BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Treasure in Earthen Vessels: a Play
A Charge to Keep: An Introduction to the People
called Methodists
Charles Wesley as revealed by his Letters
The relations between the Society of Friends and Methodism
The Methodist Pilgrim in England
The Story of Cleethorpes and the Contribution of Methodism
Methodism and the Love-Feast
The Story of Methodism in Newland
John Cennick (1718–55): a handlist of his writings
Representative Verse of Charles Wesley
William Grimshaw, 1708–63

Charles Wesley's Verse

AN INTRODUCTION

by

FRANK BAKER

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To the memory of
JAMES ALAN KAY

PREFACE

WHEN the plans for *Representative Verse of Charles Wesley* were being discussed almost a decade ago two elements were envisaged. One was a selection that would give the non-Methodist student of English literature some idea of the riches that Wesley offers to the scholar as well as to the worshipper. This clearly would form the bulk of the volume, its *raison d'être*. It seemed that there was need for something else, however, a guide-book mapping out the territory that the student would traverse, perhaps for the first time—or at least a rough sketch pointing out the chief landmarks. There was some debate as to whether these two elements should be published separately or as a unit, but the consensus of opinion was that the student would prefer to have the introduction to Charles Wesley's verse along with that verse, and it was published in that way, increasing the price of the volume, but (we believed) greatly increasing its value.

It has naturally been a great pleasure to me to read the high words of praise that reviewers have given to the volume and especially to the introduction. One of the reviewers suggested that the introduction should be made available as a separate work, and it is in response to that request that this new edition of the monograph has been prepared.

The original introduction was geared closely to the selections which followed it, and for that reason it was felt desirable to re-write and re-set the work. In this process I have made a few slight alterations and a few additions, but the work is basically the same. I am grateful once more for the co-operation of Dr Frank Cumbers, who asked me to undertake this revision, and to his staff, who have so carefully seen it through the press.

FRANK BAKER

Duke University,
    Durham, North Carolina.
        April, 1963.

CONTENTS

THE DISCOVERY OF CHARLES WESLEY

THERE is little difficulty in securing enthusiastic tributes to the outstanding merits of Charles Wesley as a hymn-writer, even though these tributes are frequently tempered by the over-bold assertion that hymns cannot be poetry and the completely false assumption that Charles Wesley confined himself to hymns. Methodist admirers have waxed rhapsodical in his praise. As these may well be accused of partiality I refrain from quotation. Let the informed 'outsider' speak. It was a cautious Unitarian, Dr Alexander Gordon, who thus described Charles Wesley's hymns: 'Rich in melody, they invite to singing, and in the best of them there is a lyrical swing and an undertone of mystical fervour which both vitalize and mellow the substratum of doctrine.'[1] It was a shrewd and scholarly Congregational layman, Bernard Lord Manning, who claimed that the 1780 *Collection of Hymns for the use of the People called Methodists*—almost pure Charles Wesley—'ranks in Christian literature with the Psalms, the Book of Common Prayer, the Canon of the Mass. In its own way it is perfect, unapproachable, elemental in its perfection. You cannot alter it except to mar it; it is a work of supreme devotional art by a religious genius.'[2] And it was an Anglican, Dr John Julian, outlining the hymnological contribution of the Wesley family for his monumental *Dictionary of Hymnology*, who placed the bardic wreath on his head: 'But, after all, it was Charles Wesley who was the *great* hymn-writer of the Wesley family—perhaps, taking quantity and quality into consideration, the great hymn-writer of all ages.'

1. *Dictionary of National Biography*, article 'Charles Wesley'.
2. *The Hymns of Wesley and Watts* (1942), p. 14.

Since the time of Stopford Brooke's *Theology in the English Poets* (1874) there has been a growing awareness of Charles Wesley's important place in the history of English verse in general, an awareness accompanied by a recognition of the fact that hymns even of a quality far lower than his average compositions play an essential part both in the development of literary taste and in the shaping of literary achievement. Certainly Charles Wesley's competence as a verse-writer has increasingly been recognized, and professors of English literature have come to agree with John Wesley that in the compositions of his brother there are to be found not only 'the purity, the strength, and the elegance of the English Language', but in some of them 'the true Spirit of Poetry'.[3] Edmund Gosse acknowledged that 'the sacred songs of Charles Wesley . . . reach at their noblest the highest level of Protestant religious poetry in this country since George Herbert'.[4] W. J. Courthope described him as 'the most admirable *devotional* lyric poet in the English language'.[5] George Saintsbury treated Wesley as the leader of the small group of truly inspired writers of religious verse who in the eighteenth century became 'more positively poetical than most of the profane'.[6] Oliver Elton placed him 'at the head of all English hymnologists', illustrating the statement that he 'often attains to poetry, and is much oftener on the brink of it' by references to his 'verbal music and easily rememberable sound', his 'ringing vowels', and his ear for rhythm, which 'often keeps the hymn going when the language flags'.[7]

From the quotations so far presented it is obvious that Charles Wesley already fills an important niche in the history of English poetry. The magnitude of his achievement, however, has been opening up to students of English literature in

3. Preface to the 1780 *Collection.*
4. *History of Eighteenth Century Literature* (1891), p. 230.
5. *History of English Poetry*, Vol. V (1905), p. 343.
6. *History of English Prosody*, Vol. II (1923), p. 501; cf. pp. 507, 530-1.
7. *Survey of English Literature, 1730-1780*, Vol. II (1928), pp. 224-6.

general only during the last two or three decades, and even now there is a vast hinterland waiting to be explored. Although a revered Methodist professor, Dr Henry Bett, had for over a generation been proclaiming the literary riches to be found in Wesley's hymns, their real discovery by the world of letters may be traced to the writings of Bernard L. Manning, quoted above, and to those of George Sampson, particularly his Warton Lecture on English Poetry, delivered before the British Academy in 1943. Under the title 'A Century of Divine Songs' Mr Sampson outlined the contribution made to English literature during the eighteenth century by the hymn—'the poor man's poetry' and 'the ordinary man's theology'. Taking as his (unannounced) text George Saintsbury's dictum quoted above, Mr Sampson claimed that eighteenth-century hymns—particularly those of the Wesleys, to whom over half the lecture is devoted—constituted a far more important literary achievement than any contemporary secular verse, and that they 'helped to form the very texture of the English mind'. And yet, he complained, 'this extraordinary outburst of religious poetry is ignored in most histories of English literature as if it had never existed'.

The pronouncements of Mr Manning and Mr Sampson compelled students of our literature to pay more attention to the work of hymn-writers, and particularly to the verse of Charles Wesley, the greatest of them all. Among other studies that of Dr Donald Davie—*Purity of Diction in English Verse* (1952)—may be noted as an important contribution to the theory of poetry. Dr Davie takes Charles Wesley as the first major example of a restrained classicism in verse which achieves its effects not through luxuriant metaphor but through 'purity of diction'. This is no sign of literary poverty, but of artistic economy in words and metaphors. Dr Davie illustrates the wide range of Wesley's language, his power in wielding simple words, the sophistication of his verse structure, his skilful use of the *dénouement* in the closing line, his

wealth of allusion, and his ability to resuscitate a dead metaphor. It can safely be prophesied that the exploration of Charles Wesley's vast contribution to English literature will continue to increase, and will continually unearth new treasures.

