

JOHN WESLEY

by

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PREFACE

SINCE, as Mr. Vulliamy has remarked, the last half-century of Wesley's life is made up of a "noble monotony," there is perhaps little need for me to excuse giving the greater part of this book to the earlier years, to the private rather than to the public Wesley, to the man in process of growth rather than to the finished figure. I have interpreted controversial points according to the more general conjectures, identifying, for instance, "a religious friend" met in 1725 with Varanese, and have avoided all apocryphal stories, except the one told of Wesley at the Charterhouse; for this legend, if not true to fact, is so true to the spirit, that I have thought myself justified in including it. Other matters have been omitted altogether, for instance Wesley's experiments with the doctrine of acting only when the spirit was free to act, and his political moves, such as his printed epistle to the American colonists and his letter to Lord North.

My sources are given at the end of the book, the most important ones being, of course, Wesley's own voluminous journals and equally voluminous letters. Those acquainted with these writings will recognize that this is so from many of my phrases, for whenever possible I have used Wesley's own words to describe his states of mind.

PRINCIPAL EVENTS IN WESLEY'S LIFE

1703....Born, June 17th.

1714....Admitted to the Charterhouse, January 28th.

1720....Matriculates at Christ Church.

1725....Meets Varanese: is “set in earnest in a new life.”
Ordained deacon, September 28th.

1728....Ordained priest, September 22nd.

1729....The Holy Club.

1731....The Aspasia episode.

1735....Death of his father. Sails for Georgia.

1737....Sophy Hopkey.

1738....Returns to England: meets Peter Böhler. The Fetter
Lane Society. Conversion, May 24th.

1739....First preaches in the open air. Chapel at Bristol;
the Foundery in London. Begins to publish his
Journal.

1740....The Methodists separate from the Moravians.

1741....Separation from Whitefield.

1742....Allows lay preaching. Death of his mother.

- 1744....First Methodist Conference in London.
- 1747....First visit to Ireland.
- 1748....Grace Murray.
- 1751....Marries Mrs. Vazeille.
- 1755....Conference discusses separation from the Church of England; judged “not expedient.”
- 1763....Maxfield breaks away. Priests consecrated by Erasmus, a Greek bishop.
- 1770....Death of Whitefield.
- 1771....His wife leaves him, but not finally. Definite break with the Calvinists.
- 1778....Starts the *Arminian Magazine*.
- 1779....Is Wesley to rule alone? Discussed by conference of preachers at Bath.
- 1781....Death of his wife.
- 1784....Ordains priests for America.
- 1785....Ordains priests for Scotland.
- 1788....Death of Charles Wesley.
- 1791....Dies, March 2nd.

PART I

THE SEEKER AFTER SALVATION

1

The Search

(1703-1735)

It is difficult to be humble. Even if you aim at humility, there is no guarantee that when you have attained the state you will not be proud of the feat. But not everybody considers it a virtue, and as a small boy at Charterhouse, John Wesley had no great opinion of it. On the contrary, he thought it well to dominate the smaller fry, whom he would gather around him to exhort and admonish; and when asked why he did not join the boys of his own age, he answered, "Better to rule in hell than serve in heaven!" Pride is one stumbling block to the Christian life; another is too great a fondness for reasoning. Wesley would accept nothing that his mind would not sanction, and from his earliest days insisted upon passing every suggestion through a fine sieve of thought. Even when asked if he would have some more bread, he used to say, "Thank you; I will think of it," a precociously "methodic" system (it is not too early to use the word) which exasperated his father. "I profess, sweetheart," he shot out tartly at Mrs. Wesley, "I think our Jack would not attend to the most pressing necessities of nature unless he could give a reason for it."

Such an attitude forebodes an intolerably dull man; but luckily, to this rationalism Wesley added an intense curiosity in whatever might be going on, and even at the end of his life seized eagerly on anything new. Thus, as a fascinated old man, he tried out in his own person the healing powers of electricity, and discussed, if in a somewhat theological way, the then budding theories of evolution. Nor did his inquiring mind stop at those

things which seem amenable to reason, and he always found the supernatural delightfully seductive. This aspect of existence was indeed forced upon him in his early youth, for while he was at school his father's parsonage in Lincolnshire was the scene of the most astounding, if not very awesome, manifestations. There was a prank loving being, a poltergeist (his sisters used to call it Old Jeffrey), which knocked mysteriously, opened doors, made noises as though money were being lavishly poured out or all the bottles under the stairs were being smashed. It gloried in rattling the warming-pans on the walls; sometimes it went so far as to push Mr. Wesley; and once it set a trencher spinning in a most intriguing manner. It appeared twice, the second time as a kind of bat-eared white rabbit, which evaded the tongs with which the manservant pursued it. Wesley's curiosity was never at rest about Old Jeffrey, who stimulated him to search out other mysteries, such as that of an apparition near Oxford, and another of a nearby haunted house. His interest was vividly stimulated by the report of the Bishop of Raphoe, who told of a young man who levitated strangely out of the Episcopal window to sup with the Devil. There were some problems, then, which resisted reason; and to the question why such things were permitted only a baffling answer could be returned; even his mother, so good a guide on knotty points, was of no help. All that one could be certain of was that the world of matter was interwoven with one of impalpable, rarely visible influences.

John was one of ten living children (nine others had died), being a few years junior to his brother Samuel, and only a little older than Charles, the remainder, sisters, some earnest, some not quite so grave, being scattered on either side of him. They were mostly reasoners, for they came of an arguing stock. Their parents also had liked to think things out for themselves, for, both born Dissenters, they had both returned to the Church as by law established. They knew their own minds, stubbornly. For instance, at the end of the seventeenth century, Mr. Wesley noticed that his wife was always silent when the King was prayed for, and thus discovering that she was a Jacobite, he declared that unless she became as good a Whig as he was he would leave her. She stood firm, and leave her he did. Luckily William III soon died, and the couple was reconciled under Anne, the earliest fruit of their reunion being John, who inherited their willfulness. The discipline of his education, entirely conducted by his

mother, helped to encourage strength of character. At five years old the children were taught to read, one day only being allowed to learn the alphabet, and they were made to cry softly after being whipped, measures essential in a large, understaffed household. Mrs. Wesley's motto, "Break the child's will," ultimately had the opposite effect; but she did succeed in breaking, or at least cracking, her husband's. She had the misfortune, she told her son, never to think like his father; but when any difference arose, for example as to whether she should hold a "conventicle" at home when the rector was away, it was she who won. She ruled the house, except on extraordinary occasions, while old Samuel Wesley, stern, harsh, ambitious for his sons, worked out his commentaries on the Book of Job.

In 1720, John left Charterhouse, elected to a scholarship at Christ Church, Oxford, where he soon found the life of the average undergraduate was formless, and lacking in seriousness. He made up his mind to change that, for himself at least; and taking an old notebook of his grandfather's, headed it with the mysterious symbols:

2 f-n-r'O r. l'.n 2 O 'q.n. fL. f;

a cryptogram which in ever varying forms, later intermingled with shorthand, he used all his life for the diary he never ceased to keep, and which he enlarged into his voluminous, *Journals*. Translated, the heading reads, "A General Rule in All Actions of Life," an imaginative claim, which was followed by abstracts from a few of Jeremy Taylor's most inspiring paragraphs. There lay, in a sense, the germ of Methodism. But Wesley was not yet nineteen, and for the next few years he found it difficult to stick even moderately close to his rules. It was hard always "to entertain awful apprehensions of the presence of God" on fine mornings when life smiled, to employ every spare hour in religion, to avoid curiosity as to all useless employments and knowledge, above all to resist the delights of conversation, which is the charm of University life. If there was one thing harder, it was to get up in the morning. For Wesley liked his bed, he was gregarious, lively and witty, he loved "knowledge," however idle, and had a passion for logical argument, though he was always careful to argue on the right side, since he despised dialectical fireworks. Besides, frivolous reading was so entrancing, not only the *Spectator*, which he would find at

the places where he went to drink coffee, but *Jane Shore*, or still older plays, such as Ben Jonson's; and who could resist *Robinson Crusoe* when it first came out? — a grave waste of time, for in those days it was not yet plausible to regard that tale of adventure as the spiritual autobiography of a godly man. So while Wesley went about, chattered, read, played tennis, wrote flippant letters to his brother Samuel enclosing verses on Cloe's favorite flea or such like, he would sorrowfully enter up in his diary, "boasting, greedy of praise, intemperate sleep... heat in arguing." He lived, he declared, in the practice of "known sins," which made him very uneasy before his three times a year participation in the Lord's Supper; but since he was not long after to stigmatize dining in Hall on Friday as "grossly sinful," it is not likely that his delinquencies were very alarming.

Although, like the rest of his family he was desperately poor and always in debt, he managed to go about a little; and towards the beginning of 1725 went with his friend Kirkham to the latter's home, the rectory at Stanton in Worcestershire. There he met the three Kirkham sisters: Mrs. Chapone (though not the famous one), Damaris, and above all, Betty, known to her familiar friends as Varanese. With the last he fell in love, while she on her part, in a phrase at once religious and loyal, told him that she "loved him more than all mankind, save her God and King." But what is the good of a penniless man falling in love? "Whether or not you will be engaged before thirty, I cannot determine," his sister Emilia wrote to him; "if my advice be worth listening to, never engage your affections before your worldly affairs are in such a position that you may marry soon." However, there are higher planes on which twin souls can meet, and if one may not talk love, one can talk religion; and since this was a subject Varanese was happy in, the passionate friendship prospered. Miss Kirkham induced Wesley to read Thomas à Kempis, and, more studiously than before, Jeremy Taylor. Having found "a religious friend," and no doubt feeling the stress of a hopeless love-affair, Wesley began to think about religion more profoundly. He was led to consider taking orders.

His parents were delighted with this change of temper; apparently he had never before shown them his serious side; but there were a great many things Wesley wished to clear up in his own mind before taking this step, and it was to his mother, not to his father, that he applied for help. Old

Wesley had had a scholar's ambitions for his son, but Susanna had more spiritual aspirations for him. What, after all, was learning? Wesley agreed, there was so much to be learnt that one could not learn it all; and besides, once one had learnt something, how could one know that it was not all a sheer waste of time? Take the good Bishop Berkeley. How easy it was to destroy his graceful, elaborate, philosophic structure! His mother always listened sympathetically, and it is not for nothing that, whereas Mr. Wesley is referred to as "the father of the Wesleys," his wife is known as "the mother of Methodism."

Pride, and reason — those were the gnarled rocks upon which the ship of the soul might split: yet after all, we may ask, is it necessary for great religious leaders to be humble? Do we associate that quality with St. Paul, or Savonarola? But Thomas à Kempis was emphatic upon the point, and if Jeremy Taylor was not quite so decisive, he seemed to incline the same way. Yet to be humble is to deny the favors God has bestowed upon you. "As to absolute humility," Wesley told his mother, "... consisting of a mean opinion of ourselves considered simply, or with respect to God alone, I can readily join with his [Jeremy Taylor's] opinion. But I am more uncertain as to the comparative, if I may so term it; and think some plausible reasons may be alleged to show it is not in our power, and consequently not a virtue, to think ourselves the worst in every company." How can one not believe one's self better than a freethinker? he went on to argue. To be humble in such company is to lack knowledge of your neighbors.

His mother does not seem to have determined the point, but on others she was more helpful. On reason, for instance. "Faith is an assent on rational grounds," Wesley declared (it is the position we have come to call latitudinarian); "Faith must necessarily at length be resolved into reason." No, his mother told him, it is "an assent to whatever God has revealed to us because He has revealed it." There are some things it does not do to reason about. These points settled, the questions which next most concerned Wesley (they were the pivots of his future life) were, how to be certain of God's love to all; and in what way was one conscious of salvation? As to the first, Thomas à Kempis was too Calvinistic. The idea that God had condemned some men before birth to the everlasting bonfire

was repugnant to Wesley; he had no taste for Tophet flares. Yet, the question is a difficult one which has puzzled the astutest theologians, — how reconcile God's knowledge of everything, past, present, and future, together with His omnipotence, with man's free will? Mrs. Wesley solved the problem; it was beautifully simple. God knows what will happen, but He does not cause it to happen, any more than our knowledge that the sun will rise tomorrow is the reason why it is actually so punctual. So much for Thomas à Kempis and the first problem: Jeremy Taylor on the second was more than a little frightening. One could not be sure that one's sins were forgiven, he said. What then! Wesley cried, Is grace so weak that its presence cannot be felt? Must men go about in perpetual fear and trembling? "God deliver us from such a fearful expectation as this!" Thus Wesley set out on his search for a saving faith, the only solution; for justification by works is a Popish doctrine, and therefore not to be considered by a good son of the English Church, though, of course, works also are essential to salvation. Wesley decided to devote his life to these questions, feeling that the salvation of one's own soul is the most important problem life has to offer. He became ever more serious, then earnest. He began, it is a severe discipline, to keep his diary much more fully; and in September 1725 he became a deacon.

During the next six years a demon attendant upon John Wesley would have found himself at various times in the company of three very distinct personalities, all with much the same, but not identical, outward features, and bound within by a strong family likeness, but no less three curiously different persons. At Epworth, he was a dapper little country parson, helping his father both there and at Wroote, where for some time he was curate. He would visit the parishioners, take his sisters to whatever village fairs might be within reach, dance with them whenever he could, would swim, and go shooting plover. At Wroote, rather a pigsty of a place, with, according to some of the family, suitably porcine inhabitants, he set about improving the garden by making seats; and at Epworth he would discuss religion with his mother, or dutifully help his father transcribe his elucidation of Job — to be presented to Queen Caroline. He was, perhaps, from his father's point of view, a little too filled with the sense of his mission, for he was not always there to do the copying, and once there was a sharp disagreement over the unfortunately beautiful Hetty Wesley.

John thought his father's drastic action in marrying her off to a lout unduly harsh, and not only opposed him at home, but publicly denounced his severity in the pulpit at Wroote in a sermon on Christian Charity. There was a tearful reconciliation; the young curate was contrite and diligent, but then, for he would never give in, he preached an equally ruffling sermon, this time on Rash Judging. Old Mr. Wesley did not say anything to his Jacky; instead he complained bitterly to Charles. But somehow the profound jars in the Wesley family — everything in that family was profound, will-impelled — healed, at least outwardly; and this second misunderstanding, which occurred in 1726, was also smoothed over, for Wesley went back to help his father from 1727 to 1729.

Oxford saw a different Wesley, a brilliant young don (he was elected a Fellow of Lincoln early in 1726) who went about looking very grave — one could not think of him dancing or going to fairs — and who was not very companionable. He was a good classic, and a shattering logician, his brother Fellows conceded; but why would he not breakfast with them, or come to gossip and crack donnish jokes? and besides, why could he not get his hair cut like everybody else? And really, to communicate every Sunday was to take one's religion, or one's self, or something or other, far too seriously. They began to laugh at Wesley, a criticism which he hated. But, as his father said, it is a callow virtue that cannot bear being laughed at, to which his mother added that she was sure "it is a strong and well-confirmed virtue that can stand the test of a brisk buffoonery." So Wesley endured; he knew it was his "calling to go through evil report and good report." He was determined to take his religion earnestly; he was going to be a *real* not a *nominal* Christian, and all his energies were devoted to this end. As to not cutting his hair, he could not spare the two or three pounds a year (in wigs?) that it would cost him; even his mother's plea that short hair was conducive to health could not move him; it might improve his complexion, or give him a more genteel appearance, but only positive ill-health would induce him to shear his locks. And nothing would persuade him to waste his time in idle, so-called *harmless* talk with the other Fellows. Harmless! why every moment wasted was harm to the soul, damping all good resolutions to work hard, to sleep less, to avoid the lure of *Gulliver*, to combat unclean thoughts. Few of the people who so assiduously invited him to breakfast truly loved or feared God. "I

resolved,” he was to write, “to have no acquaintance by chance, but by choice; and to choose such only as would help me on my way to heaven.” There appeared to be singularly few of these in Oxford, so he tried to escape to a school in Yorkshire, the chief attraction of which was that it lay in such a ghastly hole that nobody would go near it; but he did not get the post.

The Wesley that the people of Oxford began to see after 1729, when he returned from Epworth (the authorities thought, not oddly, that the man appointed lecturer in the classics and moderator of the classes ought to reside in College), was the same man, but exaggerated; for he found that his brother Charles had, with one or two other young men, founded a sort of society to lead the religious life. This was a delightful surprise, for when Charles had first come to Oxford and John had remonstrated with him for his levity, he had answered, “What, do you expect me to be a saint all at once!” Charles, spurred on by a young man called Morgan, had taken to doing good works, to living according to strict rule, to submitting his poetry to religious themes. Since in 1726 John had read Law’s *Serious Call* and *Christian Perfection*, he also had come to think that priests should attend to the poor and sick rather than to points of grammar or the elucidation of Hebrew syntax. He joined his brother with enthusiasm, and at once sprang to the leadership of the group. Thus Oxford beheld with astonishment a tiny coterie taking Christian doctrine literally (it was to happen again a hundred years later), incessantly praying, rigorously observing fasts, living meagerly so as to give all they could to the poor, and preaching, yes, actually in jails! They would meet together several evenings in the week to read the Greek Testament; their hours were strictly allotted to various forms of work; they never took their ease. Thus inspired, John at last conquered his intemperate sleeping, by setting his alarm clock first at six, then at five, then at four. Life was all ardor and stringency; the group wept over their sins; it was said that they even opened veins to cool the intemperance of their blood. To mock at them became the thing; they were called the “Supererogation Men,” their society was the “Holy” or “Godly Club,” they were even dubbed in derision, reviving an old nickname, “Methodists.” Such was the young don of Lincoln.

But at the same time there was another strangely different Wesley in Worcestershire and Gloucestershire, the Wesley admired, cherished, by Varanese and her friends the Granvilles. They on their part saw a High-Church parson, little, but neatly and compactly built, exceedingly active, with beautiful auburn hair, which, parted in the middle, fell to his shoulders in graceful curling locks, and defined a cameo-featured face set with most expressive eyes full of assured fire. There were two Granville sisters, Ann and a young widow, Mary, Mrs. Pendarves, whom Wesley had met in 1725 when he was first attached to Varanese. That was an attachment that had lasted, for in 1727, Martha Wesley had written to her brother complaining of not having heard from him — “When I knew that you were returned from Worcestershire, where I suppose you saw your Varanese, I then ceased to wonder at your silence, for the sight of such a woman, ‘so known, so loved,’ might well make you forget me.” Varanese, she knew, was “so dear” to Wesley. But in about 1730 her attention began to be occupied by a certain Mr. Wilson, whom she afterwards married, and Wesley turned his to the Granville sisters. He fell ecstatically prostrate before first one, then the other; but it was Mary who fascinated him the most.

