. The sufficiency of power and grace in our blessed Lord Jesus for this great salvation from all sin even in this life. But Mr. Wesley is a more accurate reasoner than to argue *a posse ad esse*, and from the absolute possibility of a thing to infer that it actually is. Therefore I suppose he adduced this as a consideration to remove a prejudice and obviate an objection which some might thence have made against his opinion, but not as an argument to prove it actually true. There can be no doubt of our Lord's power and grace. The question only is about his being pleased thus to exert the same in this life. And we may in this respect compare the saints in this life and their present habitation together, this earth and the heavens we see round about it. We are sure by revelation that this earth and these heavens will be burnt and purified, and that in their place or stead there will be new heavens and a new earth, wherein will dwell righteousness, and there can in no wise enter into the great city thereof, the new Jerusalem, anything that defileth. This our Lord's power and grace could just now bring to pass. And just now his power and grace could make us as clean as our habitation is to be made. But it follows not that therefore it is already done. We see it is not done. And we are not told that either of them will be done in this life, but at the end of this life. And we and our habitation are spoken of as much alike in this respect (Rom. 8:9–23 with 7:24), which rather makes against than for Mr. Wesley's opinion.

2. His other argument was to this effect: No sin or sinful person can enter into heaven, and therefore everyone must be sinlessly perfect before he be admitted there. Now when shall they be made so previously to the admission into glory? It must either be in this life or in the portal of death, for immediately after death they will be carried into heaven; except you feign a purgatory or some middle state wherein they are to be made sinless and perfect, and afterwards carried into heaven. It cannot be in the point

of death, for that point is like a mathematical point, having no parts, and is indivisible. Therefore it must be in this life. And since it must be in this life, you must allow it some time. And if but a minute, why may it not also be for an hour, or a day, or week, or month, or for a year or years?

Now let us see wherein lies the precise difference betwixt this opinion and the common doctrine of the Reformed churches. This last I shall take from the *Shorter Catechism* of the Assembly of Divines at Westminster, Question 37: 'What benefit do believers receive from Christ at death? Answer. The souls of believers are *at their death made perfect in holiness and do immediately pass into glory ...*'<sup>18</sup> Mr. Wesley agrees with them that the souls of believers do from the death of the believer immediately pass into glory, and that when they enter into that glory they are perfect in holiness. But they say that such [a] soul is made thus perfect at the death of the believer. And he says that it is before his death, and therefore in this life—from whence, by way *sorites*,<sup>19</sup> he infers that a believer may for a considerable time be sinlessly perfect in this life. Which is contrary to the doctrine of the Reformed churches which we have in the foresaid *Catechism*, Question 82: 'Is any man able perfectly to keep the commandments of God? Answer. No mere man since the fall is able in this life perfectly to keep the commandment of God, but doth daily break them in thought, word, and deed.' And in the 15<sup>th</sup> Article [of the] Church of England: 'Sin (as St. John saith) was not in him' (Christ). 'But all we the rest, although baptized and born again in Christ yet offend in many things; and if we say we have no sin, we deceive our selves, and the truth is not in us.'

Let us next humbly examine Mr. Wesley's second argument aforesaid against this doctrine of the Reformation. So far as it agrees with this doctrine as above there is now no dispute with him. But wherein it differs therefrom it is founded on four suppositions which he has not at all proved, and which to me humbly appear not to be true. And when I have endeavoured to show this, I will next endeavour to show that his own former concessions are not consistent with this argument of his, and the only one I remember he adduced in that sermon for a positive direct proof of his opinion.

[Page 6]

1. It supposes, but he has not offered to prove, that a believer's soul cannot be made perfect in holiness in an instant, a mere point, the very point of death. And to say that a point is without parts and indivisible, as the mathematicians define their point, is but a wittyer's jest and not a solid argument as to any real existence. No mathematician ever said that some point did or could actually exist; though very fit to be supposed in *pure mathematics*, but not literally taken in *mixed mathematics*, which deal in real existences. It is not fit for creatures of our narrow capacities and faculties

<sup>18</sup> The phrase placed in italics was written in larger letters than surrounding text. I have used italics to show this emphasis.

<sup>19</sup> i.e., a chain syllogism.

to hu<nt><sup>20</sup> after and entertain subtleties unnecessarily that do not enlighten us in our way but bewilder and perplex us—and like an *ignis fatuus*<sup>21</sup> lead among briars, bogs, and pits—especially in divine matters, and more especially when we could not have known their truth but by revelation. It is sufficient here if I show that this blessed change in [the] soul of a believer may be wrought in an instant, in the smallest conceivable point of duration. For which I humbly offer these two arguments: (1) In so small a point the soul was brought into existence, according to any ideas we have. For we (at least I, or any I ever conversed with or read) have none of any midst between not-being and being. The soul, as all creatures else, once did not exist; then it did exist. What kind of point of duration was it in which from nothing it came to be something? Do you have any notion of it but as a very instant? I suppose not. Those who deny the *preexistence* of the soul, or that it comes *ex traduce*,<sup>22</sup> say that *creando infunditur et infundendo creatur*.<sup>23</sup> And this has long been the commonly received opinion in our Western world. These men, whether their opinion be true or not, must think this creation and infusion to be instantaneous. But all who allow the soul to have been created, and brought from nothing in whatever part of duration, must hold it to have been instantaneous. Why then may not a less thing be brought to pass instantaneously? It is less to make perfect a soul wherein work is already solidly and really begun and advanced than to make that soul to be when it had no being, to make it something, and what it is, when it was nothing. And is it so great a matter to render perfect a soul already very good, a soul that already is regenerated and became a new creature, is grown up in Christ, and that is even a father in Christ, by the mighty working of the Holy Ghost? Is this, I say, so great a matter that the same Holy Spirit cannot complete his own divine work in an instant? Pardon me to say that this seems a gross absurdity, and to such our little subtleties often lead us. (2) A work of the same kind, but greater, shall be done instantaneously, and therefore so may this be. And being of the same kind, and for the same end and purpose, so it probably will be. By 1 Cor. 15:50–54, with 1 Thess. 4:15, we learn that the believers who shall be on the earth when our Lord comes to judge the world and carry all his saints to full and endless glory with him shall not die. But because flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, they shall be changed *in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye*.<sup>24</sup> And their corruptible shall put on incorruption; and their mortal, immortality. One cannot doubt but that then also their souls shall be changed, and all that was corruptible or sinful therein shall put on incorruption and perfection, for then shall they be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall they ever be with the Lord. Since so complete and perfect a change shall be made on the whole man, soul and body, *in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye*, why should you think that the soul alone cannot be

<sup>20</sup> A fragment of the page is missing, but the word seems clear.

<sup>21</sup> A flitting phosphorescent light sometimes seen in marshes.

<sup>22</sup> i.e., the soul of the child comes 'by transfer' from its parents.

<sup>23</sup> 'It is created as it is poured out and infused into the creature'; i.e., the soul is created in the instant it is joined with the body.

<sup>24</sup> This phrase placed in italics here and the next two instances was written each time in larger letters than surrounding text. I have used italics to show this emphasis.

made sinless and perfect, according to its then state, *in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye*? The apostle does not here entertain us with subtlety and pretended mathematical point, but solidly and substantially as things themselves are really to be. But if any will yet be so curious and over-subtly inquisitive as to insist on his indivisible mathematical point of death which has no parts, and ask whether that point be in this life or the next, before death or after it (since it must be one or other of them and cannot be any way reckoned in both, or one side of it before and the other after death, since it is indivisible and has no parts), I beg leave to ask him whether the point of duration of the soul's creation was before this life or after it? And whether the point, the moment, the twinkling of an eye of the foresaid blessed and grand change of the whole man is to be in this life

[Page 7]

or the next? And when he falls on a good answer to these queries, he will find it as good an answer to his own.<sup>25</sup>

2. This argument supposes what Mr. Wesley did not prove, nor so far as I yet see can be proved, that death is a precise point—or, to avoid that subtlety, is instantaneous. If you take death for the soul's local departure from its habitation, the body, why may not the soul linger at the door, as the man when acting in this world might linger in the door of his house when going abroad? Again, a man may lay in his house, or in a machine that he actuates, till it be taken to pieces and be no more house or machine, but a mere heap of materials. If you take death to be the ceasing of the organical connexion and influence between soul and body, then death seems not for the most part to be instantaneous. In few diseases, and in few deaths by outward force, is it so. It is evident to common observation that for the most part the body does not die at once but gradually, and animal life wears out of it like the flame of a candle dying away in a socket. Before all animal life seems wholly to cease, we often see strong animal motions in the body. But whether or not, or how far, the person has then what we call sensation, we in many cases do not know. Yet we say not that the man is then actually dead, nor yet that he is alive, but that he is in the pangs of death. It is not easy to determine whether the man be dead when the animal motion remains yet there is no sensibility. Or when all animal motion, all heat, and everything belonging to animal life ceases. Nor whether in either of these cases the soul has locally departed from the body or not. The ceasing of the organical connexion and influence between body and soul, either wholly or in the most essential parts of it, wherever the soul then locally be, whether you call it strictly death or life, if it be such that death in the strictest sense must inevitably follow, and that the reciprocal operations of body and soul on each other never can again recover to anything that can be called animal and rational life but by a miracle, it is fully enough in the present case. For in this state that

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<sup>25</sup> Erskine strikes out five lines of text closing this first point, and rewrites them as the beginning of his second point.

seems to be neither life nor death. There is a duration not instantaneous, wherein the soul may be made perfect. If I be asked why I form so nice cases, I will beg leave to answer that it is not because I have pleasure in them, but to meet the subtleties used on the other side, and show why I think them not true nor conclusive. My purpose in the former number was to show that the soul might be made sinlessly perfect at the very point of death, though it were but an instant; and in this to show that, for the most part at least, it is more, and maybe considerably more, than an instant. Each of these seems to me to overthrow the argument. And we need not take the words ‘at death’ in the foresaid 37<sup>th</sup> Question for the precise point of death in the strictest sense, but for about the time of death as above; and such a way of speaking, taking ‘at’ more laxly for ‘about’, frequently occurs in good authors and in common conversation.