CHARLES WESLEY'S LITERARY OUTPUT

ONE of the major problems facing any student of Charles Wesley's verse is that of his enormous literary output. The hundreds of his hymns in the older Wesleyan hymn-books are only small selections; the thirteen volumes of his *Poetical Works* omit over thirteen hundred poems available only in manuscript. Even a widely representative collection such as that for which this introduction was written is quite inadequate for the research student who seeks to do more than acquire the basic 'feel' of Wesley's writing. It is well at the outset to understand something of the magnitude of the task of even *reading* all Wesley's verse, let alone studying it.

Many have smiled over George Saintsbury's characteristic dictum: 'They say Charles Wesley wrote between six and seven thousand hymns—a sin of excess for which he perhaps deserved a very short sojourn in the mildest shades of Purgatory, before his translation upwards for the best of them.'[8] Actually this fabulous figure is both understatement and overstatement. It is an exaggeration to speak of six thousand 'hymns' if that term is to be used in a narrowly specific sense, as defined below; it is a serious understatement if by 'hymn' we mean—as most people who make such statements about Charles Wesley's writings usually do mean—his verse compositions as a whole, or even those with more or less religious content.

I dare not claim that my own statistics contain no element of error—the task of compilation is beset with multifarious problems—but the figure of 8,990 of his poems which I have read is near enough to nine thousand to proclaim that

8. *History of English Prosody*, Vol. II (1923), p. 531.

'round' number as the total of his extant poems *as he left them*. The last cautionary phrase is necessary because of the many alterations to which they have been subjected, division into separate parts here, combination of smaller units into a larger unit there, and extracts everywhere. In particular it is fairly common knowledge that many of his compositions were (to use his own description) 'Short Hymns' of only one or two stanzas. To gain an adequate understanding of the scope of his literary output, therefore, it is necessary to count the lines, not the poems. To summarize the results of such a wearying though (I believe) necessary undertaking, we may take it that Charles Wesley wrote (again in round figures) nine thousand poems, containing 27,000 stanzas and 180,000 lines. This is something like three times the output of one of our most prolific poets, William Wordsworth, and even more than that of the redoubtable Robert Browning. Moreover, unlike both these poets, Charles Wesley's verse consists almost solely of lyrics in stanzaic form—a mere 7,500 lines are extant in various couplet forms. Taking the average—and it must be stressed that this is an *average*, not a description of normal practice—Charles Wesley wrote ten lines of verse every day for fifty years, completing an extant poem every other day.

Much has been written about the dangers of facility in verse, and most of it applies to Charles Wesley. He left scores of poems incomplete—many of them published in that form without any hint that the author had originally intended an addition or continuation. There are hundreds that he could have improved, should have improved, and almost certainly would have improved had he deliberately prepared them for publication. Oliver Elton's comment contains much truth, though it is far from being the whole truth: 'Charles Wesley has the note of the *improvisatore*, with whom it is hit or miss. . . . He goes wrong, not through over-elaboration, but through neglect of finish.' For the defence we can produce thousands of poems which Charles Wesley carefully revised time and

time again, particularly the 3,500 manuscript poems on the Gospels and the Acts, whose five volumes were worked through and touched up eight times between their completion in 1764 and his death in 1788. His extant manuscripts abound in erasures, alterations, and alternative words—as may be seen in some of the texts and collations in *Representative Verse of Charles Wesley*. Even these frequently revised poems, however, often betray signs that they were originally composed in the saddle rather than in the study, and are more memorable for their flow and pace than for their depth or their polish.[9] Many a poem came to him white-hot, and its original casting has only been tampered with to its detriment. It cannot even be said that all Charles Wesley's own revisions were obvious improvements, though this is more nearly true of the editorial emendations of his brother John.

In his *Life of the Rev. John Wesley* Henry Moore preserves an interesting picture of 'brother Charles' at work on his verse from youth to age: 'When at the University, in early youth, his brother (as he informed me) was alarmed whenever [Charles] entered his study. *Aut insanit homo, aut versus facit.*[1] Full of the muse, and being shortsighted, he would sometimes walk right against his brother's table, and, perhaps, overthrow it. If the "fine phrenzy" was not quite so high, he would discompose the books and papers in the study, ask some questions without always waiting for a reply, repeat some poetry that just then struck him, and at length leave his brother to his regularity. . . . When he was nearly fourscore, he retained something of this eccentricity. He rode every day (clothed for winter even in summer) a little horse, grey with age. When he mounted, if a subject struck him, he proceeded to expand, and put it in order. He would write a hymn thus given him on a card (kept for the purpose) with

9. See *Representative Verse of Charles Wesley*, Nos. 185, 187, 195; cf. Nos. 240 and 254, the former left permanently unfinished, the latter an 'imperfect hymn just as it came to [his] mind', later revised for publication.

1. Moore's footnote translates: 'The man is mad, or making verses.'

his pencil, in shorthand. Not infrequently he has come to our house in the City-road,[2] and, having left the poney in the *garden* in front, he would enter, crying out, "Pen and ink! Pen and ink!" These being supplied, he wrote the hymn he had been composing. When this was done, he would look round on those present, and salute them with much kindness, ask after their health, give out a short hymn, and thus put all in mind of eternity.'[3]

2. I.e. Wesley's House adjoining Wesley's Chapel, City Road, London.
3. Vol. II (1825), pp. 368–9.

THREE

CLASSICAL TRAINING

BETWEEN those two pictures of the poet at work, as an Oxford tutor in his early twenties and as a veteran Anglican clergyman and Methodist preacher on the verge of eighty, there is much more than a gulf of fifty years' literary experience—there is a complete transformation, both in content, in form, and in inspiration. Yet it must be claimed that the academic exercises and experiments of the Student of Christ Church, Oxford, his myopic absorption in the classics, and especially in the Latin poets, tilled the soil for what became his life's blossoming. It has usually been assumed that Charles Wesley suddenly became a poet at his conversion in 1738, that 'Where shall my wond'ring soul begin?' was, in fact, his first substantial venture into verse. Nothing could be farther from the truth, although this assertion is not susceptible of absolute proof. He was already, I am convinced, a matured poet. Already he had written hundreds of competent versifications of the classics in the manner of Dryden or Pope. This seems to have been a major preoccupation of his nine years at Oxford, the foundation having been laid by thirteen years at Westminster School under his elder brother Samuel, himself a noteworthy classicist and poet, as was their father before them. At Westminster Charles Wesley had become saturated with the classics of Greece and Rome as he was later to become saturated with the classics of Samaria and Jerusalem. In both cases his enthusiasm found expression in a series of occasional poems inspired by his meditations on purple passages. His *Short Hymns on Select Passages of the Holy Scriptures* and his five subsequent volumes on the Gospels and the Acts have survived. His

youthful volumes on the classics have disappeared, and only fragments remain.[4] Those fragments, however, form a reminder of the deep classical scholarship and of the genuine poetical talent displayed while he was still an Oxford don. Doubtless he dreamed of an academic future when he would gather the heady literary fruits of his solid classical studies at Westminster and Oxford. He did reap his harvest, but it was not the kind that he had expected.

