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A table of contents for the *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* can be found here:

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Proceedings

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THE STORY OF THE LEEDS “NON-CONS”

The Reasons for the Secession

[The article which follows is in succession to those appearing under the same title in *Proceedings*, xxxv, pp. 81-7 and 122-4, and represents Part III of the author's study of the subject.—EDITOR.]

THE “Leeds Organ Case” was important for innovations in church government and administration which became precedents for other seceders from the Wesleyan body. Dr. Maldwyn Edwards has written:

These early secessions were prompted partly by dislike of Bunting and what he symbolized. They were, however, not so significant as the larger secession in 1849. They were local in character and small in numbers.¹

On the contrary, the fundamental issues of pastoral supremacy; the demand of laymen for a place in the high counsels of the connexion; “stopping supplies” to force ministers to capitulate, linked the three secessions of 1827, 1835 and 1849-52 with equal importance. Furthermore, the Leeds secession has been called “the first radical reform in Methodism”, setting firmly circuit and local independence against executive power in the annual assembly, with the ultimate aim of a “congregational” form of government, resolving the tensions between “lay rights” and “ministerial pretensions” by abolishing the separated ministry.

Immediately the Conference had given permission for the installation of an organ in the Brunswick chapel, a series of events was initiated which led to secession as surely as though it had been designed. The anti-organists had already engaged in acts as unconstitutional as any charged against the Conference: if the Conference “packed” its committee with ministers favourable to organs and liturgy, thus ensuring the revision of the District Meeting's recommendation against the installation of the organ, local preachers of

¹ Maldwyn L. Edwards: *After Wesley* (1935), p. 158.

both East and West Leeds circuits had signed the memorial of protest sent to the Brunswick Leaders' Meeting in October 1826, although Brunswick was in the Leeds East circuit. After the Conference, they began to meet regularly in "combination" meetings of leaders, stewards, local preachers and society-members of both circuits, in violation of the rules and usages of Methodism.

The members of the deputation to the Conference arrived back in Leeds on Friday morning, 10th August 1827, and on the evening of the same day upwards of fifty local preachers heard their report. It was "passed unanimously with the exception of three" to resist so "arbitrary and unconstitutional an innovation" by the Conference. The meeting was adjourned, and re-assembled on the 17th, with an attendance of about one hundred leaders and local preachers from the two Leeds circuits. It was reported that pacific measures proposed to several of the trustees had failed: they were now prepared to appeal to the full body of trustees for early reconsideration of the whole question.

Messrs. J. Mallinson, T. Simpson and M. Atkinson were deputed, and they waited upon the superintendent, Thomas Stanley, requesting him to call an early meeting of the trustees. He replied that he could not now interfere, as the Conference had given its sanction, but he suggested that as he was about to leave the circuit, the matter should lie over until the arrival of the new superintendent, Edmund Grindrod. A Leaders' Meeting and a "combined" meeting of about sixty leaders and local preachers agreed.

Eventually, a deputation waited upon the new superintendent, to give him "a correct statement of the case", and to urge him to call a trustees' meeting. Edmund Grindrod was now to play so important a part in the mounting drama that a glance at the man himself will help to assess his influence on the course of events. Was he sent specially for the work "intended to be done"? Was Matthew Johnson justified in his opinion that "a people afflicted with such a scourge have much need of patience and forbearance"?

Grindrod entered the Wesleyan ministry in 1806; he was President of the Conference in 1837, and Secretary in 1832 and 1833. He died in 1842, the year in which was published his *Compendium of Laws and Regulations of Wesleyan Methodism*. Wesley F. Swift, in the Leeds Conference *Handbook* (1956), thought that the sorry tale might have been different "but for the weakness of the superintendent of the East Circuit". Many similar judgements have been passed on his conduct, and it has been charged that "he acted under the direction of a more inflexible will and nature than his own".

The Leeds dissentients themselves may not have endorsed these imputations. They discovered in Grindrod a strong, determined character, whom no threats or inducements could divert from his course of duty—as when they offered him an "easy passage" in the circuit if he supported their peace proposals. James Sigston, the arch-collaborator with Matthew Johnson, promised him "a fine

opportunity of gaining the affections of the people, and rendering his labours among them more efficient". But the price was the virtual abandonment of the organ scheme.

It was of no avail. Grindrod may have been subordinate to Jabez Bunting, but he was not subservient. He sought no favours from his influential friend, for it was no favour to be sent to Leeds at that particular time. His acquiescence was of strength, not of weakness, and if he turned to Bunting for advice at a critical point in the emergency, it was no more than many men in the connexion were doing.

On 27th August 1827, about eighty leaders and local preachers were told by their deputation that Mr. Grindrod had given the same answer as Mr. Stanley. Their reaction was violent; angry resolutions were passed, condemning the action of the Conference as "arbitrary and unjustifiable"; they renounced any obligation to contribute to certain connexional funds; class and ticket moneys were reduced, some from 4d. to 1d. per week, others from 5s. to 1s. per quarter.

At the September Quarterly Meeting, Grindrod declined to put a resolution which would instruct the circuit stewards not to remit moneys to the connexional funds, on the ground that the payments were not optional. Robert Eckett later endorsed the superintendent's ruling, saying:

The superintendent was perfectly justified in refusing to put such resolutions to the vote, as they were clearly Methodistically unconstitutional. After two hours' wrangling, Matthew Johnson asked all who were in favour to stand up—"whereon by far the majority instantly arose".

The Local Preachers' Meeting had been held on the morning of the same day, 24th September. A member brought a charge against the secretary, Matthew Johnson, that he had called "illegal meetings" of the local preachers. He had previously challenged Johnson on the matter of an illegal summons, and had given him notice that he would be called to account for it. Johnson not only acknowledged that he had summoned preachers of both Leeds circuits to unconstitutional meetings: he took glory in it, and declared that in similar circumstances he would not hesitate to do the same again. He defiantly rejected every appeal of the superintendent not to pursue these irregularities, leaving the latter with no alternative but to pronounce a sentence—a very mild one!—suspension from his office as a local preacher for three months, with the proviso that it should be revoked, within the three months, the instant he retracted, and promised amendment for the future.

The superintendent could not be induced to change his decision, despite all the protests and arguments of a majority of the local preachers. It is difficult to see how he could have acted otherwise without losing every vestige of respect and authority in the circuit.

When Grindrod had declined, in August, to interfere with the

decision of the Conference, thirty local preachers signed a declaration not to preach in the Brunswick chapel if an organ were installed. Now, out of a total of about eighty, sixty to seventy preachers of both Leeds circuits withdrew their services immediately—"to their everlasting honour", said J. Barr. They were invited to sign a document pledging themselves not to notify their superintendents of their intentions. A few retained their honour as Christians, and declined to sign, but on the following Sunday a number of congregations were without preachers.

It is remarkable that although Johnson and his supporters professed outrage at the action of the superintendent, there was no charge preferred against him, nor any appeal to higher authority against the suspension. In the biography of his father, T. P. Bunting said :

It is almost amusing to notice how ignorant these Leeds dissentients were of their real rights . . . they might have summoned a District Meeting . . . and charged him with a breach of rule . . .²

In this, "T.P." was at fault; there is evidence that the dissentients were well aware of their rights. J. Barr said :

Mr. Grindrod has broken the Law of Pacification, and for such an offence, he is liable to be tried by a general District Meeting.

In fact, Grindrod himself offered to submit his conduct to the judgment of a District Meeting, but no action was taken.

Were the dissentients unsure about the rights of their case? Or was the situation allowed to drift to a planned end of separation? Johnson did not change his mind; neither did the superintendent; the suspension was not revoked. The issues no longer centred on the merits or demerits of the organ scheme; they became diffused through the labyrinth of constitutionalism, minutes, and statutes. The trustees showed no indecent haste in erecting the organ. It was not until July 1828 that "the zealous musical folks were hurrying in the pipes of the organ into the vestry below", above which the Rev. Titus Close, who had supported the superintendent, was conducting the week-night service.

Meanwhile, the "Sigstonites", or "Non-Cons", as they were alternatively and popularly called, had taken steps which, if not designed to make reconciliation more difficult, inevitably produced that effect. To meet a situation in which members were abstaining from public worship in the Methodist chapels, a large schoolroom was hired, and John Yewdall, friend and collaborator with Sigston, Johnson and their supporters, was invited to conduct the first service. Other rooms were also secured, some in close proximity to the circuit chapels, and regular Sunday services were conducted by the self-excluded local preachers.

On Christmas Day 1827, the first general meeting was held in the Ebenezer chapel of the Methodist New Connexion. It was a love-feast, and much emotional elation was displayed. Shortly afterwards,

² cf. Plan of Pacification, 1795.

the decision was taken to continue meeting as a separate body, to be called the "Protestant Methodists", whilst remaining in association as a branch of the Conference connexion, at least until the next Conference, when their case would again be submitted.

In March 1828, however, a further definitive step was taken, bringing them still nearer to the "point of no return". The Leeds Baptists, having built a new chapel in another part of the town, offered their old "Stone Chapel" for sale. It was situated in St. Peter's Street, within a short distance of the Wesleyan chapel, the Old Boggart House, and was estimated to seat nearly one thousand persons. The "Non-Cons" bought it, and within a short time it was opened for worship. James Sigston announced the opening hymn: "God moves in a mysterious way".

As there were about a dozen preaching-places, the desire was expressed for "a regular plan for the preachers in the circuit"; a plan was provided. On Easter Day, 19th April 1828, the Park chapel in Caroline Street was opened, the sermon being preached by James Sigston.

Dr. A. Stevens, in his *History of Methodism*, said:

The introduction of the organ had been MADE THE OCCASION of hostile proceedings by a large party who, FOR OTHER REASONS, had been opposed to the government of the Connexion.

J. Kirsop, in *Historic Sketches of Free Methodism*, declared that this was "as foul a slander as ever was penned". The facts of the case may not fully substantiate Dr. Stevens's allegation, but neither do they completely disprove it.

After the suspension of Matthew Johnson and the revolt of the sixty to seventy local preachers, a deputation representing about seventy leaders and local preachers presented a "peace plan" to the superintendent. It required that Johnson should be restored immediately to his office and work as a preacher, and that the trustees should take no further steps about the organ until after the next Conference had reviewed the situation.

William Dawson, a widely-known and popular preacher, added a poignant note to the peace plan. He carried the proposition that the suspended local preachers' secretary should not be asked to express regret for his own conduct, but only for "the distressed state of the society". He had sounded Matthew Johnson, who had "at once expressed his readiness to comply with the terms". It was the perfect "face-saver", but the "weak" superintendent was having none of it.

