

We are still left with a continued and deep cleavage in culture, ethos, sympathies, outlook and social background between the Established Church and the historic Dissenting bodies—the Presbyterians, the Independents and the Baptists, who were later to be joined by the Methodists and the other Free Churches. To some extent the gulf has been narrowed as toleration has become more real and as movements towards unity have grown in the last fifty years. But in the extraordinarily rapid changes of this century, in the present background of indifference and apathy towards the Christian Church in all its manifestations, and in the contemporary challenge to Christian unity, we are left asking ourselves searching questions about the necessity and the relevance of divisions which are part of the incomplete and still unsettled settlement of religion which the Toleration Act provided.

<sup>1</sup> G. M. Trevelyan, *History of England*, p. 476.

<sup>2</sup> H. W. Clark, *History of English Nonconformity*, i, p. 378.

<sup>3</sup> Bogue and Bennett, *History of Dissenters* (1808 edition), i, p. 200.

<sup>4</sup> The text of this act and of others is conveniently given in Gee and Hardy, *Documents Illustrative of the History of the English Church*.

<sup>5</sup> *History of English Congregationalism*, p. 469.

<sup>6</sup> *Rooted in Faith*, p. 92.

<sup>7</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 474.

<sup>8</sup> *English Religious Dissent*, p. 125.

<sup>9</sup> For 'The Sheriffs' Cause' see B. L. Manning and O. Greenwood, *The Protestant Dissenting Deputies*, pp. 119 ff.

## WESLEY'S PURITAN ANCESTRY

Frank Baker

JOHN WESLEY was nothing like as interested in the Wesley family tree as thousands of people since his day have become. One genealogical fact, however, did impress him: he came from a line of evangelical preachers. Writing to his brother Charles in 1768, he toyed with the idea that one of Charles's three sons might become a minister: 'It is highly probable one of the three will stand before the Lord. But, so far as I can learn, such a thing has scarce been for these thousand years before, as a son, father, grandfather, *atavus*, *tritavus*, preaching the gospel, nay, and the genuine gospel, in a line.'<sup>1</sup> In fact, the youngest of Charles Wesley's three sons died in a few months, and the other two became renowned musicians, but not ministers. After missing one generation, however, one of Charles Wesley's grandchildren—

another Charles—became Dean of the Chapel Royal, and in the following generation at least two more, the sons of Samuel Sebastian Wesley.

It is important to note John Wesley's claim that his ancestors proclaimed the *genuine* gospel, for in this he revealed his own strong sympathies with those Puritan forbears who for conscience' sake had been as ready as he himself was to defy the discipline of Church and State. Both his grandfathers—we will henceforth think of them from the point of view of John and his brother Charles rather than from that of Charles's potential ministerial sons—were ejected from their livings in 1662, as was also one of his paternal great-grandfathers. At least one, and possibly two, of his three other great-grandfathers was a noted Puritan of pre-1662 days.

What little John Wesley as a young man knew about his ancestry came from his parents. Both of them, however, were enthusiastic converts from Dissent to Anglicanism, and it is not surprising that they did not fill their children's heads with stirring tales of their predominantly Puritan forefathers. As a result the Wesley children developed no early taste either for genealogy or nonconformity. After the death of his elder brother Samuel in 1739, their widowed mother came to live with John Wesley in the Foundery, London, until her death in 1742, when she was buried across the way in the famous Puritan burying-ground of Bunhill Fields, along with John Bunyan and 100,000 other Dissenters. John Wesley naturally became the depository of family lore and family documents, though for many years neither interested him greatly. His *Journal* for 4th January, 1773, reveals him sorting his papers and coming across a letter written in 1619—'I suppose by my grandfather's father, to her he was to marry in a few days.'