She was young, lovely, appealing, with a cultured and spirited mind which had been the delight of her uncle George Granville, first Lord Lansdowne, poet and Jacobite. She brought to Wesley the aroma of another world, the world of brilliance and fashion, and, above all, she led him into the realm of delicately fastidious personal relations. It dazzled him. Was he in love? Yes; but with a vision. His love was begotten by despair upon impossibility. She on her part might have married him, since she cared nothing for worldly glamor, having refused Lord Baltimore, prince of Maryland, to succumb in 1743 to the protestations of Dr. Delany: but how could Wesley have married her? It was not only that he had no money — even his Fellowship would be lost on marrying — but how could he intimately approach so glowing, so ethereal a creature? And by now Wesley was wary of love; his experience with Varanese had taught him that it was “an avenue for grief.” Mrs. Pendarves did her best to promote familiarity; both she and her sister were entranced by the diminutive clergyman, so full of earnestness, culture, and vitality; and they gave the brothers a clique name such as they all had. Mary was Aspasia, Ann was

Selima, Mrs. Chapone became Sappho; thus Wesley was Cyrus, and Charles, gracious poet, was drawn into the charmed circle as Araspes. One can live an idyll even though haunted by religious fears.

A correspondence followed (Charles's letters are lost), on the surface suave, artificial, formal, yet seeming to heave underneath with all the agitations of suppressed passion. "My dear Varanese" is mentioned again and again, but it is Aspasia who now makes Cyrus's heart-strings vibrate, as they did, with "that soft emotion with which I glow even at the moment while I consider myself conversing with a kindred soul of my Varanese." If he walked with Varanese, it was of Aspasia that he thought, of her gestures, of how she looked when she sat on that tree-trunk; even darkness could not shade that "image of God." Thus, deliciously, he instructed the sisters in the holy life (how much better a thing Selima would find existence if only she would get up at six every day, to give one hour to private, one hour to public prayer), while they on their part took upon themselves to cure "those improprieties of behavior which in my inexperience of the world so frequently betrays me": they initiated him, in short, into the subtle delights of feminine friendship, of intuitive reactions. And, amid all their iridescence, it was above everything their humility that made him wonder; humility! in people so brilliant, so refined, who, Selima especially, made such rapid progress in divinity. His own humility was, as usual, sadly lacking. "For want of this I cannot follow you as I would," he wrote sadly to Aspasia; "I must be left behind in the race of virtue. I am sick of pride, it quite weighs my spirits down. O preserve me that I may be healed!" So the delightful correspondence went on all through 1731; was it not pleasant to be consulted on matters of conscience, such as whether Aspasia should go to concerts on Sunday evenings, more than pleasant to be told that the beauty of holiness shone in one's face? Cyrus was distracted if Aspasia left him too long without a letter; what had he done to offend her? He counted the days till he should see her. And then, the dangers of the town! Cyrus grew ever more solicitous for Aspasia, for it seemed to him that she was wasting the inestimable gift of herself on the butterfly triflers of London society! Then, suddenly, Aspasia took alarm; a postscript to a letter ran ominously, "I must insist upon your burning all my letters, and pray don't make use of any epithet before my name when you write to me. I have not time to tell my reasons." Alas, she had not

time to write again at all, for though Wesley answered the letter, no word broke the silence of the Dublin that had engulfed her. Was this the end? Had it all been an ineffable dream? Impossible that there should be nothing left, not even a few pages of writing! He burnt her letters; she had insisted; but — not till he had taken careful copies of them.

The disappointment seemed to unify the three John Wesleys; at least, two of them disappeared. He became one man, the earnest leader of the Holy Club. It was with renewed ardor that he plunged into the life of austerity, of self-denial, of diligent devotion, undertook the search for a saving faith. Method! that was the only way. There was no direct evidence that one had attained salvation — he at least could feel no assurance: but by acting according to rule, especially that of the primitive Church, one could not go far wrong. One could obey all the injunctions contained in the various rubrics, and thus live the holy life, for if a saving faith might be difficult to reach, there might be a saving method. Ever more method! The Holy Club redoubled its rigors (what did it matter if Morgan had starved himself into a consumption, and died mad?), fasted more, even on days which were not definitely laid down for fasting, prayed, practiced rescue work, exorcised spirits from haunted houses, kept ever more aloof, courted the ridicule which had once made life so uneasy to John (for as John had been told on his ordination in 1728, a priest was one who bade defiance to all mankind), filled up every moment. “Leisure and I have taken leave of one another,” he had written to his elder brother some years earlier. Good heavens! he had not known what he was saying; the diligence of those days was mere idleness to this; now he made himself ill from zeal. The Club did indeed debate whether one could be righteous overmuch; and though they decided that this was possible in three ways — by raising up one virtue to the detriment of another; by exalting grace to the neglect of law; or by laying too great burdens upon one’s self — they came to the conclusion that they were in no danger. Yet Wesley felt that he was not renouncing the world as wholly as he should, not nearly so well as his mother had succeeded in doing. How was he to do this? he asked her. “What is the surest and shortest way? Is it not to be humble? Surely this is a large step in the way. But the question recurs, How am I to do this? To own the necessity of it is not to be humble.”

Something was wrong, perhaps at the very basis. When he and Charles had walked to Epworth in 1731, discovering on the way that they could very well read as they walked, and so not waste precious time, they had found on their return that their converts had lapsed. The same thing happened in 1733: during an absence of Wesley's at home, the community of twenty-seven had dwindled to five, one of whom immediately after seceded from fear of singularity. There must be more method still. Every ritual was crammed into their devotions; they debated, and against John's judgment resorted to the dubious practice of ejaculatory prayer. It did not dawn on Wesley that it was his own magnetism that had attracted the group, and that without him all this rigor was meaningless.

Then, in 1734, his father, thinking himself failing, suggested that his second son should succeed him at Epworth. No, no, he must stay at Oxford, even if he became more and more outcast, even if he had fewer and fewer pupils, even if he made no converts. At all costs he would make sure of salvation; and when that year Aspasia made an advance, sending him a letter from Dublin, his answer was cold, final. How could she think that he could help her? "I sincerely thank you for what is past." The key was turned in the lock, unequivocally. Cyrus was dead. Thus, headed by Wesley, the remnant of the Club, reinforced by Whitefield, went deeper into the mysteries of the faith. Ought they not to mix water with the wine at the Lord's Supper? Clearly that had been an omission. Yet still Wesley felt he was getting no closer. He dabbled in the writings of the mystics; they were dangerously seductive, and nearly shipwrecked his faith; but their "noble descriptions of union with God," he found in the end, "made everything else appear mean, flat, and insipid," — works, faith, everything. Mysticism! It abolished love — and, of course, though Wesley did not say this, made the mediation of God's Son unnecessary, Christianity superfluous. "The Mystics are the most dangerous of its enemies," Wesley decided; "they stab it in the vitals." No; there was no release with them.

With whom then? The question became acute, for in 1735 his father pressed him, this time insistently, to apply to succeed to the living, and so make a home for his mother and sisters after the rector's death. The younger Samuel, snugly ensconced as headmaster of Blundell's school near

Tiverton (where he was looked upon as something of a rigid prig), had stoutly refused the succession, and joined in urging his brother. At this renewed demand, John shrank aghast, and compiled a terrific screed to his father, in which, in twenty-six long argumentative sections, he proved that it was better for his soul, and therefore better for Christianity, that he should stay at Oxford. Surely he could do most good where he was most perfect. At Oxford he had every advantage — a few close friends to watch over his soul, freedom from half-Christians, freedom from care, which last St. Paul had said was essential: at Epworth he would relapse into the state of a mere ordinary parson, hated by his parishioners: for, once he had told them what he thought of them, all his present popularity with them would evaporate. Through all the letter one can feel Wesley writhing at the prospect that he, who, as Law had penetratingly told him, wanted to convert the whole world, should be cabinet in a desolate parish. Old Mr. Wesley loyally tried his hardest to chew his son's indigestible logic; but he confessed that he did not understand it all, and very much doubted whether his son had arrived at any universal truths in his gigantic epistle. The young man's obvious duty was at Epworth. The younger Samuel thought so too. Not to undertake a cure of souls when offered was, he told his brother, to go back on the promises made at ordination. Wesley fiercely resisted this argument; he was under no necessity to undertake a cure of souls, and he wrote to the Bishop of Oxford to confirm him in this view, as was duly done: at the same time, how did Samuel know that he would not accept one of the College curacies? In fact, he probably would. Suddenly, however, for no revealed reason, he gave in. Nevertheless, when his father died the old man's dream was not fulfilled, and another man got the living. Perhaps the authorities had not liked the Jacobite sermon Wesley preached before the University in 1734; perhaps they did not approve of mixing water with the communion wine. At all events Wesley was allowed to struggle after salvation at Oxford.

Not for long, however: for a few weeks later it was suggested to him that he might go to Georgia, under Colonel Oglethorpe, founder of the colony. Wesley jumped at the offer. There, among the Indians whom he would convert (simple people, crying out for light, begging to be taught), he would be able to achieve holiness. Freed from temptations to eat or drink too much, away from women, except such as were, he felt, scarcely of the

same species as himself, far from the lure of talk, in which the tongue might utter phrases not salted with the divine wisdom, surely he would become fully converted. Yes, he would go to Georgia; he would undertake vicarial duties temporarily at Savannah; then he would convert the Indians. But he made it quite clear that his dominant motive in going was to save his own desperately seeking soul.

2***Georgia*****(1736-1737)**

JOHN WESLEY, with his brother Charles, who was going out as Oglethorpe's Indian Secretary, settled down in a cabin partitioned off in the forecabin. There they would be able to dwell in seclusion, and gain strength for their operations against the devil, who, as Wesley said, hates aggressive warfare. It had been suggested to John that he might well begin his ministry among the passengers, a collection of very average "adventuring" colonists leavened with the presence of a few Moravian Brethren, earnest, primitive Christians, and he leaped at the opportunity.

The brothers began with self-discipline, by seeing how little they could eat: no meat, no wine, only rice and biscuit — and immediately set out upon their task. Here was fruitful soil, not the scoffing indifference of a University; and, besides, they had the passengers at their mercy. Those destined for salvation could not escape as people could at Oxford; there was no getting away from the ship, nor from the Wesleys, who pervaded every corner of it in their tireless activity. Matters began well enough; the Wesleys succeeded in putting ashore a notoriously drunken servant-girl before they sailed; a man who objected to the only cabin being used for services left the ship at the first port out; and Oglethorpe got rid of the second mate, "an oppressive, insolent, turbulent man... an unrighteous and wicked man." There was a fair number of communicants, a child or two and some Quakers were presented for baptism, sickness induced a grateful seriousness in a woman and a sailor. The Wesleys, much encouraged, decided to give up suppers.

But then things did not go quite so well. Some people objected to so much, such continual, expounding and being read to; the woman who was serious when ill became less so when well. And soon the ship was rent by a

dissension. A Mrs. Hawkins, “a gay young woman,” showed signs of repentance. Wesley, delighted, after long and frequent catechisings, admitted her to the communion table. This very much upset the other ladies, and their husbands, and even split the Methodists. Charles, more rigorous than John, who always leant towards charity, was “perverse” on this point; Ingham and Delamotte sided with Charles in thinking Mrs. Hawkins a hypocrite; Oglethorpe was unsound, and Wesley had to reprove him. The bickerings among the women grew ever fiercer, the tension among the men terrific. Wesley, harassed, decided that he must take no pleasure in food and drink, for the only times at which he was at all at peace were when he was learning German to be able to talk with the Moravians.

Then there were storms; seas burst into the cabin, and Wesley found to his horror that he was unwilling to die. He was therefore unfit. There were some, indeed, who, supported by the sailors, declared there had been no danger, but that merely showed that they were true cowards, who did not dare face even the idea of death. The only people who seemed unalarmed were the Moravians. “In the midst of the psalm wherewith their service began... the sea broke over, split the mainsail in pieces, covered the ship, and poured in between the decks, as if the great deep had already swallowed us up. A terrible screaming began among the English. The Germans looked up, and without intermission sang calmly on. I asked one of them afterwards, ‘Was you not afraid?’ He answered, ‘I thank God, no.’ I asked, ‘But was not your women and children afraid?’ He replied mildly, ‘No; our women and children are not afraid to die.’” This gave Wesley courage to minister to his crying, trembling neighbors, and he was able to record, “This was the most glorious day which I have hitherto seen.”

And so the voyage went on, with prayers and exhortations, tending the sick, writing sermons, learning German, which, however, proved an intractable language. Oglethorpe gave up his cabin to a woman who was ill, the Wesleys surrendered theirs to Oglethorpe, and slept where they could, in whatever beds happened to be vacant, or on boards. Towards the end of the journey, his bed being wet, John lay down on the floor, and slept soundly; “and I believe,” he wrote, “I shall not find it needful to go to bed, as it is called, any more.” On the whole an exciting if confusing journey.

Everything had not gone well, but now and again the Lord had opened broad paths.

On the 8th February, 1736, three days after they reached land, Wesley had a peculiar experience. He asked the advice of Mr. Spangenberg, the Moravian pastor, with regard to his own conduct. "Do you know yourself?" Spangenberg asked him; "Have you the witness within yourself? Does the Spirit of God bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God?" Wesley was surprised at this question from a man of his own age, and did not know what to answer. The good German noticed his confusion, and inquired, "Do you know Jesus Christ?" A difficult point, and Wesley paused before he answered, "I know He is the Savior of the world." "True," the Moravian replied, "but do you know He has saved you?" This was not at all the procedure Wesley was accustomed to: it was usually he who asked the questions. He managed to bring out, "I hope He has died to save me." Spangenberg had little more to ask, since the answers did not seem satisfactory. He only inquired again, "Do you know yourself?" to which Wesley hesitatingly returned, "I do." But he feared he had spoken nothing but vain words.

This was the introduction to two years the record of which reads like the wildest fantasy, whether we regard Wesley simply from the inside, or see him merely as others saw him, externally; while if we consider the immense discrepancy between the two, and the utterly topsy-turvy results of the Wesleys' efforts, we feel that everybody in Georgia must have been a little mad. Wesley, except in one instance, was ruthlessly logical, methodical to an extreme, with a directed passion which seemed fanaticism to the mixed humanity, some riff-raff, some pietistic, of the infant colony, with its passions rough and ready, inclined at times to turbulence.

The moment Wesley landed, he began to display that astonishing activity which he never left off, and at the same time submitted himself to the rigid discipline, the strenuous reaching out after salvation, which gave him a sense of proportion so different from that of the average parson. The spirit within, known only to himself, drove the man, unflaggingly, relentlessly, to further ardors and endurances. Beginning the day at five, he would fill it

with devotions, prayers, visits, secretarial work for Oglethorpe (Charles proving thoroughly inept), writing for long stretches punctuated every hour with a short spell for prayer, learning piety from the Moravians, teaching himself German, translating hymns from that language, acquiring Spanish so as to talk to the Jews, besides attending his English parishioners, conducting prayers in French, reading the Greek Testament, poring over devotional books, instructing, exhorting, baptizing, marrying, burying, and for relaxation dipping into Plato (although he had renounced the classics), swimming in the river among the alligators, gardening, building, and, once, for half an hour, playing upon the flute — above all singing, singing when alone, singing when one man came to visit him, singing among the Moravians. Reading his diary, one gets the impression that he sung his way through his life in Georgia, often hymns of his own making. Method, method everywhere, in keeping his diary, looking after his books, in reading, in writing, in praying and fasting. Especially in fasting. During his first Lent, deciding that the ordinary fast was not enough, he would go the whole day without touching a morsel of food, ending it only with a little bread and butter at nine o'clock. Sleep? What did it matter where one slept? — in bed, or on boards, or out of doors in the drenching dews, from which one took no harm, unless a genteel education had led to despicable softness. Yet in spite of this mortification he enjoyed life — no sour Puritan here — enjoyed the little that he ate, delighted in swimming, reveled in the beauties of the countryside. And if his diary was dotted with the ejaculation *Κυριε βοηθει* (O Lord, come to the rescue!), it was only at periods of difficulty.

Oglethorpe found him invaluable, eager to help, untiring, a good secretary, a born organizer: but his parishioners did not find his organizing capacity so much to their taste. Schools, yes, he might institute them as much as he pleased, but his other arrangements were uncomfortable. Splitting up the service into two parts, with the part they most wanted to attend at five in the morning, might be according to the rules of the ancient Church, but it was inconvenient, as was the time in the afternoon he chose for his visits, a time when every decent, hard-working man would like to be tasting the joys of a siesta. And all this rigor, these rules about communion, this insistence upon plunging an infant three times into water when baptizing it, this arrogancy with Dissenters, this refusal to bury good honest citizens

because in life they had not had the exact religious coloring he himself displayed! The men did not like him. With the women, however, it was different. They warmed to the popular preacher side of him, especially as he always dilated upon the doctrine of love rather than that of fear, to his mixture of humility and pride, his eagerness to help, his spruce figure, and his “Adonis locks of auburn hair, which he took care to have in the most exact order.” Women; there was a possible snare: they were weak creatures that had to be helped, but was it wise to have too much to do with them? He had asked Spangenberg’s advice when he arrived, especially about Mrs. Hawkins, and the worthy Moravian had answered in the words of Thomas à Kempis: “Have little to do with good women; but commend them to God;” which dictum Wesley amended to “Have little to do with women.” “I stand in jeopardy every hour,” he wrote to his brother in discreet Greek: “Two or three [of my parishioners] are women, younger, refined, God-fearing. Pray that I know none of them after the flesh.”

For Charles had gone a hundred miles south to Frederica, with Oglethorpe, and at once got into difficulties. As a secretary he was useless, as a pastor he was unendurably strict. What with early prayers, objecting to shooting on Sunday, and trine immersion for infants brought to baptism, he was soon thoroughly unpopular. Besides, Mrs. Hawkins was there, whose husband, given to a little Sunday shooting, was surgeon at Frederica. Mrs. Hawkins, young and gay, we remember, and her friend Mrs. Welch, believed that life was meant to be physically enjoyed; and both seemed to feel that the best person to enjoy it with would be Oglethorpe. They went to Charles Wesley and confessed that they had committed adultery with Oglethorpe; they then went to Oglethorpe and told him that his secretary was spreading this libel about him. The astounded governor was furious, after the manner of a man of action; he would be seized, as men of action so often are, with illdisciplined spasms of religion, now hot, now cold, flying into rages, then brimming over with honeyed love. When the perturbing Mrs. Hawkins came to him with her story, he turned against Charles, ordered his people to provide him with nothing, not even boards to lie on, and forbade them to touch his laundry. Charles’s life grew intolerable; he was shot at, he fell ill, he believed that his enemies were possessed of devils (whence, possibly, his brother’s extreme fasting), and John came to the rescue, being nearly drowned on the journey. While there

he seemed to make a little progress with Mrs. Hawkins; but then she grew angry, and Mrs. Welch swooned. "God will reveal all," Wesley noted down; "Open my eyes." As to Oglethorpe, his mood varied, and in sum Wesley found Frederica an evil spot, where he had to talk to his brother in Greek in lonely places, and where their lives were in danger. He took Charles away, and both the brothers were glad to escape. Charles made one more attempt to live at Frederica, but on a second failure soon went back to England.