Any full understanding of the verse of Charles Wesley must begin with this classical background, and with an educational system that insisted on aspects of literary study which are now regarded as unimportant sidelines if not the veriest eccentricities. In Wesley's youth the swing in higher education toward mathematics and modern languages was only in its infancy. The classics still held the field, together with the arts of thinking, of writing, and of speaking, which went with them. Rhetoric, in particular, which we hardly consider a basic academic subject, was then a most important part of education both at grammar school and university level, and those strange 'exercises' before graduation at Oxford and Cambridge were largely modelled on the practice of the Schools of Rhetoric organized in Athens by Marcus Aurelius. The study of rhetoric was essential to the matter, as well as to the manner, of the 'acts' and 'opponencies' at Oxford, and colleges offered prizes for 'declamations'. This was the academic atmosphere in which both Wesleys breathed freely. In their days there were no examinations in 'practical' or 'applied' subjects, and their mother tongue was almost a foreign language. All was 'pure' and as far removed from the realities of daily living as dead languages could make it. Even though there were symptoms of academic decay at Oxford, and although the medieval system was on its way out, one of the basic elements of the Methodist reformation at the university was a revival of learning as well as of re-

4. Moore's *John Wesley*, Vol. II, pp. 366-7. For examples and a discussion see *Representative Verse of Charles Wesley*, Nos. 232-3.

ligion, and of learning moulded on traditional classical lines. The classics continued to provide genuine inspiration to both Wesleys, and when John Wesley founded his own grammar school at Kingswood it was on classical lines. Vossius' *Rhetoric* was prescribed as a text-book for the senior class, whose pupils had to 'learn to make themes and declaim'.

The picture may seem slightly overdrawn, but at least it should serve to underline the fact that Charles Wesley's art of versification was quite consciously an *art*, and a carefully practised art, long before he was fired with religious inspiration. When we refer to rhetorical devices in his verse, devices with fearsome titles such as anadiplosis and aposiopesis, chiasmus, epizeuxis, oxymoron, and parison, it is no perversity of the enthusiastic researcher who imagines minutiae which don't really exist, and thus makes the process of Charles Wesley's verse-making sound much more complicated than it really was. Nor is it that Wesley had accidentally stumbled upon a way of saying things which had a peculiar structure and therefore a peculiar literary effect. It was all there in his classical training, a training so thorough that the vocabulary, the style, and the structure of his verse were markedly affected by it. This is not to suggest, of course, that every rhetorical device, every Latinism or metrical effect, was deliberately thought out by Wesley, any more than they are by other poets. But a particular mode of writing, the classical mode, had become so ingrained that even when he wrote unpremeditated verse some of its features frequently recalled the classical tutor's study almost as much as the prayer-room or the pulpit.

As experiences accumulated for Charles Wesley with the passing of the busy years—ordination, travel, 'heart-warming', evangelical preaching, marriage, family joys and anxieties, deep concern over the pattern of contemporary Church life, political shocks—the young Oxford tutor developed out of all recognition. His verse gained new notes, experimented with new techniques, acquired a new depth—and height.

Gradually the Bible came to mean to him even more than the Classics had meant, saturating his language in speech and in verse. Yet the Scriptures never completely ousted the Classics, either in thought or in composition—witness the quotations from Horace and Virgil and Ovid prefixed to the political verse of his seventies.[5] They remained parallel streams watering the broad and fertile acres of his post-conversion years.

5. See *Representative Verse*, Nos. 292, 302, 310–11.

FOUR

THE SPIRITUAL IMPETUS

ALTHOUGH the beginnings of his capacity for the making of memorable verses must be sought in his classical training, the name of Charles Wesley could hardly have been known and loved in millions of homes across two centuries and five continents apart from the quickening of his talent through a spiritual impetus. For any great poetry to be written there must be both consummate craftsmanship and a powerful urge. Without the spiritual urge that was born at Whitsuntide 1738 and that continued through varying phases to his life's end, Charles Wesley would have been both more and less successful as a poet than in fact he became. He would (I believe) almost certainly have achieved widespread recognition as a minor poet, possibly as one of the major poets; he would have written some really great love poems (always assuming that he had fallen in love!) and he would have made a name chiefly by his scintillating satire—a more polished Butler or Swift, a more virile companion for Gray, Goldsmith and Collins. He would have been admired, feted and feared in the literary circles of his own day, and applauded by the literary historians of every day. This did not happen, however, and it is of course impossible to prove that it would have happened. In the event his talents as a poet were both enriched and engulfed by his discovery of a rapturous personal religion. Henceforth all other activities, no matter how deeply felt, how vividly expressed in verse at the time, assumed but secondary importance compared with his spiritual obsession. This spiritual obsession brought a new note into English secular verse and swelled immeasurably the rising tide of hymnody—hymnody which overflowed

into sacred poetry and became a formative influence in the literary education of the average Englishman.

Both Charles Wesley's chief strength and the main reason for the comparative neglect of his verse by literary students are to be found in the basic content of his published work. In his day it was considered 'enthusiastic' to undergo deep religious emotion, and most indecorous to *write* about such matters. Yet the Wesleys and their followers undoubtedly did experience deep religious emotions, just as they thought deeply upon theological problems (which was socially permissible), and they became convinced that the conventional inhibitions and reticences about personal religion were at least partly to blame for the cold frustrations of the century. Therefore they must broadcast the good news of personal salvation from sin through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the normality of a personal assurance of that saving faith, and the possibility of the crowning spiritual experience of what was variously called 'holiness', 'Christian perfection', or 'perfect love'.

The Wesleys were profoundly convinced that a personal experience of God's saving and sustaining love was possible not only for an elect few, but for all men. In their theological thought they went to the very brink of Calvinism, endorsing its emphasis upon the sovereignty of God, but then drew back. Salvation must be 'free', but it must also be 'for all', otherwise it was hardly a gospel. Both became key-notes of Methodist preaching and Methodist singing. The theological atmosphere of English religion was changed from the rigid Calvinism of the seventeenth century to the Arminianism and modified Calvinism of the nineteenth century. In this theological revolution no two men played a greater part than the brothers Wesley, and it seems likely that the hymns of Charles were even more influential than the sermons of John.