Whether in fact Wesley's supposition was correct, with Bartholomew Wesley, his 'grandfather's father', we must begin our brief genealogical summary.<sup>2</sup> Stevenson's outline of Bartholomew Wesley's ancestry, which is possible but not proven, introduces several ancient branches of a noble family who spelt their name variously as Wellesley, Westley, and Wesley, and who were settled in Somerset, in Devon, and in Ireland. Sir Herbert Wesley of Westleigh, Co. Devon, married his cousin Elizabeth, daughter of Robert Wellesley of Dangan Castle, Co. Meath, Ireland, whose wife was also a Wellesley by birth. They had three sons: William, through whom the line continued into modern times; Harpham, who died unmarried; and Bartholomew, 'who was ordained a priest, and became the head of that branch known as the Wesleys of Epworth'. Indisputable biographical data about Bartholomew are still rare, and several doubtful or incorrect assertions are made in most accounts, including that in the *Dictionary of National Biography*. His birth, education and ordination are still matters of speculation, and Stevenson's claim that he married Ann, daughter of Sir Henry Colley of Kildare, Ireland, is uncertain.<sup>3</sup>

Certainly Bartholomew Wesley was the minister of the combined parishes of Charmouth and Catherston in Dorset at the time of King Charles II's narrow escape after the battle of Worcester. Tradition has it that the ostler at the Queen's Head, Charmouth, ran to share his suspicions about the disguised stranger with the parson, but found him at his 'morning exercise'

(apparently prayer, not preaching), and by the time the message reached Wesley the runaway king had safely embarked for France. We cannot claim with certainty, however, that the devotional habits of Wesley's puritan great-grandfather provided a turning-point in British history as well as leading eventually to his own ejection, for there are rival accounts of the incident. Clarendon's *History* assigned the parson's role to a lay Puritan preacher, and in his *Concise History of England* John Wesley, apparently unaware of any possible family connection, followed Clarendon, speaking of 'a weaver who had been a soldier in the Parliament army'. This was in September 1651, and for some years before and after this Wesley was the incumbent at Charmouth.<sup>4</sup>

Bartholomew Westley was ejected in 1662 from Allington, just north of Bridport, where he had been for six years at least. After his ejection he made a living as a physician, while continuing to preach occasionally. When the provisions of the Five Mile Act drove him from the Bridport area he seems to have returned to Charmouth, where (jointly with his son John) he had bought some property in 1663. Selling this in 1668 he settled in Lyme Regis, where he was buried on 15th February, 1670/71. His wife (possibly his second wife) Mary survived him only a few months, and was also buried at Lyme Regis on 13th July, 1671.<sup>5</sup>

Bartholomew's death was apparently hastened by that of his son John, of whom Calamy gives an extended account in his *Continuation*. He was born about 1636, matriculated at New Inn Hall, Oxford, in 1651, gaining his B.A. in 1654 and his M.A. in 1657. Calamy tells how at Oxford he was noted both for his application to Oriental languages and for his devout life, which brought him to the kindly attention of the Vice Chancellor, the great Puritan divine John Owen. He was associated with a 'gathered church' at Melcombe Regis (now Weymouth), served as a village missionary and port chaplain, 'officiated as minister' aboard the *Triumph*, and in May 1658 was appointed to the tiny parish of Winterbourne Whitchurch, Dorset, for which office the Triers promised him an augmented salary as 'a godly and able young man'. He himself was able to claim 'the apparent conversion of several souls' to 'the power of godliness' wherever he preached, specifically listing 'Radipole, Melcombe. Turnwood, Whitechurch, and at sea'. According to Calamy, he married a niece of the Church historian Dr Thomas Fuller (who is also supposed to have been the daughter of John White, the Patriarch of Dorchester), but no details of this marriage have been discovered. The promised augmentation not materializing, he apparently took pupils in order to support his growing family, who included Timothy (baptized 1659), Elizabeth (1660/1) and Samuel (17th December, 1662).<sup>6</sup>

