

CHARLES WESLEY'S "HYMNS FOR CHILDREN"

BOTH John and Charles Wesley loved children, and were deeply concerned for their spiritual welfare—oppressively so in the view of modern educationists. Richard Green's *Wesley Bibliography* lists ten separate works ending with the phrase "for Children", quite apart from the textbooks prepared for Kingswood School. They range from *Instructions for Children* in 1745 (Green, 62) to an abridged edition of *Hymns for Children* with a preface by John Wesley dated 27th March 1790 (Green, 414).

Perhaps the most interesting of all are the various volumes entitled *Hymns for Children*, all issued anonymously, with the partial exception of the preface to the 1790 collection. The best known is that of 1763 (Green, 223), which contains a hundred hymns, some of them quite lengthy. That this was actually the production of Charles Wesley himself seems proved by a sentence in a letter of 1760 to his wife: "I am going to print my Hymns for Children." Of the abridged version of this with John Wesley's 1790 preface I have not so far examined a copy, though there is one in the Victoria University, Toronto. At our British Methodist Book-Room, however, there are two copies of an earlier edition of the same abridgement without John Wesley's preface, one dated 1787, and the other without title-page.

The rarest of all, however, is the earliest work with this title, which Green numbered 99, and of which he had not seen a copy when the first edition of his monumental work was compiled. An additional note to the second edition describes the publication, but adds, "I am compelled to think that this tract was not compiled by Wesley." This opinion seems to have been formed mainly because of distaste at the common evangelical eighteenth-century attitude towards children and death—certainly in those days a far larger proportion of children died in youth, and there was little attempt to keep from them "the facts of death". In particular, Green seems to have been disturbed by the closing lines of a verse to be used "At lying down in Bed", which may or may not have been written by the compiler, but was obviously approved by him. These same sentiments, however, can be multiplied and magnified by recourse to the 1763 *Hymns for Children*. It seems to the present writer almost certain that the tract was published by the Wesleys. It also seems probable that it was published by Charles Wesley.¹

¹ It does not appear to be mentioned in the advertisements of various Wesley publications which from time to time were appended to their books and tracts. Although these advertisements speak of "Books publish'd by Mr. John and Charles Wesley", one gets the impression that they were prepared by John Wesley, and there seem to be more omissions of ephemera written by Charles than by John. This is somewhat shaky evidence, however, and the lists vary considerably in their comprehensiveness.

It is very difficult to date this first *Hymns for Children*, which consists of 12 pages duodecimo. Not only does it seem to have escaped being listed, but it bears no name of compiler or printer, no name of place of printing, no date. One clue which has been of value in similarly undocumented publications has so far yielded only negative results. There is a distinctive ornamental rule over the title, but this does not coincide with scores of similar printer's devices which I have listed from Wesley's publications, though it is reminiscent of some. This might be construed as an argument against its publication by Wesley if my catalogue of printer's devices were anything like exhaustive, but I cannot pretend that it is. The type of device used, however, tends to confirm an early date for the pamphlet—probably somewhere in the middle 1740s.

Hymns for children first appeared in the *Collection of Psalms and Hymns* published by John Wesley in 1741; of this there was a new edition in 1743, with considerable alterations and with the addition of the name of Charles Wesley to the title-page. Like the 1737 Charleston volume with the same title, this was a composite work; the 1743 volume certainly, the 1741 volume almost certainly, contained several contributions by Charles Wesley. Both the 1741 and the 1743 editions included a "children's section"—three hymns for the orphans in Georgia, seven for "Charity-Children", one for "the opening of a Charity-School", and three "for any School". None of these fourteen hymns appeared in any of the three volumes entitled *Hymns for Children*.

In 1742 the two brothers issued their third joint publication under the title *Hymns and Sacred Poems*. It contained a group of seven "Hymns for Children". Six of these were reprinted in the 1763 *Hymns for Children*, forming the opening group of "Hymns for the Youngest", the first two hymns, "Gentle Jesus" and "Lamb of God, I fain would be", being in 1763 split into two parts. The hymn omitted from the 1763 collection was also inadvertently omitted by Dr. George Osborn from the Wesleys' *Poetical Works*: it is "Hymn V" in the *Hymns for Children* soon to be described in detail.