This gospel, illustrated from Scripture, from theological debate, and from personal experience, formed the one theme of Charles Wesley's hymns. When Dr J. E. Rattenbury wrote

on *The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley's Hymns* there was no implication that any other doctrines were of central importance to Wesley. Everything else was bent to this: the ventures into the Arminian-Calvinist controversy, the more academic verse on the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, the mysticism and sacramentarianism of the *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*, nearly every paraphrase and meditation based on the Old Testament as well as on the New—all was seen through the Gospel glow, every event was brought to its focus in the Cross, the Divine Act on behalf of man. Even Wesley's love poems needed only a few light touches to transform them into hymns; even his poems of spiritual despair have a substratum of assurance; hardly a topical or a controversial or a political poem but eventually leads to the Cross and to the final Crown in heaven. Charles Wesley did write poems, many more poems than has generally been realized, which were not strongly tinctured with the glowing colours of his own deep faith—but he did not publish them. His published work was a weapon of his evangelism, both in creating the atmosphere and in reinforcing the message of the Methodist preacher. Indeed in some respects the exhortation from the pulpit was a far less effective weapon than the song in the pew.

The subsequent lowering of the spiritual temperature, even within Methodism, made it somewhat difficult after a few generations to sing many of Charles Wesley's greatest hymns without either hypocrisy or at least a faintly uneasy self-consciousness—a 'defect' from which the hymns of Isaac Watts do not suffer, for they enshrine, not the heights and depths of the human soul, but 'average religious sentiment'.[6] One example of this debasing of Wesley's spiritual currency is to be seen in his preoccupation with heaven. One of the most characteristic features of his hymns is the way in which, no matter with what earthly subject they begin, they end in

6. J. E. Rattenbury, *The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley's Hymns* (1941), pp. 59-60.

heaven. Not only a clear belief in an after-life, but frequent and fervent thoughts about it were common both to saint and sinner in Wesley's day. Death as the entrance to this after-life obtruded itself much more upon the attention of adults and children alike then than now—quite apart from the fact of a much higher rate of mortality. Gradually agnosticism has laid its cold hand on the man in the street, and even the man in the pew neither wishes to be reminded too frequently about death nor has very clear views about heaven or about hell. As a result our hymn-books have required drastic revision. Many hymns, such as 'Ah! lovely appearance of death!'—though not 'Rejoice for a brother deceased'—have been completely banished. Others have been truncated by the omission of the closing references to heaven. Yet heaven for Charles Wesley was not simply a place of rest —or even of joy—after death. Heaven was a relationship between God and man, a relationship summed up in the word 'love', just as the Person of Christ was summed up as 'Love', and just as the perfect life of the Christian was summed up as 'love'. In other words, heaven was in some sense present in the Christian's earthly communion with God, and the real heavenliness of the after-life was the enlargement and enrichment of this communion. This is seen constantly in Charles Wesley's poems, including the excised portions, as in this final stanza (omitted from the hymnbooks) of his 'O for a thousand tongues':

> With me, your chief [i.e. chief of sinners],
> you then shall *know*,
> Shall feel your sins forgiven;
> Anticipate your heaven below,
> And own, that love is Heaven.[7]

Not only did Wesley's conversion introduce him to depths and heights of personal emotion. Not only did it help him to

7. See G. H. Findlay, *Christ's Standard Bearer* (1956), pp. 67–74.

view those emotions in the context of eternity. It also enlarged the boundaries of his experience horizontally upon earth as well as vertically into heaven, by making him more susceptible to the emotions of others. Nor is 'susceptible' a large enough word; he was more responsive to the emotions of others, deeply, desperately concerned about them, for they were the potential children of God, and lived on the threshold of eternity. So powerful was the sympathetic link between Charles Wesley and others that it is sometimes exceedingly difficult to be sure whether in his verse he is describing his own experience or identifying himself with that of someone else. Occasionally clues of time or place or circumstance make it clear that he writes of himself. In other instances it is just as clear that he is thinking and feeling himself into the personality of another, as when he writes for wives and widows, coalminers and criminals, lay preachers, Loyalist soldiers, or the scholars at Kingswood School. There remains a large body of verse, however, where—unless new evidence is forthcoming, such as is occasionally available in his manuscripts—it is impossible to be sure whether he portrays personal or vicarious experience. Dr Rattenbury pointed out that his use of the first person singular is often 'a piece of dramatic personation', as when he writes:

> Pity my simplicity,
> Suffer me to come to Thee.

On the other hand Dr Rattenbury also stressed the fact that the penitential hymns in the first person are usually far more powerful and convincing than those in the third person, and are therefore the more likely to have emerged from Wesley's own experience. Be that so, his faculty of convincing 'personation' remains. There is little doubt that Charles Wesley's personal discovery of religious faith brought such a heightening of sensitivity that his identification with the emotions of others led to the development in his verse of what can justly be described as a form of dramatic art. 'It is in this dramatic

poetry, combining liturgy and evangelism,' says Mr T. S. Gregory, 'that we can discern the genius of Charles Wesley.'[8]

8. J. E. Rattenbury, *The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley's Hymns* (1941), pp. 28–31; T. S. Gregory, article on 'Charles Wesley's Hymns and Poems' in the *London Quarterly Review*, Vol. 182 (1957), pp. 253–62. This same identification with the deepest spiritual experience of every man is one of the reasons why Charles Wesley's verse can be so effectively used in private devotions. The cover of Dr J. Alan Kay's *Wesley's Prayers and Praises* (1958)—an anthology of lesser-known poems for devotional use— claims that Wesley 'speaks to our condition with a directness which is without parallel'.

CHARLES WESLEY'S VOCABULARY

HAVING thus sketched in the academic and spiritual background to Charles Wesley's ventures into verse, it is desirable to analyse some of the literary characteristics of his work, and thus to demonstrate in some small way the manner in which his heritage was transmuted into genuine poetic achievement. Dr Donald Davie claims that Wesley takes a Latin word and 'refurbishes' it so that 'the blunted meaning or the buried metaphor comes sharp and live again, by a sort of Latinate pun'.[9] Dr Henry Bett gives many examples of such words—'expressed' (a shape struck out with a die), 'illustrate' (illuminate), 'secure' (free from care), 'tremendous' (terrifying), 'virtue' (manliness or power).[1] Most of these words have suffered from continuous debasement, so that it is difficult to recapture the shade of meaning which they had for Wesley, and in some cases well-nigh impossible without a footnote. The word 'pompous', for instance, recalled the due dignity of a magnificent procession without any of its modern overtones of ostentation.