John Westley was clearly both a Puritan and a Parliament-man, and soon found himself in hot water after the Restoration. On 5th February, 1660/1, an information was laid against him 'for diabolically railing in the pulpit against the late King and his posterity, and praising Cromwell; also, for false doctrines, professing to speak with God. . . .' He was thrown into prison, released, and incarcerated again without trial.<sup>7</sup> Calamy utilized Westley's diary, and in particular reproduced from it his interview with Gilbert Ironside, one of four new bishops consecrated in January, 1661. Westley answered the bishop's charges of civil indiscretions by pointing out that he had received

the royal pardon and taken the oath of allegiance. He defended his undoubted lack of episcopal ordination by claiming that he 'had a mission from God and man', and stating that he was called to the *work* of the ministry, though not to the *office*. Early in 1662 he was again arrested while leaving Church and charged at the assize court with not reading the Book of Common Prayer. Although he succeeded in deferring the issue on the technicality that the book had not been tendered to him, it was clear that the issue would be settled when the Act of Uniformity came into operation. On Sunday, 17th August, 1662, he preached his farewell sermon to a weeping congregation, and the following February he and his family left Whitchurch. For months they were wanderers, forced from Weymouth to Bridgwater, on to Ilminster, and then to Taunton, until eventually they were able to return and settle in a rent-free house in Preston, three miles north-east of Weymouth. From this headquarters Westley managed to serve as pastor of a congregation in Poole. For a time the Five Mile Act forced him out of Preston, but in 1666 he decided to defy the law, and not only lived there but preached with only a modicum of concealment at the expense of constant persecution and imprisonment. The account of his death preserved by his son Samuel stated that in 1670 he was again arrested while 'preaching at a meeting, and by lying on the cold earth . . . he contracted a sickness which in ten days cost him his life'.<sup>8</sup> Calamy claimed that the Vicar of Preston refused to bury him in the church there, and the date and place of his burial are not known.

Young Samuel, born in the year of his father's ejection, managed to continue his education at Dorchester Free School, was adopted by the Dissenters as a likely candidate for their ministry, and sent to Dissenting Academies in London. Here he was living with his mother and an aged aunt in 1683 when he suddenly forsook his dissenting background to enter Exeter College, Oxford, as a preparation for offering himself for Holy Orders in the Church of England. In 1688, the year of the Glorious Revolution, he graduated, was ordained, and was married. His marriage on 12th November assured John Wesley of an even more famous Puritan grandparent, for Samuel's bride Susanna was the twenty-fifth child of Dr. Samuel Annesley.<sup>9</sup>

Annesley was born in Warwickshire about 1620, and as a child believed himself called to the ministry, beginning a lifetime practice of reading twenty chapters of the Bible every day. After education at Queen's College, Oxford, he was ordained episcopally (probably as deacon only), and then in 1644 by presbyters, after which he served as chaplain on a man-of-war. He secured a wealthy living at Cliffe, in Kent, and was made D.C.L. of Oxford in 1648. His presentation to the vicarage of St Giles', Cripplegate, London, in 1658, was renewed both by the Trustees and by the king in 1660. In 1662, however, in spite of the exhortations of his cousin, the Earl of Anglesey, an Anglican with strong Puritan sympathies, he refused to conform, and was ejected. He suffered several convictions for preaching, and became one of the acknowledged leaders of London Nonconformity from his meeting-house in Little St Helen's. Here in 1694 he and others conducted the first public ordination held by the Presbyterians after 1662, one of the ordinands being Edmund Calamy. Annesley died in 1696 and his funeral sermon was preached by Dr Daniel Williams, founder of the Library and Trust bearing his name.

As his second wife Samuel Annesley married a daughter of the parliamentarian John White (1590-1645), through whom some confusion possibly arose in John Wesley's mind about his 'grandmother's father' being Dr John White (1575-1648), the Patriarch of Dorchester and chairman of the Westminster Assembly. Annesley's father-in-law was also a well-known Puritan, familiarly known as 'Century White' because as chairman of the 'Committee for Scandalous Ministers' he published *The First Century of Scandalous Malignant Priests*; like his namesake, he was also concerned in the settlement of Massachusetts.

Dr Samuel Annesley's children grew up in an intense atmosphere of theological discussion, and like her sister Elizabeth (wife of John Dunton) Susanna Annesley gained from the strong Puritan training of her youth not only demanding moral and devotional standards, but a mind richly stored with scripture and divinity, so that she proved a valuable source of theological reference for her sons. Even when she was twelve she was familiar with the pros and cons of the debate between Church and Dissent, and long before her marriage to Samuel Wesley at the age of nineteen she had adopted Anglicanism, apparently with little objection from her father.