It is not irrelevant to speculate whether, had the peace plan been accepted, the separate services would have been commenced, or, with the "combination" meetings, discontinued and abandoned! No promise or guarantee was ever given by the dissentients that they would observe Methodist order and discipline. Dr. Benjamin Gregory said:

Mr. Sigston and his immediate following were not indisposed to a conflict with the Conference, but they had been kept in check for twenty years.

Mr. Grindrod knew all about this, and instead of allowing himself to be beguiled by a spurious "peace plan", he countered with a "document", which the leaders were required to sign, or signify their assent to, pledging themselves to support the superintendent's action or else be deprived of voice or vote at the disciplinary Leaders' Meeting. The "document" provoked considerable criticism, and at the 1828 Conference Richard Watson (ex-President), after commending the ability with which the Leeds ministers had defended Methodism against a form of congregationalism, condemned the

depriving the Leaders' Meeting of its guaranteed rights, by forbidding voice or vote to every Leader who would not either sign or verbally assent to a written Document, which would have committed him beforehand to one particular side.

Watson's view was not shared by all the members of the Conference. Daniel Isaac wrote that the dissentients

boasted that a large majority of the Leaders were in their favour, had attended the illegal meetings, were pledged to stand by them, and would acquit them.

Two irregularities do not constitute justification to either side, even though one is a retaliation, provoked by regular secret meetings, at which a chairman was elected and the proceedings were minuted. In the result, the "document" did not secure a majority of the leaders' signatures; the superintendent was not able to carry out all his intentions; the "combination" meetings continued, and the agitation was kept alive.

One month before Matthew Johnson's suspension was due to expire, Grindrod announced that he had summoned a Special District Meeting, to "aid him in dealing with his recalcitrant members". It was known that, with William Scarth, a leading trustee, he had been to Manchester to visit Jabez Bunting, who was then Secretary of the Conference. Probably he had acted on Bunting's advice in calling the Special District Meeting, although he did not lack the resolution to act on his own judgement and responsibility if need be. Unhappily, to the doubtful expedient of a Special District Meeting, summoned to meet on 4th December, twenty days before Johnson's suspension was due to end, as Chairman of the Leeds District he added to the meeting three superintendents—one each from Bolton, Liverpool, and Manchester—who could not by any means be described as "the three nearest", as was required by the relevant Methodist law. He also invited two former Leeds East circuit ministers, George Marsden and Thomas Stanley, who were well acquainted with the situation and personalities in Leeds; but, with rather less discretion, included in his invitations Jabez Bunting, Secretary of the Conference, as the President's "official advisor".

The Special District Meeting assembled in Leeds on Tuesday, 4th December 1827. The sessions continued until the 11th, but from

the beginning many of the leaders and local preachers refused to cooperate. Separate meetings had been arranged with the local preachers of the Leeds West circuit as well as with leaders and local preachers of the East circuit, but the members of the Special District Meeting declined to meet any of them in "combination". On the evening of the 4th, at the same time as the first meeting with leaders of the East circuit was held at the Old Chapel, the Old Boggart House, a "combination" meeting assembled at the house of James Sigston. A letter was sent to the President, the Rev. John Stephens, at the Old Chapel, requiring that any of the leaders and local preachers of the West circuit who wished it should be admitted to the meeting. This demand was refused, and all the meetings were constituted and carried out as arranged.

It is unfortunate that abbreviation excludes an adequate account of the series of meetings. The evidence of contemporary writers shows that members of the Special District Meeting attended constitutional and regular Leaders' Meetings, and though, contrary to the expectation of some dissentients, several of them intervened in the discussions, the resolutions were voted upon only by the leaders.

The town leaders of the East circuit met on the evening of 6th December. The "document" was again produced, with little success. Charges of "factious conduct in attending illegal meetings, etc." were preferred against James Sigston and Joah Mallinson. Neither was present. Notice of the charges, and a summons to appear before the leaders the next morning, were sent to them. They replied with notes to the President, giving their reasons for not attending what they called an "illegal" meeting. In their absence, they were excluded from the society.

The report of the Special District Meeting was issued on 11th December 1827. It is a document of liberal and pacific temper, but showing no indulgence to violators of Methodist rule and usage. The action of Edmund Grindrod in suspending Matthew Johnson was approved. So far as the records show, that was the only disciplinary action taken against Johnson. The Leaders' Meetings which deposed leaders who refused to renounce the "combination" meetings were exonerated. Inevitably, from this point, the controversy moved on, inexorably and irrevocably, to withdrawals from the Wesleyan body and the formation of a new society.

JOHN T. HUGHES.

[The Rev. John T. Hughes is a supernumerary Methodist minister who has served in many circuits of the UMFC tradition. His special interest is in secessions and amalgamations within Methodism from 1827 to 1857.]

Back numbers of the *Proceedings* are often requested by research students and others. It sometimes happens that the part required is out of stock. Members who have copies they do not wish to retain are invited to send them to our Society's Library. Carriage will be refunded on parcels addressed to the Editor at 25-35, City Road, London, E.C.1.

THE WESLEYS IN THE "ORANGE STREET HYMNAL"

(Continued from page 98)

II. Samuel Wesley

Samuel Wesley junior was hardly influenced by the Evangelical Revival, but it was revival hymn-singing which popularized those of his poems which came into congregational use. Toplady found room for five of his poems. So far as "Hail Father whose creating call", "Hail God the Son, with glory crown'd" and "Hail, Holy Ghost, Jehovah, Third" are concerned, Toplady's selection long antedates their inclusion in Methodist hymn-books. The fourth item—"Hail, Holy, Holy, Holy Lord"—appealed to Toplady and perhaps to no other editor except Martin Madan. The fifth hymn—"The Lord of Sabbath let us praise"—had established itself long before 1776, and was probably the best-known of all its author's hymns. Our interest in the five hymns named is not in their hymnological history, however, but in the stamp which Toplady put upon them for use at the Orange Street chapel.

Hymn No. CLXXXIX—Hail Father whose creating call

In the matter of text, Toplady treats this hymn tenderly. For "creating" in the opening line he reads "commanding". His sixth stanza (Wesley's fifth) begins "Thou reignest the unchanging GOD" for Wesley's "Supreme and all-sufficient God". The only other alterations of text concern one or two pronouns. What Toplady did to this hymn was to drive into it, between stanzas 4 and 5, his hobby-horse of election, shabbily caparisoned, thus:

Elected by thy Grace alone
Our names were wrote in Heav'n:
And, for our sins, thy equal SON
A sacrifice was giv'n.

The effect is disastrous, both from a literary and from a devotional point of view.

Hymn No. CXC—Hail, GOD the SON, with glory crown'd

Toplady's treatment of this hymn is similar to that just mentioned. He halves Wesley's six stanzas, and slips between the parts an ill-fitting link which mechanically churns out a favourite dogma:

Our feeble Nature he assumes
And full of truth and grace,
By his *Imputed* Work becomes
The LORD *our* RIGHTEOUSNESS.

The lines, as well as the typographical stresses, are probably Toplady's own.

Samuel Wesley's opening stanzas contained a poetic image regarding eternity prior to the incarnation, and his final stanza a contrast

with this regarding the "whole eternity" when the cycle of time has been completed. The first stanza ran:

Hail, God the Son, in glory crown'd
 Ere time began to be!
 Throned with thy Sire, through one Half-round
 Of wide eternity.

Toplady, very punctilious over prepositions and tenses, itches to get this straight, and in doing so weakens Wesley's contrast:

Hail, GOD the SON, with glory crown'd
 Ere time began to be!
 Thron'd with thy Father, through the Round
 Of past eternity.

Wesley's fourth stanza (Toplady's fifth) had opened with the couplet
 To save Mankind from lost Estate
 Behold his Life-Blood stream!

To Toplady this is ambiguous (and Arminian!), and requires to be Calvinized, which he does, mildly for him (and ambiguously?) by making the former line read

To lift us [=the elect] from our lost estate.

Hymn No. CXCI—Hail Holy Ghost! Jehovah! Third

The text of this hymn also Toplady treated with considerable respect. In Wesley's fourth stanza he did according to his custom wherever he found it, namely, refused admission to the poetic "Jesu's" and wrote "Jesus' ". In that same stanza he altered the third line from "Dying, his Soul an Off'ring made" into "His dying Flesh an Off'ring made". To Wesley's five stanzas he added another—and where he got it from is a mystery:

Sole Author of our second Birth,
 Faithfull thou wilt be found:
 Thy work of Grace, begun on earth
 Shall be with Glory crown'd.

Hymn No. CXCII—Hail, Holy, Holy, Holy Lord

Whatever Samuel Wesley would have thought of it, Toplady edited this hymn very intelligently by taking out stanza 3 and placing it at the end, thus giving a more natural progression of thought. All the stanzas with an ascriptive note are together, and the petitionary note concludes the act of praise. A few textual changes occur, the chief of which are (showing the originals in brackets):

- Stanza 1. Enthron'd in everlasting state
 Ere Time its Round [Race] began.
- „ 4 [5]. To Thee, by shining [mystic] Pow'rs on high
 Were humblest praises giv'n.
- „ 5 [6]. There all the holy, happy ones
 [All that the Name of Creature owns]
 To Thee in hymns aspire.

Hymn No. CCXXXIX—The Lord of Sabbath let us praise

It seems likely that Toplady started with Samuel Wesley's 1736 cento of four stanzas, rather than the later popular cento of two eight-line stanzas. Wesley's second stanza he rejects completely, with sound critical instinct, as these lines are easily the weakest in the hymn :

Thus, Lord, while we remember thee,
We blest and pious grow :
By hymns of praise we learn to be
Triumphant here below.

After pushing up stanza 3, he imports a stanza (a poor one) from an entirely different composition of Samuel Wesley, and makes the singer do a big mental jump in consequence. Toplady's fourth stanza is Wesley's altered in the interests of the doctrine of election. On to this he claps four lines which make a pious jingling anti-climax. This is heavy handling for a little gem. The facts are as follows :

TOPLADY	SOURCE
<i>The Lord's Day</i>	
1. The Lord of Sabbath let us praise In concert [consort] with the Blest, Who, joyfull in harmonious lays Employ an endless Rest.	S. Wesley— <i>Sunday</i> Stanza 1
2. On this Glad Day a brighter scene Of Glory was display'd GOD, the eternal WORD, than when The [This] universe was made.	<i>Sunday</i> —stanza 3
3. Alone the dreadful race he ran Alone the winepress trod : He dy'd and suffer'd as a Man He rises as a GOD.	S. Wesley— <i>Hymn for</i> <i>Easter Day</i> — stanza 3
4. He rises, who our pardon [mankind has] bought, With grief and pain [s] extreme : 'Twas great to speak our souls [a world] from naught, 'Twas greater to redeem.	<i>Sunday</i> —stanza 4
5. A blest eternity we hope With HIM in heav'n to spend : Where Congregations ne'er break up And Sabbaths never end.	Source unknown (Toplady's own?)