Wesley displayed a Miltonic facility for incorporating polysyllabic Latinate words into the texture of his verse in such a manner that they illustrated his theme, introduced a modulation into the verbal music, and varied without disrupting the rhythm. Adjectives and adverbs ending in '-able, -ably' and '-ible, -ibly' were particular favourites, but nouns and verbs were used with similar effect. A well-known and

9. *Purity of Diction in English Verse* (1952), pp. 76–7.
1. *The Hymns of Methodism* (1945), pp. 35–46. (Originally published in 1913 as *The Hymns of Methodism in their literary relations*, enlarged in 1920, and greatly enlarged as well as recast for the third edition in 1945, with its shorter title.)

deservedly praised example is found in the opening stanza of one of his *Nativity Hymns*:

> Let earth and heaven combine,
> Angels and men agree
> To praise in songs divine
> Th' incarnate deity,
> Our God contracted to a span,
> Incomprehensibly made man.

This illustrates what Dr Davie describes as the threading of Latinisms on the staple Anglo-Saxon of his diction so that both 'criss-cross and light up each the other's meaning'— witness, 'songs/divine', 'contracted/span', and 'incomprehensibly/man'. Moreover every word is used precisely, not only (as we shall see later) carefully chosen and carefully placed, but so carefully chosen and placed that clear thought about its exact meaning is demanded of the reader, and always rewarded. Wesley's is the art of the etcher, sharp and definite rather than vague and suggestive.

Some people are basically afraid of precision and profundity in hymns, and are also apt to confuse a lengthy word with prolixity. An interesting example is to be found in 'O Thou who camest from above'. Wesley wrote of the 'flame of sacred love' kindled on the altar of his heart:

> There let it for thy glory burn
> With inextinguishable blaze.

This was too much for the compilers of the ill-fated 1904 edition of *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, who replaced classical tautness by tautology, making the closing line read 'with ever- bright, undying blaze.' This meddlesome botch (as John Wesley would undoubtedly have called it) did not find its way into the 'standard edition' of *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, and has happily been refused entry to the 1950 edition, which has restored a few other of Wesley's original

readings. Unfortunately, however, as Mr Findlay points out,[2] it has been retained in the *BBC Hymn Book*.

It must be granted that Wesley's introduction of Latinisms in order to point and illustrate his thought does not always 'come off', mainly because he is writing above our heads. Most of us lag far behind him in our familiarity with the classics. It needs, therefore, not only a mental effort, but the consultation of a lexicon, in order to appreciate fully some of his words and phrases. We are in much the position of the rank and file of Wesley's converts: we get the gist of his thought through the sturdy Anglo-Saxon, and are swept past the finer points of the Latin allusion. Unlike most sermon-tasters, we understand the argument, but not the illustration. A few familiar examples may be quoted, prefaced by the warning that because they are familiar we may miss their fuller significance:

> Blest with this antepast of heaven![3]

> Still present with Thy people Thou
> Bear'st them thro' life's disparted wave.[4]

> Unmark'd by human eye,
> The latent Godhead lay.[5]

> Concentred all thro' Jesus' name
> In perfect harmony.[6]

Greek words are nothing like so frequent in Wesley's verse as those from ancient Rome, and they almost always come from the Greek of the New Testament. A familiar example

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2. *Christ's Standard Bearer*, p. 16.

3. 'Where shall my wond'ring soul begin': 'antepast', a foretaste.

4. 'Arm of the Lord, awake, awake!': 'disparted', divided in two, like the Red Sea for the children of Israel, about whom he has been writing.

5. 'Let earth and heaven combine': 'latent', concealed. This may be a reminiscence of St Thomas Aquinas, whose hymn *Adoro te devote* speaks of 'latens Deitas'. See Bett, *The Hymns of Methodism*, pp. 112–14.

6. 'All praise to our redeeming Lord': 'concentred', having a common centre.

is the use of 'panoply'—the original is πᾶνοπλία—in 'Soldiers of Christ, arise'. Another occurs in a favourite stanza of both Dr Bett and Mr Manning, taken from one of Wesley's *Hymns Occasioned by the Earthquake* (1750), where he describes the unshaken house awaiting the Christian in the City of God:

> Those amaranthine bowers,
> Inalienably ours,
> Bloom, our infinite reward,
> Rise, our permanent abode,
> From the founded world prepared,
> Purchased by the blood of God.

Both Bett and Manning point out the Latinism of 'founded' and the retention of the original Greek in the musical 'amaranthine'. I may add the point that this latter retention is quite deliberate, for the English translation 'never-fading' would have fitted the metre equally well.[7]

Very occasionally there are references to or reminiscences of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament. In some stanzas on Isaiah 9[6-7], 'The mighty God, the everlasting Father', Wesley prefixes the normal translation of the Authorized Version, but in the poem itself instead of 'everlasting Father' uses the literal translation from the Hebrew, 'Father of eternity'. Similarly, in the phrase from Psalm 8[5] about man being made 'a little lower than the angels' he prefers the original (which is followed by the Revised Version), and reads 'a little lower than God', somewhat to the consternation of the non-Hebraists among the Methodists.[8]

7. For fuller details of Charles Wesley's use of the Greek NT see Bett, op. cit., pp. 81–92.

8. 'Sovereign, everlasting Lord', in *Collection of Psalms and Hymns* (1743), pp. 66–7. In the 3rd (1744) and later editions Wesley found it desirable to add the following footnote to 'little less than God': 'So it is in the Hebrew.' For these and other references to Wesley's use of the Hebrew see Bett, op. cit., pp. 76–8. It should be noted that Wesley's approach to the Hebrew text was strongly influenced by Matthew Henry's commentary—see Rev. A. Kingsley Lloyd's article, 'Charles Wesley's debt to Matthew Henry', in the *London Quarterly Review*, Vol. 171 (1946), p. 333.

When all has been said, however, it must be reasserted that the basic texture of Wesley's speech was provided by Anglo-Saxon, in which every now and then was woven a bright pattern of classical words. Wesley's Anglo-Saxon was derived (like that of many of our greatest writers) from the King James Version of the Bible. This was partly because Bible words and phrases permeated the atmosphere that he breathed as a boy at Epworth, and partly because the solid purity of their diction appealed to his clean, direct mind. Even his pre-conversion translations from the classics are more Anglo-Saxon than Latin in their vocabulary. Certainly after his conversion he deliberately chose homespun words, both because they formed the language of the English Bible and because they spoke most clearly to the ordinary man. Although Wesley is occasionally Miltonic in his use of the sonorous Latin word, in general he is much more akin to his distant kinsman Daniel Defoe in his use of robust though rarely colloquial common speech. Charles Wesley's Latinisms generally enforce and illustrate for the educated man the basic meaning conveyed in staple Anglo-Saxon to the less erudite worshipper. The deliberate Latinisms, therefore, are comparatively few, though always significant.

This predominant use of the mother tongue was the more noteworthy in an era of neo-classicism, when scholars were fond of larding their weighty tomes with Greek and Latin quotations. John and Charles Wesley sometimes used Latin and Greek in conversation and in correspondence for the sake of privacy or precision, and knew as many classical tags as the next Master of Arts, but both carefully refrained from any form of classical ostentation. Just as their volumes were reduced in size, so their sentences were freed from superfluity and ambiguity for the sake of the 'man in the street'. They wrote plain English for plain people. This economy in words was the result in part of training, in part of a purified taste, and in part of deliberate restraint for the purposes of evangelism. The result both in prose and in verse was a lucid,

direct, forceful style whose influence on the spread of Methodism, as even on English literature, was greater than has often been recognized.