Had John Wesley depended solely on parental information and enthusiasm, he would certainly not have developed that sympathy with the Puritans which he reached in later years along with the realization that even his own Puritan ancestry had in part foreshadowed the Methodist movement. With minor exceptions his reading at Oxford and in Georgia was that of a conventional High Church Anglican.<sup>10</sup> Only after his Aldersgate experience did Puritan piety lay its hold upon him. Even so, Neal's *History of the Puritans* apparently made little impression on him when he first dipped into it in 1739, though he was deeply impressed in 1741 by Matthew Henry's biography of his father, and somewhat less so by that of Matthew Henry himself. As Methodism became established, however, Wesley came strongly under the influence of Richard Baxter—especially his *Aphorisms of Justification*—and Jonathan Edwards. Writings of both these men, abridged and published by Wesley, were carefully discussed at the 1744 Conference. During a debate on Church government at the 1745 Conference, Wesley showed himself leaning strongly towards non-episcopal forms as both primitive and still valid. The reading of Lord King's *Inquiry into . . . the Primitive Church* in January 1746 convinced him that there was in fact no essential difference between bishops and presbyters, in spite (as he put it) 'of the vehement prejudice of my education'. His Puritan reading began to build up rapidly. In 1747 he turned again to Neal's *History of the Puritans*, writing: 'I stand in amaze. First, at the execrable Spirit of Persecution, which drove those venerable Men out of the Church, and with which Queen Elizabeth's Clergy were as deeply tainted as ever Queen Mary's were: Secondly, at the Weakness of those holy Confessors, many of whom spent so much of their Time and Strength in disputing about Surplices and Hoods, or Kneeling at the Lord's Supper!<sup>11</sup> In that same year of 1747 he defended Thomas Cartwright from 'John Smith's' attacks, claiming him and his associates as 'the most learned and most pious men . . . in the English nation'. To Smith's warning that Methodism was heading for a similar fate to Puritanism he replied: 'So be it!<sup>12</sup>

When Wesley began the publication of the fifty volumes of his *Christian Library* in 1749, he so respected the Puritans that he followed his extracts from Foxe's *Martyrs* with the sufferings of the Puritans, 'who sprung up, as it were, out of their ashes'. Much more, however, did he value their 'practical divinity'—the main theme of his work. When in 1751 he came to volume 7 he wrote a lengthy introduction, criticizing the Puritans' low view of sanctification and their eagerness for controversy, but finding 'abundant recompense' in their solid piety and scriptural learning; 'They are men mighty in the Scriptures, equal to any of those who went before them, and far superior to most that have followed them.' So impressed was Wesley that about half of his *Christian Library* was devoted to the Puritans.

As he neared the end of the *Christian Library* project, Wesley met Calamy's *Abridgment of Mr. Baxter's Life*. Again he referred to 'prejudices of education', but acknowledged: 'I could not but see, that the poor Nonconformists had been used without either Justice or Mercy: And that many of the Protestant Bishops of King Charles, had neither more Religion nor Humanity, than the Popish Bishops of Queen Mary.' Wesley apparently used either the 1702 or the 1713 edition, neither of which contained much about his own ancestors. In 1765, however, in Londonderry, he came across the account of his grandfather's conversation with the Bishop of Bristol, apparently transcribed from Calamy's *Continuation* (1727). As we read his *apologia* for inserting the documents (slightly abridged, of course) in his *Journal* we note that he has at last generated a little genealogical enthusiasm: 'I may be excused if it appears more remarkable to me that it will do to an unconcerned person.'<sup>13</sup>

John Wesley was by now quite convinced that he was in a glorious succession, and rarely did his pen drip more acid than in his *Thoughts upon Liberty* (1772), aimed chiefly at the demagogy of John Wilkes, but taking in the history of 'liberty of conscience' from the founding fathers of New England to the Act of Uniformity: 'So, by this glorious Act, thousands of men, guilty of no crime, nothing contrary either to justice, mercy, or truth, were stripped of all they had, of their houses, lands, revenues, and driven to seek where they could, or beg, their bread. For what? Because they did not dare to worship God according to other men's consciences!'