3. This argument supposes it to follow, but has not proved the consequence, that if the soul in any point of time in this life may be made sinlessly perfect, it may likewise be made so in larger portions of time—yea, for a day, a week, a month, a year, or years. For a proof we have a question put: Why may it not be so, since all these times are in this life? If therefore a sufficient difference be assigned, a sufficient reason why it may be in the one and not in the rest, the reason implied in the question will be sufficiently answered. If you take death only to be the soul’s local departure from the body, and call the time ‘life’ wherein the organical connexion is ceased or impaired as above, then in that time the body, having no influence on the soul, is not a bar to its sinlessness, which cannot be said of the former time of life. And if the connexion be not wholly broken, yet in the essential parts of it, then the influence of the body

[Page 8]

on the soul is so far gone that it cannot disturb the soul nor draw it to sin, which till then cannot be said. There was a remarkable passage of a husband and wife who, being very devout and earnestly wishing to be quite free from all entanglements of every fleshly affection, did voluntarily part and went into different monasteries, where they lived with great strictness. The husband becoming very old, and his life being but a mere breath which departing hovered on his lips, the wife came from her monastery to take her last leave of him. After good discourse and just going away, she bowed down and kissed him, and the dying old man, with the very small remainder of strength he had, said to her—*abi, abi, restat adhuc scintilla!*<sup>26</sup>

4. This argument justly supposes that on death the soul presently passes to heaven, and being perfect is received there. But it also supposes, which it proves not, that this passage is instantaneous. For if it be not instantaneous, there is a time wherein it may be made perfect before it gets into heaven— even according to Mr. Wesley’s notion that it cannot be instantaneously made perfect, and therefore [he] says it<sup>27</sup> must be made so in this life. But it may be made perfect in this passage, which is not instantaneous. I say not that in this passage it will be made perfect. Nor is it the

<sup>26</sup> ‘Go [away], go [away], the spark [of attachment] remains even yet!’

<sup>27</sup> Ori., ‘in’; likely an error.

doctrine of the foresaid Question 37. It is a query I have now nothing to do with. But it may be then perfected according to Mr. Wesley's notion, if the passage be not instantaneous, which is enough to answer this argument. I believe it is true that this passage is not instantaneous but takes some time, because of its length, even for a spirit to travel it. We know by Dan. 9:23–24 that an angel so exalted as Gabriel, though made to fly swiftly, took some time, though a short time, to fly from heaven to earth. It cannot take less to fly from earth to heaven. And farther, we know not whether the angels employed to convey souls to heaven be as exalted as Gabriel and can do as much as he. And yet we have reason to apprehend that in their carrying souls to glory they may meet with opposition and retardments from the prince and power of the air (through which region they must pass), as the Scripture calls the devil. For that he opposes the angels in executing their duty we see in this same book of Daniel.

5. Let us now try whether Mr. Wesley's concessions are consistent with this argument, or rather whether this argument be consistent with them; for the concessions being mostly good, the argument must be bad if it be inconsistent with them. Mr. Wesley yielded that none of the patriarchal or Jewish saints were sinlessly perfect in this life, and yet on their death went straight to heaven. And he yielded that under the gospel new converts, Christians not fully grown up, did sin; and that even some fathers in Christ were not sinlessly perfect, because they sought it not and prayed not for it in faith. Yet he denies not that all such Christians, though sinfully imperfect in this life, go immediately to heaven when they die. And he claimed this great privilege of sinless perfection in this life only to such fathers in Christ as sought after it and prayed for it in faith. And for this reason: because they must go sinlessly perfect to heaven, and therefore must be made so in this life. Then when were the Old [Testament] saints made perfect? When was David, who on his death bed not only had such a spirit of revenge in him but did all he then could to execute his revenge, and by what seems an evasion and eluding his own promise and oath? We read not of his amendment in this particular, but what we read of him immediately after is, 'so David slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David'.<sup>28</sup> And if he had changed to a better mind, he would have countermanded his revengeful instruction to Solomon. And then Solomon probably would not have fulfilled it. Which yet he did, having first laid a trap for Shimei, as if he had intended that his being put to death should not be attributed to his old offence (for which he had the king's oath that he would not slay him) but to a new offence just then committed. And it would appear that David intended some such contrivance should be used, for on mentioning his own oath, which seemed to secure Shimei in succeeding reigns as well as his own (as the oath of Israel to the Gibeonites secured them under succeeding rulers<sup>29</sup>), he adds, 'for thou art a wise man, and knoweth

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<sup>28</sup> 1 Kings, 2: 10.

<sup>29</sup> Joshua 9.

[Page 9]

what to do unto him; but his hoary head bring thou down to the grave with blood' (1 Kings 2:1–10). When then was David made sinlessly perfect, even in his heart, sentiments, and inclinations, if not in the point or in the pangs of death, when death had laid so sure hold of him and all his faculties and powers that he could not return to life but by a miracle, and when the bystanders and witnesses of his dying could not perceive what was working in his soul separating gradually from his body, and could not perceive his advancing to and attaining sinless perfection? So it is also now under the gospel, when many believers are dying who had not been sinlessly perfect. The witnesses of their death, to the last gasp of breath that they can perceive, see imperfection still in them, as some remains of impatience, some former misapprehensions and prejudices, etc. But they see not what is wrought in the soul when outwardly the connexion of it with the body is, to their apprehension, gone or just a going. What then do these witnesses think? Do they conclude or fear that he is not to go to heaven, because they see he is not sinlessly perfect when they think he is out of life and dies? O no! God forbid that real Christians were in so woeful [a] case, and brought to sorrow for dead saints, who really were saints, as those without hope! And this would indeed make the gate of heaven so strait that much fewer than our Lord has told us of could enter in thereat,<sup>30</sup> and that many would be excluded to whom our blessed Saviour will say, 'Enter ye into the joy of your Lord'.<sup>31</sup> I gladly own that some saints die with hardly any remains of sin perceivable by the witnesses observing their death. And every such instance is the rejoicing and comfort of a Christian's heart. But all who are really in Christ, and therefore go really into his glory, do not die so. When can these be made sinlessly perfect, if not at such time as I above argued as to David and need not repeat? And there having been and still being such instances, as Mr. Wesley according to his concessions must acknowledge, this argument cannot be thought conclusive.

I thought to have subjoined an argument against sinless perfection in this life, and some remarks on adding this epithet 'sinless' to 'perfection', etc. But these not particularly touching this sermon but the whole cause itself, I forebear to say any more at present and to lengthen this long paper. God of grace and truth, lead us into all truth by thy grace which is in Jesus!

A clean copy of this was sent to Mr. Charles Wesley under a sealed cover,<sup>32</sup> wherein was wrote as follows

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<sup>30</sup> Matthew 7: 14.

<sup>31</sup> Matthew 25: 21, 23.

<sup>32</sup> So this manuscript is Erskine's personal draft, not the copy mailed to Charles Wesley.

Dear sir,

The paper from which the enclosed was copied was for that purpose put in the hands of an honest Christian friend last Tuesday morning. He brought me not the copy which you now have under this cover till late yesternight; having, it seems, been much taken up with his own affairs. If your brother and you will take the trouble to read and consider it, I entreat to know your judgments of the contents, which though differing from your opinions, yet I humbly hope are not expressed with self-confidence, nor unsuitably to the respect and love which I bear to you. To find on solid grounds what is God's truth is all the aim of, dear sir,

Your most affectionate friend and  
humble servant,

London. Monday morning,  
16 Jan. 1748/9

James Erskine

RANDY L. MADDOX

## John Milton and Charles Wesley: A Study of Influence

‘Great writing is always rewriting or revisionism and is founded upon a reading that clears space for the self, or that so works as to reopen old works to our fresh sufferings’.