Moreover, Anglo-Saxon is direct and monosyllabic compared with the elaborations and profundities of Latin and Greek. Words derived from Anglo-Saxon are therefore likely to be more vigorous than those from the classical languages, whose strength lies in the ability to express a finer precision of thought. The one is more appropriate for action, the other for contemplation. For the most part Charles Wesley's verse is not mystical nor quietly contemplative; certainly it does not embody an eager pursuit of knowledge for its own sake. The note of wonder and awe is never far away, but primarily Wesley's hymns are poems of action—of theological action, the action of God in Christ, matched by the responding action of man.[9]

This marriage of common speech to the timeless realities of personal religion, rather than the jargon of the *literati* harnessed to the latest academic or scientific fashion, almost preserves Wesley from the charge of being 'dated'. Almost, but not quite. His verse contains a few less happy Latinisms and some archaic grammatical constructions. He frequently introduces ideas distasteful to modern congregations, such as 'bowels', 'blood', and 'worms'—though the criticism here must be levelled at the Bible rather than at the eighteenth century.[1] Nevertheless there is surely much truth in Dr Bett's claim that Wesley's vocabulary is 'distinctly the most modern diction to be found in eighteenth-century verse',[2] and in Mr George Sampson's comment in his Warton lecture that the language of the common man for which Wordsworth sought so painfully, because the belles-lettres of the eight-

9. Cf. Manning, *The Hymns of Wesley and Watts*, pp. 24–6. For a study of Charles Wesley's use of the verbs 'feel' and 'prove' see Findlay, *Christ's Standard Bearer*, pp. 39–46.

1. Cf. Bett, *The Hymns of Methodism*, pp. 35–49; G. H. Vallins, *The Wesleys and the English Language* (1957), pp. 21–4, 70–4.

2. Bett, op. cit., p. 34.

eenth century merely echoed the *patois* of the drawing-room, was nevertheless enshrined in verse in the hymns of the Evangelical Revival. In some of these hymns—as in those of John Cennick—it was used at its most colloquial or with the exaggerated technicalities and sentimentalities of contemporary piety at its worst, but in those of Charles Wesley it was normally purified and strengthened, rarely stilted or erudite.

Nevertheless Charles Wesley was not afraid to experiment with unusual terms, particularly with lengthened and strengthened forms of common words, even though they involved the wedding of Anglo-Saxon and Latin. Some such terms were already available for him, though they might be archaic. Such was 'implunge', used in his brief but exhilarating response to the invitation of Revelation 22[17], 'And let him that is athirst come', where nothing but the biggest words would do for the rapturous climax:

> Thy call I exult to obey,
> And come in the spirit of prayer,
> Thy joy in that happiest day,
> Thy kingdom of glory to share;
> To drink the pure river of bliss,
> With life everlasting o'erflow'd,
> Implung'd in the chrystal abyss,
> And lost in an ocean of God![3]

Occasionally he would coin a word. One very interesting example, not noted in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, occurs in a well-known poem, but has been almost lost through carelessness or timidity or a combination of both. The early manuscripts and printed editions of 'Soldiers of Christ, arise' show that Wesley originally wrote:

> Extend the arms of mighty prayer
> Ingrasping all mankind.

3. *Short Hymns on Select Passages of the Holy Scriptures* (1762), Vol. 2, p. 430—henceforth noted as *Scripture Hymns*.

He could perfectly well have used 'embracing' except that its sentimental connotations might have cheapened the climax. On the other hand in his day it would have been possible to use 'grasp' as a synonym, though the normal meaning was 'to inclose in the hand, to take hold on with the hand, to seize on'.[4] He set aside the conventional term for a bold adaptation of the word that by itself did not quite fit. His coined 'ingrasping' is both robust and also creates a vigorous mental picture of the mighty arms of prayer spreading wide enough to clasp all men within their embrace. In face of the orthodoxy of printers, however, combined with the obstinacy of most who read or sang the hymn, he seems eventually to have acquiesced in the splitting of this powerful coining into its two components.

Whether derived from Anglo-Saxon, Latin, Greek, or Hebrew, from a combination of two of them, or springing from his own eager mind, Charles Wesley constantly sought *le mot juste*. Hence the hundreds of variant readings in his manuscripts. A case in point is the hymn that John Wesley and a midlands congregation were singing at the moment of Charles Wesley's death—'Come let us join our friends above', whose fourth stanza closes:

> Ev'n now by faith we join our hands
> With those that went before,
> And greet the blood-besprinkled bands
> On the eternal shore.

Two manuscripts are available for this hymn. In one a blank has been left, and 'blood-besprinkled' fitted later into that blank. In the other the same line receives still further attention, 'greet' being struck through and replaced in the margin by 'grasp', which in its turn gives way to 'clasp'. Finally 'greet' is reinstated.[5] Perhaps more striking is the choice of a

4. Bailey's *Dictionary*, 15th edn, 1753.
5. *Representative Verse*, p. 132.

word in a poem prepared by Wesley for his pregnant wife in 1755, intended as a prayer for her use in the coming ordeal:

> Who so near the birth hast brought,
> (Since I on Thee rely)
> Tell me, Saviour, wilt thou not
> Thy farther help supply?
> Whisper to my list'ning soul,
> Wilt thou not my strength renew,
> Nature's fears and pangs control,
> And bring thy handmaid through?

In the fifth line Wesley originally wrote 'Speak it to my list'-ning soul', which means almost the same, but unhesitatingly discarded this for the music and mystery of 'whisper', with its reminiscence of the powerful presence of God made known to Elijah in the 'still small voice', to which he refers in his *Scripture Hymns* as 'the soft whispering voice of love'.[6]

As a tribute to Charles Wesley's precision, flexibility, and economy in the use of words, we can do no better than to quote John Wesley's preface to the 1780 *Collection*, remembering that this statement applies chiefly to his brother's verse, which makes up the bulk of the volume: 'Here is no doggerel, no botches, nothing put in to patch up the rhyme, no feeble expletives. Here is nothing turgid or bombast on the one hand, nor low and creeping on the other.[7] Here are no *cant* expressions, no words without meaning. . . . Here are (allow me to say) both the purity, the strength, and the elegance of

6. *Representative Verse*, p. 282 ; cf. *Poetical Works*, IX. 180.
7. I am indebted to Dr. George W. Williams of Duke University for pointing out Wesley's indebtedness here to Pope's *Essay on Criticism*, lines 346–7:

> While expletives their feeble aid do join,
> And ten low words oft creep in one dull line.

