

“What’s Puzzling You? [author of the *Fly Sheets*].” *Methodist Recorder* (Aug. 16, 1945): 3.

The Rev. Frank Baker states that James Everett was “almost certainly the author of the ‘Fly Sheets.’” Will Mr. Baker inform us on what evidence he makes this statement? (Mr. S. J. Gee, London, W.8.)

Rev. Frank Baker, B.A., B.D.: At the 1849 Conference James Everett was singled out as the “almost certain” author of the *Fly Sheets*, being one of a number who had refused to sign a semi-official circular denying authorship. He had previously written to the President, Dr. Robert Newton, “I object to answer any question as to authorship, until a searching inquiry is made into the truth or falsehood of the allegations made in the *Fly Sheets*. At the Conference he objected to being challenged before anyone else, before even his senior colleague on the same circuit, who was also involved. The reason given for this procedure was, “You are called first because you are the most suspected,” to which Everett replied, “If I am the most suspected, you of course have the most evidence against me.” No real evidence was forthcoming, however, and Conference did not expel him as the author of the offending publications, but because he “contumaciously refused” to deny his authorship. The case against him rests on circumstantial evidence, and is not sufficient to prove the case, which is likely to remain one of Methodism’s literary mysteries.

The main facts on which the “strong and generally prevalent suspicion” of Everett’s authorship was based were as follows: (a) Like the anonymous author, he was thoroughly acquainted with the inner workings of Methodist official circles. (b) His views on Methodist officialdom were undoubtedly those expressed in the *Fly Sheets*. (c) His experience as a prolific author, and as publisher and bookseller, would give him a unique opportunity to secure anonymous publication. (d) The anonymous method was characteristic of him. Besides scores of minor anonymous pieces, he was the author of the most important work in the Warrenite controversy, *The Disputants*, acknowledging its authorship four years later, and of the clever caricatures of ministerial personalities, *Wesleyan Takings*, acknowledging authorship many years later, though when challenged at the time he had taken up an almost identical attitude to that he adopted over the *Fly Sheets* inquisition. (e) The style of the *Fly Sheets* undoubtedly resembled Everett’s. (f) It cannot be denied that personal invective in the *Fly Sheets* manner was common in Everett’s words and writings—sarcastic, clever, but sometimes unfair. (g) A manuscript had been discovered on the desk of one of his close friends in York, which seemed to be the original of a section of one of the *Fly Sheets*. (h) His refusal to deny authorship obviously told against him.

None of this evidence was conclusive, though the cumulative effect was strong. Careful inquiries continued to be made long after the expulsion, but no more evidence was found. It seems obvious that the tracks had been carefully covered—again a characteristic of Everett’s literary procedure. Nor could a real alternative to Everett’s authorship be suggested—the next most likely author, Samuel Dunn, appears to have denied a hand in the *Fly Sheets*.

Those who know of Everett’s manuscript diary will immediately ask if there is any new evidence there. The first available reference in the diary, under the date April 18, 1847, must in fairness be quoted in full:—

“There are printed circulars, going under the name of *Fly Sheets*, which are making a noise in the Methodist world, assailing the *Executive*, in no

measured terms; circulated, from all that I can learn, chiefly, if not exclusively, among the Preachers—*anonymous*, professing to be from a *Committee*, exposing various *abuses*, and demanding *reform*. I received a copy with the London postmark, so also did Messrs. Burdsall, Walton, and others, in other quarters. Some of the preachers have been heard to state that the greatest evil attending these missiles, is, their *truthfulness*. They are evidently by different hands, but the complaint is, that they are too personal.”

This evidence, however, must be largely discounted, for the Diary was written partly with a view to publication, and such a controversial issue was likely to be “doctored.” More important still, this entry comes a year later than the first stir caused by the *Fly Sheets*, and long after Dr. Bunting had waxed indignant about them in the 1846 Conference. Is it likely that Everett, *unless he knew their origin*, would have omitted any previous mention of them in his voluminous diary? Add to this the fact that the actual diary entry follows two pages of manuscript which Everett has first heavily scored through, and then completely obscured by glueing sheets of paper over them, and one can hardly resist the conclusion that here was some tangible clue to the origin of the *Fly Sheets* which must be hidden away, the more innocuous paragraph quoted being appended in the blank space at the foot of the page.