‘The anxiety of influence cripples weaker talents but stimulates canonical genius’.<sup>1</sup>

The relationship of any writer to his or her predecessors is a complex and defining one. In his essay ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’, T. S. Eliot famously said: ‘No poet, no artist of any kind, has his true meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead’.<sup>2</sup> In the case of Charles Wesley, we can set him beside Isaac Watts, or Philip Doddridge, or Addison, in order to see him more clearly; and we can also set him beside his successors, Cowper, or Heber, or Neale, or Fred Pratt Green. In either direction, looking forward or looking back, he is defined by his relationship with others. In an essay in Newport and Campbell’s *Charles Wesley: Life, Literature and Legacy* (2007), I tried to explore this debt to classical literature and to Milton.<sup>3</sup> In the present essay I wish to explore further the connection with Milton, because that interaction is, I suggest, crucial to his art; and to our understanding of what that art is.

All poets struggle with their predecessors in what Harold Bloom, quoted above, calls ‘the anxiety of influence’. And for a century and a half after his death in 1674, Milton’s work was the formidable antecedent against which eighteenth-century poetry struggled and romantic period poetry rebelled. Keats said of Milton: ‘I have but lately stood on my guard against Milton. Life to him would be death to me’.<sup>4</sup> Wordsworth took *Paradise Lost* for a starting point for the poem on his own life, *The Prelude*. In the same way, Charles Wesley both uses Milton and differs from him, and it is precisely in that use and difference that the secret of his greatness is to be found.

There are plenty of verbal echoes of Milton in Charles Wesley’s hymns, and I shall be referring to some of them during the course of this essay. But it is not my primary purpose to trace borrowings: they are easily found in such lines as: ‘With thee conversing, I forget’, or ‘O dark, dark, dark (I still must say)/Amid the blaze of

<sup>1</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Western Canon* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Co, 1994), p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> T. S. Eliot, ‘Tradition and the Individual Talent’, *Selected Essays* (third edn, London: Faber & Faber, 1951), p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> J. R. Watson, ‘The Hymns of Charles Wesley and the Poetic Tradition’, in Kenneth C. G. Newport and Ted A. Campbell (eds), *Charles Wesley: Life, Literature and Legacy* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2007), pp. 351-77.

<sup>4</sup> Letter to George and Georgiana Keats, Friday 17 - Monday 27 September, 1819, in Elizabeth Cook (ed.), *John Keats: The Oxford Authors Series* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 515.

Gospel-day'.<sup>5</sup> I shall refer to some of these in due course, but such verbal borrowings are not my primary concern.

I am engaged rather with influence in a deeper sense, from the Latin root. I want to suggest that the influence of Milton on Charles Wesley was that of one whose spirit 'flowed in' to him: in the sense that Wesley saw Milton as the inspired poet, blind but granted inward light, whose response to the world around him was to produce great poetry, a sublime utterance. Moreover that poetry was sacred poetry, an art that sought to interpret that world in a way that corresponded both to human experience and to the teaching of the Old and New Testaments. The greatest of Milton's poems was designed, explicitly, to 'justify the wayes of God to men' (*Paradise Lost*, I. 26), and it could be argued that Charles Wesley was trying to do the same thing in more than 6,000 hymns. His reading of Milton does exactly what Bloom suggested in the quotation that I have used for an epigraph: it 'clears space for the self', and in that space it 'reopens old works to our fresh sufferings'.

Milton was a fundamental example, a reason for his successors to think of writing sacred poetry. But his awareness of suffering is not all. For Charles Wesley there would be the added interest of Milton's belief in the unity of voice and verse, the 'Sphear-born harmonious Sisters' of 'At a Solemn Musick'. In that poem, Milton speaks of music and poetry, when joined, as able to present to our 'high-raisd phantasie'

That undisturbed Song of pure content,  
Ay sung before the saphire-colour'd throne  
To him that sits theron  
With Saintly shout and solemn Jubily,  
Where the bright Seraphim in burning row  
Their loud up-lifted Angel trumpets blow,  
And the Cherubick host in thousand quires  
Touch their Immortal Harps of golden wires,  
With those just Spirits that wear victorious Palms,  
Hymns devout and holy Psalms  
Singing everlastingly. (lines 6-16)

This is what we find in Charles Wesley, in 'Father of everlasting grace', where he prays for the blessing of the Holy Spirit on earth:

So shall we pray, and never cease,  
So shall we thankfully confess  
Thy wisdom, truth, and power, and love;  
With joy unspeakable adore,

<sup>5</sup> 'With thee conversing I forget' is from 'Saviour, who ready art to hear', *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1740). In modern texts this hymn begins 'Talk with us, Lord, thyself reveal', *Hymns and Psalms* no. 542. 'O dark, dark, dark (I still must say / Amid the blaze of Gospel-day' is from 'When, dearest Lord, when shall it be', *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1740), the first line was changed, probably by John Wesley, to 'When, gracious Lord . . .'

And bless, and praise thee evermore,  
And serve thee as thy hosts above.

Till added to that heavenly choir,  
We raise our songs of triumph higher,  
And praise thee in a bolder strain;  
Out-soar the first-born Seraph's flight,  
And sing, with all our friends in light,  
Thy everlasting love to man.<sup>6</sup>

Even as early as 'At a Solemn Musick', written in the 1630s, Milton was already thinking of the Fall, when 'disproportion'd sin/ Jarr'd against natures chime': he prays

O may we soon again renew that Song  
And keep in tune with Heav'n, till God ere long  
To his celestial consort us unite,  
To live with him, and sing in endles morn of light. (lines 25-8)

Charles Wesley uses the same idea in one of two poems entitled 'The True Use of Music' from *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1749):

Jesus, Thou soul of all our joys,  
For whom we now lift up our voice,  
And all our strength exert,  
Vouchsafe the grace we humbly claim,  
Compose into a thankful frame,  
And tune thy people's heart.<sup>7</sup>

The metaphors at the end - 'compose', 'tune' - make the idea obvious. That hymn is full of the joy of music, properly used: for Wesley counsels against 'the noisy burst of selfish love' in a verse that goes on to describe singing very beautifully:

The joy from out our heart arise,  
And speak, and sparkle in our eyes,  
And vibrate on our tongue.<sup>8</sup>

Throughout this hymn, sweet music and harmony become a metaphor for the good life, and misused music and discord become a metaphor for sin, just as in Milton; and the final verse echoes the end of 'At a Solemn Musick' (notice the word 'endless'):

With calmly reverential joy,  
O let us all our lives employ  
In setting forth thy love!

<sup>6</sup> Charles Wesley, *Hymns of Petition and Thanksgiving for the Promise of the Father* (1746).

<sup>7</sup> Charles Wesley, 'The True Use of Music', in *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1749).

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*

And raise in death our triumph higher,  
 And sing, with all the heavenly choir,  
 That endless song above.<sup>9</sup>

Let us turn at this point to the beginning of Charles Wesley's career as a hymn writer. It is significant, I think, that his first response to his 'conversion' experience of 21 May 1738 was to write a hymn: his journal for Tuesday 23 May says that 'At nine I began an hymn upon my conversion, but was persuaded to break off for fear of pride. Mr Bray coming, encouraged me to proceed in spite of Satan'.<sup>10</sup> The fear of pride when writing devotional poetry was a common theme in seventeenth-century poetry, most famously described in Marvell's poem, 'The Coronet', in which he hopes to write a wonderful poem to the king of glory, a finer poem than any he has received, but

Alas I find the Serpent old  
 That, twining in his speckled breast,  
 About the flow'rs disguis'd does fold,  
 With wreaths of Fame and Interest.<sup>11</sup> (**Lines 13-16**)

If this is what Charles Wesley felt on sitting down at nine o'clock on that Tuesday morning, Mr Bray sensibly persuaded him that Satan was not lurking in the poet's sense of achievement but in trying to put him off writing altogether. The devil's argument would run thus: 'if you write about your conversion experience in the finest poetic language that you can produce, you will be guilty of the sin of pride; therefore, it would be better to keep quiet about it'. The argument is clever, and applies to all devotional poets and hymn writers. Charles Wesley refers to it in verses three and four:

And shall I slight my father's love,  
 Or basely fear his gifts to own.  
 Unmindful of his favours prove?  
 Shall I, the hallowed cross to shun,  
 Refuse his righteousness to impart,  
 By hiding it within my heart?

No, though the ancient dragon rage,  
 And call forth all his host to war; . . .

He is determined to proclaim what has happened to him, that wonderful assurance that is so great that he does not know where to begin, and he cannot find words to express what he feels:

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in John R. Tyson (ed.), *Charles Wesley, A Reader* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 100.

<sup>11</sup> H. M. Margoliouth (ed.), *The Poems and Letters of Andrew Marvell* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1952), p. 14.

Where shall my wondering soul begin?  
 How shall I all to heaven aspire?  
 A slave redeemed from death and sin,  
 A brand plucked from eternal fire,  
 How shall I equal triumphs raise,  
 Or sing my great deliverer's praise?