Pope, in his turn, was adapting a passage in Dryden's *Essay on Dramatic Poetry*.

the English language: and at the same time the utmost simplicity and plainness, suited to every capacity.' This tribute, of course, covers far more than the vocabulary, and summarizes also the style, or the use made of that vocabulary, to which we now turn.

LITERARY ALLUSIONS

ONE of the delights of reading is to be moving in two dimensions at the same time—in the dimension of the immediate reality of the story being told or the theme being expounded, and also in the dimension of allusions, which light up different aspects of the subject from the viewpoint of other writings or experiences, and thus make it vital and vivid. As in his vocabulary so in his literary illustrations Charles Wesley drew from wide reading, but again primarily from the Bible. We have already seen that he often used single words from Latin and Greek as metaphors in miniature. Sometimes this allusive quality of his verse extends to a phrase, a sentence, or even several sentences. Dr Bett shows how a famous passage in the *Aeneid* (vi. 724–9) colours one of Wesley's poems—'Author of every work divine'—and also draws attention to the influence both of Horace and of Edward Young on another—'Stand th'omnipotent decree'. He suggests that Horace's 'Caelum, non animum mutant, qui trans mare currunt', recalled either consciously or unconsciously, was the probable origin of some striking lines in one of the *Hymns occasioned by the Earthquake, March 8, 1750:*

> In vain ye change your place,
>   If still unchanged your mind:
> Or fly to distant climes, unless
>   Ye leave your sins behind.

There is a possible allusion to the *Iliad* (viii. 19) in the 'golden chains' of 'Author of every work divine,' noted above, and a more sustained reference in one of the *Hymns for the*

Nativity of our Lord, 'Join all ye joyful nations'. Here Wesley alludes to the Greek legend of Hercules strangling in his cradle the snakes sent to destroy him, a legend typically translated into the Christian idiom, though this particular stanza was marked by John Wesley for future omission:

Gaze on that helpless object
Of endless adoration!
Those infant hands
Shall burst our bands,
And work out our salvation;
Strangle the crooked serpent,
Destroy his works for ever,
And open set
The heavenly gate
To every true believer.[7]

Dr Bett also garners echoes in Charles Wesley's verse of several English poets, particularly Shakespeare, Milton, Herbert, Dryden, Pope, Prior, and Young.[8] It is almost inevitable that the phraseology of a man's favourite authors should find their way, sometimes unnoticed, into his own writings, though the results in the case of Charles Wesley are occasionally quite surprising to the modern reader. Most of us are familiar with the fact that 'Love divine, all loves excelling' follows the stanzaic pattern as well as echoes the opening words of Dryden's 'Fairest Isle', but very few of us would realize unaided the debt of 'Jesu, Lover of my soul' to Prior's *Solomon*, in its direct quotation of the phrase 'the nearer waters roll'. Undoubtedly this is a direct quotation, for *Solomon* was a favourite poem with both John and Charles Wesley; it occupies a hundred pages of John's *Collection of Moral and Sacred Poems*,[9] and Charles urged his

7. Bett, *The Hymns of Methodism*, pp. 124–9; cf. p. 163.
8. Ibid., pp. 130–69; cf. Davie, *Purity of Diction in English Verse*, pp. 73–5.
9. Vol. 1, pp. 91–192.

daughter Sally to memorize it completely![1] Another familiar echo of Prior's *Solomon* is to be found in the closing lines of 'Christ, from whom all blessings flow':

Love, like death, hath all destroyed,
Rendered all distinctions void:
Names, and sects, and parties fall;
Thou, O Christ, art all in all!

A glance at Prior's own lines makes the debt unmistakable:

Or grant thy passion has these names destroy'd:
That Love, like Death, makes all distinction void.

Charles Wesley's elder brother Samuel also influenced him greatly, and that not only by teaching him to appreciate and practise the compressed, balanced, epigrammatic verse modelled on the classics. Constant reminiscences of Samuel's own poems appear in those of Charles. Dr Bett points out some of them, including the striking allusions in 'Christ the Lord is risen today' to Samuel's 'Hymn on Easter Day', part of which ran:

In vain the stone, the watch, the seal,
Forbid an early rise,
To Him who breaks the gates of hell,
And opens Paradise.

Dr Bett demonstrates the debt by printing in italics the borrowed phrases in the better-known hymn by Charles:

Vain the stone, the watch, the seal,
Christ hath *burst the gates of hell*:
Death *in vain forbids His rise,*
Christ hath *opened Paradise*![2]

1. Letter of 1st October, 1778, where his request that she should begin by memorizing Book I must be read against the background of his commendation of Miss Morgan's example, who, in following his plan of study, 'has got a good part of Prior's Solomon by heart.' (*Journal*, Vol. 2, pp. 278, 280.)
2. Bett, *The Hymns of Methodism*, pp. 151–5, especially p. 153.

Strangely enough Dr Bett omits to mention that one of
Charles Wesley's most telling phrases—'Our God contracted
to a span', from 'Let earth and heaven combine'—quotes the
last four words of Samuel Wesley's 'Hymn to God the Son',
though he does point out its more remote possible ancestry,
'contract into a span' used in a quite different context in
George Herbert's 'The Pulley'.[3]

Once more, however, it is the Bible that provides Wesley
with a never-failing source of allusions as of matter and of
language. A detailed familiarity with the scriptures was the
'extra poetic dimension' (to use Dr Davie's phrase) in which
Wesley could move at will and be fairly certain that others
could follow him, both the more educated among his readers
and—to some extent at least—the few among the Methodist
worshippers who remained illiterate.[4] Through the Scripture-
saturated hymns of Charles Wesley Bible-reading and hymn-
singing were mutually enriched.

Much has already been written about the wealth of scrip-
tural allusions in Wesley's hymns, and undoubtedly much
more will yet be written. There is no need to labour the point,
but two illustrations may be given. In Wesley's day it was
quite unnecessary to expound to a Methodist congregation
the closing lines of 'Sing to the great Jehovah's praise', which
are usually omitted from modern hymn-books either because
of their theology of the Second Advent or because of the mis-
leading Latinate construction in the second line. As so often,
the hymn ends in heaven, with the Second Coming of our
Lord, but this is illustrated by a doubled metaphor from the
Old Testament:

> 'Till Jesus in the clouds appear
> To saints on earth forgiven,

3. I am indebted to the Rev. A. S. Holbrook for pointing out that Jeremy
Taylor's *Holy Dying* uses the phrase 'contract Divinity into a span'.
4. The Wesleys exerted a great though often indirect pressure toward
wider literacy, for converts wanted to be able to read their Bibles and their
hymn-books.

> And bring the grand sabbatic year,
> The jubilee of heaven.