John found Savannah better than Frederica. The people there submitted more willingly to organization; they were "affected" at what was said to them. And if attendance at church fell off after the first occasion — the people of Savannah might be allowed their share of natural curiosity there were some stout believers and some remarkable returns of sinners to righteousness. Small religious societies were formed, which compensated Wesley a little for not being able to visit the Indians, the "main design" of his going out. But soon Wesley had to go back to Frederica, to wrestle with Mrs. Hawkins, who, however, grew very angry, and Wesley "got no good." There were, indeed, some bright symptoms even there; Wesley was heartened by an exemplary death, and Oglethorpe forbade shooting on Sundays. On the other hand, one of his parishioners, Horton, told him, "I like nothing you do. All your sermons are satires upon particular persons, therefore I will never hear you more; and all the people are of my mind, for we won't hear ourselves abused. Besides, they say they are Protestants. But as for you, they cannot tell what religion you are of. They never heard of such a religion before. They do not know what to make of it. And then, your private behavior — all the quarrels that have been since you came have been 'long of you." But then, as Wesley was to remark, it was his business to talk, to tell home-truths; he was not for the "accursed principle," as he called it, of "He that hath ears let him hear." It was precisely the people who seemed to have no ears that he was determined to make listen. Even Mrs. Hawkins. Back again in Savannah he wrote her a letter, a painful task, relieved by interludes of song. Nevertheless Wesley began to be troubled; his will was aroused, a desire appeared in him to force, to dominate; these people should, they must, do as he told them; thus he drenched them, in Southey's phrase, with the physic of an intolerant (and therefore intolerable) discipline. Yet he loved his flock, he

was passionately eager to save them, and spared no pains, instructing them privately in religion, but still he felt that things were not going as they ought. A visit to Charleston freshened him to make another attack upon Frederica.

He sallied forth straightway upon Mrs. Hawkins. She greeted him with a demand to know what two Greek words meant in a letter Charles had written him, and which had been intercepted. Wesley's answer was evasive; he did not translate the words, but said that only she and Mrs. Welch were pointed at in them. Her husband came in and raged, and Wesley, exhausted ("no sleep; fleas," is a diary entry of the time), burst into tears. The amiable couple then threatened that they would have both the brothers unfrocked. After that there were scenes with Oglethorpe, scenes with Horton, and the next day a terrible scene with Mrs. Welch, who publicly heaped scurrilous abuse upon him. Worse was to follow on the third day. Mrs. Hawkins sent for him. She threatened him with a double-barreled pistol, and when he struck her hand up, rushed at him with a pair of scissors, threw him down on the bed, and cried that she must have either his life-blood or his hair. A servant girl came in, and Mrs. Hawkins shrieked for a knife; men servants came, and at last a constable and another, who began to take hold of the demented woman. But at that moment Hawkins, coming in, forbade anyone to touch his wife and demanded what that scoundrel Wesley was doing in his house. What Wesley was doing at that moment was to grip Mrs. Hawkins's wrists securely, so she seized his cassock with her teeth, tearing both his sleeves, and bit his arm. Degrading scene; and afterwards Oglethorpe was of little help.

So Wesley, after a perilous journey, getting lost, sleeping in the open, and encountering a storm at sea, returned to Savannah, where he found to his horror that his *locum tenens*, an Independent, had broken the rules about baptism and was only haphazardly publishing banns before marriage. "Oh discipline! Where art thou to be found?" Wesley cried; "Not in England, nor (as yet) in America." The "as yet" is significant; and he settled down ever more fiercely to organize, to visit, to exhort, to methods his own life. And then, since Frederica was a part of his parish, he, after a while (we are

now in October, 1736), went back there, though without much hope of doing good.

But there was one parishioner to whom he thought he might bring comfort, one who had been much under his particular care for some time, Sophy Hopkey, niece of the wife of Causton, chief magistrate of Savannah, who had surrendered her to Wesley's discretion. She was eighteen, and sunk in the despondency of a broken love affair with a dubious character called Mellichamp, who wildly threatened bloodshed if she married anyone else. From the first she had interested Wesley, and, dressed in white since she had discovered that his preference lay that way, had daily had recourse to him for spiritual aid; moreover she had nursed him through a fever due to his having taken a little meat and a dash of wine at Oglethorpe's request, who was afraid that his abstention might be misconstrued. Miserable at the Caustons', she had fled to Frederica, and Wesley found to his sorrow that in that ignoble spot her religious notions had vanished. She "was scarce a shadow of what she was.... Harmless company [that dread snare] had stole away all her strength." She panted to go back to England, and not all Wesley's readings from the *Serious Call* and Ephrem Syrus could move her; only when he pressed her hand did she dissolve into tears and confess that her determination to go home began to stagger. Clearly she was in a dangerous condition. What was Wesley to do?

He went to the fort to consult Oglethorpe; no one was there except Horton, who was waiting for the governor; but, when the latter came back he ignored Wesley and rushed to kiss Horton. The action was full of meaning; Wesley's influence had sunk! Oglethorpe, busied with the affairs of the infant colony, could not be bothered with the problem the parson put to him. Send the girl back to Savannah, he said, a decision which prostrated her in a passion of weeping. Very well, Wesley agreed, but how? Why, in Wesley's boat.

It is dangerous for a susceptible man to travel for a week alone in the company of a charming girl, ten times more so if she is a damsel in distress, appealing to all that is generous and warmhearted in a man eager to save her soul. Wesley hoped that he would emerge free, buoyed up as he was by the belief that she would hold firm by her repeated desire and design to

live single. Through storms, in which she expressed her indifference to life, in calms, and encamped on romantically uninhabited islands, he studiously read to her Bishop Patrick's *Prayers* and Fleury's *History of the Church*, but he could not always keep clear of personal issues. How far was she engaged to Mellichamp? He was constrained to ask. "I have promised to marry him or none at all," she answered. Then, in spite of himself, the words bubbled out of Wesley's mouth: "Miss Sophy, I should think myself very happy if I was to spend my life with you." "I am every way unhappy," she wailed in a flood of tears; "I won't have Tommy for he is a bad man. And I can have no one else. Oh Sir! You don't know the danger you are in." Thus, although the conversation ended with a psalm, it was two very over-strung, nerve racked mortals that finally arrived at Savannah.

How marvelous she was! So still when he expounded, so unweariedly active at other times. Wesley adorned her with every perfection, every virtue, every grace. She could live on bread and water, was "patient of labor, of cold, heat, wet, badness of food or of want; and of pain to an eminent degree...." Neat, she despised the fripperies of dress; thoughtful, she loved retirement; her quick understanding "reached the highest things and the lowest." "As her humility was, so was her meekness. She seemed to have been born without anger...."

But no! No! The thought of marriage was as distressing as the thought of not marrying Sophy. Wesley trembled at the notion that he would not be able to keep his celibate resolves. "Naked to follow the naked Christ" was his ideal, not connubial happiness; he knew that if he married he would not be able to resist the temptations of the state, the snug fireside. His friends, whom he consulted, gave ambiguous answers, as did the Bible from which he sought guidance by chance reference. So she continued to come to his house, where, immediately after breakfast they would join in Hicke's *Devotions*, to be followed by a French lesson, and that again by prayers. In the evening they would ponder Ephrem Syrus, and afterwards Dean Young's or Mr. Reeve's *Sermons*, or, dullest of dull Puritans, Dr. Owen. Strange Galeottos, but Galeottos none the less, and Wesley began to waver. In vain he drained devotional works of their virtue, imbibed anatomy and medicine, struggled with German grammar, plunged into

Spanish, sought refuge in Hebrew, took boat and cut down trees, prayed with Delamotte, sang, wrote letters, and ever more rigidly trampled bare the paths of parochial duty — he drew fatefully nearer the precipice. Would it not be better to flee from Georgia? But escape was not so easy; the better parishioners implored him to stay until his place could be filled: he could not abandon them.

Physical adventure, absence from Savannah, seem to have a little distracted Wesley's thoughts from the enticing Sophy, whose name does not appear for some time in the *Journal*, except when he advised her to sup earlier and not go to bed immediately after. He would tramp the woods with Delamotte, wading breast-high through swamps, sleeping out and getting his clothes frozen as hard as the trees against which he rested. He made a dash to Frederica, where he stayed three weeks, though his life was in danger, and he utterly despaired of doing any good there. But the abnegation did not last, and when he came back he rushed off instantly to rescue the docile Sophy from company he thought would not improve her. Then a month of torture followed (February, 1737); celibacy tugged him, Sophy tugged him; he was in a "great strait." He still thought he would remain single, but a quasi-proposal, impulsive as his former one, escaped him without the consent of his mind; centered in himself, he harried the luckless Sophy into distraction: if he had wished, he could not have driven her into a neurotic state with more fiendish skill.

Sophy's half-hearted repelling of that second half-minded offer seemed to him a "narrow escape." The bewildered savior of his own soul ran for strength to a Moravian pastor, who alarmingly told him that he saw no reason why Wesley should not marry. Luckily Ingham and Delamotte were made of sterner stuff and unequivocally disapproved of the idea. Ingham doubted the girl's religion and sincerity, and as for her determination not to marry, upon which Wesley seemed to count, he had better not put it to the test. But still Sophy came for French lessons, and still the barricade of Hicke's *Devotions* was not enough. He fled to the woods, scribbling a hasty note, "I find, Miss Sophy, I can't take fire into my bosom, and not be burnt." He cut down trees, studied, sang, had recourse to the long-abandoned ejaculatory prayers, examined himself. Sometimes he was cheerful, but sometimes God hid His face, and Wesley's

heart sank like a stone. To leave Sophy was like a sentence of death; nevertheless, when he went back he told her that he would not marry until he had been among the Indians. “Private prayer, uneasy,” the diary for that day records; and later, “More uneasy. Κυριε βοηθει” The next day the wretched Sophy told him that people marveled what she did so long at his house, and added, “I don’t think it signifies for me to learn French any longer.” He made no protest, and it is small wonder that when next he saw her she was “sharp, fretful, disputatious.”

Ah, but she would never marry, she had said so. Time and again she as good as proposed to Wesley, but he cheated himself with her outspoken negative. The atmosphere grew ever more hideously tense. One day was “indeed an hour of trial. Her words, her eyes, her air, her every motion and gesture, were full of such softness and sweetness,” Wesley confessed, “I know not what might have been the consequence had I but touched her hand. And how I avoided it, I know not. Surely God is over all!” The next day he did touch her hand — but no, she would never marry, it was no use proposing. Still, it would be better not to touch her any more — ever.

Delamotte, who lived in Wesley’s house, saw it all through the tears which gushed from him at the thought that he would have to live away from his adored leader. Wesley assured him he would never marry, but Delamotte told him that he did not know his own heart. Perhaps not; then he would tame it, by furious bouts of logic, by learning Italian, by singing, by being more thankful in eating; but even these exercises produced no cure; he was just as undecided. An appeal to God through lots would settle the question. He and Delamotte put into a hat three pieces of paper on which were written the injunctions “Marry”; “Think not of it this year”; “Think of it no more,” and with a sigh of thankful relief Delamotte found that he had drawn the last. Another trial by sortilege brought the answer from the Searcher of hearts, “Converse with her only in the presence of Mr. Delamotte.” So, it was decided; there could be no doubt now what God wanted. Wesley felt relieved.

But the worst agony, for both the lovers, was yet to come. Four days later, on March 8th, Sophy told Wesley that she had entirely cast Mellichamp out of her heart, but that Mr. Williamson was paying her his

addresses. Williamson! a person, Wesley declared, “not remarkable for handsomeness, neither for greatness, or knowledge, or sense, and least of all for religion!” But, Sophy assured the lover who would not see, she would never do anything without first consulting him. Ah, he was in the toils; even if he saw her only in company, he admitted, he would love her more and more. It was beyond his strength to break it off. He went into the house and found Mrs. Causton in a rage at a letter from Mellichamp to Sophy which she had intercepted. She rated the helpless girl, shouting at her, “Get you out of my house; I will be plagued with you no more. Mr. Wesley, I wish you would take her, take her away with you.” Wesley, controlled, answered that Sophy was welcome to a room in his house or she might go to the Moravians. This was too much for Sophy; she burst into tears.

The next day Wesley went back to them. Mrs. Causton said that both she and Sophy were most grateful for all he had done, and — would he publish the banns of her niece’s marriage with Williamson the next Sunday! Wesley thought he was dreaming. Was this a trick to entice him? He put the suspicion away as unworthy. He asked if Sophy were willing. Yes, he was assured by Williamson and by both the Caustons, unless he had any objection. It started into his mind “What if she means, unless you will marry me?” But he checked the thought with, “Miss Sophy is so sincere; if she meant to she would say so.” Alas, she had said so, again and again, but Wesley had not seen. What could the poor girl do more? Desperate to escape Mellichamp, still more desperate to get away from the Caustons, she had to marry somewhere, and she wanted to marry Wesley. But he had hung off. When he saw her she once more told him, in answer to his reproach, that he had not consulted her, that she had only agreed if he had nothing to object. But Wesley’s desire to save his soul was stronger than his desire to marry Miss Hopkey: he ignored the offered opportunity.

Nevertheless when he went home he walked up and down in agony. He had never felt such pain, never known such an hour. “To see her no more; that thought was as the piercing of a sword.” He was weary of the world, weary of light. He sought God, but God forsook him. Then Causton appeared; he did not at all approve of this match. What exactly had passed between Sophy and Wesley? Wesley innocently told it all. “If you loved

her,” the astounded Causton burst out, “how could you possibly be so overseen as not to press her when she was so much moved?” Well, he concluded, Wesley might make sure that the girl really knew her own mind. So Wesley went to her again, and asking her if she was decided, accepted her assurance that she was; and yet, when that evening he read to the family out of Bishop Hall’s *Meditations*, Sophy fixed her eyes alternately on him and Williamson, steadily, as though reading them both. Williamson was alive to the meaning of that scrutiny, and wisely carried her off three days later and incontinently married her. “On March 4th,” Wesley was to say in reference to the day of the lot drawing, “God commanded me to pull out my right eye; and by His Grace I determined to do so: but being slack in the execution, on Saturday March 12th, God being very merciful to me, my friend performed what I could not.” The dedicated soul was saved; reason supporting pride had won the battle against love; but that the real casualty had been the unfortunate Sophy does not seem to have occurred to the man striving after salvation.

A violent emotional storm such as the one Wesley had passed through does not at once leave a man in peace; nor did the people concerned do so. Williamson was angry and forbade his wife to see Wesley; it unsettled her, and besides, he might make her too strict for his comfort. Wesley himself was in some doubt as to Sophy’s integrity. Had she dealt quite openly with him? She professed that she had, so he was able to admit her to Holy Communion. Then further doubts arose; Wesley heard things, he even inquired about things — Sophy had never really broken with Mellichamp until her marriage, and had been toying with Williamson for weeks. What did it count that she did tell Wesley that if he had pressed her at any time, she would have accepted him? He could not forgive (it never entered his head that he was entirely to blame); he was very worried; the “case,” as he came to refer to it briefly, was the subject of frequent discussion with his friends. And then she became wearied in well-doing; she grew lax in fasting, she neglected half the services, she did not come to communion — and, worst of all, she never declared herself penitent for her duplicity with Wesley! He would have to take disciplinary action. When at last, on August 7th, after a long interval, she presented herself to partake in the Lord’s Supper, he repelled her from the table.

There was an immediate uproar. Williamson, without hesitation, had a warrant made out for Wesley's arrest for defamation of his wife's character and for refusing to administer her the sacrament, by which Williamson declared himself injured to the tune of a thousand pounds. On the 9th Wesley was apprehended. He denied the first charge, and stated that the court was not competent to judge the second, and was ordered to stand his trial. Williamson demanded a bail of £50, but the clerk interposed, "Sir, Mr. Wesley's word is sufficient." Then Causton grew busy, and on the ground that Wesley's action was an insult to his family, entered zestfully into a glorious period of suborning witnesses, in which, since he was storekeeper as well as chief magistrate of Savannah, his efforts were crowned with success. A terrific Grand Jury was impaneled, consisting of forty-four people — nearly the whole adult male population of Savannah. The result as regards Wesley was prejudged; but there was another, a curious one, unforeseen by Causton; being unpopular, his own character was inquired into (he was in consequence ultimately dismissed his post); and though the Jury found against Wesley, a minority signed a statement exonerating him and ascribing the whole of the accusations to Causton's malice.

Wesley was in a strong position; nine of the ten counts against him were on purely ecclesiastical grounds — he had not buried, baptized, conducted services, properly, and so on. These he ignored. As to the tenth, defaming Mrs. Williamson, he was prepared to answer it. Yet, strangely enough, though he appeared at five or six courts as they sat, he was never called upon to do so.

But it was quite plain to Wesley that he had better leave Savannah. He was doing no good; people did not care for his ministrations. He had given his heart, his mind, his body, to their redemption; they replied that he was some kind of Papist, that they had been happy enough until he came, but that since then there had been nothing but quarrels, that his visitations were inquisitions — in short, that they did not at all like his sort of Christianity. Perhaps they felt that he was too concerned to become a saint. Wesley felt no obligation to stay. He had, indeed, been appointed pastor of Savannah, but against his will, and only as a stop-gap: he had come to convert the Indians. But he was not allowed to go to them, on

account of the danger; and besides, if he were, the prospects of success did not seem very encouraging. The Indians were not, after all, the noble savages he had hoped; they were degraded drunkards, lechers, murderers, they were eaten up with idleness. He had met some of them when they came to Savannah; and to the chiefs he always appeared in full canonicals. They had said, indeed, that they would not mind having it explained to them what Christianity was about, but they did not want to be made into Christians as they were in Spanish-American lands without this simple preliminary being gone through. Christians? What were they? Were they the people who lived at Frederica and Savannah? If so, after observing their behavior, they would rather retain their own religion.