Oh how shall I the goodness tell,  
 Father, which thou to me hast showed?  
 That I, a child of wrath and hell,  
 I should be called a child of God,  
 Should know, should feel, my sins forgiven,  
 Blest with this antepast of heaven!<sup>12</sup>

The verse does two things at once: it expresses the inadequacy of words to convey his sense of blessing, and it specifies what the blessing is - being called a child of God, finding himself a brand plucked from the burning. It is a brilliant exercise in stating a dilemma and solving it, or at least partly solving it. I have argued elsewhere that Charles Wesley writes poem after poem, because he is forever searching for the language that he needs to express his powerful feelings.<sup>13</sup> Here his emotions are those of wonder and joy, described in words and images that convey that sudden overwhelming sense of being born again, of having a fresh start.

We can set beside this the great speech that Adam makes at the end of *Paradise Lost*, when he has been told of the coming of the Saviour and of the Resurrection:

O goodness infinite, goodness immense!  
 That all this good of evil shall produce,  
 And evil turn to good; more wonderful  
 Than that by which creation first brought forth  
 Light out of darkness! full of doubt I stand  
 Whether I should repent me now of sin  
 By mee done and occasiond, or rejoyce  
 Much more, that much more good thereof shall spring,  
 To God more glory, more good will to Men  
 From God, and over wrauth grace shall abound.

(*Paradise Lost*, XII, 469-78)

Adam has had a moment of revelation. At last the whole pattern of events is revealed, from the Fall, and the loss of Paradise, to the Redemption of the World by our Lord Jesus Christ. It is a sudden blinding insight into the whole process, into the reason why everything that has occurred in the twelve books of the poem has happened as it has been described. He has experienced happiness of an unbelievable

<sup>12</sup> Charles Wesley, 'Where shall my wond'ring soul begin?', *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1739).

<sup>13</sup> J. R. Watson, *The English Hymn: A Critical and Historical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 222.

intensity and beauty, as he made love to Eve in the Garden of Eden; and he has experienced the loss of that innocence and love, the quarrelling that ensues, the misery of sin and his consciousness of his own failure and disobedience, followed by his decision to return to God in penitence and sorrow. He has experienced the full range of human emotions, from the heights of pure and untainted happiness to the tragedy of an action that he would take back if he could, but which cannot be reversed. At the same time we, as readers, are made conscious of the designs of Satan: we can see his rebellion against goodness and its punishment, and his fall into hell, followed by his mean desire to take revenge by turning humanity away from God, persuading them to disobey his command.

But, of course, the Fall precedes the Redemption. Milton had promised the reader in the first lines that this would be the subject of the poem:

Of Mans First Disobedience, and the Fruit  
Of that Forbidden Tree, whose mortal tast  
Brought Death into the World, and all our woe,  
With loss of Eden, till one greater Man  
Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat,  
Sing, Heav'nly Muse . . . (*Paradise Lost*, I, 1-6).

The muse is a heavenly muse, which is to sing of the pattern of sin and redemption: Milton lets you know at the beginning of the poem what the outcome will be. He prays for inspiration from the Holy Spirit, remembering that at the beginning of the process of Creation 'the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters' (Genesis 1: 2):

Thou from the first  
Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread  
Dove-like satst brooding on the vast Abyss  
And mad'st it pregnant: What in me is dark  
Illumine, what is low raise and support;  
That to the highth of this great Argument  
I may assert Eternal Providence,  
And justify the wayes of God to men  
(*Paradise Lost*, I, 19-26).

This is paraphrased in Charles Wesley's 'Come, Holy Ghost, our hearts inspire', also a rewriting of John Cosin's 'Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire':

Expand thy wings, Celestial Dove,  
Brood o'er our nature's night;  
On our disordered spirits move  
And let there now be light.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> 'Come, Holy Ghost, our hearts inspire', in Wesley, *Hymns and Sacred Poems*.

The last line neatly takes us back to Genesis, but also forward to the state of inner darkness that is the background to the hymn: we need the Holy Spirit because without it all is dark in the night of our nature. Milton, of course, was able to say that he also experienced physical darkness because he was blind. He refers to his blindness in affecting lines of great beauty in Book III:

Thus with the Year  
 Seasons return, but not to me returns  
 Day, or the sweet approach of Ev'n or Morn,  
 Or sight of vernal bloom, or Summers Rose,  
 Or flocks, or herds, or human face divine;  
 But cloud in stead, and ever-during dark  
 Surrounds me, from the cheerful waies of men  
 Cut off, and for the Book of knowledge fair  
 Presented with a Universal blanc  
 Of Nature's works to mee expunged and ras'd,  
 And wisdom at one entrance quite shut out.  
 So much the rather thou Celestial light  
 Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers  
 Irradiate, there pluck eyes, all mist from thence  
 Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell  
 Of things invisible to mortal sight (*Paradise Lost*, III, 40-55).

This is one source of 'Christ whose glory fills the skies' (the other is Luke 1: 78-9, where 'the day-spring from on high hath visited us/ To give light to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death'):

Dark and cheerless is the morn  
 Unaccompanied by Thee:  
 Joyless is the day's return,  
 Till Thy mercy's beams I see,  
 Till they inward light impart,  
 Glad my eyes, and warm my heart.

Visit then this soul of mine.  
 Pierce the gloom of sin and grief;  
 Fill me, radiancy divine,  
 Scatter all my unbelief:  
 More and more thyself display,  
 Shining to the perfect day.<sup>15</sup>

Milton and Wesley both knew about darkness, the one physically, the other as a metaphor for a life in this world without the light of Christ, without whom 'dark and cheerless is the morn'. And the greatness of both poets, I think, is in their ability to present the reader with a knowledge of human nature in all its sin and failure, their

<sup>15</sup> 'Christ whose glory fills the skies', in Wesley, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1739).

awareness of living in a fallen world. You will remember how Charles Wesley's 'conversion hymn' continues:

Outcasts of men to you I call,  
Harlots, and publicans, and thieves!<sup>16</sup>

He was powerfully conscious of the imperfections of the society that he found all around him in the London of 1738, a city where prostitution thrived, and taxes were unjustly raised, and thieves prospered. He was conscious, too, of his own imperfection. If we go back to the journal entry for that Tuesday, 23 May, we read 'Throughout this day he [God] has kept up in me a constant sense of my own weakness.'<sup>17</sup> It was a sense that remained with him throughout his career: he writes of himself as a representative human being in his sin and failure as he comes to Holy Communion in 'Saviour, and can it be':

I am not worthy, Lord,  
So foul, so self-aborred,  
Thee, my God, to entertain  
In this poor polluted heart:  
I so frail and full of sin,  
All my nature cries: 'Depart!'

Within and without, Wesley finds the imperfections of fallen humanity. The word that he used for it is 'woe', from the opening lines of *Paradise Lost*, in which the 'mortal taste' of the apple 'brought death into the world, and all our woe'. The three long syllables of 'all our woe' are a wonderful example of the rhetoric of *litotes* or understatement: they sum up everything that is wrong with the world. They remind us that, while some of humanity make their best efforts, the world is full of suffering and grief and misery. Milton himself, as he was writing *Paradise Lost*, was acutely conscious of everything that had gone wrong for him. He was old, and blind, and (after the Restoration) in some danger: there is a story that he was saved from arrest and possible execution by Andrew Marvell, who was a Member of Parliament. But whether in danger or escaping it, he had lived long enough to see everything in ruins that he had worked for and given his eyesight for. As Latin Secretary to the Commonwealth, he had devoted himself to the cause; and now, with the return of Charles II, it had all turned into one of the failures of history.

Milton's 'all our woe' comes again in verses from 'O for a heart to praise my God' that are omitted from modern books, but which clearly depend on Milton:

Thy tender heart is still the same,  
And melts at human woe;

<sup>16</sup> 'Where shall my wond'ring soul begin?', in Wesley, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1739).

<sup>17</sup> Tyson (ed.), *Charles Wesley, A Reader*, p.100.

Jesu, for thee distrest I am:  
I want thy love to know.

My heart, thou knowest, can never rest,  
Till thou create my peace,  
Till of my Eden repossess,  
From every sin I cease.<sup>18</sup>

Paradise has been lost, for human beings live in a fallen world, the world of history, of harlots and publicans and thieves. Indeed one of the reasons why Milton's poem is so great is that it explores the human condition so clearly and thoroughly. Adam and Eve, the great mistake-makers, the tragic protagonists, are banished from paradise, and in the process they become the first human beings, repentant failures, struggling into the beginning of human history. Charles Wesley's verses remind us of human failure and divine compassion, the heart of God that 'melts at human woe'. That is the love that he needs, 'I want [need] thy love to know'. Until he finds that love he is restless, echoing St Augustine's *Confessions*: 'Thou hast made us for Thyself; and our heart is restless, until it repose in thee' (book I, chapter 1).

This is St Augustine mediated through Milton, for Wesley yearns for nothing less than the re-possession of the Eden that has been lost. Milton puts it this way:

Then wilt thou not be loath  
To leave this Paradise, but shalt possess  
A Paradise within thee, happier farr (*Paradise Lost*, XII, 585-7).