(To be continued)

GEORGE LAWTON.

Recent issues of *Methodist History*, whilst dealing largely with events in America, contain some scholarly articles for the general reader. The number for April 1970 publishes a study by our President, Dr. Maldwyn Edwards, on "Two Early Methodists in Prison", the reference being to John Nelson and Joseph Capper. There is also a useful checklist of Doctoral Dissertations on Methodist subjects, 1912-68, but the list is confined to American seminaries.

JOHN WESLEY'S INTRODUCTION TO WILLIAM LAW

A Comment

AS one who is proud to have partnered Dr. Frank Baker in one piece of Methodist historical research, may I express our sense of the immense debt owed by World Methodism to his incredible industry and insight. That partnership proved his readiness to revise accepted views, even his own. So may I set down my doubts of his doubts of Wesley's *fourfold* statements about the date of his earliest reading of Law. For convenience, I re-state Dr. Baker's arguments, but fairness demands that readers should study his own case, as printed in *Proceedings*, xxxvii, p. 78 ff.

I. Dr. Baker's dating

(a) This derives from a valuable study of Wesley's contemporary records. The first mention, in these, of one of Law's books, is in a record of books he set his students in 1730 (Colman collection, volume VII). Dr. Baker writes:

Of fourteen men who were enrolled under his care in July 1730 and the following few months, only one was set to read Law's *Serious Call*, and none his *Christian Perfection*.

This aroused Dr. Baker's suspicions of Wesley's subsequent apparent claims that he had read these two books at least two years—at most four years—before this.¹ Believing that the Conversion account was "heavily charged with emotion", and that this was because his first reading of Law was "undoubtedly a spiritual landmark for Wesley" (*ibid.*, p. 78), he asks: "Why was there no more evidence of his enthusiasm for these works among his pupils?" (*ibid.*, p. 80). This persuades him that when Wesley began reading the *Serious Call* on 3rd December 1730 (the first mention of one of Law's books in the surviving diaries), this was actually Wesley's first reading of Law.

Actually, in the Conversion account, Wesley says he "was much offended with both" Law's books. This hardly shows the "enthusiasm for these works" on which Dr. Baker bases his argument. Later I shall show that the words in which Dr. Baker must find the emotion extol not Law's books, but the Bible.

Even if we were to accept Dr. Baker's high estimate of Wesley's enthusiasm for these books, would it follow that a single mention of

¹ Wesley has four subsequent accounts of his later reading of Law, which I shall refer to under the following titles:

- (a) The Conversion account. (*Journal*, i, p. 467)—date, 1740.
- (b) The *Principles* account, found in *The Principles of a Methodist* (1742). (*Works* (1812 edn.), xi, p. 412. Dr. Baker does not use this.)
- (c) The Newton account—a letter to John Newton of 14th May 1765. (*Journal*, v, p. 117.)
- (d) The *Perfection* account—A *Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (1766). (*Works* (1812 edn.), xi, p. 158 ff.)

the one in these lists, and the absence of the other, could prove with high probability that Wesley's fourfold claim to have read them previously was mistaken? As one would expect of a good tutor, Wesley had certainly read the majority of the books set in the lists given by Dr. Baker and by Dr. V. H. H. Green.² It is therefore extremely likely that he had read the *Serious Call* previously, as he set it for one of his pupils. Dr. Baker shows that he read it with real attention later, but he read many books more than once. Wesley was lecturer in Greek (i.e. New Testament Greek), Logic, and Philosophy, so that these subjects would govern his choice, reducing his ability to set devotional books. Dr. Green reports that Wesley said "that he made no attempt to persuade his pupils to become members of the Holy Club". Only two or three joined in 1730. Even for these, possibly Wesley preferred not to set *Christian Perfection*, since to do so might have been condemned as recruiting more "Supererogation men",³ as the original Methodists were probably already called because of their use of this book.

Do we not need stronger evidence than Dr. Baker has so far provided? This is even more important because the testimony of the Diaries is incomplete. Wesley may still have had his diary for the period 20th February 1727 to 29th April 1729 when he wrote about reading Law's books, in the Conversion account. This diary we do not have. Neither do we have any of his letters between 19th March 1727 and 19th December 1729. To say with Dr. Baker, and in absence of diaries and letters, that it is "barely possible . . . but highly unlikely" that Wesley read Law's two books in the period for which we have no diary verification is to place heavy weight on unstable evidence in semi-darkness.

(b) However, although Dr. Baker does not specifically say so, it may be that his argument also rests on the fact that after Wesley's first mention in his diary of reading the *Serious Call* on 3rd December 1730, he began "collecting" or summarizing it on 9th April 1731, continuing this until 1st November that year. He does not record in his diary reading *Christian Perfection* until 7th November 1732, and he "collected" it in 1733. Does not this prolonged special interest in these books prove that these were the first readings, and that Wesley's subsequent claims that he read them much earlier, and in the reverse order—the order of publication—were wrong?

Consider a similar case—Wesley's reading of *Nicodemus; or, a Treatise on the Fear of Man*, by A. H. Francke. The first Georgia diary shows that Wesley began reading this on 17th November 1735,⁴ and continued it on subsequent days. It is mentioned again on 5th December 1736, and Wesley began "collecting" it on 7th December, completing this on the 18th. Wesley valued this book highly, and published his own edition in 1739. Surely the editor of the Standard edition of Wesley's *Journal* is right in saying of the November 1735

² *The Young Mr. Wesley* (1961), pp. 131-2.

³ See p. 149.

⁴ *Journal*, i, p. 119.

entries, "he began a new book, *Nicodemus . . .*,"⁵ i.e. that this was his first reading. And this would be a parallel to Dr. Baker's argument regarding Wesley's reading of Law's books. But the parallel is not complete, for the diaries and letters are not missing for the two or three years prior to November 1735. The diaries record his reading of *Nicodemus* in 1733 and 1734,⁶ and a valuable letter shows that it was a strong influence on Wesley in 1735.

If this evidence of Wesley's earlier reading of *Nicodemus* had been missing, we should have been robbed of contemporary evidence that Francke (and Halle missionaries) contributed to his decision to become a missionary in 1735, just as they had influenced him through his mother's reading about them when he was a boy of seven. Similarly, if we accept Dr. Baker's theory, we cease to look for the influence of Law on Wesley prior to December 1730, in spite of Wesley's fourfold encouragement of such research.

II. Wesley's dating

Dr. Baker recognizes that, in view of the nature of his evidence, his conclusion, although in his judgement highly probable, is still not a certainty. My argument, similarly, could not do more than lessen the reader's estimate of that probability. Let us now consider the probable accuracy of Wesley's own statements.

(a) We take the following from the Conversion account :

5. Removing soon after to another College, I executed a resolution which I was before convinced was of the utmost importance,—shaking off at once all my trifling acquaintance. I began to see more and more the value of time. I applied myself closer to study. I watched more carefully against actual sins ; I advised others to be religious, according to that scheme of religion by which I modelled my own life.⁷

Wesley was in residence at Lincoln College on 4th April 1726, but on the 19th had leave to go home until September.⁸ The real removal of which he wrote was therefore in September 1726. The first evidence after this of any of the changes mentioned is in a letter of 25th January 1727 to his mother about "a scheme of studies . . . for some years".⁹ His letter to her of 19th March 1727 says he would exercise his "liberty to converse with companions of my own choosing", and save time "by rising an hour sooner in the morning".¹⁰

Wesley continues the paragraph without any subdivision :

But meeting now with Mr. Law's *Christian Perfection* and *Serious Call*, although I was much offended at many parts of both, yet they convinced me more than ever of the exceeding height and breadth and depth of the law of God.

It seems obvious that by "now" Wesley meant that he met Law's books after making the changes in his practice previously mentioned. The resolutions had to be tested for a little time, and "now" is

⁵ *ibid.*, i. p. 121.

⁷ *Journal*, i, p. 467.

⁹ *Letters*, i, p. 37.

⁶ Green, *op. cit.*, p. 300 f.

⁸ *Letters*, i, pp. 30-4 ; Green, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, i, pp. 42-3.

ambiguous. This could take the reading of *Christian Perfection* on even to early 1728, and the *Serious Call* to a little later that year.

However, Dr. Baker says of Wesley's statement :

. . . the implication is that the two books were read (in the order noted) shortly after Wesley had become a Fellow of Lincoln College in March 1726. Yet this could not possibly be, for although . . . *Christian Perfection* appeared in 1726, his *Serious Call* . . . was not published until 1729, or at the earliest November 1728. [Overton says it appeared in 1728.]

But Dr. Baker is only able to date the reading as "shortly after . . . March 1726" because he has failed to try to date the changes in Wesley's habits. Dr. Baker's brilliant proof that the editor of the *Journal* was wrong in claiming that Wesley read *Christian Perfection* in December 1726, and his confirmation that neither books nor their author are mentioned in the Diary, is consistent with my own interpretation of Wesley, for the Diary ended on 19th February 1727, and two of Wesley's resolutions were mentioned in the letter of the following month. Some may think that I am taking as much liberty with the adverb "now" in dating it in early 1728 as Dr. Baker does in dating it shortly after March 1726. But in doing so I have the authority of Wesley in

(b) The *Principles* account, which Dr. Baker does not quote. *The Principles of a Methodist* was written by Wesley in 1742, in reply to a pamphlet on that subject by the Rev. Mr. Tucker. Both were dealing with paragraph 5, which we have called the Conversion account. The Conversion account continues immediately after the last quotation, ending ". . . the law of God" (see previous page) :

The light flowed in so mightily upon my soul, that everything appeared in a new view. I cried to God for help, and resolved not to prolong the time of obeying Him as I had never done before. And by my continued endeavour to keep His whole law, inward and outward, to the utmost of my power, I was persuaded that I should be accepted of Him, and that I was even then in a state of salvation.¹¹

Wesley corrects Tucker's interpretation of the Conversion account, saying :

It is asserted that Mr. Law's system was the "creed of the Methodists : " but it is not proved. I had been eight years at Oxford, before I read any of Mr. Law's writings : and, when I did, I was so far from making them my creed, that I had objections almost to every page. But all this time my manner was, to spend several hours a day, in reading the scripture in the original tongues. And hence my system (so termed) was wholly drawn according to the light I then had.¹²

Here Wesley is saying that "the light" he "then had", i.e. "the light" which "flowed in so mightily upon [his] soul" was the light of Scripture. Presumably these are the words which are "heavily charged with emotion", which led Dr. Baker to wonder why Wesley did not show "more evidence of his enthusiasm for [Law's] works

¹¹ *Journal*, i, p. 467.