This first *Hymns for Children* is much more closely related, both in content and form, to the 1742 volume than to that of 1763. In all probability the 1742 group of hymns (even although in the event two were omitted) inspired the idea of a separate hymn-tract for children, incorporating some suitable hymns from previous publications. To these were added some brief guides to the devotional life. Although this cannot at present be proved, and may in fact eventually be disproved, I believe that Charles Wesley prepared and published this little devotional guide for young children somewhere in the middle 1740s; I believe also that it affords at least a clue to the family devotions both in his parents' home at Epworth and in his own later home in Bristol. After listing the hymns with which the tract commences, therefore, and which occupy the first nine pages, we propose to reprint the closing pages verbatim.

- p. (1) "HYMNS / for / CHILDREN.
[single rule]"
- pp. (1)-2 "HYMN I. / Gentle Jesus, meek and mild . . ."
[14 verses, 77-77., from *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, 1742, pp. 194-5.]
- pp. 3-4 "HYMN II. / Lamb of God, I fain would be . . ."
[13 verses, 77-77., from *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, 1742, pp. 195-7, omitting verse 11.]
- pp. 4-5 "HYMN III. / Come let us join the Hosts above . . ."
[6 verses, C.M., from *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, 1742, pp. 197-8.]
- pp. 5-6 "HYMN IV. / Lover of Little Children, Thee . . ."
[6 verses, C.M., from *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, 1742, pp. 201-2.]
- p. 6 "HYMN V. / All Thanks and Praise to God belong . . ."
[6 verses, C.M., from *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, 1742, pp. 199-200, omitting verses 2 and 3.]
- p. 7 "LIFE and ETERNITY. / Thee we adore, eternal Name . . ."
[7 verses, C.M., from *Collection of Psalms and Hymns*, 1741, p. 15; by Isaac Watts, being Hymn 55 in Book II of his *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*.]
- pp. 7-8 "Hymn for Sunday. / The Lord of Sabbath let us praise . . ."
[4 verses, C.M., from *Collection of Psalms and Hymns*, 1741, p. 46; by Samuel Wesley, jun., published in his *Poems*, 1736, p. 241.]
- pp. 8-9 "A Morning Hymn. / Jesus the all-restoring Word . . ."
[6 verses, C.M., from *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, 1740, pp. 25-6.]
- p. 9 "An Evening Hymn. / Jesus, the all-atoning Lamb . . ."
[6 verses, C.M., from *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, 1740, pp. 26-7.]

These latter two hymns are included in the opening pages of a manuscript volume preserved at the Book-Room ("MS. 47") which seems to be the earliest of Charles Wesley's manuscript volumes; it seems likely that this volume was used in the compilation of the 1740 *Hymns and Sacred Poems*. In this detail, also, there seems to be confirmation of Charles Wesley's authorship of the early *Hymns for Children*.

The pamphlet concludes with :

- p. 10 "An Exhortation for a Child.

If you have any Regard, dear Child, to your own eternal Happiness, it ought to be your chiefest Care to serve and glorify God. 'Tis for this End, God both made and redeemed you: And two excellent Rules he

hath given you in Holy Scripture ; by the conscientious Observation of which you will be able, through his Grace, to dedicate your tender Years to his Glory.

The one teaches you what you have to do ; *Remember now thy Creator in the Days of thy Youth.*

The other teaches you what you are to avoid ; *Fly youthful Lusts ;* that is, all those Sins which are usually incident to young Persons.

You cannot imagine the unspeakable Advantages a pious Youth gains by the Practice of these two Rules ; and how many ghostly Dangers that Soul escapes, which is seasoned betimes with the Fear of God, before he be sullied with ill Company ; before he hath contracted vicious Habits, which will cost him infinite Pains to unlearn ; learn then, dear Child, to accustom yourself to bear Christ's Yoke from your Youth ; do but consider how welcome a young Convert is to God : To young *Samuel*, God revealed himself ; and it was *St. John*, the youngest of all the Disciples, who was permitted to lean on our Saviour's Bosom at the last Supper.

Directions for a Child.