Milton uses the word 'tragic' at the opening of Book IX of *Paradise Lost*, as he starts to describe the Fall itself. The tragedy is all the more powerfully felt because Milton has been so beautifully and tenderly concerned to paint the Garden of Eden in all its glory: the loveliness of the landscape, the fertile plants, the delightful weather, and above all Adam and Eve, conversing together decorously and courteously, loving one another in mutual respect and admiration. In Book IV Adam reminds Eve at one point that it is evening, and time to go to rest to be ready for work in the Garden next morning: she responds

With thee conversing I forget all time,  
All seasons and thir change, all please alike.  
(*Paradise Lost*, IV, 639-40)

This is the source of Charles Wesley's 'Talk with us, Lord, thyself reveal', where the second verse (originally the third) is:

<sup>18</sup> 'O for a heart to praise my God', in Wesley, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1742).



This is the state that Charles Wesley prays to recapture in the hymn: ‘Talk with us, Lord, Thyself reveal’. In both Milton and Wesley ‘talk’ is one of those simple words, so simple that we often underestimate it or even ignore it. Talking is one of the simplest and most precious of human activities, and when it is done well, it is one of the greatest joys of life. When it is done badly, as in abuse or falsehood, it is one of the worst features of human behaviour. Milton shows this in the debased speech of Adam and Eve after the Fall, in which they have the first matrimonial quarrel in human history, each blaming the other for what has happened. Here, following Milton, Charles Wesley prays for divine talk, Godly talk, for a state in which he can ‘find his heaven’. It is one more example of the way in which he follows Milton in portraying the ideal while knowing the actual, in remembering the talk in the garden and contrasting it with the talk that too often goes on in a fallen world.

*Paradise Lost* presents a tragic story, redeemed by the grace of God in Jesus Christ. But the greatest human tragedy in Milton’s work is that of Samson in *Samson Agonistes*. In the opening speech he wonders why, after all the promise of his youth, he now finds himself ‘Eyeless in Gaza at the Mill with slaves’. There was a promise that he should deliver Israel from the Philistines, but now he is exposed ‘to all the miseries of life,/ Life in captivity/ Among inhuman foes’. It was, as we are reminded, his own fault for marrying Dalilah against his parents’ advice, and then telling her the secret of his strength. The drama finds him a miserable figure, chained and enslaved, and tortured by his own thoughts of his weakness and failure:

Promise was that I  
Should Israel from Philistian yoke deliver;  
Ask for this great deliverer now, and find him  
Eyeless in Gaza at the mill with slaves,  
Himself in bonds under Philistian yoke;<sup>21</sup>

He remembers that it was his own foolishness that brought him to this state, and then goes on to lament his blindness:

O dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon,  
Irrecoverably dark, total Eclipse  
Without all hope of day!<sup>22</sup> (80-82)

Milton obviously empathised with Samson, for he himself was blind, eyeless in London we might say, living for a time under what today would be thought of as house arrest, hearing of the intolerance of the reign of Charles II with the mind of one who had worked all his life to find an alternative to the old hierarchy of monarchy, Lords and bishops. Charles Wesley, sixty or seventy years later, had his own vision of society as the same society that needed to be transformed: as we have seen, the ‘conversion hymn’ refers to the ‘harlots, and publicans, and thieves’ of London; and

<sup>21</sup> H. C. Beeching (ed.), *The Poetical Works of John Milton* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900), p. 510.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 80-82.

the diary entry for those days refers to his constant sense of his own weakness. This combination of his own self-knowledge, and his sense of a world that has gone wrong, are two elements of his hymn writing that are clearly visible, even when the hymns are those which celebrate salvation with joy and wonder. His *Samson Agonistes* hymn is found in *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1740) where it begins 'When, dearest Lord, when shall it be' (changed, probably by John Wesley, to 'When, gracious Lord...'). Verse 2 is very clearly a development of the Samson theme:

A poor, blind child, I wander here,  
If haply I may feel thee near!  
O dark! dark! dark! I still must say,  
Amid the blaze of gospel day!<sup>23</sup>

The hymn is a prayer for comfort by a man who feels himself a sinner, full of faults, one who comes to God 'with only sin and misery' (verse 5). In the last two verses he knows himself to be sick, and in want (verse 6) and blind and weak (verse 7). He is, as he puts it twice in the poem, 'helpless' without God: the hymn begins with a question – 'when shall it be/That I shall find my all in thee' and ends with a prayer 'A helper of the helpless be,/ And let me find my all in thee!'<sup>24</sup> It is Charles Wesley's reworking of one part of the Samson legend. He is not about to pull down the temple upon the Philistines, but his self-assessment is one that originates in the blind and captured figure.

Charles Wesley takes Milton's poem and appropriates it for his own purposes. He takes Samson's state, and applies it to his own spiritual condition. In this he was in advance of his time: if you look up 'dark, dark, dark' on the computer, you will find that almost all the poetic examples are from the twentieth century. The state of inner darkness fits well with a century of wars and horrors; which brings me to my final point, which is how close Charles Wesley is to the deep dilemmas of our own time.

He is a writer of such abundance and variety that it is possible to find in Charles Wesley's work (as in Shakespeare's) the representation of almost every kind of human emotion and spiritual state, from the serene confidence of 'Love divine, all loves excelling' to the misery of 'I am not worthy, Lord/ So foul, so self-aborred'. In drawing attention to his swerve from Milton, I do not want to underestimate the influence of other sources, particularly the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer. But the element in his work that emanates from Milton does two things: first, it reminds us of the importance of music and poetry in the presentation of the gospel. Singing the gospel is an important way of celebrating its wonder and joy, and in that singing Milton and Charles Wesley see the harmony that would be ideal on earth, if it could be achieved, and both anticipate the harmony and joy that they hope for in heaven. Second, it is consistently concerned with the world as a fallen world. The myth of paradise lost is an exploration of the fundamental problems of being human,

<sup>23</sup> 'When, dearest Lord, when shall it be', in Wesley, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1740).

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*

of the mistakes and failures that we have individually, and of the mistakes and failures of societies and nations.

What Charles Wesley learned from Milton was nothing less than the recognition of who we are as people, in all our imperfection and all our hope. The hope comes from the work of God in salvation and redemption, and it is set against the unworthiness of humanity. As one last example from Milton, there is the scene between Adam and Eve at the end of Book X, following the Fall and the entry of Sin and Death into the world. They are both deeply conscious of their part in ruining the happiness of the world, and Eve is in despair. She argues that suicide is the only course of action. She stands for all those whose view of life is so pointless, gloomy and guilt-ridden, that suicide is the only honest response. Adam counsels otherwise. He argues that it is their duty to go on: they should work, and should put up with life in all its good and its bad aspects. They should turn back to God in repentance:

What better can we do, then to the place  
Repairing where he judg'd us, prostrate fall  
Before him reverent, and there confess  
Humbly our faults, and pardon beg, with tears  
Watering the ground, and with our sighs the Air  
Frequenting, sent from hearts contrite, in sign  
Of sorrow unfeign'd, and humiliation meek (*Paradise Lost*, X, 1086-92)

And this is what they do. They are given a foretaste of the future, including the birth of Christ and his sufferings and death, in a narrative by the Archangel Michael, after which they go out into the world, hand in hand, 'with wandering steps and slow'.

I suggest that this kind of complexity is the truest representation of what we feel spiritually, or ought to feel. It is not a 'blessed assurance', nor a simple celebration of the power and majesty of God in Jesus Christ, but a Miltonic awareness of the need to go on, in spite of everything. It is what is found in the hymns of Charles Wesley: and if the Methodist Church ever loses those hymns, or the majority of them, it is hard to see what its fundamental purpose, its particular contribution to serious ideological and theological thinking, will be. Meanwhile, most of us stumble on through life, working and hoping, and dimly aware that

To our high calling's glorious hope  
We hand in hand go on.<sup>1</sup>

J. R. WATSON

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<sup>1</sup> 'All praise to our redeeming Lord', in Charles Wesley, *Hymns for those that seek and those that have Redemption in the Blood of Jesus Christ* (1747).

## Notes and Queries

### 1598: THE MARRIAGE OF REV JOHN WESLEY TO MRS MARY VAZEILLE

In the *Ipswich Journal*, no. 629 (Saturday, 2 March 1750-1), adds yet further confusion as to when John Wesley was married to Mary (Molly) Vazeille (née Goldhawk c.1709–81) and by whom. There is a suggestion that the Rev Charles Manning the vicar of Hayes Middlesex married them, but there is no firm evidence that he did. The *Ipswich Journal* reports in its ‘Sunday Post’ section, Saturday 23 February: ‘On Monday last the Rev. Mr. John Wesley, Methodist-Preacher, was married by his Brother, the Rev. Mr. Charles Wesley, to a Merchant’s Widow, in Threadneedle Street, of great Beauty, Merit, and every Endowment necessary to render the Marriage-State happy, with a jointure of 300 l. per Annum’.