A footnote in his *Concise Ecclesiastical History* (1781), based largely on Mosheim, underlined his strong convictions. To a passage stating that 'the more moderate Puritans . . . only desired liberty of conscience, with the privilege of celebrating divine worship in their own way', he added the comment: 'And it was vile tyranny to refuse them this.' When he came in his appendix to recount once more the 'Short History of the Methodists', we notice an interesting difference between the account of his last challenging Oxford sermon given here and the one given in his *Journal* nearer the event. In his *Journal*, published in 1753, he has written: 'Frid. 24 [August, 1744]. St Bartholomew's Day, I preached, I suppose, the last time at St Mary's. Be it so. I am now clear of the Blood of these Men. I have fully delivered my own Soul'. Thirty years and more later he saw this event in fuller perspective, and appreciated the symbolic significance of its having taken place on St

Bartholomew's Day of unhappy memory. He therefore added: 'And I am well pleased that it should be the very day on which, in the last century, near two thousand burning and shining lights were put out at one stroke. Yet what a wide difference is there between their case and mine! They were turned out of house and home, and all that they had; whereas I am only hindered from preaching, without any other loss; and that in a kind of honourable manner. . . .'<sup>14</sup>

Perhaps there was not such a wide difference between the treatment meted out to John Wesley and his Puritan forefathers as he implied. Certainly through the years he had realized, in spite of the 'vehement prejudice' of his upbringing and education, his close spiritual affinity with the Puritans, realized even that the Puritan blood in his own veins was in part responsible for the fact that he, like them, was resolved to preach 'the genuine gospel' no matter what the Church established by law might say or do. If he was a true child of Samuel and Susanna Wesley, he was equally a true grandchild of John Westley and Samuel Annesley.

<sup>1</sup> *Letters*, v: 76. Wesley's Latin has slipped, and he has omitted two genealogical links from the correct series: *pater, avus, proavus, abavus, atavus, tritavus*. For great-grandfather and great-great-grandfather he should have used the terms *proavus* and *abavus*; the clumsier but less confusing English terms were in use, but do not appear in Wesley's writings.

<sup>2</sup> In the compass of the article the merest summary of biographical data is given, and many genealogical problems are ignored. Nor are full references given to the standard works, from which the outline is prepared: Calamy's *Continuation of the Account of the Ministers . . . ejected* (1727), A. G. Matthews's *Calamy Revised* (1934), Adam Clarke's *Memoirs of the Wesley Family* (1823), William Beal's *Fathers of the Wesley Family* (2nd edn, 1862), G. J. Stevenson's *Memorials of the Wesley Family* (1876), the *Dictionary of National Biography*, and the *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*.

<sup>3</sup> Stevenson, xv-xvii, xxi, 4, 6. Unfortunately Stevenson contradicts himself, e.g., about the elder son William; nor does his genealogical table correspond fully with his printed data. His assertions, the only material readily available, were repeated even by so critical a writer as Alexander Gordon in the *D.N.B.*

<sup>4</sup> Clarke I: 21-2 (quoting Hutchin's *Dorset*), 25-9; Beal, 24-9; *Minute Books of the Dorset Standing Committee*, 1646-1650, pp. 500-1, etc.; Tyerman's *Samuel Wesley*, 28-32; John Wesley's *History of England*, III: 230; *Proc. of W.H.S. IV*: 89-91.

<sup>5</sup> *Proc. of W.H.S. IV*: 89-91, 150; V: 20-3; VI: 1. Broadley's statement about Bartholomew Westley's re-marriage appears to be based on a misreading of 'my now wife' as 'my new wife', and this evidence needs reconciling with Stevenson's statements. For the 1663 and 1668 deeds I am indebted to Mr R. W. J. Pavey of Charmouth; in the first both Bartholomew and his son described themselves as 'of Bridport, Clerk', and in 1668 the father was 'of Charmouth, Clerk, and the son 'of Preston, Clerk'.