¹² *Works* (1812 edn.), xi, p. 412.

among his pupils", but, I repeat, Wesley claims the words referred to Scripture and not to Law's books. (See the first page of this article.) But Wesley was also pointing out that Law's books had been read later than might be assumed. Wesley went to Oxford in June 1720. In 1742, when Wesley wrote, the calendar year still ended on 24th March. If he read his first book by Law after he "had been eight years at Oxford", he could have commenced *Christian Perfection* at the turn of 1727/8 on the old calendar, at the end of March in our 1728. This evidence is valuable, since Wesley wanted to show how late Law's influence had commenced. How much more effective his reply could have been if second thoughts, and reference to his diary, or class-records, could have made it possible for him to say, in agreement with Dr. Baker: "It was not until December 1730, a year after I began to lead the Oxford Methodists, that I first read the *Serious Call*; and not until 1732 did I read *Christian Perfection*, after I had been *twelve* years at Oxford"!

(c) Dr. Baker believes that in the Newton account Wesley "summarized his earlier statement" in the Conversion account, writing: "In 1727 I read Mr. Law's *Christian Perfection* and *Serious Call*, and more explicitly resolved to be all devoted to God, in body, soul, and spirit." Wesley actually continues immediately: "In 1730 I began to be *homo unius libri*." The connexion of Law and reading Scripture are still in his mind as in the two earlier accounts. Dr. Baker is correct when he says that this "1727" is inaccurate, if the two books are considered, but we have shown that it could have been in harmony with the Conversion account, and also with the *Principles* account, in respect to Wesley's reading of *Christian Perfection*.

(d) We come now to the *Perfection* account. Wesley's *Christian Perfection* of 1766 amplifies—and in places corrects—his letter to Newton of 1765. A comparison of the two statements will show the reader that here he intentionally modifies his timing of the reading of Law made in the Newton account. He writes:

In the year 1726, I met with Kempis's *Christian Pattern*. . . . A year or two after, Mr. Law's *Christian Perfection* and *Serious Call* were put into my hands I determined to be all-devoted to God, to give Him all my soul, my body, and my substance.¹⁸

If we accept 1726 as his datum, he modifies the Newton account, saying he first had the two books in 1727 and 1728.

(e) To sum up the argument for Wesley's dating, let us first summarize Dr. Baker's view. (1) Because of the diary records of 1730-3, he claims that Wesley's three accounts reverse his reading of Law's books into the order of their publication. (2) He says the Conversion account implies that Wesley read the books shortly after March 1726, but the Newton account gives 1727, and the *Perfection* account 1727 or 1728 as the date. He rejects their total testimony

¹⁸ *ibid.*, xi, p. 158 ff.

because of (3) the "vagueness" of the first and last and (4) the "inaccuracy" of the second statement. (5) He finally says:

. . . each merely provides additional evidence that in Wesley's memory past events, even important events, changed dates and even relative positions with kaleidoscopic ease.

As to (1), I argue that the Conversion account is less "vague" than Dr. Baker thinks, and dates the first reading of Law as later than March 1727, and that this was made more precise by the *Principles* account, which shows that Wesley could have commenced *Christian Perfection* about the end of March 1728. Similarly, if we accept the *Perfection* account's correction of the Newton account, the two books were put into his hands in 1727 or 1728. (3) The "vagueness" of an historical statement does not mean that it is untrue. I have shown that the Conversion account is more precise than Dr. Baker assumed. If we relied on the two allegedly "vague" accounts *alone*, it seems sufficiently precise to weigh their agreed claim that Wesley read the books in 1727 and/or 1728 against Dr. Baker's claim that he read them between December 1730 and December 1732. (4) The Newton account was not "inaccurate" as far as the reading of *Christian Perfection* in 1727 is concerned, in the light of the two earlier accounts, and, in any case, we ought to accept the correction in the *Perfection* account, dating the reading of the two books in 1727 or 1728. (5) Dr. Baker writes of "kaleidoscopic" changes. Actually, Wesley's second statement made his first more precise, and his fourth statement made his third more accurate, but it is the historian's task to try to discover a consensus of the four statements. I think all four statements practically harmonize if Wesley commenced *Christian Perfection* in March 1728 (our calendar), i.e. 1727 Old Style, but had not "read" it, in the sense of finishing it (see *Principles* account) until later in our 1728, and if later still in 1728 he read the *Serious Call*. However, I would be content to defend the "vague" 1727 and/or 1728.

All four accounts give events in chronological order, and yet Dr. Baker claims that Wesley deliberately altered the order of his reading the books (1730-2, which, presumably, he remembered!) in order to put the books into the order in which they were published, which he had also remembered!

Suppose we accept this unlikely claim. Most people remember happenings within a framework of major events—a marked feature of Wesley's memory. All four accounts agree, on Dr. Baker's interpretation, in timing Wesley's first reading of Law after the award of the Lincoln Fellowship in 1726. The three accounts he considers also obviously date it before Wesley's early leadership of the Holy Club. *Dr. Baker therefore asks us to believe that Wesley had forgotten that he had not read "Christian Perfection" before his early leadership of the Holy Club, or before his meeting in April 1732 with Clayton, among whose Manchester friends Law's books*

were well known, or—surely to his shame—before his meeting with Law himself in July 1732!

(f) Confirmation of Wesley's dating would follow if we could find reasonable evidence of any unacknowledged influence of Law on Wesley prior to the dating of the readings by Dr. Baker. Wesley said his initial reaction to Law was qualified, but real, and that it was accompanied and followed by study of the law of God in Scripture.

Wesley wrote to his father in November 1730, consulting him about the Holy Club, its practices, and the nicknames and opposition it had provoked. His father replied on 1st December 1730:

. . . Would you be angels? I question whether a mortal can arrive to a greater degree of *perfection* than steadily to do good, and for that very reason patiently and meekly to suffer evil. . . . The less you value yourselves for these unfashionable duties (as there is no such thing as works of *supererogation*), the more all good and wise men will value you, if they see your actions are of a piece; . . .¹⁴

The words italicized by me indicate that both father and son had the idea of Christian perfection in mind. Samuel's dominant interest in Job provides him with the example of a "perfect" man (Job i. 1, A.V.) who did good, and yet was able "for that very reason patiently and meekly to suffer evil". One of the nicknames given to the Oxford Methodists was "Supererogation men". It is highly probable that it had already been used before Wesley wrote to his father,¹⁵ and that Samuel was referring to this. The Club gave to the poor. Before this, Wesley had asked for the bishop's permission for their prison visitation. Were these regarded by opponents as two of the works of supererogation—poverty and obedience? (See one of the classical texts—Matthew xix. 21: "If you would be perfect . . . give to the poor . . . follow me.") Wesley said that their opponents "found out several of our customs, to which we were ourselves utter strangers".¹⁶ Were they jocularly attributing to them the third counsel—of chastity? However, this short quotation shows three connexions with the idea of Christian perfection.

Law defines Christian perfection as "the right and Full Performance of those duties which are necessary for all Christians, and common to all states of life". Following his father's reply, Wesley and his friends put questions to friends and opponents about their work, asking:

Whether it does not concern all men of all conditions to imitate Him, as much as they can, "who went about doing good"?

Whether all Christians are not concerned in that command, "While we have time, let us do good to all men"?

And so they continued with their questions, "whether upon [these]

¹⁴ *Letters*, i, p. 127.

¹⁵ See *Journal*, i, pp. 95-8, 101; L. Tyerman: *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley*, i, p. 88.

¹⁶ *Letters*, i, pp. 126-7.

considerations" they should continue with their work for the prisoners and the poor.¹⁷

These two examples are sufficient to justify further search for the unacknowledged influence of Law's two books, prior to the dating of the readings by Dr. Baker, whose research has been valuable; as, from some research already done, I am sure that after the dates he gives there was an intensification of the influence on John Wesley of the great Non-juror.

FREDERICK HUNTER.

[Dr. Frank Baker's *Reconsideration* will appear in our October issue.—EDITOR.]

[The Rev. Frederick Hunter, M.A., B.D. is a Methodist supernumerary minister in the Herne Bay (Kent, England) circuit, and has frequently contributed to various periodicals on early Methodism. In 1968 he delivered the Wesley Historical Society annual Lecture, under the title *John Wesley and the coming Comprehensive Church*.]

¹⁷ *ibid.*, i, pp. 127-8.

THE ANNUAL LECTURE

in connexion with the Manchester Conference, 1970,

WILL BE DELIVERED IN

Levenshulme Methodist Church,

On Wednesday, 1st July, at 7-30 p.m.,

BY

The Rev. J. LEONARD WADDY.

Subject: "JOHN WESLEY AND THE WEDNESBURY RIOTS."

The chair will be taken by MR. ROY W. BURROUGHS.

The Annual Meeting of the Society will be held at the same church at **5-30 p.m.**

Mrs. Herbert Ibberson kindly invites members of the Society to **Tea** in the schoolroom at **4-30 p.m.** It is essential that all those who desire to be present at the Tea should send their names to the Rev. George D. Clarke, 148, Slade Lane, Levenshulme, Manchester, 19 (Telephone 061-224 4586) not later than Monday, June 29th.

The Levenshulme church is on Stockport Road. On leaving the Conference Hall, walk down Brunswick Street to Ardwick Green (five minutes' walk), and take bus 89 (from Albert Square), 92 or 94 (from Piccadilly). Alight at Matthews Lane, and walk 150 yards forward to the church. Cars follow the same route along the Stockport road to Levenshulme, and may be parked in Woodfold Avenue or the nearby streets.

The Society's main **Exhibition** will be in the **University Library**, with supplementary displays at the **Rylands Library** in Deansgate and also at **Chetham's Library**, close by the Cathedral.

METHODIST ENROLLED DEEDS AT THE PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE

MEMBERS of this Society familiar with Wesley F. Swift's *How to write a Local History of Methodism* (revised in 1964 by the Rev. Thomas Shaw) will know that at the Public Record Office, Chancery Lane, London, W.C.2, there repose masses of copies of deeds relating to charitable trusts, enrolled under an Act of 9 George II "to restrain the Dispositions of Lands, whereby the same become unalienable". They will also know that a list of these was published in 1871 as an appendix to the *32nd Annual Report of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records*. This list is available in some major libraries, but otherwise it is difficult to come by, and also the information it provides is inadequate to locate the documents without further research. Although I count myself a fairly experienced local historian, initiated into at least a few of the mysteries of the Public Record Office, I suffered unusual frustration in getting my hands on these transcripts, and therefore I think it may be helpful to outline procedure, taking nothing for granted except the ability to profit from sight of the deeds.