Whilst Charles Wesley was the first to refer to Mrs Vazeille in his Journal entry dated Thursday, 19 July 1749: ‘At Ned Perronet’s I met Mrs. Vazeille, a woman of a sorrowful spirit’. In the entry in Charles Wesley’s Journal for 2 February 1751 he writes: ‘My brother, returned from Oxford, sent for and told me *he was resolved to marry* I was thunderstruck, and could only answer, he had given me the first blow, and his marriage would come like the *coup de grace*. Trusty Ned Perronet followed, and told me, the person was Mrs. Vazeille’. Charles Wesley was on friendly terms with Molly Vazeille because in May 1750 he went to Ludlow to stay with the Gwynne family for some nine days and Mary Vazeille went with him. At the end of the stay Charles returned to London with his wife Sally and Molly Vazeille. When Charles was told that it was Mrs Vazeille that John was to marry it made him so ill he could neither eat, sleep or preach for several days. On the 17 February Charles wrote: ‘I was one of the last that heard of his unhappy marriage’. All the evidence confirms that it was not Charles Wesley that conducted the marriage ceremony but maybe, as Luke Tyerman, it was Charles Manning who married John and Molly at her house in Threadneedle Street (*The Life and Times of the Rev John Wesley. M.A. Founder of Methodism* (1870-1), vol. 2, p. 101).

DONALD H RYAN

## John Wesley's *Journal*: the Mystery of 'Clare Hill' and the Location of Richard Henderson's Asylum at Hanham.

In his article 'Richard Henderson and his Private Asylum at Hanham',<sup>1</sup> H. J. Foster puzzled over the location of a meeting reported by John Wesley in his *Journal* for Friday 25 September 1789: 'I spent an hour at Clarehill [*or* Clare Hill] with Mr. Henderson, I believe the best physician for lunatics in England'.<sup>2</sup> Wesley had regularly visited Henderson at Hanham - a village four miles outside Bristol, and a mile from Wesley's school at Kingswood - so Foster wondered whether 'Clare Hill' (which does not exist) might be a misreading of Wesley's handwriting. Foster gave several instances of editorial misreadings of place names in the later *Journal*, whose printed transcriptions Wesley did not live to correct, and considered the nearby Hare Hill as a possible emendation. But, he reasoned, Henderson's asylum was not actually 'in or on' Hare Hill, so he wondered whether 'Clare Hill' was the name rather than the location of Henderson's asylum. He dismissed the possibility that Henderson could have moved his asylum from Hanham. In fact there was a move, and this provides a clear solution to Foster's conundrum.

The facts, stated briefly, are as follows. Richard Henderson, an Irishman, had been an itinerant Methodist preacher until 1771.<sup>3</sup> He then went on to set up a boarding school at Hanham. He closed the school following a tragic incident in 1778 when two of the school's pupils drowned while a school party was bathing in the nearby river Avon.<sup>4</sup> In 1780 he opened an asylum for the insane at the same premises, and in 1789 he moved this asylum to Cleve Hill (modern spelling: 'Cleeve'), Downend, Bristol, three and a half miles further north. After Henderson died in 1792, his widow Mary took over the asylum, running it with the help of Dr Edward Long Fox, who then became its proprietor in 1794. With the support of the evidence summarised below, it is safe to propose that 'Cleve' (which can easily be misread as 'Clare') is the correct reading for Wesley's *Journal*.

<sup>1</sup> H. J. Foster, 'Richard Henderson and his Private Asylum at Hanham', *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, 3 (1902), 158-61. Later writers - William Ll. Parry-Jones, *The Trade in Lunacy: A Study of Private Madhouses in England in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), p. 336, and Roy Porter, *Mind-Forged Manacles: a History of Madness in England from the Restoration to the Regency* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 352 - credit this article to 'Anon', unaware that it was one of a sequence of interlinked short articles attributed to H. J. Foster.

<sup>2</sup> Richard P. Heitzenrater (ed.), *The Works of John Wesley: The Bicentennial Edition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press CD-ROM, 2005), *Journal* 25 September 1789. Foster wrote 'Clare Hill', as printed in all the *Journal* editions available to him in 1902, and as followed by Curnock in 1916. This was amended to 'Clarehill' by Heitzenrater in the Bicentennial Edition quoted here.

<sup>3</sup> Heitzenrater (ed.), *Wesley Works*, Bicentennial Edition CD-ROM, *Journal*, 29 September 1781, note 33.

<sup>4</sup> The fullest account is by Joseph Cottle a pupil at the school, who was an eyewitness: 'On the Genius and Character of John Henderson' in *Malvern Hills, with Minor Poems and Essays* (London: T. Cavell, 1829), pp. 365-66. Cottle writes that he was ten when this happened, thus placing it (inaccurately) in 1780, the date followed by *DNB* and other secondary sources. A firm date of 27 July 1778 is given in William Dyer's diary (Bristol, Bristol Central Library, MS Bristol Collection 20095).

First it is necessary to clear up a further misunderstanding created by William Parry-Jones in his authoritative survey of private asylums *The Trade in Lunacy* (1972). Parry-Jones had read Foster's article, and knowing from other sources that there was an asylum at Cleve Hill, he realised that Wesley's visit to 'Clare Hill' was likely to be a misreading of 'Cleve'. But he attempted to solve the problem of Wesley's visits to Henderson's asylum at Hanham, by naming the Cleve Hill asylum 'Hanham House'.<sup>5</sup> This allowed him to situate the Hanham asylum at Cleve Hill, thus leaving the reader with the misleading impression that two different asylum locations were one and the same. If the asylum in its new location was known as Hanham House, Richard and Mary Henderson would surely have used this name when advertising it in 1789 and 1792 respectively.

The opening dates of Henderson's Hanham asylum, and the exact details of its location, appear in newspaper advertisements from mid February 1780. For example *Bonner and Middleton's Bristol Journal* of 20 May 1780 announced that: 'The Public are hereby informed, that R. Henderson, late Master of Hanham Academy, has opened a Receptacle for that most pitiable class of the Afflicted – the disordered in Mind. [...] This undertaking will be conducted at Hanham, near Bristol, on the upper Bath Road'. Foster found on a visit in 1902 that older Hanham locals were still referring to a property known as The Grange as 'the madhouse', and he learned of a tradition that Hannah More, a known visitor and supporter of Henderson's asylum, had slept there.<sup>6</sup> The Elizabethan building Hanham Grange, which housed the asylum, was pulled down in 1840-1.<sup>7</sup> A monochrome watercolour of this building survives in a manuscript album 'Illustrations of Bitton' held at Bath Central Library.<sup>8</sup> A recently renovated building in a cul-de-sac named Grange Court, off the A431 upper Bristol-Bath road that runs through Hanham as its High Street, is a Victorian construction on the same site.

Foster followed his article on Henderson's asylum with a profile of one of its most striking inmates known as Louisa, the Maid of the Haystack.<sup>9</sup> She was an unidentified amnesiac woman found living rough locally, whose care at Henderson's asylum was funded by Hannah More. Because her identity could not be discovered there was public speculation (wholly unsubstantiated) that she was a secret offspring of

<sup>5</sup> Parry-Jones, *Trade in Lunacy*, p. 172.

<sup>6</sup> Foster, 'Richard Henderson and his Private Asylum at Hanham', 159.

<sup>7</sup> Rev. H. T. Ellacombe, *The History of the Parish of Bitton, in the County of Gloucester*, 2 vols (Exeter: privately printed, 1881), vol. 1, p. 93. I am grateful to Paul Townsend, author of a page on Hanham Grange for bringing this book to my attention, <http://www.flickr.com/photos/brizzlebornandbred/2038386542/> [accessed 20 February 2013].

<sup>8</sup> Catalogued as Rev. H. T. Ellacombe, 'Illustrations of Bitton', Bath Central Library LS/Fol G942.391 BIT. Hanham Grange is on Fo. 42. It has now been scanned by the library's reprographic service following my identification, and is on view at <http://www.bathintime.co.uk/image/1002475/west-hanham-grange-west-front-pulled-down-1840-1> [accessed 20 February 2013].

<sup>9</sup> H. J. Foster, 'Louisa, the Maid of the Haystack', *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, 3 (1902), 161-62.

European royalty.<sup>10</sup> One notable inmate not mentioned by Foster is William Gilbert, the son of Nathaniel Gilbert of Antigua who first brought Methodism to the West Indies. William, a counsellor-at-law, needed asylum care after a manic episode in Portsmouth, when (according to Joseph Cottle) after losing a client's case he caused great upset to his landlady by throwing all the contents of his room out of the window, believing he was following Christ's injunction to: 'Sell all that thou hast and distribute to the poor' (Matt. 19: 21).<sup>11</sup> Cottle writes that he stayed for 'about a year' in the Hanham asylum, accompanying John Henderson, Richard's son, on walks into Bristol.<sup>12</sup>

Clearly Richard Henderson was still living at Hanham when Wesley visited him on Friday 13 March 1789. Wesley's *Diary* for that day reads as follows: '12:30 Chaise. 1 Hanham; religious talk, dinner; visited; chaise. 4 At the school; prayer. 5 Tea, necessary talk (religious)! with Richard Henderson'.<sup>13</sup> Wesley called on Henderson and invited him back to Kingswood School for tea, perhaps giving him a lift in the chaise. Henderson was very distressed by the recent death of his son John, and Wesley evidently took great care to do what he could for him.