So Wesley, after consulting his friends, decided to leave Georgia; and on November 22nd, 1737, went to tell Causton that since the latter had called him a hinderer of the peace, he proposed to depart immediately. He then posted up a notice to that effect. He made preparations to go on December 2nd; but on that day Causton sent for him and told him that he could not leave unless he gave security to appear before the court and gave bail as to Williamson's charge. Wesley answered that he would give neither bond nor bail at all. Thereupon the magistrate published an order forbidding anyone help Wesley to go. So Wesley decided to make a bolt of it, and that evening slipped away in company with three others, who, for reasons less commendable than his own, also wanted to leave Savannah. They made their way out of Georgia, getting lost, nearly dying for want of the water which Wesley discovered by poking his stick into the ground, and which they then dug down to with their hands, and finally arrived at Charleston. There Wesley expected worse trials than contempt and hunger, which are easy to be borne, namely respect and fullness of bread: however, he just managed to survive these crosses, though his spirit was drained by ease and harmless conversation, and on Saturday 24th he left America hoping, if it pleased God, some day to return.

3

Salvation

(1738-1740)

WESLEY never at any time lacked moral courage, even to battle against himself, which is the hardest of all struggles; for pride or mere pugnacity will enable a man to defy vulgar opinion. If on a given day he would have to register failure in his diary — that he had wasted a few minutes, or had been inattentive, that he had done no good, or been “lost” — five o’clock the next morning would find him sparking for the fight, optimistic, brave. But on the voyage home he lost his resilience. He was profoundly depressed, seized by a vague fear of he knew not what danger, from which crying to God brought only passing relief. He tried to hold forth, to exhort, to create a flock, but found that he was utterly unwilling to speak; and even though he was easier after beginning to instruct the cabin-boy, he was once more a prey to inhibition. Was it God’s will that he should be silent, he wondered, or was it a temptation from nature, or the Devil?

The voyage went on, mainly in storms — once it blew “a proper hurricane” — and Wesley found to his dismay that he was still afraid of dying. Quoting Donne he cried:

*I have a sin of fear, that when I’ve spun
My last thread, I shall perish on the shore,*

for though he could usually say, “Verily, if the Gospel be true, I am safe,” in a storm he would think, “What if the Gospel be not true?” Suppose he had surrendered all — ease, friends, repute, country, life — for a mere dream, “a cunningly devised fable!” “I have a fair summer religion,” he wrote in bitter self-contempt, and in the fullness of his heart convicted himself “of unbelief... of pride... of gross irrecollection... of levity and luxuriancy of spirit.” There were indeed moments when, from preaching,

or from making good resolutions, his spirits revived, but continual self-examination bogged him in despondency. Yet how difficult it was to know what was right, when, as he saw, he had for many years been tossed by various winds of doctrine. In the reaction from the Popish error of justification by works, he had nearly fallen into the mistake of magnifying faith to too amazing a size: and if English divines had rescued him from well-meaning but wrong-headed Germans, the English divines themselves cut the rock from under his feet by interpreting the scriptures in various ways. He had been in a sense too zealous, he found, had applied the local rules of Provincial Synods as though they were universally applicable, and committed other blunders of the same sort; he remembered with horror his flirtings with the mystics. His faith! What was his faith? Even devils have faith — of a sort. His pride was abased. “Oh!” he groaned in despair, “I went to America to convert the Indians; but who shall convert me?”

When such a cry issues from a mood of intense depression, the answer is usually not long in coming, and it came to Wesley exactly four months later than the prayer torn from his heart, through the mouth of Peter Böhler, whom Wesley met soon after getting back to London. This Moravian, nine years younger than Wesley (who was now thirty-five) had come across with a group of other Germans; and Wesley, on meeting them, being always drawn towards Moravians and irresistibly attracted by Böhler, found them lodgings near his own. He needed just then to have by his side someone who was calm, at once warm and placid in the faith, for his outer as well as his inner life was troubled: there were unpleasant interviews with the Trustees of Georgia, and already he was finding that his ministrations were not liked, for preaching in London on February 5th, 1738, he was immediately told that many of the best of the parish were so offended that he was not to preach there again. He had enlarged on the text, “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature,” and something in his fervor, perhaps a suggestion that his hearers had a good deal too much of the old Adam about them, had upset their content in their genteel, self-flattering faith. On the next Sunday, after holding forth in another church on Charity — “Oh hard sayings! Who can bear them?” he was told that there also he was not to preach any more. He went off to Oxford with Peter Böhler.

The Moravian was exciting; there was something about him ordinary Christians, even good ones, had not got. His words, even in the Latin they conversed in, were suggestive, if not always understandable. What did he mean, for instance, when he said to Wesley, “My brother, my brother, that philosophy of yours must be purged away?” Reason! Surely reason must not be abandoned? Wesley went back restlessly to London, where he preached two or three times, deciding that that sermon was the best which had given the most offense. No more fair summer religions for other people; religion was to be a flail, a scourge, or, as Mr. Chesterton has expressed it, “a terror, a splendor, a necessity, and a nuisance.” He rushed about, first to Salisbury to see his mother, who was staying with one of her married daughters; and he was about to go to Tiverton to see Samuel, when a message was brought to him that his brother Charles was dying at Oxford. He started off at once, resolving on the way to be absolutely open and unreserved with all he met (that is, to preach at them without delay), to labor after seriousness, and never to laugh — “no, not for a moment”; never to speak a word that did not “tend to the glory of God, not to talk of worldly things.” The stormy path was the only one; his old doctrine of cheerful Christianity was forgotten.

Charles was recovering from his pleurisy by the time John got to Oxford, where he found Peter Böhler, who talked, talked to such purpose that the next day the Moravian clearly convinced the elder of the brothers of unbelief, of want of that faith “whereby alone we are saved.” Unbelief! At once it struck Wesley that he must stop preaching. How could he who had no faith dare to exhort? “By no means,” Böhler said; “Preach faith till you have it; and then, *because* you have it, you *will* preach faith.” Thus two days later Wesley began to impart this strange new doctrine of justifying faith, though his soul started back from the work. Justifying faith! What was this faith? He could not say, he had not himself got it: he was only certain that it was essential to have it. The first man to whom he preached, a criminal under sentence of death, was converted. Happy omen!

Perhaps, as Böhler said, if he preached enough what he did not believe, he would come to believe it. At all events, when a few days later he took a journey north with a friend, they lost no opportunity of declaring the truth, on the roadside, or at inns where the good people who wanted to eat

their suppers in peace were apt to be resentful; but the laggards were soon brought to a better mind. Indeed, if the two friends did not open, God would reprove them for their negligence by sending a stinging downpour of hail. So at Altrincham they tackled a Quaker, who was “well skilled in, and therefore sufficiently fond of, controversy,” and, after arguing for an hour, Wesley somewhat inconsistently advised him to dispute as little as possible; and when once a man overtook them on the road, whom they found more inclined to speak than to hear, “We,” Wesley records, “spoke and spared not.” Others again were cautioned against talkativeness and vanity, and these experiences stirred Wesley so greatly, that when he got back to Oxford, he abandoned formal prayers, finding that those he invented gave him greater relief.

On March 23rd he met Böhler again, and was more and more amazed at the accounts he heard of the fruits of living faith, holiness and happiness. But, after preaching a little more, and finding no miraculous change in himself, he decided to wait in silence and retirement in the country. Böhler, however, called imperiously to him, and on April 22nd Wesley went to meet the Moravian again. Now he agreed to all that Böhler said, but yet he could not understand what he meant by “instantaneous work.” How could faith be given in a moment, how could a man be turned *at once* from darkness to light, from sin and misery to righteousness and joy? “Look at the Bible,” Böhler said; and to his astonishment Wesley found that nearly all the conversions recorded there were instantaneous. Still he resisted. That was all very well, but those events had taken place in the first days of Christianity, and things were altogether different now. Böhler unhesitatingly produced several people who had had the experience in their own persons. Wesley could only cry, “Lord help Thou my unbelief!” These proofs convicted him of being too dilatory; really he ought not to preach any more; but his mentor told him that he must on no account hide his talent in the earth. So Wesley promptly declared his new belief in this faith which struck, at the house of old Mr. Delamotte, to a company which included his brother Charles. They were all profoundly shocked. Charles especially was horrified at what he called his brother’s “worse than unedifying discourse,” while Mrs. Delamotte was so overcome that she abruptly left the room. How scandalous of Wesley to say that he had not faith!

But Charles soon veered round. A recurrence of pleurisy brought Böhler to his bedside, who at last made him see that only grace, not a so-called “belief,” could save. In the meantime, while waiting for this faith to come, the brothers and a few more, on the advice of and under the guidance of the compelling Moravian, who was about to leave them for America, formed a society which met in Fetter Lane. It was not strictly a Moravian society, and not yet Methodist, but it differed from other societies, which the Wesleys, among many more, had founded both at Oxford and in Georgia, in that it was not merely a gathering for religious talk, but involved a discipline, a division into bands, and a mutual confession of temptations and faults. Then John preached more vigorously than ever in the churches, so vigorously as to be forbidden the use of three more pulpits. But he was by no means always cheerful. From May 10th to 13th he was sorrowful and very heavy; he could not read, nor meditate, nor sing, nor pray. A letter from Böhler refreshed him a little. The next day, being a Sunday, he again preached at church, and was again told he was to preach there no more, and realized more fully than ever how intolerable the doctrine of faith was to men, especially to religious men. In some bitterness he wrote to Law, reproaching him for not having opened his eyes to the doctrine of grace; but Law got the better of a short controversy, remarking shrewdly that Wesley must not think he had changed his faith because he had changed his expressions. The week after, Charles had another relapse, and on the Sunday suddenly received the light and was as suddenly cured of his pleurisy. “Who is so great a God as our God?” Wesley demanded.

But the three days following were days of unbearable gloom: Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, he felt continual sorrow and heaviness in his heart. Yet Wednesday, 24th, seemed to begin with some hope. At five o'clock he opened the Greek Testament and read, “There are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, even that ye should be partakers of the divine nature.” But how could he partake? He wrote agitatedly to a friend, “How am I fallen from the glory of God! I feel that I am sold under sin.... Does ‘His spirit bear witness with our spirit that we are the children of God?’ Alas! with mine he does not.” He was desperate; but, opening his Bible again before he went out, he read, “Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.”

Perhaps there was promise there, a promise that seemed to be strengthened when he went to St. Paul's in the afternoon and heard Purcell's music ascending the glorious dome, bearing upwards the words, "Out of the deep have I called unto Thee O Lord; Lord, hear my voice!" He was profoundly moved. Under the influence of these words, and of beauties to which he was always susceptible, it was with reluctance that he allowed himself to be dragged that evening to seek, surely a gloomier God, with a society in Aldersgate Street. A layman was reading aloud Luther's preface to the *Epistle to the Romans*; and then, at about a quarter to nine, while the voice was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, Wesley felt his own "strangely warmed." All at once he was sure that he did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given him that the Son of God had taken away *his* sins, *his*, and saved *him* from the law of sin and death. Ah yes, he had believed before, but with the faith of a servant, not that of a son. Then, faith had been an assent, even if an assent to what God had revealed because He had revealed it; but this, now, was a sensation, a warming of the heart; it felt like a physical embrace. At last!

But still, not safety. That very evening, in the solitude of his room, he was much buffeted with temptations, and ever and anon during the next few days hideous doubts, varied temptations, shadowed his happiness with gloom. Although the texts at which he opened his Bible were always encouraging, "Yet the enemy injected a fear, 'If thou dost believe, why is there not a more sensible change?'" A Moravian told him that he must not fight with temptations, but flee from them the moment they appeared, and take shelter in the wounds of Jesus. Gradually he felt himself stronger. On the Sunday after his conversion, he declared, at the house of Hutton, a God-seeking bookseller with whom he had lodged, that until the 24th he had not been a Christian! The scandal was terrific. He was attacked as an "enthusiast," a seducer, a setter forth of new doctrines. The Huttons, in terror for their children, thought he had gone mad, and told him that if he had not been a Christian five days before, then he must be a consummate hypocrite. Wesley, however, was confident and calm: he had not been a Christian, not in the way that he now was; he had been a mere nominal Christian, a poor simulacrum, so why not say so?

But Mrs. Hutton could not let the matter rest there, and she wrote to Samuel imploring him either to confine or to convert his brother when he went to see him, “For after his behavior on Sunday 28th, when you hear it, you will think he is not quite a right man.” Strange delusion, wildfire, rank fanaticism, such are the words that occur in her letter. Samuel, correct, uninspired, orthodox, was horrified and remonstrated vigorously, while old Mrs. Wesley, hearing the Huttons’ account, was equally perturbed, until John, in his own fascinating person, made it all clear to her. These things probably did not much shake Wesley, it was his own experiences that continued to do so, for he found that he had not altogether got dominion over sin, was not always triumphant over temptation. One day at Oxford, for instance, he spoke with sharpness instead of with tender love, of one that was not sound in the faith. Immediately God hid His face, and he was troubled. Still finding “a kind of soreness” in his heart, he decided to go to Germany to see the Moravians and their leader Count Zinzendorf; accordingly, he sailed for the Continent on June 13th, in company with Ingham.

Holland was delightfully clean, Germany picturesque, the Moravians charming, and Herrnhut, “the place where the Christians lived,” of overwhelming interest. Wesley noted every detail of the organization, how the sexes lived separately, and even within the sexes were again separated by ages (“according to growth, like cabbages,” Southey comments), being even buried in different parts of the cemetery. He observed how they were schooled, how they worshipped, how they sang in processions, were split up in hierarchic bands, with monitors public and secret, and how, when the time came, the young men and maidens were paired off by order or by lot. He was entranced; they were attractive people, holy, devout, who could give enthralling accounts of their religious experience, and Count Zinzendorf himself was the most Christian of men, if a little dictatorial. It was with regret that he tore himself away from them; they were perfect people; and yet, and yet — when the glow had cooled were they, after all? Doubts grew, and in September 1738 he began a letter to them: Did they not neglect joint fasting? Were they serious enough, utterly innocent of levity? and were they busy enough? Further, were they not too reserved, apt to use guile, and inclined to magnify their own Church too much?

Finally, most significant question of any, “Is not the Count all in all? Are not the rest mere shadows, calling him Rabbi...?” Wesley did not send that questionnaire, but after a time for consideration he did write them a letter, in precisely the same vein. From that time Wesley knew in his bones, however much his heart might mislead him, that he could never become a Moravian; his will would have clashed with Zinzendorf’s, and it was Wesley who must guide, Wesley who must lead.

But the Moravians in Germany counted for little in the tremendous excitement, the nervous exaltation, of the next few months. Wesley lived in a state of extravagant strain, his intense emotionalism exacerbated by his asceticism and his wretched allowance of sleep. It was his will alone, one would think, that made it possible for him to survive, a will to dominate, first himself, then others — a will almost, it would seem, to dominate God! At least he would wrest from God the faith that he wanted, for even in the strenuous weeks which followed, and in which so much happened that seemed directive, if not directed, Wesley was still not in possession of *assurance*, of certain faith, of a sense of forgiveness of sins, of dominion over temptation. The almost intolerable rapture of what was nearly miraculous sank sometimes, even now, into a trough of despondency; he would feel dead, not only in heart but almost in body, until the same stimulus preaching, or a conversion, or some manifestation — would have the same tonic result.

The account of these two years in his *Journal*, or in that of others, in his diary, in the lives by his biographers, read like a whirling dream, a vortex of unbelievably multiple physical and spiritual events. Coming back from Germany in an elated mood, singing, it would appear from his diary, more than usual, he found work to do. There was preaching in the churches, from more and more of which both he and Charles were being excluded, preaching in other places, exhorting the Fetter Lane Society, helping Charles in his newly discovered work of converting condemned criminals, interviewing the dismayed Bishop of London, and collecting and publishing not only abridged editions of edifying works, but manifestoes, and collections of hymns written by himself and Charles or translated from foreign tongues. But even so he never ceased to examine himself; he was still his own chief interest, and when he went down to Oxford in October,

he found that though he was “new” in many things, as a convert should be, new in holiness, in designs, in desires, in conversation and in actions, he still could not find in himself the love of God or of Christ; he had no settled, lasting joy in the Holy Ghost. Still, he thought he had a measure of faith; his warming of the heart had not been meaningless. But then, on a second visit to Oxford, he met his old friend Delamotte, who administered a severe, astringent dose. “You are better than you were at Savannah,” Delamotte told him (so much had thought eroded his devotion), “but you are not right yet. You know that you were then blind, but you do not see now.... You have a simplicity,” he went on, “but it is a simplicity of your own: it is not the simplicity of Christ. You think you do not trust in your own works, but you do trust in your own works. You do not believe in Christ.”

Pride! Was he never to be rid of pride? Consulting the Bible by lots brought some relief, and on January 4th, 1739, he humbled himself again by writing: “I affirm I am not a Christian now... I have not any love of God. I do not love either the Father or the Son.... Again, joy in the Holy Ghost I have not... I have not the peace of God!” Ultimately he did attain the full sense of forgiveness of sin, with all its attendant joys, but it was when he had ceased to think so perpetually of himself. The tremendous struggle was in the end resolved — when Wesley was merged in his calling.

What this calling was soon became apparent. It was, in fact, as callings so often are, the fulfillment of his ambition, which was, as Law had so clearly seen many years before, to convert the whole world. The time seemed ripe, the moment waiting for the man. There were strange manifestations of the power of God in Scotland, and on a wholesale scale in New England. Nor were encouraging symptoms lacking in London. One woman had seen Christ in a vision at her bedside; another had met Him in her garden, had talked with Him, drunk of His blood and, embracing Him, had been washed in it. A prophetess had uttered in Wesley’s presence, and he could not ascribe the performance either to hysterics or to artifice. Wesley grew ever more inspired — at the love-feasts of the society in Fetter Lane, at sermons where crowds listened entranced, and at private meetings where people would fall to the ground in an agony of conversion. Lunatics were cured. He preached “a new way,” direct experience, a new birth, and, in

Moravian language, the “indwellings,” the “getting into Christ,” which so enraged his brother Samuel. He went to Oxford again, and there a woman who had opposed this “new way” suddenly “fell in an extreme agony, both of body and soul,” and was converted. And in the midst of these excitements, he was called upon to go to Bristol.