The documents usually contain considerable information, e.g. the names, occupations and residences of the original owner of the land and of the trustees, the location, name and extent of the property, and the purposes for and conditions on which it was conveyed. Later deeds, whereby a new trust is appointed, normally recapitulate details included in earlier ones, and sometimes contain beautifully-drawn plans. In his *Sociology of Cornish Methodism* (Cornish Methodist Historical Association: Occasional Publication No. 8 (1964)), Mr. John Probert has used the originals of such records to analyse the social structure of Cornish Methodism, on the basis of occupational stratification. It is also possible to compare successive trusts of the same chapel for evidence of social change and perhaps of growing prestige on the part of the denomination concerned.

This said, it would obviously be more sensible initially to exhaust the circuit safe or other possibilities. It may be, however, that the deeds cannot be tracked down or inspected locally, particularly if the chapel or other property concerned has disappeared or been converted long since to other uses, or if present owners are unwilling to allow access. In such case the PRO is the only answer. Incidentally this is a way in which members from the provinces now resident in London or the Home Counties could pursue their original interests, or perhaps give valuable help by undertaking on-the-spot commissions.

The Public Record Office, near the Fleet Street end of Chancery Lane, opens at 9.30 a.m., and closes at 5 p.m. Mondays to Fridays and 1 p.m. on Saturdays. Until the PRO gets its additional building at Kew (about 1975), reading accommodation will remain at a

premium, and it is unwise to arrive later than opening time, especially in the summer, when the place is thronged with overseas scholars. It is usually expedient to stake one's claim to a seat as soon as possible. A "temporary permit" for one week can be obtained at the "Enquiries" desk; for research extending longer than a week, a "reader's ticket" is necessary, and the application form for this has to be countersigned by a person of recognized standing.

The *Appendix* to the *32nd Annual Report* can be found just inside the door of the Round Room. This lists about 12,000 trust deeds covering England and Wales, up to 1865, in a kind of alphabetical-chronological order of places and dates, i.e. all the As for one year are followed by all those for the next. The earlier deeds are listed under regnal and not calendar years: 1 George III began on 25th October 1760, 1 George IV on 29th January 1820, and 1 William IV on 26th June 1830. Thus a deed dated 5 William IV may refer either to the latter half of 1834 or the first half of 1835. A chapel in a hamlet may appear under the hamlet or under the parish, and there are some misprints, but on the whole the *Appendix* is a monument of assiduity. Let us now take a specific example. Suppose we are interested in Methodism at St. Columb Minor, Cornwall, in the 1850s. We look through the Ss for 1850, then for 1851, and find a reference to "a piece of land, etc., . . . for Wesleyan Methodists. 1851.81.6": 81 is known as the part number; we shall call 6 the item number.

The *List of Chancery Rolls* must next be consulted. This was originally published in 1908 as No. XXVII of the *PRO Lists and Indexes* series, and may likewise be seen at leading libraries. In the Round Room we can find it in the set of shelves headed "23 CHANCERY 23"; the *List* is number 72. We look through this *List* for the section headed "Close Rolls", and, in this, for the year 1851. Under this, on page 182, we locate our part number 81 on the right, and make careful note of the corresponding piece number on the left—in our case 14212.

A requisition form must next be completed; in pencil we enter our name, ticket number, the date, our seat number, and the call number of the document. The call number consists of two sections: first the class number—which in all cases for these transcripts is C.54—and then the piece number, 14212. The form is handed in at the counter—not more than three documents may be requisitioned at once except with special permission, and in any case a separate form is required for each one—and in about half an hour we check back to see if the document has arrived. Documents for the same day are not to be ordered after 3-30 p.m. To save time we can order by post, addressing our application to "Enquiry Desk (Reservations)", and stating our ticket number, the date when the documents are required, and the call numbers, the above example being written C.54/14212. Failure to quote this number properly will elicit a note to the effect that the document cannot be produced. At any time

forms can be submitted personally requesting documents for a date in the near future ; but those required on a Saturday must have been ordered by 3-30 p.m. on the Friday, and in this case a certain latitude may be allowed as regards the maximum number.

The transcripts of trust deeds are on long—sometimes enormously long—rolls of parchment. The easiest way to cope physically with this type of record is to place it on the table, unrolling it with one hand and rolling it up with the other until the item required is reached. For our St. Columb Minor deed we look for item number 6 (the last part of the reference in the *Appendix*) in the left-hand margin, and there we find in bold letters the names of the parties to the agreement. It may be worth mentioning that the *Appendix* occasionally gives an item number wrongly, e.g. as 14 or 17 when in fact 4 or 7 is correct. All notes must be taken in pencil. When we have finished, we roll up the document, making sure it is the right way round, and hand it back at the counter, stating our name.

Finally, a word of caution : things are not always what they seem ! A speaker at the Wesleyan Reform Conference of 1865 deplored the fact that “many churches in the Union did not use the name ‘Wesleyan Reform’, but ‘Free Methodists’, ‘Wesleyan Methodists’ and others that certainly did not identify them with the Union”. Thus in certain cases only precise local knowledge will permit a denomination to be accurately determined from the information gleaned from the transcripts. It could be even more misleading to rely on the *Appendix* alone.

JOHN DUNSTAN.

[Mr. N. J. Dunstan, M.A. is Senior Lecturer in Modern Languages at Sheffield Polytechnic.]

This year's Conference handbook, *The Manchester Methodist, 1970*, revives hopes—rather shattered by some productions of recent years—that the day of worthy Conference handbooks is not past. In every way Manchester has “done us proud”; but no wonder, when the captain of the production team was our capable “Lancs and Ches” Branch secretary, Alan Rose. Others were involved, we know, and they are all to be congratulated. All aspects of life in Manchester and district are dealt with, including music, sport, and railways; but our readers search eagerly for contributions on Methodist history, and they will not be disappointed. Mr. Rose himself writes on “The Story of Manchester Methodism”, the Rev. John Banks on “The Mission”, Dr. Percy Scott on “Hartley Victoria College”, and Dr. Kenneth Crosby on “Manchester Methodism, Today and Tomorrow”. We hope the book will enjoy a wide sale, even among non-Conference folk, and that it will encourage future editors to “go and do likewise”. Copies of the handbook can be obtained, price 3s., from Mr. Donald Kirkby, Department for Chapel Affairs, Oldham Street, Manchester, M1 1JQ.

The Society of Cirplanologists have issued, along with the Lent 1970 number of their bulletin *Cirplan*, the third supplement to their Register. This runs to 22 pages, and shows how many old and useful circuit plans are still to be found lying around in odd places.

DISCORD IN MODERN METHODISM

IT has been frequently claimed that the schisms in nineteenth-century Methodism were produced by a fundamental rift between two opposed Methodist constitutions. In "high" Methodism, emphasis was placed on connexionalism, whereas in "low" Methodism authority devolved upon the local chapel. The constitutional rift had its counterpart in doctrinal differences. Alongside the principle of connexional organization there developed a high doctrine of ministerial authority and sacramentalism. However, in "low" Methodism greater weight was given to the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, and the minister came to be viewed as a representative of the local chapel.¹ The discord between these two views of church order resulted in schisms from Wesleyan Methodism which attempted to establish the salience of low Methodist doctrines. The Kilhamites and Protestant Methodists are typical of such groups which rejected "high" Methodism in favour of greater local autonomy. These dramatic examples of denominational schism have tended to obscure the fact that, even within an apparently united Methodism, there is a tendency for various groups to emerge around both "high" and "low" Methodist wings. In particular, pressure-groups arise during periods of crisis when one of these traditions appears to gain in influence. In modern Methodism, a crisis has resulted from the problems of ecumenism.

The contending factions whose divergent aims complicated the ecumenical negotiations before 1932 were largely arranged into high and low groups. The "other side"—predominantly high Methodists—were fearful lest union with non-Wesleyans would dilute their high Methodist principles and also weaken the possibility of a final reunion with Anglicanism. Alternatively, other anti-union groups, such as the "Progressives", felt that existing ecumenical proposals would involve a compromise of the Free Methodist principles of decentralism and lay involvement. Attempts to unite two or more denominations tend to disunite them internally. This paradox has been studied by Dr. Currie, who concentrated on the development of Methodist divisions up to 1932.² Unhappily, the 1932 union did not put an end to these domestic conflicts, and, with the development of conversations with the Church of England, discord has once more become accentuated.

Whilst the "other side" eventually capitulated to the forces working for Methodist union, they were in the long run concerned to preserve "high" Methodism in the new Methodist Church. The sacramentalist wing of the "other side" tended to emerge in the Methodist Sacramental Fellowship, whose membership included such leading figures as Dr. J. E. Rattenbury, Sir Henry Lunn, and the

¹ A cogent discussion of "high" and "low" Methodism is to be found in John H. S. Kent: *The Age of Disunity* (1966), chapter 2.

² Robert Currie: *Methodism Divided: a study in the sociology of ecumenism* (1968).

Rev. A. Kingsley Lloyd. The MSF was inaugurated at a conference of thirty-three people at Colwyn Bay in August 1935. The basic aims of the Fellowship were

- (1) Re-affirmation of the faith that inspired the Evangelical Revival and the hymns of the Wesleys—the Faith that is formulated in the Nicene Creed.
- (2) Making the Holy Communion central to the life of the Methodist Church.
- (3) Re-union. Adhering to the principles of the Reformation, yet being convinced that the divisions of the Church Militant are becoming ever more clearly contrary to the will of God, the Fellowship works and prays for the corporate re-union of all believers.³

Individual members of the Fellowship gave three pledges, which were of daily prayer, daily Bible study, and a minimum monthly reception of Holy Communion. The three aims of the MSF and the three individual pledges imply corresponding dissatisfactions with contemporary Methodism. MSF members were disturbed by the signs of increasing secularism and materialism in British society, and felt that commitment to a clearly-articulated theology was one weapon against such social tendencies away from religion. Furthermore, they were concerned to stem what they felt was a tide of irreverence in public worship. In particular, Dr. Rattenbury complained of

constant chattering in the House of the Lord, the sitting posture at prayer, miscellaneous garments in pulpit and choir, utter disrespect of sacred objects such as the Communion Table, semi-secular solos and many other practices which need not be enumerated.⁴

The final dissatisfaction of the MSF was their objection to what they saw as a one-sided interest in unity with the Free Churches to the virtual exclusion of episcopal churches. In short, they wanted to direct Methodism along a path which led to reunion with the Church of England.

Although in the long run the MSF had considerable success in gaining wide recognition and acceptance for its aims and basis, in the first instance the Fellowship faced considerable opposition. In 1937, Conference received thirteen petitions from circuits and one from a District synod asking for an investigation of the principles of the MSF. A committee was appointed, under the chairmanship of the Rev. C. Ensor Walters. At the Conference of the following year, the committee reported that there was no widespread indifference to doctrine among Methodists, and that the Methodist Church was committed to union with episcopal and non-episcopal churches alike. The committee felt, however, that the standards and practices of the MSF were not "furthering a re-union in which the Free Churches may all be associated".⁵ Criticizing the second aim of

³ MSF Pamphlet No. 1, Selly Oak, 1936.