<sup>6</sup> In addition to the general authorities see *Calendar of State Papers: Domestic*, 1657-1658, p. 474, and 1658-1659, p. 81. To the children of John should possibly be added Bartholomew Westley of Catherston—see *Proc. of W.H.S. XXI*: 46. What amounts to almost certain refutation of the claim that John Westley married a daughter of John White is given in Frances Rose-Troup's *John White, the Patriarch of Dorchester* (1930), pp. 392-3.

<sup>7</sup> *Calendar of State Papers: Domestic*, 1660-1661, p. 504. Some of the accusations are detailed in Beal, 52-3, and others in Matthews, p. 521.

<sup>8</sup> Transcript of Letter, 2nd August, 1692, in Bodleian Library: Rawlinson MS. 406, pp. 100-3.

<sup>9</sup> The record of their marriage appears in the register of Marylebone Parish Church, London, where later Charles Wesley was buried.

<sup>10</sup> The record of Wesley's reading is summarized from his *Journal* (Standard edn.), *Letters* (Standard edn.), R. Green's *Wesley Bibliography*, and Wesley's *Works* (3rd edn., 1829-31). Cf. Dr A. W. Harrison's articles in *Proc. of W.H.S.*, XIII: 25-9; XV: 113-7, 161-5, and V. H. H. Green: *The Young Mr Wesley*, Appendix I.

<sup>11</sup> Wesley kept sets of Neal in his libraries, used it for the courses in Kingswood School, recommended it to correspondents, and gave it honourable mention in the preface to his *History of England* (1775).

<sup>12</sup> Henry Moore's *Wesley*, II: 535-6, 546.

<sup>13</sup> *Journal*, IV: 93; V: 119-124.

<sup>14</sup> *Works*, XI: 39; *Concise Ecclesiastical History*, III: 246, IV: 187.

## NONCONFORMITY IN THE AGE OF WESLEY

Norman P. Goldhawk

TO ALL OUTWARD appearances the years in which John Wesley was being educated in the rectory at Epworth did not augur well for the future of Nonconformity in England. True, the Toleration Act of 1689 had brought to an end active persecution of Dissenters, who had now won the right to worship in their own ways. Yet the civil and legal disabilities which they still had to endure, together with a general movement for the further protection and advancement of the Established Church under Queen Anne, did not help to make their lot a happy one. It was perhaps not easy for the children of those who had resisted the Anglican claims to hold out against a widely-felt attitude that England should be ruled only by Churchmen. Moreover, as Dr Payne has said, 'there was often a genuine desire to render public and patriotic service and almost every avenue was closed to avowed Dissenters'. That many should have followed the examples of John Wesley's parents in returning to the Church of England is, under such circumstances, not surprising. The Tory majority which was elected to the Parliament of 1710 would have made this movement much more general. An Occasional Conformity Act was at last passed, aimed at preventing Nonconformists from attending a Communion service in the parish church in order to qualify for civic office, although it proved largely ineffectual. Only the death of the Queen prevented the Schism Act of 1714 from becoming law; the intention had been to declare that Dissenters, who were the irreconcilable enemies of the Church, and whose schools were a danger to the universities and to the Church, should not be allowed to engage in educating others. In fact, from the beginning of the reign of George I, the majority of Nonconformists were among the most loyal supporters of the throne, and they remained firmly attached to the House of Hanover throughout the century. With the accession of George I, the position of the Nonconformists was certainly assured; some benefits were granted them which led to the improvement of their status throughout the country. Yet it was more than a hundred years before their legal rights were formally extended.

The Nonconformists of the age of Wesley thus enjoyed but a limited freedom; as a result they were prevented from playing much of a part in public affairs. For this reason Mr Bernard Manning could say of his own denomination: 'I shall not deny that, set between the heroic Congregationalism of the seventeenth century and the triumphant Congregationalism of the nineteenth century, the Congregationalists of the eighteenth century seem flat and uninteresting. . . . In the seventeenth century Congregationalism held an undefined position in the State, now high, now low, now in power, now in persecution; in the eighteenth century there is a state of equilibrium.'<sup>1</sup> This judgement is, of course, true if politics are the standard, and such a point of view no doubt justified the confident resolution of both Houses of Parlia-