The call came from Whitefield, who had come back from Georgia (he had sailed from England on the day that Wesley returned) and was soon to go back there as Vicar of Savannah. He had been preaching at Bristol, inaugurating his evangelistic career with striking success. He was extraordinarily eloquent; his zeal, his sincerity, his love for his fellow-creatures, and his gift for oratory at vast open-air meetings, moved even the notoriously brutal miners, till their faces, black with coal-dust, were furrowed white with tears. He had always been emotional. As a servitor at Oxford he had adored the Wesleys from afar, and had become worthy to belong to the Holy Club by starving himself into collapse: and now this appeal to thousands, the bringing of them gloriously to God, satisfied his raptural needs. Or nearly. What was still lacking was martyrdom; he wished to reach Christ through a sea of blood; he longed to wear the martyr’s crown; at least he was sure he would be imprisoned. But as no one would imprison him, he could only hope that he would some day be a good enough Christian to deserve incarceration. Meanwhile, Bristol was being converted, but Whitefield had to leave Bristol to come to London and then go back to Savannah. Would Wesley come to carry on the glorious work?

Wesley did not want to go, the more so as he found himself fully employed in London, even though there was by now hardly a church in which he was allowed to preach. He resorted once more to the *Sortes Biblice*, and found that he was to go — and die there. The society was consulted, Charles was fiercely against his brother’s going, and the discussion went on for hours. Again the Bible was referred to by the method of chance, and again and again the message was, expressed in different ways, Go and die there! There was no help for it: Wesley must go, and he went, convinced that he was journeying to his death. Charles was wild with grief. “He left a blessing behind him,” he wrote of his brother in his diary: “I desired to die with him.”

Death was mysteriously withheld, as was Whitefield's martyrdom, and Wesley plunged into the work. At first he professed himself much perturbed at "this strange new way of preaching in the fields." All his life, he said, till quite lately, he had been very tenacious of every point relating to decency and order, and would have thought the saving of souls almost a sin if it had not been done in a church. But since he had already considered the possibility in London, on finding that the churches would not hold the enormous congregations he attracted, two days after reaching Bristol, which was the day on which Whitefield left, he "submitted to be more vile," and preached to about three thousand people from a little knoll. Methodism, in his own phrase, was "beginning to begin."

To the Church, Bristol, with its degraded colliers at Kingswood, its Dissenters (largely Quaker), and its atheists, seemed barren ground; to Wesley it appeared white for harvest. The people flocked to hear him, crowding rooms so that the floors gave in, driving him to stand on tables in streets, to preach in natural amphitheatres; his fame grew, and he was invited to Bath. And then, on the day before Easter, 1739, there was the earliest of those manifestations which were his wonder and (at first) his supreme joy. A young man listening to him was seized with a violent trembling and collapsed; but on the congregation calling upon God, he found "peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." The signal instances of God's mercy increased in number, in violence, in strangeness. Sometimes the people on either side of Wesley were mown down in swathes; at others, individuals fell in paroxysms of bodily anguish, shrieked, fought, foamed at the mouth, the attacks sometimes continuing for days. They were being born again, born of God, but it was they who suffered the indescribable pains of child-bearing. Wesley's imagery again and again expresses this, even when the event was not quite successful, as once when they had grieved the jealous God by questioning his work. "The children came to the birth," he recorded, "but there was not strength to bring forth." But failures were rare. Strong resisters, even Quakers, were struck to the ground; mothers followed the example of their daughters and fell into fits; many would roar in the disquietude of their spirits, and sometimes the whole floor of a room would be covered with writhing figures calling upon God, filling the air with their moans.

Nor were the agonies entirely due to being born; they were often caused by the expulsion of the Devil. Sometimes his satanic presence was only to be inferred, as in the case of the girl who had to be held down for three days; at others he declared himself to be there. Once, when Wesley was summoned through a drenching shower to see a girl, and arrived “cold and dead, fitter for sleep than for prayer,” on seeing him, the devil in the girl burst out into horrid laughter and said, “No power, no power; no faith, no faith. She is mine; her soul is mine, I have her, and will not let her go!” Still worse was the girl of nineteen who had to be held down by three people. Wesley blandly gives the account.

“It was a terrible sight. Anguish, horror, and despair, above all description, appeared in her pale face. The thousand distortions of her whole body showed how the dogs of hell were gnawing her heart. The shrieks intermixed were scarce to be endured. But her stony eyes could not weep. She screamed out... I am damned, damned; lost for ever. Six days ago you might have helped me. But it is past. I am the devil’s now. I have given myself to him. His I am. Him I must serve. With him I must go to hell. I will be his. I will serve him. I will go with him to hell. I cannot be saved. I must not be saved. I must, I will, I will be damned.... She then fixed her eyes on the corner of the ceiling, and said, ‘There he is; aye, there he is. Come good devil, come. Take me away. You said you would dash my brains out; come, do it quickly. I am yours. I will be yours. Come just now. Take me away.’” What could be a clearer, more gratifying proof, of the reality of demoniac possession?

The curious thing is that these manifestations were only permitted when John Wesley was the preacher; they never happened with Charles, with Whitefield, or, definitely, with any others of the group. It was the more striking when Whitefield, who had been ministering in London for some days, asked Wesley to go with him to a gathering, and then invited him to preach. At his own sermons nothing untoward occurred; but the moment John opened his mouth, people were struck to the ground. It was amazing. It was not that he was a very eloquent preacher; he spoke in short, economical phrases; he could not hold a candle to Whitefield as an orator, but his sentences seemed to clutch at men’s hearts and drag them out.

Brushing his hair back with his hand, the face he presented to his hearers would fill them with awe, and he used his eyes in such a way that each felt that they pierced him alone, that his words were meant especially for him. He seems to have exercised a sort of hypnotic influence on his audiences. Perhaps he was conscious of this power, and liked to use it, for God had given it him to convert with, and convert he would. For though he might speak the words of humility as much as he liked, the spirit of pride was there, pride that he had been chosen to do this work. And perhaps also the hysterical displays satisfied his hungry emotionalism, cheated by his failure to love and to be loved humanly, a longing he professed to have eradicated. And above all he could rule, rule in hell while serving in heaven. His doubts vanished, his fits of unhappiness disappeared.

Not that all was smooth, even inside the circle. Charles was not at all comfortable about these noisy and not very exalting signs of grace. Though he was not blind to psychological possibilities, for once he and his brother had been overtaken by insane laughter when about to pray together, yet he suspected fraud, and one or two cases being discovered, he induced his brother to discourage them, though not to forgo them altogether. Whitefield, again, began to show a regrettable tendency towards the doctrine of predestination; Wesley refused to discuss it, the first sign he showed of realizing that there were things more important than doctrine. Let Whitefield, let anybody, believe what they would, so long as they believed the supreme thing, the assurance of faith. Thus he refused to allow an aspirant to join the Fetter Lane Society, not because he was a Calvinist, but because he would insist on discussing his doctrines publicly. Nor was the society itself going altogether smoothly. At meetings the young men would show, to the detriment of prayer, that they were interested in the young women, and the difficulty was to separate the sexes without hinting at the insulting reason why. Further, there was a slight difference of opinion as to whether secret monitors should be appointed, on the Moravian pattern, a suggestion which Wesley scotched. If he was to be admonished, let it be openly. But on the whole there was no cause for anxiety; the brethren were united, and Wesley continued his ministrations at Bristol.

Outside, of course, there was terrific opposition. Most of the clergy thought Wesley out of his wits and refused him their pulpits. Bishop Butler (of the *Analogy*), haling Wesley before him, and saying coldly that the accounts of the conversions he heard, and which Wesley joyfully confirmed, were “very extraordinary indeed,” asked him by what authority he preached in his diocese. The general authority of ordination that Wesley claimed was not enough for Butler, who forbade him to continue. That did not stop Wesley, but the Bishop took no action. Samuel Wesley grew ever more aghast at his brothers, and implored them to return to sanity. When he heard of John’s interview with Butler, he warned them lest they should, not be excommunicated from the Church (he deplored the feebleness of its discipline), but themselves excommunicate the Church, a prophesy which fell on deaf ears, and which, since he died in November 1739, he did not live to see justified. Old Mrs. Wesley was at first averse to this new faith; then, one day, at Holy Communion, she felt that at last all her sins were really forgiven her, and her criticism ceased. Lay opposition was more furious still. Wesley could triumphantly floor such a miserable antagonist as Beau Nash with a witty retort; for when Nash scornfully told him that he judged from common report that Wesley’s preaching frightened people out of their wits, Wesley told him that he did not dare judge him by common report. Other attacks, however, in papers and magazines, in prose and verse, by word of mouth and in preposterously large pamphlets, full of defamation and misrepresentation, were not so easy to answer. In fact, Wesley at this time did not answer them, even that most galling one which spattered him with the muddy name of Papist. Fools! As though he had not again and again abjured justification by works! So he went on through the storm, acquiring and building a meeting house at Bristol, the cost of which, though penniless, he took upon his own shoulders. God, he did not know how, would provide. He also took over a ruined building in London, near Finsbury Square, called the Foundery.

At the beginning of November 1739, Wesley went back to London, and then the state of affairs he found there was far from encouraging, for the Fetter Lane Society was woefully at odds within itself; there was sullenness, quarreling, variance over fundamentals. It was the fault of Charles. He was more original than John (a comparison of their poems shows it) — it was he who had started the Holy Club, it was he who had

first been converted, but he had not a tithe of his brother's driving power, his will to mold things as he wanted them to be; he had none of his ambition, being altogether a simpler man. In some ways he was as extreme as his brother, certainly in his addiction to the more picturesque portions of obsolete ritual, but he was at this stage of his development more gentle to others, more able to see their point of view. He dreaded the roughness in which his brother rejoiced, crying ha! ha! amid the trumpets, and so had let the society be invaded by a grievous heresy.

It was a form of quietism, of "stillness," as the Moravians who expounded it called it. There would have been no harm in it in a general way Wesley himself had taken to heart the text "Be still, and know that I am God" — but as applied by the members who embraced it, it had two serious consequences. First, it denied that there could be degrees of faith; either you had full assurance, or you had nothing. Then, secondly, if you had nothing, it was no use to do anything but wait — no prayer, no Bible-reading, no good works, no fasting, could avail you anything; to partake of the Lord's Supper was meaningless. Wesley could accept neither of these propositions: he knew that there were degrees of justifying faith; he had felt them in himself, had seen it operate in others. You should wait for Christ and be still, but at the same time use all means of grace. Not to do the latter was to deny all the ordinances of the Church; it meant schism, and the idea of separating from the Church of England was one which Wesley would not harbor for a moment. The meetings were ominous; there were none of those glorious gatherings which went on with prayer and singing till one, till two, till three o'clock in the morning. Either the brethren sat grimly silent over their tea and bread, or there were acrid disputes. It became clear that the true believers would have to separate from the Moravians, with whom, except for a trifling variance over the question of Episcopal succession, they had been almost identified. The issue swayed in the balance for weeks; it was with dismay that Wesley saw most of the society becoming engulfed in this dark mysticism, far above him, he declared, and hankering after French prophets. If there was to be a prophet, he would not be a Camisard! At last, on Sunday, July 30th, 1740, he decided to act. He went to a meeting in Fetter Lane, at the end of which, having been silent till then, he read a paper stating the

Quietist view, refuted it, and then asked those who agreed with him to follow him out.

Many started after him, but they did not all go far, because one of the Moravians, guessing what was coming, had hidden Wesley's hat under those of all the others; and Wesley's search for his own under the tumbled pile at the end of the room so delayed him that the Moravian leader had time to dissuade some of his followers from deserting. Nevertheless eighteen or nineteen out of the sixty odd went with Wesley; and when they met at the Foundery on the Wednesday, they saw their numbers swelled by sixteen men and most of the women. The Wesleyan Society of Methodists was clearly and distinctly established as a new and separate organization.

PART II

THE EVANGELICAL REVIVALIST

1

The First Leaps

(1741-1743)

AND now a new Wesley, the real Wesley, emerged, the man of action, indomitable, full of explosive energy. The prig-Wesley of Oxford, together with the smoothly fashionable parson; the rigid authoritarian of Savannah, together with the egotistic savior of his own soul; the torn and riven Wesley, the almost fanatical theolept of the recent months, gradually disappeared, to give way to the man who — the phrase is famous — transformed the countryside of England. To say that in his great leadership, in his organizing which amounted to genius, in his passionate and untiring work of regeneration, he at last found himself, is in a sense true; to say that he at last lost himself is truer still.

Wesley had made his port, but the society had yet to squeeze through perilous straits, only just scraping between the rock of predestinarianism on the one hand, and the maelstrom of Moravianism on the other. For, cogitating in America, Whitefield had decided that he must fly the colors of Calvin. Not, he explained, that he had read anything of Calvin's; no, the doctrine of election had been imparted to him more simply by the agency of Christ and His apostles; indeed, he had had it direct from God, who had singled him out. Thus authorized, he implored Wesley, whose feet he repeatedly said he was ready to wash, to read and to think, and to rid himself of his pestilential notions of "universal redemption," of "free grace," of possible "sinless perfection" in this life. Why must Wesley dispute? he asked fretfully, who, after all, had disqualified himself from

judging the question by admitting that he had not the witness of the spirit within himself. He, Whitefield, daily felt Christ's blessed Spirit filling his soul and body as plain as he felt the air which he breathed or the food which he ate. "I hope," he wrote, "at this time I feel something of the meekness and humility of Christ." There seemed to be more hope than fact in the statement, and Wesley was not the man to submit to such arrogance. Let Whitefield plead as much as he liked that a dissuasion in their ranks would injure the cause, that it was likely to rob them of a satisfactory martyrdom; he would never for a moment, for any reason, confess adherence to a doctrine of predestination. Why, it made God out to be worse than the Devil! He believed in universal redemption (which is not the same thing as universal salvation), and that if there were some elected to do special work (as he knew there were, feeling himself to be one), most men deserved hell, from which they were only saved by the righteousness of Christ being imputed to them. Whitefield did not relieve the tension by bidding Wesley be more cautious in discovering God's will by lot, and reminding him that the method had told Wesley that Whitefield ought not to go to America, where he had glamorously spread the light. Either Wesley must abandon sortilege, or suppose that God might be wrong.

The astonishing lucubrations from Whitefield, in which he begged Wesley not to dispute, and himself disputed, in which he swore he would never leave Wesley, yet left him as he did so, were private and far away; they called for no immediate action. But Wesley had to contend with a center of disaffection nearer at hand, and public. The Kingswood school for colliers' children, of which Whitefield had laid the foundation, and which Wesley had completed, was under a layman, ignorant but holy, called Cennick, who was devoted to Whitefield, and now embraced the stimulating doctrines of election and reprobation. In continual visits to Bristol, Wesley fought the heresy which at one time sadly depleted his own meetings. Cennick wrote orgulously to Whitefield: "I sit solitary, like Eli, waiting what will become of the ark." Once, he sighed, but with spiritual pride behind the sigh, the Gospel had seemed to flourish gloriously at Kingswood; but now "with universal redemption Brother Charles pleases the world. Brother John follows him in everything." The letter, with all its sting, fell into Wesley's hands; he saw he must be prompt Cennick was about to found a rival society.

Wesley therefore called a general meeting, at which he accused Cennick of plotting behind his back, and produced the letter, which Cennick unrepentantly avowed; whereupon the gathering warmed to recriminations both theological and personal. Wesley adjourned the meeting for a week — not, however, to resume the discussion: for, born to command, he was about to show that he was. After letting the Calvinists babble for awhile, he read a short statement, which concluded that he, John Wesley, with the approbation of the Kingswood faithful, declared the predestinarians expelled from the society, not for what they might think, but because of their “talebearing, backbiting, and evil-speaking, for their dissembling, lying, and slandering.”

The reasons he gave were excuse enough, but the real point at issue, however much he might glaze it over, was the doctrinal one. This was made clear enough by Whitefield, when he came over from America in the spring of 1741, to renew body to body the contest of which the long-range preliminaries had already made some noise in London. For, on February 1st, those who went to the Foundery were mysteriously given printed copies of one of Whitefield’s most controversial, we might say most insubordinate, letters to his leader. Wesley, holding out one of the papers, had explained that it was an underhand production, printed without authority, and saying: “I will do just what I believe Mr. Whitefield would do were he here,” he tore it in pieces, an example universally followed, so that in two minutes there was not one whole copy left. “Ah, poor Achitophel!” Wesley commented in his *Journal*. The evil moment was shelved, but only shelved. When Whitefield arrived indeed, he protested that he would never, never preach against the Wesleys, he would rather die; but a week later he declared with equal vehemence that he must attack the brothers. It would be sinful not to do so. Wesley did his utmost to avert the rift; he pleaded that the subject of election might not be discussed at all; he drew as close as he dared to the predestinarian point of view: but it was all in vain. Whitefield set up his own tabernacle; the Countess of Huntingdon, hitherto an ardent follower of the Wesleys, founded her “Connection,” and the Wesleys were alone.

But by now Wesley had reached the stage where a doctrinal difference, within limits, could not separate him from a man whom he liked, and who had the spirit of regeneration in him. Dissenters, even Quakers, his *bêtes noires*, were admitted to the society. He was acquiring charity. Though Whitefield for some time attacked him, he himself never riposted, and when asked why he did not answer one of his former disciple's pamphlets, he replied, "You may read Whitefield against Wesley, but you will never read Wesley against Whitefield." It was not only because he felt controversy futile, but because he saw that a public difference put a weapon in the hands of their common enemies. In two years the leaders were friends again; and as a proof of how little Wesley felt resentment, he would consult Lady Huntingdon on the publication of his *Journals*.

Then Moravianism. There, it was not divergence but likeness that was the danger, for both the Wesleys were ineluctably drawn to the Moravians, John so much so that when he again met Peter Böhler, in April 1741, he exclaimed, "I wonder how I refrain from joining these men! I long to be with them: and yet I am kept from them." Charles was even more attracted; in fact, for a short time nothing did keep him from them. John made no complaint, for Charles was always completely open with him; he merely explained why he himself could not join them, although they were in many ways exemplary. They were too mystic; they sometimes acted with guile — the thing in the world Wesley most hated — they were inclined to exalt their own Church too high; they despised, actually scoffed at, self-denial. "O my brother," he cried out, "my soul is grieved for you: fair words have stolen away your heart." John saw himself about to be completely isolated. but Charles's loyalty to his brother, his intense reverence and love for him, dragged him back from the gulf, and the two were from then on inseparably united.