⁴ MSF Pamphlet No. 7, "In Defence of the Methodist Sacramental Fellowship, at the Conference of the Methodist Church at Hull, 1938. The Speech of the Rev. J. E. Rattenbury, with notes", p. 12.

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 14.

the Fellowship, the committee expressed the judgement that the MSF had "isolated the Lord's Supper from other means of grace".⁶

In a long—but charitable—speech to Conference, Dr. Rattenbury undermined much of the implicit criticism of the committee, and probably saved the MSF from an early death. By defending the Fellowship's sacramentalism on the basis of John Wesley's devotional discipline and the eucharistic hymns of Charles Wesley, the speech was indicative of the "high" and "low" divisions in Methodism which the 1932 union had brought to a head. Having countered the charges brought against the MSF by the Conference committee, Dr. Rattenbury concluded by observing that the real basis of criticism rested upon a fear of ritualism. He argued that since Methodism itself had become increasingly ritualist in its public worship, the MSF was no longer in disharmony with existing Methodist practice. He stated that in 1895 he was the first Wesleyan to wear the double collar or stock, but Roman collars were worn by eighty to ninety per cent of the Methodist ministry in 1938. He claimed that morning celebrations of Holy Communion, the use of crosses on altars, the wearing of gowns, and the presentation of the offertory—all of which had once raised the cry of "No Popery!"—were now standard practice.

With the disruptions of the second world war, criticism of the MSF faded before the massive task of preserving Methodism at home and abroad. After the war, the MSF returned to the problems of consolidating its membership and pressing its claims. Changes of attitude at Conference were now entirely consistent with MSF policy. In 1947, attendance at the Lord's Supper by Methodists was laid down by Conference as a monthly duty, and lay administrators of the Sacraments were to receive instruction from the Chairman of the District. With the opening of Anglican-Methodist negotiations in July 1956, the MSF had achieved its aim of counteracting the trend towards union with the Free Churches. It is of course a matter for speculation whether or not the ecumenical failure of 1969 will prove a major obstacle to the continuance of the Fellowship. It may be that disappointment with the Anglican vote will drive ecumenical energies elsewhere, and sap support for the MSF.

Another interesting example of the development of an "other side" in modern Methodism is to be found in the case of the Methodist Revival Fellowship. The MRF started in embryo with a group of Methodist ministers and laymen who after the second world war met annually for prayer and Bible study. These annual meetings led eventually to the creation of a specific MRF organization within Methodism in January 1952. Official recognition of the MRF came at the Conference of 1955.

The MRF attempted to strengthen and to conserve the principles of what it saw as authentic Methodism by encouraging personal

⁶ *ibid.*, p. 14.

holiness as an antidote to the growing formality of church life. Consequently, the MRF

exists to bring together those of the "people called Methodists" who are really concerned that the Methodist Church should, under the hand of God, fulfil its historic mission, and who are longing for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Churches.⁷

In their personal devotions, members of the MRF promised to pray for a spiritual revival in their own hearts and in the life of the Church. In addition to fostering personal holiness, the Revival Fellowship adhered to a fundamentalist position on scripture and on the "Four Alls of Methodism".

Although the MRF was initially a devotional movement, it became increasingly drawn into an anti-unionist position after 1963 because of its opposition to the doctrinal bases of the ecumenical proposals. For the MRF, support for the "Conversations" *Report* was inconsistent with an uncompromising stand on scripture alone. Opposition, however, raised another difficult problem—whether it was possible to co-operate with other Methodists who were not scriptural fundamentalists. In January 1964 the MRF chairman was forced to ask:

is the co-operation of evangelicals with non-evangelicals within our present denominational set-up truly consistent with a policy of total commitment to Scripture?⁸

Between 1963 and 1967 the problem of deciding on unity was partly shelved, since Conference had neither accepted nor rejected the "Conversations" *Report*. The intervening period was taken up with consolidating the MRF by the creation of local devotional groups, known as "searcher" groups. There was also theological consolidation, necessitated by the so-called Charismatic Revival, which caught the attention of MRF members in the mid-sixties. The *Sound of Revival* (the Fellowship's journal) and the MRF committee were busy steering their members away from the dangers of excessive involvement in the Charismatic Revival.

Although the 1967 report, *Towards Reconciliation*, made concessions to criticism which had been offered by dissentients, in the opinion of the MRF this did not meet the basic objections to the 1963 *Report*. Because MRF members felt that unity would involve a compromise of their fundamental commitment, anti-union feeling hardened, and the July editorial of the *Sound of Revival* in 1968 expressed the view that

the Holy Spirit, because He is the Holy Spirit, cannot return in fulness to a church which fails to honour the truth, by making that which is doubtful (historic episcopacy) a matter of "invariable practice".⁹

Thus, between 1952 and 1969, the main preoccupations of the MRF swung from encouraging a life of personal holiness among the

⁷ *The Methodist Revival Fellowship* (undated), section 7.

⁸ *Sound of Revival*, published by the MRF, January 1964, p. 3.

⁹ *ibid.*, July 1968, p. 3.

members to opposition to union with the Church of England on the basis of the various reports. These preoccupations are, however, superficially distinct. The MRF's adherence to personal devotion in the setting of the "searcher" groups, which were intended to be free from the fetters of connexionalism, is strikingly reminiscent of the issues which lay behind the demands for greater democracy in the early Methodist schisms. The MRF, however, proposed abstinence from the Service of Reconciliation rather than total separation.

A more radical stand against both connexionalism and ecumenism was made by the Voice of Methodism Association. Unlike the Revival Fellowship, the VMA did not start as a devotional movement, but emerged out of the specific crisis in 1963 with the Dissident Report. With the emergence of TAMU (Towards Anglican-Methodist Unity), which anti-unionists saw as a pro-unionist association, VMA members felt that there was a need for the creation of a popular movement to guarantee the principles of the Deed of Union. As the first VMA bulletin claimed, "The Voice of Methodism is the Deed of Union". Consequently, the VMA was formed in London in January 1964 with the object of rejecting the 1963 *Report* and reviving the "historic witness of Methodism".

The VMA followed the MRF in attempting to experiment with decentralized forms of church order through the creation of local study groups and house churches. The VMA's *Syllabus of Group Studies* advised that group meetings must be "free from interference by connexional or circuit officials".¹⁰ Whilst the VMA's study groups were an attempt to revive the traditional class meeting, they were also examples of the typical reaction of Free Church Methodism wishing to rid itself of centralized oversight and officialdom. VMA's fears of increasing centralism and sacramentalism, which they saw as implicit facets of ecumenism, were expressed in the Association's rejection of *The Scheme* and in its arrangements for a separate Methodist church.

Members of the Methodist Church who found the VMA's criticism of ecumenism too strong, but were nevertheless anti-unionists, gravitated towards the National Liaison Committee. The NLC was formed in 1965 at Leeds—an historic city for Methodist dissent—and issued *The Statement*. The arguments put forward by the Leeds *Statement* varied little from those which were common to the MRF and the VMA, viz. the supremacy of scripture, the Deed of Union, and the Protestant Reformation. In particular, the NLC aligned itself firmly with "low" Methodist adherence to the priesthood of all believers and with the principle of an "open" table at the Lord's Supper. Despite its restrained criticism of the union proposals, the NLC tended to move to an increasingly radical position after 1965. It felt that *Towards Reconciliation* failed to meet basic objections. In April 1967, therefore, the NLC was presented with three possible courses of action: to continue in the Methodist Church

¹⁰ VMA: *Suggested Syllabus of Group Studies* (undated).

but without participating in the Service of Reconciliation, to leave Methodism for another free church, or to form a new Methodist connexion. Given the latter possibility, the NLC proposed "to invite the Conference of 1967 to appoint a committee to prepare a Contingency Plan for the peaceful division of the Methodist People".¹¹

The publication of *The Scheme* in 1968 had the effect of throwing the NLC into the arms of the more radical VMA. From the NLC point of view, *The Scheme* was unacceptable because it appeared to accept the principle of historic episcopacy, threatened existing links with the Free Churches, and implied that the Service of Reconciliation was a service of re-ordination. By 1968, therefore, the NLC was poised for the eventuality of establishing a new connexion, possibly in co-operation with the VMA.

The central conflict in Methodism can be analysed as a conflict between chapel and connexion, or, as Dr. Currie expresses it, between "Wesley's search for Christian Perfection or Scriptural Holiness and the Methodist people's search for a religious democracy".¹² It is tempting to view this conflict as, if not abated, at least dormant after 1907 and 1932. However, in so far as ecumenism involves some compromise of tradition and principle, the tensions between "high" and "low" Methodism have once more been accentuated. The union of Methodism in 1932 had the effect of high-lighting the divergence between the two wings. Methodists with a free-church background feared that union would be bought at the cost of the importance of the local chapel and its laity; "high" Methodists feared that union would be detrimental to Wesleyan sacramentalism, the position of the ministry, and the strength of the Connexion. After 1932, the Methodist Sacramental Fellowship, which was a sort of remnant of the "other side", sought to preserve and to emphasize the sacramental aspects of Wesley's doctrine of scriptural holiness.

In more recent times, the Anglican-Methodist negotiations have witnessed history repeated. Methodists who see their church as a constituent of the Free Churches and regard the Deed of Union as a central document of their beliefs have been recruited to anti-union movements. Methodists who see it as part of the Catholic wing of Christendom and regard separation from Anglicanism as a tragedy of history have adhered to pro-union movements. Thus, in historical perspective, the periods 1850-9 and 1963-9 are closely similar. In both, the "high" and "low" wings of Methodism became more clearly demarcated and increasingly critical of each other. The development of a full schismatic state of affairs in the 1960s was, however, forestalled in Methodism by the Anglican rejection of *The Scheme*.

BRYAN S. TURNER.

[Mr. Bryan S. Turner, B.A. is Assistant Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Aberdeen. The foregoing article forms part of his thesis in preparation for the Leeds Ph.D. Though dealing with a twentieth-century controversy, which places his work outside our usual field, he points out a notable parallel with events in Methodism in the nineteenth century, and his article may be of value to the historian of the twenty-first.—EDITOR.]

¹¹ NLC: *A Statement* (April 1967).

¹² Currie, *op. cit.*, pp. 80-1.

SCHEDULE OF METHODIST BUILDINGS OF HISTORICAL AND/OR ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

DURING recent years, the need has increasingly been felt for the making of a careful survey of the buildings of Methodism, their history and physical appearance. In 1959, a sub-committee of the International Methodist Historical Society (British Section)¹ was formed to discuss the compilation of an "illustrated list of Methodist chapels which are architecturally and historically significant". With these terms of reference, the committee, the following year, recommended that the Conference should be asked to approve a scheme to discover "The Hundred most significant Methodist Chapels in the British Isles". It was suggested that the term "significant" should be used to indicate such categories as "old", "new", "large", "small", "simple", "ornate", and "of historical interest". Nominations of such chapels were to be accompanied by photographs, sketches, and/or ground plans.