Turning now from Hanham to Cleve Hill: a 'Richard Henderson of Cleve Hill' listed in 1789 as a subscriber to Walter Churchey's *Poems and Imitations of the British Poets* first alerted me to the possibility that Henderson had moved.<sup>14</sup> This move is confirmed by an advertisement appearing in the *Bath Chronicle* of 27 August 1789:

At CLEVE HILL,

A HOUSE For the reception of the INSANE.

R. HENDERSON, obliged to quit his late residence at Hanham, where he has several years administered to the relief and cure [sic] of the Afflicted in Mind, is now removed (in the same line) to a House situated on a pleasant healthy spot called Cleve Hill, and which, in justice to himself he must say, is fitted up in the most comfortable and commodious manner that long experience could point out, and will be conducted upon principles the most liberal and humane, and that are best calculated to promote the happiness and recovery of those entrusted to his care.

It follows that Henderson was at Cleve Hill by the time Wesley visited him on 25 September 1789. Richard Henderson died on 14 February 1792, but the asylum he had

<sup>10</sup> The so-called Piano Man found on a Kent beach in 2005 is a modern instance of how such amnesiacs can stimulate fanciful myth-making. Early reports described this mystery man 'stunning' social workers with a 'virtuoso performance' on the piano. Later (i.e. after he was identified) it turned out 'he was only able to play one note continuously', <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/kent/4172662.stm> [accessed 20 February 2013].

<sup>11</sup> Joseph Cottle, *Early Recollections; chiefly relating to the late Samuel Taylor Coleridge, during his long residence in Bristol*, 2 vols. (London, 1837), vol. 2, p. 314.

<sup>12</sup> The dates for this are likely to be 1788-89. See Paul Cheshire, 'William Gilbert and his Bristol Circle', in Nicholas Roe (ed.), *English Romantic Writers and the West Country* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 81.

<sup>13</sup> John Wesley, *Diary* 13 March 1789, Bicentennial Edition CD-ROM.

<sup>14</sup> Walter Churchey, *Poems and imitations of the British poets. With odes, miscellanies, and notes* (London: for the author, 1789).

started was to flourish. On 17 and 24 March 1792 his widow Mary Henderson placed the following advertisement in *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*:

INSANITY,

MARY HENDERSON begs leave to inform the Public in general, and the Friends of her late husband in particular, that she intends to carry on the business as usual at CLEVE-HILL. Those who shall entrust their friends under her care may depend on all possible attention being paid to them, as a very eminent Physician of Bristol will regularly attend the house, and she has every other necessary assistance for the comfort and accommodation of her patients.

The 'very eminent Physician' mentioned in Mary Henderson's advertisement is Edward Long Fox, who was to take over the Cleve Hill asylum in 1794 before moving it again, in 1806, to purpose-built accommodation at Brislington three miles outside the centre of Bristol on the road to Keynsham.<sup>15</sup> Its facilities were admired, as was the unprecedented cost of £35,000 for its construction. Parry-Jones describes Brislington House as 'one of the foremost private licensed houses in the country'. Henderson's admirable policy, which Wesley had praised in his *Journal*, of engaging sympathetically with his patients, and prioritising care over confinement, was the commanding ethos of this new asylum.

PAUL CHESHIRE

## Wesley Historical Society Conference 26 – 28 June 2014

### *Methodism and Conflict*

#### *About the theme.....*

To mark the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War, the theme of the WHS 2014 conference explores Methodism's response to conflict. As well as exploring how Methodism responded to both world wars, the conference will also examine the challenges and impact of conflict on the theology and pastoral life of the Methodist people. The conference will seek to examine the way that Methodists have responded to, and been involved in, conflict. Implicit within the theme is an approach to understand the individual, as opposed to the institutional, responses to war and

<sup>15</sup> For this final paragraph, see Parry-Jones, *Trade in Lunacy*, pp. 36, 85-86, 112-4.

conflict, both in terms of the physical and social impact as well as theological and moral in the context of war and conflict.

***About the programme.....***

For the first time, the conference will include the annual lecture to the society, which will take place on the final day, Saturday 28 June. The lecture will be given by Professor Michael Hughes, the Professor of Russian and International History in the University of Liverpool. Among the other topics to be featured in the conference programme will be the role of Methodist military chaplains, Methodism and conscientious objection in two world wars, and Methodism and the occupation of the Channel Islands 1940 – 45.

During the Conference, there will be opportunity for participants to give short papers (limited to 4 000 words, or about 20 minutes in duration) on any topic related to the theme. Contributions from members and post-graduate research students are especially welcome.

***How to register an interest in attending.....***

To register an interesting attending or contributing a short paper to the Conference you can email to [conferencesecretary@wesleyhistoricalsociety.org.uk](mailto:conferencesecretary@wesleyhistoricalsociety.org.uk) or write to Rev Dr David Hart, Wesley Historical Society, 1b Whiteladies Road, Bristol, BS8 4NU

Full details of the conference programme, including costs will be available in the Autumn of 2013.

***The Venue***

The Conference will be held at High Leigh Conference Centre, Hoddlesdon, Hertfordshire. This popular Conference Centre hosts a wide range of conferences, training conferences and events, many for religious groups and organisations. All accommodation is *en suite* and there is excellent access for those with mobility restrictions.

## BOOK REVIEWS

Edward Royle (ed.), *Yorkshire Methodism: Essays to Commemorate the Jubilee year of the Wesley Historical Society* (Leeds: Wesley Historical Society (Yorkshire), 2013, pp xii + 116. Paperback, £5.00. ISBN 978-0-9574933-0-8).

This collection of five essays by different well-known Methodist historians makes an interesting addition to the literature recording Methodist history in Yorkshire. It is a well presented book with an unusual slip cover providing a full colour illustration of the Wesleyan Chapel at Hutton Cranswick. However, the essay format has tended to make it something of a niche publication and several of these essays will be of more interest to the specialist historian than the more general reader. Despite the focus on Methodism, there are wider considerations of politics and social history to be found in these pages.

The opening essay, by John Lenton, is truly a historian's essay. By that I mean that it will be of most interest to researchers in the field. It is somewhat dense in statistics and short on narrative, as might be expected of the subject. Lenton discusses the importance of Yorkshire people in the history of Methodism, particularly Wesleyan Methodism. Using his criteria of births in Yorkshire he has produced detailed research on Vice-Presidents, other lay members, notable ministers and those who have contributed to the church by way of skills and monies. One point of clarification: I was puzzled by the statistics on ministers with surnames beginning A or R, this seemed a little odd until I queried the author who informed me it was a selected sample system.

Methodism in Saddleworth is an eminently readable piece of work which offered puzzles for a Scot, such as wapentake (a subdivision of a county similar to a hundred) and the concept of a Yorkshire 'chapelry' in a Lancashire parish. Puzzles I had to undertake my own research to answer, but that adds something to the interest and doubtless would create no problem for a Yorkshire reader. Having read Simon Armitage's *All Points North* some years ago, I was able to see where the author was coming from when he claims Saddleworth for Yorkshire. Armitage, writing from the present Yorkshire side of the divide says 'all we know is that this side is Yorkshire, always was, and on the other side the buses are a different colour'. I leave it to the reader to judge this geographical conundrum. Throughout, the essay held my interest and piqued my curiosity. Why was Joseph Barker expelled from the Connexion? The chapels mentioned all had very large numbers of seats, but comparatively small attendances. How this latter related to the ratio of free and rented seats would be of interest.

The essay by Colin Dews describing Glasshouses, a model village created in the latter half of the nineteenth century, offers an illuminating and carefully researched

story of an area and a village. It describes the industry, the area and the people as well as their Methodist connections. Dews takes us from the growth of industry in the area, through the foundation of the model village up to the mid twentieth century and the decline of the mills and all which that meant. There are some fascinating little vignettes of the times, such as the reference to the exportation of ale to France and Germany, not only the unlikely venture, but the fact that a Methodist business was built on a brewery.

John Hargreaves' contribution on the Methodist political involvement in Halifax in the nineteenth century falls into two parts stylistically. He opens with a narrative account of the town's political life and the wider connections of law and political change; his second half takes a more statistical look at the elections and office bearers of Halifax, but keeps up the interest. Like the other essays in this book it drove me to investigate further some of the issues raised, in this case the New Poor Laws, with the intention of better understanding the issues referred to. While the author makes a good case for significant Methodist involvement in the political life of Halifax in this period, which was his thesis, it is far less clear what influence they brought to bear on the social ills referred to. This, of course, is the weakness of such short essays in that they can raise awareness of issues, but are not suited to in-depth discussion of them.