But two men, or three or four, cannot officer an army, and who was to help the Wesleys? Not the scandalized pastors of the Church of England, or at most one or two of the less easily frightened souls among them. Pastors of some sort there had to be, for without them the flocks relapsed from zeal, or slipped on the uncertain paths of theology. Wesley therefore appointed, to act as expanders, a few ardent souls who loved to explain: but what is the use of explaining if you are not anxious for a result? If you

are, your explanation will insensibly merge into exhortation, and then, all unaware, you are preaching. Lay preachers! — then unknown to Mother Church. What would this lead to? The expanders could not be reined in, all the less so that they were unpolished men, unused to making nice distinctions between their thoughts and their emotions. Maxfield, for instance. During Wesley's absence at Bristol, he had taken wing, and from expounding had risen to preaching, till even Lady Huntingdon, the most exalted expert, had been deeply impressed. Wesley rushed up to London to stop this irregularity; but his mother, in her room beside the Foundery, which she occupied until her death in July 1742, uttered the words, "John, take care what you do with respect to that young man; for Thomas Maxfield is as much called to preach the Gospel as ever you were!" Wesley hesitated, heard him preach, and gave in. "It is the Lord," he declared; "let Him do what seems to Him good." He excused the step to the reluctant Charles: "I am not clear that Brother Maxfield should not expound in Greyhound Lane; nor can I as yet do without him." Nor can I as yet do without him — that was the crux. What was a mere Church ordinance compared with the work, Wesley's work — so far had he already got from his worship of every rubric he could lay his hands on. Before another four years had passed he had irrefutably convinced himself that lay preachers were scriptural, for necessity knows no law, not even the law of logic. Not all the scribes who preached had been of the tribe of Levi, he concluded; "and if we come to modern times," he added, "was Mr. Calvin ordained?" Apparently not. Further, in Germany, neophytes had to prove themselves preachers before they could be ordained at all: and even in the English Church parish clerks often read prayers, witness "that singing man" at Christ Church who murdered with his excruciating chant every lesson he read. Who had ordained him? Wesley triumphantly asked. Why, there was not even a hint of separation from the Church in appointing — no, not "appointing," "allowing" — lay preachers.

But indeed, every haphazard event, every necessity of the moment, seemed to conduce to the fated end, the founding of a separate Church, however abhorrently John Wesley might cast the idea out of his mind. The general organization itself of the society came into being through a mere practical need of money; for Wesley's appeal for funds for his Bristol buildings having failed to produce more than a fraction of the sum required,

it was suggested that every member of the society should subscribe a penny a week. A vague organization indeed; but when it was pointed out that some of the members could not afford this, one of the richer ones said that he would be responsible for eleven other brethren, and would make up from his own purse what pennies were lacking. This was a system with a form, and since it was universally adopted, the society was split up into classes of twelve, and these soon became, not only the financial unit, but the disciplinary one as well. The overseer became responsible, not only for the material harvest of his class, but also for its spiritual one. And it was Wesley, the master, who chose him, with extreme care as to his religious fitness. The class leader would make house-to-house visits, until these were found both impracticable and unsatisfactory; impracticable because mistresses did not always find it convenient for their cooks to be taken away from their work to indulge in religious exercises, unsatisfactory because if there were internecine squabbles, it was better for the parties to meet face to face. In this way was the weekly meeting established.

Thus it was easy to watch jealously over the membership of the classes, and of the society; there were frequent and salutary purgings of backsliders, of disorderly walkers, of insincere members; the precious were sifted from the vile. Further, “bands” were formed, of chosen folk, separated according to sex, to stimulate each other by the recital of their religious experiences, of their temptations, of their relapses into sin — with consequences that were not always happy, because to admit a temptation sometimes seemed to imply yielding to it, and the result was a scandal. Tickets for the society, a form of passport, were issued, signed as often as not by one of the Wesleys, renewable at stated intervals; and these, sometimes plain, sometimes adorned with texts, mottoes, pictures of cherubim blowing trumpets, or whatever design seemed at the moment suitably allegorical, served as further checks. No longer need Wesley cry, “O Discipline! Where art thou to be found?”

The next step was obvious enough — the provision of buildings, for open-air preaching is not convenient in all weathers: and besides, since many parsons refused communion to Methodists, it was necessary to have somewhere where the Wesleys could officiate. Today these buildings dot the countryside with models of inspired dreariness, but comely or not,

they marked a definite stage; for once a religious society has an organization of its own — and this was made clearer still when the first Annual Conference was called in 1744, and the society became the United Society of Methodists.— its own preachers, and its own buildings, there is little use pretending that it is still within the fold of the Established Church. Nevertheless Wesley passionately repudiated dissent: far from being Dissenters, he declared, the Methodists were the sound part of the English Church.

Methodism, then, was being put on a solid basis, but no more in an outer atmosphere of calm, than, within, deliberately and with foreknowledge of the end. All the time there was the feverish excitement of night-watches, where sometimes they would sing and shout for joy till morning, of conversions, of schisms, of hectic opposition from outside. Still people would be struck down when Wesley preached, or, seized with fits, would come to the knowledge that their sins were blotted out; still there would be startling general conversions, as when at an all-night meeting Wesley descended to find a roomful of people groaning and crying out at the strength of the Lord, expelling their demons, and coming to the birth; still there were seceders to the Calvinists and to the Moravians, and occasional drastic purgings of the classes or the bands. Soon also the bitter paper attacks began to give place to physical violence. There had, indeed, in the early Bristol days been noisy interruptions, but the faithful had been able to sing louder than the intruding roughs had bawled; now, however, in London and elsewhere, the opposers became more brutal, and began to wrestle, to throw wildfire and crackers, to use cudgels, to hurl mud and stones; while in Wales, Seward, the first Methodist martyr, was killed with bludgeons. Wesley warmed to the fight, became more absorbed in the glorious work, was ever more active for every moment of his eighteen-hour day, feeling that ten minutes once lost were lost for ever, preaching, privately exhorting, making raids, as Charles also did, into Wales and into Cornwall, editing works of edification, to compose *The Christian Library* (once getting into trouble over copyright), and printing his own sermons, hymns, journals. Even a severe fever hardly checked him in his course, that of the born organizer who was also a born evangelist; it was indeed the evangelist in him that brought the organizer into play.

But what, precisely, was his mission? To found a new Church? God forbid! To rescue the vast mass of the poor from a state of hopelessness, accomplishing, in fact, a social reform of unlimited dimensions? No. To revivify a drowsy Church then? If asked, he would probably have answered that he was merely carrying out his duties as a priest of the Establishment. What he was doing primarily was to satisfy his nature by engaging in works justified by faith, for if works without faith are meaningless, even impious, when grace is present they are the flower of faith. But apart from any conscious reasoning, almost one might say, unaware of what he was after, he was really impelled by an uncontrollable intent to impart the revelation that had been renewed in him. Woe unto all possessors of the truth who do not tell it! His faith before his conversion had been a reasoned approval, however hard to give, of God and his decrees; now it was a surrender, a surrender which made it urgent for him, not to save his own soul, but those of others. Not that he had yielded up reason — that philosophy of his was never purged away — and when an opponent stated that it was a fundamental principle in the Methodist school that all who came into it must renounce their reason, he retorted sweepingly, “Sir, are you awake? Unless you are talking in your sleep, how can you utter so gross an untruth? It is a fundamental principle with us that to renounce reason is to renounce religion: that religion and reason go hand in hand, and that all irrational religion is false religion.”

Yet, though he refrained from saying so, the reason he meant was not that to be found in books, nor, exactly, the unaided reason of the mind. What had made his “rational religion” significant to him, and precious, what indeed had been essential to his receiving it, had been a personal contact, a living connection — it was this that Peter Böhler had been to him — as though the torch must be passed on from hand to hand, in an actual apostolic succession. The torch! Wesley thought in terms of flame, of fire, heavenly fire, not that of hell, though he always felt that his rescue at the age of six from the blazing Epworth parsonage was symbolic of his being a brand plucked from the burning. Flame and fire were the words that came to his lips whenever he wanted to image the inner truth, the divine reality. Had not his heart been “strangely warmed” at his conversion? “There are twelve of you,” he told the Methodists of Carlisle, “and all professing to have hearts on fire with the love of God.” At Woodhouse, when he

preached, “a flame,” he said, “is suddenly broken out.” Fire, the pure devouring element: Christ had said He came “to throw fire upon the earth.” And, ever since Charles had written in a hymn:

*Oh that in me the sacred fire
Might now begin to glow,*

Wesley had loved to chant it as he rode about the country on his endless itinerancy; “Spirit of burning, come!” he would sing; “Refining fire go through my heart!” And at the end, when very old, he would still recur to the idea of the torch, saying — again the words are his brother’s:

*Jesus, confirm my heart’s desire
To work, and speak, and think for Thee,
Still let me guard the holy fire,
And still stir up Thy gift in me.*

Guarding the holy fire; that was what he was doing.* He was himself a flame going up and down the land, lighting candles such as, by God’s grace, would never be put out; and as one reads the colossal *Journal* one gets the impression of this flame, never waning, never smoky, darting from point to point, lighting up the whole kingdom, till at last in due course it burnt out the body it inhabited.

* This, from Eayrs’s *Wesley*, requires separate acknowledgment.

2

The Glorious Battle

(1744-1769)

A NOBLE monotony! Not to the man who lived those fifty years of whirling incident, of hard work, of tense excitement and danger. He flashed up, down, and across the three kingdoms, organizing, purging, preaching, every year riding at least four thousand five hundred miles, undaunted by weather, uncowed by mobs, indefatigably scheming, and bringing not only hope and happiness to degraded thousands, but clothes, food, health. Not alone, however; for besides one or another companion that he took with him, he felt that an angel was ever by his side, while again and again it was clear that a special dispensation was granted him. Storms would obscure the landscape all around him when on the road, but where he travelled it was fine; the ships on either side of him when he went to Ireland (which he did twenty-one times) might lie becalmed, but his own was bowled along by a spanking breeze. If he was so placed at a preaching that the sun dazzled him, God would gently interpose a cloud, or if He did not, would give his eyes strength to withstand the glare. Calling on Christ would not only instantaneously drive away lingering fevers, but would also cure persistent lameness in his horse. “Cannot God heal either man or beast, by any means, or without any?” Wesley asked. It was clear that He could, and did. “What I aver here is the naked fact,” Wesley would write in recording some such incident; “Let every man account for it as he sees good.” On the other hand, alas, Satan was sometimes dominant; and then he would stir up contrary winds, though it was not always certain that these should not be ascribed to God wishing Wesley to stay a little longer in a place to do more good; and on one occasion the Prince of Darkness inspired Wesley’s horse with so stubborn a reluctance to leave his stable that it was with great difficulty that he was got on to the road, after much jibbing and backing into gates. Influences not of the earth were constantly operating — had Wesley not known this ever since the days of Old Jeffrey? — even to the

point of bringing back to life men who were virtually dead. “It is not the work of man that hath lately appeared,” Wesley declared; “all who calmly observe it must say: ‘This is the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.’”

More marvelous, however, in eyes such as ours, removed from these manifestations, is Wesley’s own gallant hardihood. If ever a spirit refused to be shackled by that inert thing the flesh, it was that which drove, or carried, John Wesley’s body over hundreds of thousands of miles, through storms at sea, through blizzards on land, torrents in rivers, and which in 1753 caused him to survive, unimpaired, an attack of consumption so severe that, to prevent, as he said, “wild panegyric,” he composed his own epitaph. Accidents, what did they matter? And since he used to read as he rode, his reins slack on his horse’s neck, over the roughest of paths and fells, tumbles were frequent enough: but then, treacle and brown paper were easily got, and they provided a sovran cure for bruises. If inhospitably treated, as he was at first in Cornwall, he could feed on blackberries; if there was no bed to lie on, well, he would lie on boards. Once, after about three weeks of such sleeping, he turned round in the night to his companion, and clapping him on the side, said: “Brother Nelson, let us be of good cheer; I have one whole side yet, for the skin is off but one side.” Rain, snow, roads slippery with ice, these were nothing to him. From his youth he had inured himself to weather, wearing both by day and by night as few clothes as was possible, and he had proved his toughness in Georgia. Besides, what he willed, he willed.

Extract from the “Journal,” February 1747.

“*Sunday*, 15th. I was very weak and faint; but on *Monday* the 16th I rose soon after three, lively and strong.... The wind was turned full north, and blew so exceedingly hard and keen that when we came to Hatfield neither my companions nor I had much use of our hands or feet. After resting an hour, we bore up again, through the wind and snow which drove full in our faces. But this was only a squall. In Baldock Field the storm began in earnest. The large hail drove so vehemently in our faces that we could not see, nor hardly breathe. However, before two o’clock we reached Baldock,

where one met and conducted us safe to Potton. About six I preached to a serious congregation.

“Tuesday, 17th. We set out as soon as it was well light; but it was really hard work to get forward, for the frost would not well bear or break; and the untracked snow covering all the roads, we had much ado to keep our horses on their feet. Meantime the wind rose higher and higher, till it was ready to overturn both man and beast. However, after a short bait at Buckden, we pushed on, and were met in the middle of an open field with so violent a storm of rain and hail as we had not yet had before. It drove through our coats, great and small, boots and everything, and yet froze as it fell, even upon our eyebrows, so that we had scarce either strength or motion left when we came to our inn at Stilton.

“We now gave up hopes of reaching Grantham, the snow falling faster and faster. However, we took advantage of a fair blast to set out, and made the best of our way to Stamford Heath. But here a new difficulty arose, from the snow lying in large drifts. Sometimes horse and man were wellnigh swallowed up. Yet in less than an hour we were brought safe to Stamford. Being willing to get as far as we could, we made but a short stop here, and about sunset came, cold and weary, to a little town called Brig Casterton.

“Wednesday, 18th. Our servant came up and said: ‘Sir, there is no traveling today. Such a quantity of snow has fallen in the night that the roads are quite filled up.’ I told him: ‘At least we can walk twenty miles a day, with our horses in our hands.’ So in the name of God we set out. The north-east wind was piercing as a sword, and had driven the snow into such uneven heaps that the main road was unpassable. However, we kept on, afoot or on horseback, till we came to the White Lion at Grantham.

“Some from Grimsby had appointed to meet us here, but not hearing anything of them... after an hour’s rest we set out straight for Epworth.”

That was stout enough work in all conscience; but what strikes us with still more amazement and admiration is Wesley’s behavior when assaulted by mobs, his astounding escapes, his utterly fearless outfacing of human brute-beasts in the riots which distinguished the Methodist crusade.

Wesley never flinched or quailed; not once would he hide or slink away. If infuriated gangs of hulking ruffians murderously battered down doors to get at him, he would face them serenely, and so terrific was the spell he cast, that when this man, less than five foot six inches tall, looked the burliest drunken hero in the eye, it was the latter who recoiled. Or Wesley would start talking in his calm voice against a howling fury, and gradually the tumult would subside; and often the rabble that had come to injure him would disperse blessing him. If he had to walk through a ravening mob, he would uncover his head so that they might see his face, and then the surging mass would give way before him. His favorite method was to go up to the ringleader and take him by the hand; and then, time and again, the man who had come to incite others to homicidal wrath would become his protector. It seemed as though his life were charmed. Although occasionally he would be struck to the ground, or be hit by stones, times without number he emerged unharmed when missiles were hurled at him, blows aimed at him, walls on which he stood to preach pushed down from under him. He tells as an instance of "how God overrules even the minutes circumstances," that when preaching at the Cross at Bolton, "one man was bawling at my ear, when a stone struck him on the chest, and he was still. A second was forcing his way down to me, till another stone hit him in the forehead: it bounded back, the blood ran down, and he came no farther. A third, being got close to me, stretched out his hand, and in the instant a sharp stone came upon the joints of his fingers. He shook his hand and was very quiet till I had concluded my discourse and went away." Again and again mud and stones were thrown into his coach when driving away from meetings, but he was always miraculously preserved, if once not so miraculously owing to the protection afforded by a very large lady who sat in his lap to shield him.

The most amazing example was at Wednesbury. He was preaching there one afternoon, when a mob from Darlaston assailed the house. Dispersed once by prayer, the rioters came back at about five, and cried: "Bring out the minister; we will have the minister." Two or three of the ringleaders, brought into the house, and ready to swallow the ground with rage, were turned from lions into lambs after a few words with Wesley, who then went out to address the mob. Standing up on a chair, he asked: "What do you want with me?" "We want you to go with us to the Justice." "With all

my heart.” The mob cried out with might and main: “The gentleman is an honest gentleman, and we will spill our blood in his defense.” Nevertheless they insisted on dragging him that night to the Justice, two miles through pouring rain. The magistrate, however, was wary. “What have I to do with Mr. Wesley?” he asked. “Go and carry him back again.” The silly mob then decided to go to another Justice at Walsall, where they arrived at seven, to be met with the answer that the magistrate was in bed. Well, there was nothing for it but to go back, and fifty or so undertook to convey Wesley home. But just then a huge rush of excited Walsall men poured in like a flood, and overwhelmed the Darlaston convoy, battering them hideously. Wesley tried to speak, but “the noise on every side was like the roaring of the sea.” When he could make himself heard in the din, the mob-leader turned and said: “Sir, I will spend my life for you; follow me, and not one soul here shall touch a hair of your head.” Vain boast. For three mortal hours the possessed rabble impelled Wesley up and down the streets, and across the river, shouting “Knock his brains out! Down with him! Kill him at once! Drown him! Hang him on the next tree!” and even “Crucify him!” Somehow he survived with no further damage than a flap of his waistcoat being torn off, mercifully not the one with papers and money in it. When he tried to slip in to the door of a house that he saw stand open, they dragged him out by the hair. He was hit twice, but both blows were as nothing, “for though one man struck me on the breast with all his might, and the other on the mouth with such a force that the blood gushed out immediately, I felt no more pain from either of the blows than if they had touched me with a straw.” Going down a slippery hill, many tried to push him over, but he knew that if he fell he would never get up again, so he did not even stumble. Angels, Charles recorded, held him up. A lusty man behind him struck at him several times with an oak cudgel, a knock from which would have meant death, but every time the blow was turned aside; how, Wesley did not know. Another man came rushing at him through the press, and raising his arm to strike, suddenly let it drop gently, and stroked Wesley’s head, saying: “What soft hair he has!” The scene is typical of many which went on through years, down to the final act of the magistrates who had refused to see Wesley: they issued a warrant for his arrest on the charge of raising routs and riots!