When these proposals were presented to the Conference of 1961, embedded in the committee's report, the basic suggestion that a list of buildings of historical and/or architectural significance should be compiled was approved, but the proposed limitation to a hundred buildings, and the rather juvenile suggestion of a competition to discover them, were rejected. From 1963 to 1967 the task of compiling the list got slowly under way. The IMHS secretary approached Chairmen of Districts, who in turn asked District Chapel Secretaries or "interested individuals" to accept and complete copies of a questionnaire to elicit the required information. The resulting returns were uneven, but by 1967 105 forms had been returned from eight Districts—10 from London North-East, 16 from London North-West, one from London South-East, three from Bristol, seven from Manchester and Stockport, two from Plymouth and Exeter, two from Scotland, and 64 from Cornwall.²

The "interested individuals" who made these returns were, not surprisingly, most of them members of the Wesley Historical Society, and it became clear as the work proceeded that the survey would be more adequately prosecuted, and more quickly concluded, if it could be adopted by our Society and worked through our network of branches, and in 1967 the scheme was so transferred with the agreement of the Conference.

The time has now come when, with the help of our branches, the scheme can be got off the ground once more, using the momentum

¹ The rather high-sounding title of what in effect is the Conference historical advisory committee.

² The 64 returns from Cornwall were the work of Mr. John Probert, who spent his weekly "day off" for many months in this task, and, with notebook and camera, tracked down and made a record of large numbers of Cornish chapels.

provided by those who so willingly completed the IMHS questionnaires. In the view of the present writer, the compilation of the schedule should be regarded as the first stage of what will eventually be a complete record of all Methodist buildings—chapels, ancillary buildings, houses, colleges, etc.³ which may be claimed as having historical and/or architectural interest. In his view it will be necessary to anticipate the later stages of the survey in regard to buildings (and there are many) which are threatened by demolition.

The schedule which will result from the survey will be securely based on the intimate knowledge and field-work of our local historians. Where a branch of the Wesley Historical Society exists, it would be the natural focus for the survey in that area. Members who would like to assist in making this survey are asked to indicate their willingness to the secretary of their branch, whilst members in parts of the country where no branch has been formed, or is actively in operation, are invited to make their offer direct to the General Secretary.

The survey will be built up, and recorded in a card index, in two stages—(1) initially the index will be based on returns sent in from branches and individuals relating to buildings which they consider to be significant, and (2) a later survey, area by area, based on experience so far gleaned, will ensure that no buildings of importance have been overlooked.

Three questionnaires have been prepared: I, *Existing Methodist Church*; II, *Building formerly used as a Methodist Church*; and III, *Former Methodist Church, now demolished*. Copies of these will be available to branch secretaries (together with lists of buildings already surveyed by the IMHS), and to others as required. The three questionnaires are given below, with model answers from returns already received.

I. Existing Methodist Church

- 1 (a) Name and address of Church—
Stamford Street, Ashton-under-Lyne, Lancs
- (b) Circuit (at present date)—**Ashton-under-Lyne**
- (c) District—**Manchester and Stockport**
- (d) Street location, or O.S. Map Grid reference⁴—**Stamford Street**
- 2 (a) When built (the year will be sufficient)—**1833**
- (b) Please add any known dates of substantial alterations or additions
—None
- 3 (a) Name of architect—
- (b) Name of builder—

³ i.e. those only of historical or architectural interest. "Houses" are not necessarily manses—e.g. a number of houses in Cornish parishes are known to have been the original meeting-places of the society before the first chapel was built.

⁴ The National Grid reference, correctly recorded, is extremely useful for locating country chapels. A guide to the use of the grid is printed on the cover of the Ordnance Survey one-inch series. The sheet number should be quoted in grid references given.

- 4 The denominational origin of the building (e.g., Wesleyan, P.M., U.M.F.C., M.N.C., Bible Christian, or as the case may be)⁶—
Methodist New Connexion
- 5 What is its grading (if any) in the Ministry of Housing and Local Government lists?⁶
- 6 Please describe the building, either in general or architectural terms, and state any historical associations.⁷

Has been a circuit chapel throughout its history. Head of Ashton M.N.C. circuit until 1907, now of Ashton circuit. The M.N.C. Conference was held in it in 1838, 1851, 1864, 1878, 1892, 1906. James Ogden, President of the M.N.C. Conference, 1878, entered the ministry from this church.

It is a typical early 19th-century rectangular auditory plan, 7 bays long and 4 bays wide. Brick-built, with good projecting stone Greek Doric portico. Round-headed windows to upper part, square-headed below. Good solid building with central pulpit; vestries behind and school at side. Corner site.

- 7 If possible, will you enclose with this form, when you return it :
 - (a) a rough ground plan, and sketches of elevations, façade, etc. :
 - (b) photographs and/or sketches ;
 - (c) any published history of the church (or information as to the whereabouts of copies of such a publication) ;
 - (d) a transcription of memorials in the building, and any of particular interest in the graveyard;⁸
 - (e) rough ground plan of graveyard.
- 8 Church Records. It would be helpful if some information could be given of the extent and location of the church's records, whether 18th-, early 19th-century or of more recent date, and whether to be found in church or circuit safe or deposited elsewhere. The older the records, the more valuable this note will be.

Name of person completing
 this Questionnaire..... Date.....

II. Building formerly used as a Methodist Church

- 1 (a) What is the present use of the building?—**School room**
- (b) Name by which it was known when a chapel—
Redruth, Plain-an-Gwarry
- (c) Circuit (at present date)—**Redruth**
- (d) District—**Cornwall**
- (e) Street location, or O.S. Map Grid reference—
Plain-an-Gwarry. O.S. Grid Ref : Sheet 189 : 695.426

⁶ If the building originally belonged to a non-Methodist denomination, or was of secular origin, the fact should be stated here, and, if necessary, amplified under Question 6.

⁷ This information can be obtained from the County Hall, Record Office, or from the Ministry of Housing and Local Government, Whitehall, London, S. W. 1.

⁸ Some will be able to do this more professionally than others. Those who would like to prepare the plans themselves will find some guidance in G. W. Dolbey : *The Architectural Expression of Methodism* (Epworth Press (1964), 35s.). The description of the building should include references to any stained glass, communion plate, or statuary of historical importance or artistic taste.

⁹ Wall-tablets and other memorials are not all as durable as they may appear, and a determined effort should be made to transcribe them. They could be numbered on the plan to show their location.

- 2 (a) When built (the year will be sufficient)—**1827**
 (b) Please add any known dates of substantial alterations or additions.
Building extended in 1852 and singing-gallery, etc. added
 (c) Date when ceased to be used as a Methodist church—**1884**
 (d) Reason for ceasing to be used as a church—**New church built**
- 3 (a) Name of architect—
 (b) Name of builder—
- 4 The denominational origin of the building . . .—**Primitive Methodist**
- 5 What is its grading (if any) on the Ministry of Housing list?—**None**
- 6 Please describe the building, either in general or architectural terms, and state any historical associations.
An historic P.M. chapel, containing two fine slate decalogue tables, signed "Amos Nicholls, Penryn Street, 182-"; also one with the Lord's Prayer and another with "A New Commandment".
- 7 If possible, will you enclose with this form, when you return it :
 (a) a rough ground plan, and sketches of elevations, façade, etc. :
 (b) photographs and/or sketches ;
 (c) any published history of the church (or information as to the whereabouts of copies of such a publication) ;
See J. C. C. Probert : "Primitive Methodism in Cornwall", passim
 (d) a transcription of memorials in the building, and any of particular interest in the graveyard ;—**None**
 (e) rough ground plan of graveyard.
- 8 *As in Form I*

III. Former Methodist Church, now demolished

- 1 (a) Name by which the Church was known—
Hinde Street Chapel, London, W.
 (b) Circuit (before closure)—
 (c) District (before closure)—**London North-West**
- 2 (a) When built (the year will be sufficient)—**1810**
 (b) Please add any known dates of substantial alterations or additions.
 (c) Date when ceased to be used as a Methodist church—
 (d) Date when demolished—**1886**
 (e) Reason for demolition (i.e. failure of church, amalgamation, town re-development, fire, etc.)—
- 3 (a) Name of architect—**Rev. W. Jenkins**
 (b) Name of builder—
- 4 The denominational origin of the building . . .—**Wesleyan**
- 5 What was its grading on the Ministry of Housing list?
- 6 Please describe the building, either in general or architectural terms, and state any historical associations.
Vide G. W. Dolbey : "The Architectural Expression of Methodism", p. 160 f.
- 7 *As in Forms I and II*
- 8 *As in Forms I and II*

As the returns come in, an abstract of their contents will be recorded and filed on an index card, of which an example is given on the next page :

Bristol Portland 1792	7/2	Wesleyan Min. List I
<p>1871 : extension west and north (with organ) ; 1883 : large hall etc. added to west end. Built by tradesmen contractors. 2nd Methodist Church in Bristol ; founded from the New Room. Liturgy used from 1792 to present day. Lieut. Thos. Webb, one of the first trustees, was a founder of American Methodism. His vault is in the crypt and portrait in stained glass window. Exterior and interior plain, the former plastered and the latter rendered in black mortar with freestone dressings. The 1891 extensions were carried out with sympathy for the character of the building. Much original work in the</p>		

The above example quotes one side of the card. The record of an important church like Portland, with its serried ranks of memorials reminiscent of Bath Abbey, could be extended to several cards.

The card index resulting from the survey, together with plans, photographs, etc. enclosed with the questionnaires, will be available for the use of our members in the Society's Library.

We feel sure that many of our members will be anxious to help in making this important survey, so that it can be completed in the not-too-distant future. To do the job thoroughly they will need, in addition to the questionnaires, a notebook, sketch-pad, camera, and a copy of George Dolbey's book *The Architectural Expression of Methodism*.

In conclusion, my thanks are due to our President, our Editor, and the Revs. George W. Dolbey (of the Department for Chapel Affairs) and Dr. John F. Butler, who read through the preliminary draft of this article and made valuable suggestions which have been included in the final draft.

THOMAS SHAW.

We gratefully acknowledge the following periodicals, which have come to hand since the publication of the list in our last issue. Some of these are received on a reciprocal basis with our own *Proceedings*, and we are glad to take part in this mutual exchange of historical information.

The Baptist Quarterly, April 1970.

The Journal of the Historical Society of the Presbyterian Church of Wales, June 1970.

The Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society of England, May 1970.