As soon as ever you awake in the Morning, dear Child, strive as much as you can, to keep all worldly Thoughts out of your Mind, 'till you have presented the first Fruits of the Day to God, which will be an excellent Preparative to make you spend the Rest of it the better.

When your Clothes are on look on your Souls as still undress'd, 'till you have said your Prayers ; no matter what Places you pray in, for God will hear you any where, if you pray from your Heart. Never omit Prayer Morn-

p. 11

ing or Evening, for many have gone well to Bed over Night, who have been found dead the next Morning ; and therefore it highly concerns you to take Care to make your Peace with God before you go to sleep.

Towards Night examine how you have spent the Day ; what has been amiss in your Thoughts, Words, and Actions that Day. Consider what Idleness or Unchastity, what Lying and Stubbornness you have been guilty of, and get the Blood of Christ to blot it all out before you close your Eyes. And if you have had any Quarrel with any other Child, be sure to be Friends with them before you sleep.

Morning Prayer for a Child.

Glory be to to [sic] thee, O Lord God, for all the Blessings I daily receive from thee, and for thy particular Preservation and Refreshment of me this Night past.

O Lord, have Mercy upon me, and forgive whatsoever thou hast seen amiss in me this Night ; and for the Time to come, give me Grace to fly all youthful Lusts, and to remember thee, my Creator, in the Days of my Youth.

Show down thy Graces and Blessings on me, and on all my Relations, (*On my Father and Mother, on my Brethren and Sisters*) on all my Friends, on all my Governors ; and give thy Angels charge over us, to protect us all from Sin and Danger.

Lord, bless me in my Learning this Day, that I may every Day grow more fit for thy Service : O pardon my Failings and do more for me, than [sic, i.e. "than "] I can ask or think, for the Merits of Jesus, my Saviour,

in whose holy Words, I sum up all my Wants. *Our Father which art in Heaven, &c.*

Evening Prayer for a Child.

Glory be to thee, O Lord God, for all the Blessings I daily receive from thee, and for thy particular Preservation of me this Day.

p. 12

O Lord, have Mercy upon me, and forgive whatsoever thou hast seen amiss in me this Day past; and for the Time to come give me Grace to fly all youthful Lusts, and to remember thee, my Creator, in the Days of my Youth.

Lord receive me and all my Relations into thy gracious Protection this Night; and send me such seasonable Rest that I may rise the next Morning more fit for thy Service.

Lord, hear my Prayers, and pardon my Failings, for the Merit of my blessed Saviour, in whose holy Words I sum up all my Wants. *Our Father which art in Heaven, &c.*

At lying down in Bed.

I lay me down, hoping to sleep,
I pray to God, my Soul to keep;
But if I die before I wake,
I pray to God my Soul to take.

[Single rule]

A Grace before Meat.

Sanctify, O Lord, we beseech thee, these thy good Creatures to our Use, and us to thy Service, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

A Grace after Meat.

Blessed and praised be thy holy Name, O Lord, for these and all thy other Blessings bestowed upon us, through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

FINIS."

This is surely not unworthy of either John or Charles Wesley. Albeit with something of the uncompromising piety of the early Methodists, as must be expected, it enshrines the straightforward simplicity of "Gentle Jesus", and is far less "namby-pambical" than that poem. It is certainly much more appropriate for younger children than John Wesley's *Prayers for Children* published in 1772 (Green, 281). One might do worse than recommend it (with some slight alterations) for use by the child of today. FRANK BAKER.

The Proceedings of the Ninth World Methodist Conference (Abingdon Press, U.S.A., pp. 520, 25s., obtainable from the Epworth Press) contains full transcripts of the addresses given at the 1956 Conference at Lake Junaluska. The addresses cover a variety of themes, expository, theological, sociological, hortatory, and historical. Amongst the latter we single out the contributions by Dr. Umphrey Lee on "The Formative Period of American Methodism", by Dr. Maldwyn Edwards on "The Wesley Family", and by Bishop Paul Garber on "Early Methodist Preaching in America". But why a couple of pages could not have been spared for a detailed list of contents is an unexplained mystery. This volume is like the famous curate's egg, but (to change the metaphor) there is much good grain amongst the chaff.