And why, we ask, all this violence? This mobfury? It seems inexplicable till we remember that the eighteenth century populace dearly loved a riot. Anything was an excuse for this diversion — the Gin Act, an alteration at Drury Lane, Wilkes's Westminster elections — the frenzy culminating in the supreme orgy of the Gordon Riots, which nearly burnt London for a second time. But why the Methodist riots especially? That is a question that needs several answers. First, men are apt to resent being told they are sinful; they revolt against the idea of having to make an effort to be saved; and then, if one or two of a family of sinners repent, life becomes extremely uncomfortable for the rest. Why should anyone interfere with their cock-fighting, their drinking, their lust? This sort of thing must be put a stop to. Other incitements, happily invented, were not lacking. Wesley was in Spanish pay, plotting for the invasion of England; he was one of the Pretender's agents, for he was certainly a Papist in disguise; he had been punished for illegally selling gin; he had tried to hang himself, but had been cut down at the last moment. Of course such a mad dog must be hunted! And then, a public speaker is always fair game, or seems so to half-witted elements, and the Methodists deliberately went amongst the most degraded of the people. Go not only to those who need you, Wesley told his helpers, but to those who need you most. Again, the mob was egged on by the self-styled gentlemen, who were very well content with their placid religion, and who, not without just cause, dreaded enthusiasm, knowing well from the history of the last century what it might lead to. And why disturb the submerged tenth in this way? Wesley felt instinctively that the educated Christians were his worst enemies, with their indifference (worst of insults), their security in their faith, and it was for them that he reserved his sermons on hell-fire and the wrath to come, preaching the love of God to the poor. As for the magistrates, apart from sharing the feelings of their class, they could not help seeing that though the Methodists might not incite to riot, it was on account of them that riots took place. And besides, some of Wesley's preachers were crude men, arrogantly making much of their own sanctity, without the innate good manners of the Wesleys themselves; they did undoubtedly stir up passions unnecessarily. Some, such as Nelson, best of men and most devoted of followers, were pressed into military service, and attempts were made to take Wesley himself; but the man who twice tried to do so grew so ashamed of his task that he let

Wesley depart quietly. But from day to day no Methodist preacher knew what might be in store for him.

But if it was Wesley's magnetism, his personal charm, his apparent humility that saved him, it was his unswerving determination, his almost ferocious will-power, that enabled him to carry out the work, with its complicated structure, its wheels within wheels of which he was in complete and sole control, and its ever-growing finance. His will! Even strangers grew aware of that. One day he found himself riding with a serious man; naturally they spoke of religion, and as naturally disagreed, till finally the stranger, who got warmer and warmer, told Wesley he was rotten at heart, and supposed that he must be one of John Wesley's followers. When he discovered whom he was talking to, he was filled with horror, as though he had met the Devil, and spurred his horse on to get away. "But," Wesley relates, "being the better mounted of the two, I kept close to his side, and endeavored to show him his heart until we came into the street of Northampton." Only *force majeure* could prevent Wesley talking, as when on the day of the snowstorm we have seen him battle with, he fell in with a clergyman; but alas, toothache quite stopped his mouth. Those who had business dealings with him soon found what sort of man they had to do with. "Sir," he wrote to a landowner at Newcastle, "I am surprised. You give it under your hand that you will put me in possession of a piece of ground, specified in an article between us, in fifteen days time. Three months have passed, and that article is not fulfilled. And now you say you can't conceive what I mean by troubling you. I mean to have that article fulfilled. I think my meaning is very plain. I am, Sir, Your humble servant." He got the piece of ground.

The building, the Orphan House, for which he wanted the land, was one of the corner-stones of his structure, the apex of a triangle of which London and Bristol were the base points. He had first gone to Newcastle at the suggestion of Lady Huntingdon, the St. Theresa of the Methodists, as Horace Walpole called her. Immediately his heart went out to the "wild, staring, loving society," for it was always enlarged towards the desperately poor, even if in the north he sometimes had to speak "strong, rough words." The land, however, was only a beginning; how put up a building which would cost seven hundred pounds? He had not a penny, he

struggled along as best he could himself, and there was nothing for it but to build on in faith. Luckily it had got about that he was rich, and so the Orphan House went up on his credit and trifling subscriptions from the society. Eventually he did become rich, “unawares” as he said, by the sale of his books; but at this early time it really seemed that it was only by the grace of God that the building went up at all.

Usually the societies met in private houses, or rented buildings, which were occupied by the lay preachers, who now formed a considerable band. They were, it need hardly be said, chosen by Wesley himself, who exacted from them promises of unquestioning obedience; they were to go where he wanted them to, and when he wanted; he might dismiss them when he wished. No preacher was allowed to remain long in the same circuit — they were all itinerant preachers within that circuit, as the Wesleys were over the whole country — for a man would be apt to lose his fire, would go dead, if there were not something new constantly to be dared and done. And the excitement must never be allowed to cool to dimness, for the Methodist movement fed on excitement: the singing, the night watches, the spectacular conversions, trances, demoniac possessions, the thrice-yearly love-feasts (though materially of only cake and water), the fervid emotional appeal and the searching examinations, all contributed to keep the movement at an exalted tension. Wesley deliberately whipped it up in others, as he did in himself by every day renewing his experience of miraculous aid. It is not surprising that there were frequent fallings away, purgings by fifties and hundreds; even his preachers could not all maintain themselves on the dizzy peaks, and retired into private life. It really needed the continual impregnation by Wesley himself to keep the movement quick, whence his extreme jealousy to keep all the appointments in his own hands, his great reluctance to hand over buildings to trustees, his insistence that even when given up, the right to name preachers to chapels and masters to schools should be vested in himself and his brother during their lifetime. Trustees! If they appointed preachers, they would take care that none should preach against their patrons. The rule was peremptory: everybody should be responsible to Wesley; he was the fountain head, the oracle, the Pythoness herself. Ambition? Not quite, at least not in the ordinary sense; but the passion of the organizer, the will to power of a man determined to carry out some

special work, the indestructible, burning need to rule. He had made this thing; he and no one else could be suffered to touch it.

And then, 1748, across these scenes of effort and strife, of dust and turmoil, of ceaseless journeyings, amid the tense concentration of constructive work, there floated into Wesley's vision the beckoning figure of Grace Murray, promising succour. She was a charming widow of thirty-two (she had recently refused an offer of marriage), and though she had risen to emotional heights and taken downward plunges, had been converted and counter converted, she was now reconverted and happily in part-charge of the Orphan House at Newcastle; and she was so refreshing as a nurse, that if the itinerant preachers fell sick, they did so more often at Newcastle than anywhere else. Wesley himself was slightly ill there in this year and, considering his nurse —so good a worker, so cheerful, so neat — he thought that she would be the very wife for him: he did not know that she was almost engaged to one of his preachers called Bennet. He proposed, and she, dazzled at the prospect of marrying the man who was by far the greatest in her sphere, and in apprehension so like a God, blurted out that "it was too great a blessing," and that "she couldn't tell how to believe it." Then, for eighteen months, there was played out the most amazing and wryly farcical series of scenes. First Mrs. Murray said that she could not bear the idea of ever being parted from Wesley; in less than a month she protested that Bennet was her only love. Sometimes she traveled with one, and sometimes with the other; then for some time Wesley thought she was engaged to him, and then it would appear that she was promised to Bennet, who for his part did not seem to know which of them she was engaged to. In the summer of 1749 indeed, in Dublin, she went through a contract of marriage *de praesenti* with Wesley; but in September, at Epworth, she sobbingly agreed, before Wesley, to marry Bennet, who claimed her as his by right; yet, by the end of the month Wesley had once more made a *de praesenti* contract with her at Whitehaven, after he had written a reproachful letter to Bennet, in which he accused him of trying to snatch the widow from him — "such a person as I had sought in vain for many years, and then determined never to part with." This seemed to settle the question; the marriage would take place in a few days. But then, suddenly, a fiercely angry, red-hot whirlwind blustered up from the south — Charles Wesley. He stormed and fumed at

his brother. If this marriage took place the whole of Methodism would be wrecked; the woman was of no standing, she was engaged to Bennet, Wesley would be looked upon as a seducer. Since Wesley was immovable, Charles, still raging, rushed off to meet the vacillating woman at Hindley Hill. He flung himself at her and embracing her cried, "Grace Murray, you have broke my heart," and then, by sheer impetuosity, he carried her off to Newcastle, summoned Whitefield, summoned Bennet, hurled the latter and Mrs. Murray through the marriage ceremony and went back to John. "I renounce all intercourse with you," he shouted, "but what I would have with a heathen man or a publican." He was beside himself.

Wesley had been in agony for some days, but calm and resigned, in spite of nights restless with fever: he had known what was happening, the desire of his eyes was being taken from him at a stroke. And here was Charles, the devoted, beloved brother, reviling him. But he felt numbed; "it was only adding a drop of water to a drowning man," his capacity for emotion was exhausted. Whitefield prayed, Nelson prayed, they both burst into tears, the room was full of anguish — and then, infinitely relieving, Wesley's abounding charity overcame everything, and he and his brother fell speechless on each other's necks. John Bennet came in; neither of them could speak; they kissed each other and wept.... And the next day Wesley preached at five in the morning as usual.

But marriage called to him; he wanted to get married. For years he had declared against it for priests, in Georgia he had renounced it, at conferences he had intimated that preachers should be as eunuchs for the Lord's sake — even if he had for a long time sought in vain for such a helpmeet as Grace Murray. But now he was sure that he would be more useful married, that God wanted him to get married; he had felt this order with especial clearness when looking at Grace Murray: and in 1751 he felt it again when looking at Mrs. Vazeille, a widow of forty, staid, well-ordered, and of a good disposition. And why should he not marry? Charles had married in 1748, and Whitefield in 1741 — though indeed the latter had declared when proposing that he was "free from the foolish passion that the world calls love" — and it had made no difference to their ministrations. So, on the understanding that he would preach not one sermon the fewer, nor travel one mile the less, he married Mrs. Vazeille —

but this time he did not tell Charles about it; indeed his brother was one of the last to hear of the sad event. And alas, the event did prove sad: for twenty years Mrs. Wesley, who appears to have verged on dementia, harried the life out of her husband. At first she did her best, but she could not bear the constant traveling, the hideous discomfort, the occasional mobbing, and besides, she was sea-sick when they went to Ireland. But why, it may be asked, need she cling to him so burr-like? Ah, Wesley was so inordinately attractive to women! And, it must be admitted in extenuation of his wife's behavior, that he wrote incredibly foolish letters full of warmth — purely Christian warmth, no doubt, but it is difficult to distinguish — to many of his tenderer converts. His wife became insanely jealous; she watched all his goings out and his comings in, she rifled his pockets, broke open the drawers of his desk, accused him of making Charles's wife his mistress, would travel a hundred miles to see who was sharing his coach with him, and even, it was reported, pulled him about by his graying hair. "My brother," Charles wrote pungently, "has married a ferret," a phrase echoed by Berridge of Everton. John bore it all with exemplary patience, was unfailing in his care for her; but even he sometimes complained — to one of his female penitents moreover — that he could not bear "the being continually watched over for evil, the having every word I spoke, every action I did, small and great, watched over with no friendly eye; the hearing of a thousand little, but unkind reflections in return for the kindest words I could advise." When she left him in 1771, never to return she said (not quite accurately), he wrote: *Non eam reliqui, non dimisi: non revocabo*. No, he would not call her back. And after all, he decided, God had provided such a wife out of His wisdom: for since the temptations of a calm hearth had not been offered him, he had not been interfered with in his divine calling: he had not, as could be seen, preached one sermon the fewer, nor traveled one mile the less.

But whatever troubles and trials there might be in his public or in his private life, there were two offshoots of his work which gave him great joy. The first was his dispensary, which he opened in 1746 for the poor of London. For many years he had "made anatomy and physic the diversion of his leisure hours," and now, taking an apothecary as assistant, he set about putting the means of health at the disposal of the poor, even prescribing for simple ailments, amid the splutterings of the outraged

Faculty. He did not care. Must a man in imminent danger of death wait for Dr. Mead to come in his chariot — and die before he came? “And when the doctor was come, where was his fee? What! He cannot live upon nothing! So, instead of an orderly cure, the patient dies!” The dispensary proved an enormous success, of continual benefit to the poverty-stricken, and another one was opened at Bristol. Further, in 1748, to reach those in out of the way places, he wrote a little book of Medicine, *Primitive Physic, or An Easy and natural Method of Curing Most Diseases*, admirable as far as general principles go (it is excellent that people should shave and wash their feet frequently), but perhaps a little wild in details. It might, for instance, be inadvisable to swallow three pounds of quicksilver ounce by ounce as a cure for twisted guts; and whether to wear leaves of celandine under and upon the feet will cure jaundice, is still, we may think, very conjectural. However, the booklet, easily slipped into the pocket, was immensely popular, reaching its twenty-first edition in 1785; and lest it should be objected that a man concerned with spiritual things should let the bodily ones alone, the epigraph it bore was *Homo sum; human nihil a me alienum puto*. Two hundred and eighty-eight ailments are treated of, from infantile rickets to old age (though death is the only certain cure for that), running through serious diseases such as cancer, cholera morbus, and consumption, to such comparatively trivial ones as baldness, canine hunger, and stings: its perusal will teach you how to cure madness, or how to destroy fleas and bugs. Some of the eight hundred and twenty-four remedies involve the most enticing concoctions of herbs and drugs, but Wesley pinned his faith most to cold baths, and electricity, which he regarded as a species of fire. The handy little *vade mecum* of medicine might be obtained at any of his chapels.

Of less immediate success was the school at Kingswood which Wesley opened in 1748 to train up preachers, and which is not to be confused with the school for colliers' children. In the first few years the purgings of the unworthy had to be so frequent and so wholesale, that the numbers dwindled alarmingly, a result all the more disappointing in that everything was done to make the boys wholly perfect, by molding them in their impressionable years, none being admitted after twelve years old. They got up at five, spent two hours in prayer, were sparingly fed, were every minute kept under the eye of a master, were put through a strenuous

course of learning such as would not disgrace the Sorbonne, and were never on any account allowed to play, or, of course, allowed to be idle for a second. As a relaxation, however, they were occasionally permitted to see a corpse. At last, in 1768, Wesley had his reward. “God,” one of the masters wrote him, “broke in upon our boys in a surprising manner... the power of God came upon them, even like a mighty rushing wind, which made them cry aloud for mercy.... While I am writing, the cries of the boys, from their several apartments, are sounding in my ears.” Nor did it stop, for every hour more children — their ages ran from eight to fourteen — found peace, for they had been lying at the pool waiting to be put in! The house rang with praise, to the high gratification of all who heard, or heard of it. Could there be a clearer justification of Wesley’s educational system? No wonder he despised Rousseau’s *Émile*! Some might avert their eyes from a painful scene of juvenile hysteria, but Wesley felt it as a return for all his struggles as the founder of a school, as direct evidence of the approval of God, and as a triumph for methodic discipline.

Discipline! The salt of religion: it sometimes appeared, indeed, that discipline was religion. At all events without it religion was like wine which lacked a vessel; spilt on the ground it became mysticism, enthusiasm, or sank dully out of sight. From being “a politician of God,” Wesley, himself so disobedient, so defiant of the Church while professing humility, seemed at times to become the mere drill-sergeant, as when he expelled two hundred of his Norwich members for slackness in attending class meetings. Discipline, in short, meant doing, and saying, exactly as Wesley ordered. It is not surprising that sometimes there were revolts.

That one or two people should break away was natural; Bennet’s defection, and his becoming an anti-Wesley agitator eight months after his marriage with Grace Murray, had nothing significant in it. But the case of Maxfield was different. A man of no education, he had, we remember, been one of Wesley’s first lay preachers. Ordained later as a priest of the Church of England by the Bishop of Londonderry, “to assist that good man [Wesley] that he may not work himself to death,” he had flourished exceedingly, and had married a rich wife. Feeling the importance of his mission, in 1762 he began to think that he might improve on the religion he had preached so long, especially on Wesley’s doctrine of Perfection. The

theological point is a little confusing to the layman, and Wesley's earlier utterances, not to mention Charles's poems, may easily lead one astray; but the issue seems to have been that whereas Wesley's Perfection meant a whole-hearted love of God and one's neighbor, which, by the constant help of Christ, kept ever-present sin in abeyance, for Maxfield Perfection meant that sin had been killed at the root; it was the difference between Perfection in Christ (the Arminian position) and Perfection outside Christ. Those who had attained the latter, as Maxfield had, were on a level with the angels, they needed no preachings, no sacraments, and they were beyond learning anything except from those equally sinless. Thus Wesley, who had no illusions about sin, was not fit to teach them. Then, to increase the ardour, Maxfield was joined by an ex-corporal of the Guards, named Bell, who, discovering from Revelation that he and his group would never die, announced that the end of the world would come fairly soon, in fact on February 28th, 1763. What Wesley objected to most, however, was not only these heresies and absurdities, and the excessive addiction of their people to meetings, but the behavior of these in chapel, their "irreverent expressions in prayer; their extolling themselves rather than God, and telling Him what they were, not what they wanted; their using poor, flat, bald hymns; their never kneeling at prayer, and using postures and gestures highly indecent." Besides, they had little love to their brethren, no meekness, and they hated being contradicted. Worst of all, the preachers screamed, making what they said in their sermons unintelligible, and Wesley hated screaming. Their prophecies and ravings made some public stir and caused reflections to be made on Methodism; and while Wesley, as he said, gladly suffered the opprobrium of Christ, he had no mind to suffer that of enthusiasm. He was surprisingly patient with Maxfield, while the latter, on the other hand, intrigued against him, and invented improbable stories. Wesley bore certain resignations unperturbed, and even the declaration of some of the society that they would not be browbeat any more by him; but in the end a break was forced on him, and Maxfield left the society, taking some two hundred members with him. His explanation of the schism was that Wesley had said to him: "Dear Tommy, I will tell the people you are the greatest Gospel preacher in England, and you shall tell them I am the greatest," and that on his refusal Wesley had expelled him. Such was the ingenuity of Thomas Maxfield.

The break, however, was serious in that it deprived Wesley of one of the very few of his people who could administer the Sacrament. Whitefield, though Wesley in a sense worked with him as being a laborer in the same field, was not of his society; Charles had practically retired and lived at Bristol; the few clergymen who were Methodists, such as “Mad” Grimshaw, Berridge of Everton, who was hardly less mad, and Fletcher of Madeley, were tied to their country cures. What was to be done? No English bishop would ordain Methodists. Luckily, just at the right moment, towards the end of the year there appeared in London the incongruous figure of Erasmus, a Greek bishop. Any bishop would do for Wesley, as long as he was a real bishop. But was he? Wesley made careful inquiries. Yes, Erasmus was a *bona fide* bishop — of Arcadia; of Arcadia in Crete, however. Wesley approached him: would he “set apart” Mr. Jones? He would, and did. But the matter did not rest there, in spite of Charles’s vehement protests. For when other lay preachers saw Jones exalted, they wanted to know why they also should not wear white bands, why they also, who performed so many priestly duties, should not share the privilege, for which they had long been pining, of administering the Lord’s Supper? The complaisant Bishop of Arcadia gratified a number of them, but when some of them demanded to be consecrated bishops, he said he could not go as far as that. The experiment, however, was not altogether successful. Jones left the society, another was stopped from performing priestly functions, and a third made a schism in Sheffield. Nevertheless it was a finger post which showed the way (horrible thought!) to separation from the Church of England which Wesley loved.