The Bulletin of the Wesley Theological Society (Concord, Missouri, USA), Spring 1970.

"Heritage", *The Journal of the Methodist Historical Society of Victoria* (Australia), October 1969.

We have also been interested to receive a copy of *George Fox and the Purefeyfs*—a publication of the Friends' Historical Society.

A NEW WESLEY LETTER

ONE is never sure where an original letter of John Wesley may turn up, and a stamp auction, where original letters of eighteenth-century vintage often appear on account of their postal markings, is as likely a place as any. In February this year the Western Auctions Ltd. of Cardiff offered Lot 248:

WESLEY, JOHN. Fine letter from Leeds July 26, 1789, written at the age of 86, 2 years before his death, to Miss Clarke at Mr Knapp's in Worcester. Complete with address leaf with straight line Leeds pmk. Also detached signature of John Berridge, acquaintance of Wesley.

By the kindness of the auctioneers, who let me see the letter, I am able to offer a transcription:

JOHN WESLEY TO MISS CLARKE

Leeds

July 26. 1789

My Dear Sister

Surely your writing to me will never need any apology: the oftner you do it, the better. There is great need of Preachers at Worcester, that are of a loving, healing Spirit. And such I believe you will have y^e following year, very different from some that went before them. Considering the Spirit which *they* were of, I do not wonder that the work of GOD did not prosper. But fear not! It will soon revive: And when you have the Blessing of GOD, all will go on well. Wishing You a constant increase of faith and Love, I am,

My Dear Sister,

Yours very Affectionately,

J. WESLEY.

The letter is addressed:

To

Miss Clarke
At Mr Knapp's, etc.
Worcester.

The Standard *Letters* contain one letter to Mrs. Clark [sic], also "at Mr. Knapp's, Glover, Worcester", dated 1st June 1782,¹ in which the aged Wesley writes: "I love your little maidens . . ." It would appear that Mrs. Clarke (or Clark) had a number of young daughters, and the recipient of the present letter seven years later would be one of them, now perhaps in her late 'teens.

The Knapp family were friends of Wesley, and he stayed at their house at Lowesmoor on several of his visits to Worcester. The Standard *Letters* contain letters to both John and Anna Knapp, and to their daughter Susanna ("Suky", of course), who was born in 1770. Both these and the letters to Mrs. and Miss Clarke give a further indication of Wesley's fondness for children—a fondness that was clearly reciprocated: one of his last letters was to Susanna Knapp, written (in reply to one of hers) only a fortnight before his death; and she went, a young woman of twenty, up to London to his

¹ *Letters*, vii, p. 158.

funeral. Clearly Miss Clarke and Miss Knapp must have been of an age.

The remarks of Wesley relating to some of the Worcester preachers (until 1788 Worcester was in the Gloucestershire circuit) can possibly be interpreted by someone with local knowledge. Perhaps the preachers concerned in his strictures were some or other of the following: James Hall, William Church, John Robotham, Barnabas Thomas—for, of the preachers stationed there in the preceding years, these were the ones who did not “die in the work”, and who may therefore have proved unsatisfactory.

One thing at any rate the appearance of this letter proves again: that we can never be sure that we have a complete corpus of Wesley's correspondence.

OLIVER A. BECKERLEGGE.

Students of Methodist history have long known the value of “Hill's Arrangement”, a list of ministers in—or who have died in the work of—Wesleyan and post-1932 Methodism. Until recently, however, there was nothing like this (except for the UMFC in Askew's *Free Methodist Manual*) for the non-Wesleyan bodies. Part of this need has now been met by Dr. Oliver A. Beckerlegge's *United Methodist Ministers and their Circuits* (Epworth Press, pp. 268, 50s.). This is an indispensable book of reference for all students and libraries, for it lists not only the men who died in full connexion, but also those who left the work—and this “Hill's” does not do. It covers those branches of Free Methodism which were gathered into the union of 1907, and closes with the union of 1932. This leaves only Primitive Methodism needing similar treatment, and this task is now being undertaken by one of our members. We warmly commend Dr. Beckerlegge's reasonably-priced book to our readers, and thank him for his valuable labour of love.

Below are given particulars of more local histories, copies of which we have been pleased to receive. A further list will appear in our next issue.

Billinghay (Lincs) centenary (pp. 20): copies from Mr. William Leary, Woodlands, Riseholme, Lincoln; no price stated.

Glanvilles Wootton centenary (pp. 8): no price or author stated.

Old Hill (Tabernacle) centenary (pp. 16): copies from the Rev. Christopher G. Edwards, 116, Barrs Road, Cradley Heath, Warley, Worcs; no price stated.

Soham centenary (pp. 8): copies, price 2s. 6d., from the Rev. Harry J. A. Elliott, 32, Station Road, Soham, Cambs.

Walcot centenary (pp. 8): copies from the Rev. Ian Mason, The Manse, Metheringham, Lincoln; no price stated.

From Year to Year—the story of the Wandsworth and Fulham circuit, 1864-1969, by the Rev. Leslie J. Farmer: copies, price 2s., from the author at 13, Enmore Road, Putney, London, S.W.15.

Burchover centenary (pp. 12): copies from the Rev. Alan A. Reeve, The Manse, New Road, Youlgreave, Bakewell, Derbys; no price stated.

For ever Building—a brief history of Rainton chapel (Yorks) (pp. 16): copies, price 4s., from the Rev. Raymond O. Ball, Wesley House, Aldborough Road, Boroughbridge, Yorks.

BOOK NOTICES

Thomas Coke, Apostle of Methodism, by John A. Vickers. (Epworth Press, pp. 400, £5.)

Mr. Vickers, a substantial contributor to the *Proceedings*, has provided a definitive biography of Thomas Coke. Although an essential figure in the early history of Methodism, Coke has been known heretofore mainly through the official biography written by Samuel Drew and published in 1817. Later biographies, such as Etheridge, Moister and Candler, added little to Drew's account. With the full apparatus of modern scholarship and an exhaustive search of relevant documents, Mr. Vickers has at last given us as complete a picture of Thomas Coke as may be.

However, Coke's character will continue to be a matter of dispute. It has long been a Methodist practice to impute to Coke anything disliked in the structure of Methodism. Charles Wesley disliked John Wesley's ordinations and blamed them on Coke, and down to our own generation an easy answer to Methodist errors has been "Coke did it." The bulk of Methodist historical writing has not been friendly. His biographers have, however, presented a uniformly kind and fair treatment. Samuel Drew, a personal friend of Coke, drew the official picture of the great man who served as Wesley's organizational aide in England, Ireland and America. Candler drew him after his own image—an archetype of the bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South.

Mr. Vickers follows the friendly character of the previous biographers, and does much to dispel the popular image of Coke as a vacillating character. One thing comes through clearly. Thomas Coke was unwavering in his dedication to the enlargement of the gospel influence of Methodism. This is the fact writ large across his life, that he felt himself "sent" as an apostle wherever there might be a chance of the enlargement of the gospel.

Many threads are woven in Coke's life. Some of these are not commendable, and may thus give occasion for the disparagement of his character when one is examining only a small segment of his life. One of these is his assumption of superiority, illustrated in his altercation with Nelson Reed in the American Conference of 1787:

"You must think you are my equals!"

"Yes, sir, we do; and we are not only the equals of Dr. Coke, but of Dr. Coke's king!"

As a consequence of this superiority, he could confidently request episcopal ordination for Asbury and himself in his negotiations with the Protestant Episcopal Church, and, years later, nominate himself to Parliamentary leaders for the bishopric of India. For him this was merely recognition of his scriptural and apostolic episcopacy imputed through the hands of Wesley. On each of these cases of episcopal ambition, Mr. Vickers says: "Coke's motive was a readiness to subordinate all things to the cause of Christ's kingdom, which more than once blinded him to the imprudence of the steps he took" (p. 346).

Dr. Coke's vacillation is less well understood. He could commend President Washington and the revolution which set the American colonies free as a nation, and, on the other hand, castigate democracy when he was in England. These and other vacillations were not motivated by a mere accommodation to his immediate surroundings. He was not simply a

chameleon. When he addressed Washington, he knew that he would open himself to criticism in England, but took the risk for idealistic motives. He never could settle with himself whether he was a faithful servant of the Church of England or a strong dissenting critic. These swings of opinion seem always to have been idealistically motivated. He was an enthusiast. To Mr. Vickers the answer to all these inconsistencies was a steady overriding sense of mission.

In regard to the work of Coke in America, there is nothing startlingly new in the book, but there is a very comprehensive compilation of materials and a judicious analysis. By these means, Mr. Vickers suitably lays to rest aspersions, beginning with O'Kelly and running forward to our own generation of scholars, that Coke exceeded his authority from Wesley in the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church. It is, we hope, no longer a matter of dispute that Wesley intended to plan a new and independent church in America (see pages 90-1 particularly). Nor does it appear that he gave additional memoranda on the "plan" which Coke did not open to the American brethren; nor is it at this point a question that Wesley intended both Coke and Asbury to exercise the episcopal office. What Wesley objected to was the word "bishop" and, most likely, the election of these two to their office by the suffrage of the American preachers at the Christmas Conference. Mr. Vickers has kindly supplied us with a brief article, "The Churchmanship of Thomas Coke", summarizing these points, in the American periodical *Methodist History* for July 1969:

The principle which underlay his reputed changes of loyalty [was] the primacy of the church's mission to the world. Rightly or wrongly, all else, including questions of Church order, was secondary in Coke's mind. . . . The question of re-ordination was, in itself, a matter of indifference to him. . . . Perhaps his word to our generation would be that in the last resort ecclesiastical charity matters more than theological chastity.

Mr. Vickers confirms the "picture of Thomas Coke, as first and last, an enthusiast for overseas missions" (p. 361). This is certainly the undisputed crown of Thomas Coke's career. John Wesley's original enthusiasm for preaching to the American Indians found its fruit in Thomas Coke's activities in the West Indian African missions. For those whose Methodist studies have been mainly centred in Great Britain and America, the detailed picture of the founding of the West Indian missions will be of great interest. Here it appears that Coke conducted himself with greater prudence, and here certainly his record was largely unsullied by the controversies which marked his association with America and with England.

This is a massive book of 400 pages, including a valuable series of appendices: the ordination certificates for Coke and Asbury, the address to President Washington and reply, Coke's ordinations, a catalogue of Coke's publications, and bibliography of studies of Thomas Coke and related "Methodistica". The index is brief but adequate. The price of the book may deter some from purchase, but one may be assured of its lasting value. Anyone who has searched diligently for a second-hand copy of Tyerman's *Wesley* should invest in Vickers's *Coke* for his grandchildren's inheritance.

J. HAMBY BARTON.

Heavy demands on our space have caused the omission of NOTES AND QUERIES this time. These will appear in our next issue.