The final section is an interesting look at the growth of Methodism, particularly Primitive Methodism in the East Riding. The rural setting offered a different context for the growth of a young evangelical movement which Edward Royle demonstrates was particularly suited to the Prims. The passage on the considerable use made of female preachers in the foundation of Primitive Methodism in this part of Yorkshire is particularly interesting. The author's use of Woodcock's accounts of Primitive Methodist meetings and preachers is evocative of its largely rural setting. The changes in style and image brought about by expansion into the towns are highlighted and can be seen in the illustrations of church buildings. This is particularly clear in that of the chapels at Lund and Driffield on the same page. This juxtaposition of rural and grand town buildings draws attention to the use of 'chapel' in the text throughout the volume while the illustrations have occasions to use 'church' when referring to particularly grand buildings.

RONNIE AITCHISON

John A. Hargreaves and E. A. Hilary Haigh (eds), *Slavery in Yorkshire: Richard Oastler and the campaign against child labour in the Industrial Revolution* (Huddersfield: University of Huddersfield Press, 2012. 256pp. £20.00, paperback).

Written out of a 2007 conference to celebrate the bicentenary of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade, *Slavery in Yorkshire* explores the campaign for factory reforms focused in the person of evangelical Christian, Richard Oastler. Contributions from local academics with expertise in the history of West Yorkshire have been neatly

assembled into a well-ordered exposition of the various contexts and connections that paved the way for Oastler's bruising battle with the leading industrialists of his day. The book of the conference now resonates with economic life in a different way than expected, with free market capitalism once again under the spotlight in the wake of a financial crisis that continues to wreak destruction in the lives of ordinary people. These essays are a stark reminder of the on-going need for the moral scrutiny of business life and the political control of markets so that they work for the benefit of all. The book hails from Yorkshire and hints, in characteristic style, that there is something about Yorkshire grit and persistence, without which national and even global social reform is not possible. As such, this book is local history in the service of determined Christian mission as it seeks to transform society for the common good. It is to be commended.

Inderjit Bhogal's foreword sets the economic context for slavery's as it existed in the Bible, in the past and continues to exist into the present. John Hargreaves' opening chapter narrates the life of Oastler, focusing primarily on his time as steward of the Fixby estate in Huddersfield, and goes on to establish thematic links with the chapters to follow. He presents Oastler as the inspirational figurehead of a well-organised campaign which rallied thousands to the cause. Although he was from Leeds, people in the mill towns of West Yorkshire made Oastler their own 'Factory King' after his 'Damascene conversion to the cause of factory reform' on visiting the home of Bradford worsted spinner and fellow reformer, John Wood. The campaign began in earnest with the publication of Oastler's vitriolic letter to the *Leeds Mercury* on 16 October 1830, in which he paralleled the employment of children in textile mills with the treatment of slaves on plantations in the West Indies. As young as seven years of age, thousands of children, mainly girls, worked from six in the morning until seven in the evening, with just thirty minutes for food and recreation, an injustice Oastler vowed to address. The campaign was lengthy, hard fought and costly to Oastler himself, but his physical fortitude, oratorical eloquence and literary skill were ultimately too much for his detractors. Some seventeen years later, the Ten Hour Act (1847) was passed by parliament, in which the daily hours of employment and age at which work could begin were finally limited by statute.

James Walvin offers a detailed description of the campaigns against slavery by William Wilberforce, himself a Yorkshire man from Hull. Richard Oastler's involvement in the movement for abolition provided fertile ground in which to learn how to move people to action, coordinate support, deal with the press and wrestle with adversaries. By the 1830s, slavery was already regarded as an abhorrent institution, so to describe employment in the factories as such was instantly to seize the moral high ground. The abolition of the transatlantic trade in slaves in 1807 and the abolition of slavery in 1833 taught that popular outrage had the capacity to topple trade and commerce, a lesson that younger reformers like Oastler took to heart.

Oastler's political radicalism had deeper roots than this though and, in chapter three, Colin Dews details the influence of early Methodism on him, in particular through his father, Robert. Robert was a religious radical, a local preacher who had

been forced to leave home at age of 16 after joining the Methodists. Although, many years later, Richard Oastler was to emerge in Huddersfield as an Evangelical Anglican, it is difficult to imagine that the influence of his father did not remain strong. Dews also wonders whether the death of his brother in an industrial accident at Marshall's Mills in Leeds will have left Richard Oastler with a particular care for what happens to people in the workplace.

Such concerns were, however, firmly lodged in the hearts and minds of the people of Huddersfield. A fire at Thomas Atkinson's cotton mill in 1818 caused the death of 17 girls as young as nine, who had been undertaking night work in the factory. The tragedy attracted national attention and contributed to the development of Huddersfield as a place in which political activism for the improvement of working conditions was already taking place when Oastler arrived in 1821. John Halstead's chapter on the Huddersfield Short Time Committee (HSTC) shows the importance of such grassroots movements in support of social reformers. On publication of his letter to the *Mercury*, the HSTC organised ground troops in support of Oastler's campaign. A year and a half later, handbills and posters issued from their printing press, summoning large numbers of ordinary working people to march in political pilgrimage from the towns of the West Riding, through Leeds, to York on Easter Monday, 1832.

Throughout the campaign to abolish the transatlantic slave trade, a moral evangelical consensus had existed between Methodists, Nonconformists and the Established Church in Yorkshire. This was not the case with slavery in Yorkshire. Wesleyan Methodist mill owners found free labour markets ideologically attractive and resisted legislative interference in their employment practices. The provincial newspapers were pitched against each other in the fight over factory reform, and Edward Royle reflects in chapter five on Oastler's knowledge of the newspapers in Leeds and on his deft use of the press as the emergent media of his day, in his campaigning. Janette Martin builds on these reflections to present Oastler as a seasoned orator, who knew that his speeches served not just to be heard, but also to be read as published articles in the national press or as printed tracts for the wider population. Even Oastler's release from prison, ostensibly for the debts he owed his employer at Fixby, was carefully orchestrated for maximum media impact. His return to Huddersfield on Shrove Tuesday, 1844, coincided with a half day holiday that permitted a crowd of some 12000-15000 people to form a procession of welcome, with their Factory King in a carriage at the head.

John Hargreaves closes with an essay which follows the fine line that Oastler walked between revolution and radicalism. Born in 1789, the year of the French Revolution, and living at a time when the Industrial Revolution was in full swing, not least in Yorkshire, Richard Oastler was denounced by his enemies as both madman and assassin. The advice implied in his pamphlet *The Law or the Needle* that children should use their grandmothers' knitting needles to sabotage equipment in their factories shows not just potential revolutionary intent but also how clever Oastler was in generating domestic social alliances to take on the economic might of industrial

England. Hargreaves concludes by reminding us that many of the issues raised by Oastler are still relevant today – health and safety at work, fair trade, work-life balance, the use of child soldiers, the abuse of child prostitutes and the employment of people in sweat shops across the world.

*Slavery in Yorkshire* offers a timely reminder of the necessity for moral awareness of what happens at the heart of business and in the world of work. It offers a snapshot of the persistence and huge personal cost that can result from taking on prevailing economic powers. It lays down a gauntlet to the contemporary church to find ways of challenging the free market ideology of today in which ordinary people are not just commodified as a factor of production but are also treated simply as a final destination for consumption in the economic process.

The book will be of interest to local Yorkshire folk who take pride in their county. It ought also to have broader appeal to those who wish to argue that Christianity belongs most properly on the streets of our cities and in the midst of political, social and economic debate. I cannot recommend it highly enough.

PHILIP BEE

**WESLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL MEETING  
AT EPWORTH MEMORIAL CHURCH SATURDAY 29 JUNE 2013**

The Wesley Historical Society returns to its roots in 2013 to celebrate the 120th anniversary of its foundation in 1893 with a full programme of activities at Epworth, the childhood home of John and Charles Wesley. Members and friends are invited to visit Epworth for the whole day on Saturday 29 June 2013, including the Annual Lecture by the Revd Margaret Jones, and to re-visit Epworth to join the congregation of Epworth Memorial Church for a service of thanksgiving on Sunday 30 June at 10.45 a.m. Coffee and tea available from 10.00-10.30.

- Wesley Historical Society Annual General Meeting 12.45 in the Memorial Church.
- 2.30: Annual lecture in the Memorial Church: Revd Margaret Jones, 'Grand-daughters to Susanna: Women's Discipleship in Wesleyan Methodism, 1800-1850'.

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**We are pleased to welcome the following new Members:**

Mr John Hogarth	Wesley Cottage, Trewint, Cornwall
Mr David M Young MA	Wrexham

**We send out sympathies to the families of the following members who have died:**

Rev Bernard W. Blanchard	Chirnside - Duns
Rev Douglas V. Brown	Lake - Isle of Wight (Former Vice President of the Methodist Conference)
Mr Henry L. Kirby	Preston
Mr John E. D. Lawn	Guidford