3

The End Crowns All

(1770—1791)

“I CAN hardly believe,” Wesley wrote on June 28th (N.S.), 1770, “that I am this day entered into the sixty-eighth year of my age. How marvelous are the ways of God!... I am now healthier than I was forty years ago. This hath God wrought!” He seemed, indeed, to have eternal youth; and though at the insistence of friends he had exchanged his horse for a carriage, he could still be seen, year in, year out, “hurrying on, still hurrying, hurrying onward,” plying his anxious visitation throughout the country, the only active survivor of the Holy Club.

He was not much given to looking back, the present was enough for him, the future would take care of itself; but still, if he wished, he might glance behind to forty years of pilgrimage. The Holy Club, Varanese, Aspasia; Georgia and Sophy Hopkey — years of struggle against something resistant even to his will; and then Peter Böhler, and his conversion, followed by thirty years of the evangelical revival which had flowered ever since he became a “Gospel preacher.” There had been stirring scenes, glorious manifestations of God’s power; and even now, occasionally, repentant sinners would roar aloud or be struck to the ground when they heard him. It was a long time since that glorious triumph in 1742, when, forbidden by the new Rector of Epworth to preach from the pulpit, he had held forth in the evenings, standing on his father’s tombstone, to congregations larger than had ever filled the church, and so movingly that many had dropped down as dead; when his brother-in-law, Whitelambe, incumbent of Wroote, had told him that his presence inspired awe. But the work had gone on, steadily increasing; the flame had spread over the whole country; thousands of the most degraded people had been rescued from misery and, better still, had got rid of the terror of death. The organization had grown, till now he had a hundred and twenty-three preachers serving fifty circuits, alive with nearly thirty thousand members of the society. If

acrid hostility spat as formidably as ever in papers and in pamphlets, the violence of mobs had largely died down; magistrates were becoming more reasonable, people in general less averse to the movement. It was being accepted. And all the reins were firmly in his own hand — the preachers, the stewards of the funds, the trustees of the buildings, the class leaders: there was no item he did not know, no thread he did not direct. Even the professional musicians had been brought to heel when they had wanted to improve his hymn tunes in preparing them for the press: the tunes should be pricked as his people sang them, he insisted, effectively. His will! it was adamant still, his power unassailable, his energy unchecked by any brake. There was no diminution in his outpourings of sermons, letters, controversial pamphlets; he still kept his diary, published his *Journal*, edited the *Christian Library* and through it all allowed no relaxation whatever in his incessant traveling. “I am still a wonder to myself. My voice and strength are the same as at nine and twenty.” Such was the jotting as he entered his sixty-ninth year.

There was need for him yet as the inviolable guardian of the holy fire, for in 1771 the Calvinists once more tried to undermine him. Whitefield was dead; his plump figure, shaken by asthma, had worn itself out as he had wished it should: but he had left behind him a college at Trevacca in Wales, a seminary largely financed by Lady Huntingdon, impetuous, independent, proud. Wesley had preached there, and Fletcher of Madeley was the visiting superintendent. Now, however, released from the authority of its founder, its fledgling prophets wished to shake themselves altogether free of Wesley and his benign doctrine. Their opportunity arose when, in 1770, Wesley, himself liberated, since Whitefield was dead, from any restraint in openly expressing his sense of predestination, directed his Conference to declare in its minutes that Methodism had of late steered much too close to Calvinism. Lady Huntingdon took violent umbrage, and issued an edict to her rejoicing college that all must renounce these minutes or leave the seminary for ever — which Fletcher promptly did. The jubilant youths of Trevacca, styled by Wesley “pert, ignorant young men, vulgarly called students,” swelled with self — conceit, decided to attack Wesley at the Bristol Conference of 1771. Their leader, the Hon. Walter Shirley (of Lady Huntingdon’s family), shot out an encyclical calling upon all men of his own sound faith to rally at Bristol for the Conference: they would gather

together in their hordes, they would march upon the stronghold, they would force Wesley to expunge the obnoxious minutes. Alas, only about ten people answered this stirring trumpet-call, and Shirley found himself reduced to crawling humbly to Wesley, saying that he had not meant this and had not meant that, and would Wesley receive a deputation to discuss the question? Patient as ever (he could afford to be), Wesley agreed, and a satisfactory document was signed to pour balm on the theological sore: but oddly enough, when this healing paper is examined, it is seen to contain nothing about election, but to deal entirely with refutation of the doctrine of justification by works! The real battle took place outside. Calvinists flew to the rescue, championed by the Rev. Augustus Toplady, known to fame as the author of "Rock of Ages," who, by pamphlet after pamphlet of adept scurrility, of theological Billingsgate, and accusations of bad faith, drew from Wesley the retort that he did not bandy words with chimney-sweeps, those notoriously dirty persons. The controversy was, however, raised to a dignified level by Fletcher, in his *Checks to Antinomianism*, which remains the classic on the subject. As far as Wesley was concerned, the result was the utter severance from Lady Huntingdon's Connection, and the complete washing of Wesleyan Methodism from the least taint of the deadly doctrine of reprobation.

This attack, however, was from the outside and so feeble that it could never have seriously injured Methodism. Far more grave was the threat to Wesley's domination which arose within the society in 1779, in the form of restiveness among the lay preachers. Charles was really at the bottom of it. As he got older and less powerful in the ministry, he became bitterly suspicious of his lay coadjutors. He had never liked them. They were uneducated, arrogant; they usurped functions they had no right to; and if John did not take great care, they would drive him, or carry him, out of the fold. "The preachers do not love the Church of England. When we are gone, a separation is inevitable." They, on their part, had no liking for Charles. In 1768 he had come to live in London, and now that the new chapel had been built in the City Road and was ousting the Foundery as the center of Methodism, he insisted on preaching there twice every Sunday, to the exclusion, the excluded ones considered, of better men than himself. And besides not being so fiery in preaching as they were, he was most lamentably allowing his sons to take up careers as musicians (Charles

was sure that this was God's will, but John knew better), which seemed to involve giving concerts in his house to the fashionable and the noble, no doubt excellent people in their way but devoid of justifying faith. There was a tussle, which the lay preachers looked upon as one between themselves and preachers in orders; but Wesley upheld his brother.

The crisis, however, was only delayed, and it soon exploded at Bath. M'Nab, the preacher Wesley had appointed there, was able to affect the Bath Society in a most edifying manner; but an Irish preacher named Smyth had recently so impressed Wesley that the latter had ordered him to preach at Bath every Sunday evening until he went back to Ireland. M'Nab furiously resented this, and such was the tumult in the Bath Society that Wesley set off for that place towards the end of November. Charles was at his elbow, egging him on to be firm, to deal strongly with these upstarts, to show none of that deplorable weakness and tendency to hedge that he had observed in him lately. The truth was that Charles in his old age was becoming panic-stricken; his behavior indicated not strength but ossification, whereas Wesley himself was strong enough to be able to yield when it suited his purposes; he did not dote upon consistency. On this occasion, however, he fulfilled all his brother's expectations. He took the highest possible line and read the rebels a paper which declared his absolute right to rule without question, to exact obedience to the last movement of a man's little finger. That was "the fundamental rule of Methodism," he stated, and we do not wonder that Toplady dubbed him "Pope John." The preachers had indeed one inalienable right, yes; that to leave the society if they wished. He made his meaning plain enough. Further, it appeared, from a letter he wrote soon after this, that he found it necessary to correct a little error into which some of his society had fallen in their view of the Conferences. These were not at all the parliamentary institutions many had seemed to suppose. They were merely meetings to which he called a few preachers together, to advise him, by no means to control him. In short, he made it perfectly clear that Methodism was Wesley. But then, he had no belief in democracy; administrators rarely have: in fact, it was plainly a fallacy, as he proved when Wilkes arose with his contention that power resided in the people. What nonsense! If this was true, why then everybody would have a vote. But since comparatively few people had votes, it was obvious that power did not

reside in the people and was not meant to. He agreed with Charles that the society must be ruled by some head, who would be, while he was alive, and as far as possible after he was dead, himself. “I chose to exercise the power which God had given me in this manner....” “Which God had given me”: “I chose” — the fiat had gone forth; and, though there was muttering and even protest among his helpers, the rebellion was crushed, and Wesley ruled supreme.

Yet at this stage it was not will power alone which made Wesley dominant; mere strength could not have done it. There was something else — the devotion he inspired in his followers. They adored him, called him Rabbi, because there was a quality in him they would all have shared if they could — his infinite charity. It might seem, perhaps, that he loved only those who obeyed him; but those he loved so well, so wholeheartedly and forgivingly, offering himself to them so utterly, that they could not but surrender. He never spared himself. All the time he gave, gave everywhere, of the spirit that was in him. And it was abundant. Certainly there was in him the desire to rule; it was an instinct which shared the honor of possessing him with the desire to give, but then the end for which he wished to rule was selfless. Or at least, since Wesley was Methodism, and Methodism was Wesley; since his pride was transmuted into identification of himself with the thing he had made; since the morbid preoccupation with himself which had marked his early years had taken an outward direction — his actions had precisely the same effect as though he had been selfless. Without his intense egotism he would never have accomplished what he did. That it was as robust as ever is plain from his printing his *Journals*, an act which assumes that everybody will find their writer as interesting as he does himself, for, candidly, they are self glorification from end to end. Even the *Arminian Magazine*, which he founded as a counter blast to the chief thorn in his flesh, the Calvinistic *Gospel Magazine*, deals largely with himself, though some of the first numbers were devoted to a discussion of the friend of his childhood, Old Jeffrey, and contained verse such as Prior’s “Henry and Emma,” the inclusion of which love-poem scandalized those who were most stern for truth. Nevertheless, because giving was a part of his egotism, he came to be the best loved man in England and Ireland.

In Scotland it was different; there he was only respected. He became chaplain to the Countess Dowager of Buchan, he was presented with the freedom of Perth, his congregations were crowded and attentive: but the Scotch, nurtured on theological discussion, would not receive justifying faith, the assurance of grace, and the possibility of sinless perfection (in Christ); “they knew too much,” Wesley commented, “therefore they could learn nothing.” They obstinately refused to fall down as though dead. Distinguished visitors were no compensation for this failure to strike fire, even if they included Boswell, armed with a letter from Dr. Johnson on the score that “worthy and religious men should be acquainted with each other,” for Johnson liked Wesley and his conversation, complaining only that the dog always had to be off somewhere and would never stay to fold his legs and talk. The acquaintance, however, did not develop: Boswell could not be convinced by Wesley’s proofs of the existence of a ghost which was then making some stir.

This, indeed, was to get Wesley on the raw, for the common attitude towards ghosts was disappointing. The skepticism of most men was such that they would not accept them, though what was worse was the sad growth of disbelief in witches, in spite of the evidence for their existence being so irrefutable. There were other trifling set-backs. For instance, Dr. Madan, whose work as a preacher had once been so much blessed, flourishingly produced a treatise in favour of polygamy, a philosophy which Wesley’s brother-in-law, Westley Hall, had practiced. Also there was a period when the discipline at Kingswood School grew so lax that some of the boys actually turned against religion (that was because they had been allowed to play), and the staff had to be changed. Petty disagreements here and there were only to be expected, for, to quote one of Wesley’s favorite texts, “it must be that offense will come.”

But these minor rubs were of no real importance, for in spite of everything the society was spreading. In the ten years between 1770 and 1780 the circuits were increased by fourteen, the preachers by forty-eight, and the membership of the society by more than fourteen thousand. Moreover, there were the followers in America, over eight thousand, and rapidly increasing, served by forty-two preachers in twenty circuits. The difficulty there was that nobody was capable of administering the

Sacrament. In 1780, Wesley implored the Bishop of London to ordain one of his preachers for the purpose, a man filled with God; but instead the bishop had sent out two men stuffed only with Greek and Latin, and what was the good of that? Well, there was only one thing left to do — Wesley must himself ordain. And why not? Many years ago he had been convinced by a book of Lord King's that bishops and presbyters were of the same order, a belief strengthened by a study of Stilling fleet's *Irenicon*: therefore, since he was a presbyter, and a presbyter was a bishop, he had a right to ordain. He would ordain. The only thing he must be careful in was to keep it very secret from Charles, who would most certainly object in no measured terms; so it was swiftly and discreetly that Wesley consecrated three priests for America. This was separation; Lord Mansfield, Chief Justice, had said, "ordination is separation." Charles was, as Wesley had foreseen, appalled: he agreed with Mansfield: Methodists were now Dissenters. The end he had so dreaded had come, the issue which had been raised, combated, and defeated at more than one Conference had finally triumphed. Samuel had been right; John had excommunicated the Church! However, he could not bring himself to quarrel with his brother; but he wrote to him: "I believe God left you to yourself in that matter, as he left Hezekiah, to show you the secret pride that was in your heart." Pride! it sounds like an echo from the very early years; but Wesley might argue that if he was still tainted with this sin, it had at least served a very useful turn. Wesley, however, stubbornly refused to admit that anything crucial had happened; he rested securely on Lord King. Nevertheless the immediate consequences were alarming. One of the men he had ordained, Coke, applied Wesley's argument that bishops and presbyters were of the same order and concluded that, since he was a presbyter, he was therefore a bishop as well. He and Asbury, whom Wesley had appointed "superintendent" in America, called themselves bishops, and it appeared likely that Coke would take upon himself to ordain priests. They had forgotten "the fundamental rule of Methodism," of which Wesley was forced to remind them, namely that Wesley alone could appoint a preacher, and that therefore Wesley alone could consecrate one. But even this symptom would not persuade Wesley that he, or any of his members, had left the Church; he instantly forgot that one of his reasons for ordaining had been that priests consecrated by English bishops would "expect to govern" the American Methodists — "and how grievously

would this entangle us!” But no; Wesley’s heart was perfectly clear upon the point (it is best not to inquire what his head was doing); he was to say till the hour of his death, what he had again and again said before, “Separate from the Church of England, and you separate from me.” But he must have seen what was happening, what had happened; he had founded a new Church. He was not a very logical thinker, but in this, surely, he deliberately deluded himself. So he went on happily exercising the functions of a bishop, in all ordaining twenty-six priests, for overseas, for Scotland, and finally for England.

The fated end had come, but for a few more years the small, spare figure could be seen driving about the country in his chaise as tirelessly as ever, his wide, bright eyes glowing beneath the still abundant but now snow-white hair, his whole face mellowed by the years, shining with the beauty of holiness. Twice a day his yet active figure, extremely neat, extremely simple, without buckle or ruffle (no Methodist was allowed to wear a ruffle), the uniform black relieved only by the white bands of a Church of England parson, would mount the pulpit and exhort in a scarcely failing voice, sometimes for three hours on end, for if he found the people loving he would not know how to stop, and would begin over and over again. And visible upon his face, no longer quite so awesome, there dwelt an all-pervading serenity: for he had done his work, had provided for the further governance of the society, and, looking back upon all that he had done, he saw that it was good. “I never fret,” he wrote to, of all people, his wife. The only danger was that he might become too serene. “Many years ago,” he wrote in 1785, “I was saying, ‘I cannot imagine how Mr. Whitefield can keep his soul alive, as he is not now going through honor and dishonor, evil and good report, having nothing but honor and good report attending him wherever he goes.’ It is now my own case... I am become, I know not how, an honorable man. The scandal of the cross is ceased.” His early troubles, distractions, periods of deep depression, faded out of his memory so completely that he declared that he had never felt more than a quarter of an hour’s low spirits. He never felt them for a moment now: he had passed into the calm of accomplishment.

But old age will not be denied for ever. In 1789, when on a pastoral tour in Ireland, he was forced to record, on entering his eighty-sixth year, “I now

find that I grow old.” He could no longer walk as briskly as he used to do, and small print bothered him unless the light was very good. On New Year’s Day, 1790, he wrote: “I am now an old man, decayed from head to foot. My eyes are dim.... However, blessed be God, I do not slack my labor. I can preach and write still.” But he could not read, worst of deprivations for a man who had read every spare moment of his days, on horseback, in his chaise, everywhere — and everything — theology, history, poetry, the classics; Barclay’s *Apology* (which he thought a feeble book), Hume, Milton, Tasso, Plato. However, he could still travel and preach. The poet Crabbe went, at Lowestoft, “to hear the venerable John Wesley on one of the last of his peregrinations. He was exceedingly old and infirm, and was attended and almost supported in the pulpit by a young minister on each side. The chapel was crowded to suffocation. In the course of his sermon he repeated, though with an application of his own, the lines:

*Oft I am by women told,
Poor Anacreon! thou grow’st old;
See, thine hairs are falling all,
Poor Anacreon! How they fall!
Whether I grow old or no,
By these signs I do not know;
But this I need not to be told,
‘Tis time to live, if I grow old”*

which he declaimed “with a beautiful cadence.”

And he was still *living*, thriftless of his energy, when at the age of eighty-eight, on March 2nd, 1791, death overtook him hard by his chapel in the City Road, to which he had just returned after preaching his last sermon at Leatherhead. He knew he was dying and gave directions that he should be buried in nothing but woollens. On his death-bed he still sang hymns, cheerfully, until he was too weak and could only murmur phrases. “Farewell, farewell,” he whispered to those who came to say good-bye, the only one among them unmoved, happy. “Now we have done,” he murmured, “let us all go.” The last evening, “finding his friends could not understand what he said, he paused, and with all his remaining strength cried out, ‘The best of all is, God is with us.’ Then, lifting up his dying

arm in token of victory, and raising his feeble voice with a holy triumph," he again repeated the words, "The best of all is, God is with us." That night, "I'll praise, I'll praise," was all he could utter. The next morning, at about ten o'clock, he passed quietly away, without a groan; and his friends, standing around his bed, sang together a valedictory hymn.

Each of the hundreds who gathered to the funeral was presented with an effigy of John Wesley, arrayed in canonicals, adorned with a halo and a crown, the whole beautifully stamped on a biscuit and handed them in an envelope of paper.

THE END.

A SHORT BIBLIOGRAPH

It would be easy to compile a voluminous bibliography; Mr. Vulliamy provides a good one at the end of his book. I append a short one dealing with John Wesley only, and for light collateral reading I would indicate the admirable *Hetty Wesley* by "Q." There are several abridged editions of the *Journals*, of which that by P. L. Parker, with an Introduction by Mr. Augustine Birrell, may be cited as a good one. There is an Everyman edition in 3 volumes.

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