More subtle is the way in which Charles Wesley equates his
conversion with the Spirit of God brooding over the face of
the waters when the earth was without form and void
(Genesis 1²):

> Long o'er my formless soul
> The dreary waves did roll;
> Void I lay and sunk in night:
> Thou, the overshadowing Dove,
> Call'dst the chaos into light,
> Bad'st me be, and live, and love.[5]

Even the Bible commentators are echoed in Wesley's verse.
Dr Bett notes his allusions to Luther on Galatians in 'O
Filial Deity', as also his use of Bengel. The Rev. A. Kingsley
Lloyd and Dr Erik Routley have demonstrated Wesley's
indebtedness to the better-known commentary of Matthew
Henry in 'Wrestling Jacob', 'Captain of Israel's Host', 'A
charge to keep', and other poems.[6] Allusions to the Primitive
Fathers, the liturgies, and the mystics are also pointed out
by Dr Bett.[7] If, however, we were to add all the allusions and
quotations from all the commentators and Christian writers
through the centuries as a supplement to all those from the
poets, philosophers, and historians both classical and modern
(supposing that this were in fact possible) it seems clear that
they would be but as a drop in a bucket beside Wesley's use
of the Scriptures. This is the vast ocean from which he draws.

5. From his 'Hymn to the Holy Ghost', *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1739),
pp. 111–13.
6. Bett, *The Hymns of Methodism*, pp. 94–7: Mr Lloyd's article in the
London Quarterly Review, Vol. 171 (1946), pp. 330–7, is noted above.
Dr Routley's article was first published in Bulletin 69 of the Hymn Society
(Autumn, 1954), pp. 193–9, and reprinted in the *Congregational Quarterly*
for October, 1955, pp. 345–51.
7. Op. cit., pp. 98–123.

His verse is an enormous sponge filled to saturation with Bible words, Bible similes, Bible metaphors, Bible stories, Bible themes. In the thirty-two lines of 'With glorious clouds incompast round' Dr W. F. Moulton found references to no fewer than fifty verses of Scripture.[8] Indeed, in the memorable words of Dr J. E. Rattenbury, 'A skilful man, if the Bible were lost, might extract much of it from Wesley's hymns. They contain the Bible in solution.'[9]

8. *Proceedings* of the Wesley Historical Society, I. 26–7.
9. Rattenbury, *The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley's Hymns*, pp. 47–52, especially p. 48. Cf. Bett, *The Hymns of Methodism*, pp. 71–97; Manning, *The Hymns of Wesley and Watts*, pp. 37–42; Davie, *Purity of Diction in English Verse*, p. 73 ; see also John W. Waterhouse, *The Bible in Charles Wesley's Hymns* (1954).

SEVEN

THE ART OF RHETORIC

WESLEY'S classical background was of some importance, as we have seen, in his choice of vocabulary and his employment of allusion. It was far more important, however, indeed it was a dominant factor, in the more artificial (a better word might be 'artistic') elements of his style: the subtle or startling changes in the normal usage of words, the careful arrangement of both words and ideas so as to bring richer meaning by parallels or contrasts or sequences, or even by somewhat complicated interlockings, and particularly by the many changes rung on the art of repetition. Most of this artistic use of words is so skilful that it is only noticed when pointed out, yet it is the secret of Charles Wesley's most characteristic effect, the compact tautness of his verse, the epigrammatic intensity, as if a powerful steel spring had been compressed into his lines, so that they were always trying to burst their restraints. This is by no means true of all his poems, but it is true of a far greater number than might be generally recognized. In some few of them the spring (to continue the metaphor) has been allowed to shoot out and quiver at its full extent. Or, to change the metaphor, some poems give the effect of a spate of words tumbling over one another, or of a smoothly flowing stream, rather than of a huge weight of water dammed up so that a mere fraction spurts through under terrific pressure. Wesley's anapaestic verses almost uniformly afford examples of rapid unimpeded flow.

It must be insisted that this effect of the restrained energy of a coiled spring or a dammed stream, both in its general intention and in its particular application, was deliberate,

though there may well be scores and hundreds of undesigned examples. Wesley's style was consciously moulded on that of the ancient classics, and he copied many or most of their rhetorical devices. Not that he was constantly saying to himself, 'Now we must have an oxymoron here, and a chiasmus there', or 'Here at last is a good opportunity for an aposiopesis!' By the time Charles Wesley came to write his greatest poems he was thirty years old, and nearly twenty years of close application to classical studies had made this literary discipline an integral part of his mental processes, just as an experienced preacher almost unconsciously analyses his ideas into 'points'. The appreciation, the terminology, and the practice of rhetoric had become almost as essential an element of his approach to literature as his A B C. Willy-nilly he worked that way—and working that way was one of the chief reasons for his success.

The Art of Rhetoric was a common title for text-books which helped the schoolboys and undergraduates of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries to choose and marshal their words, both in speech and writing, with the fullest effect. There were over three hundred different terms by which they could describe the 'tropes' and 'figures' and 'fine turns' used by the ancients to make language clear, forceful, and beautiful. The peak period for the use of these devices in English was probably the late sixteenth century, about the time of Puttenham's *Arte of Poesie*, which describes over a hundred of them. Gradually the art of rhetoric was transmuted from the poet's dream to the schoolboy's nightmare, and eventually faded into the light of common day, becoming a memory and an aroma difficult for men of our scientific era to recapture. Even after the middle of the eighteenth century, however, the rhetoricians, though fewer, were far from extinct. In 1755 a grammar school master named John Holmes published an *Art of Rhetoric* listing over 250 rhetorical terms with explanations and illustrative examples. Some of these terms have found their way into

common speech—words such as enigma, irony, sarcasm. More survive as technical terms still used by grammarians—like apostrophe, ellipsis, euphemism, periphrasis, and even hyperbole, synecdoche, and prolepsis, Others are almost completely forgotten.

In defence of *The Art of Rhetoric* it should be pointed out that technical terms have great importance in simplifying the complications of life. It is therefore a serious mistake to assign more than its value as satire to the words of one of Wesley's favourite poems, Butler's *Hudibras*:

> For all a Rhetorician's Rules
> Teach nothing but to name his Tools.

This displays excellent rhetoric—in the unfortunate derogatory sense of that word—but poor intelligence. For it *is* important, as any surgeon would insist, to know the names as well as the uses of one's tools. It is a great economy of time and effort if a single word can be used instead of an involved description, possibly supported by an illustrative example. Yet many of the Greek, Latin, or Latinized Greek terms which were the rhetorician's tools have not found their way even into the larger dictionaries. Granted that some of them had synonyms, and that others were too finicky to be of permanent value; nevertheless not all those laid aside were useless or cumbersome. How, for instance, would we describe a long succession of subordinate clauses whose meaning is at last made clear by the completion of the sentence? A good example is 'If . . ., if . . ., if . . ., if . . .—You'll be a man, my son!' It hardly seems satisfactory to define this as 'the rhetorical device that forms the basis of Kipling's "If".' But 'the Greeks had a word for it'—a word which was adopted by the Romans, and which came into English with the rest of the paraphernalia of rhetoric, but has now been thrown out as lumber. The word was 'hirmos' or 'hirmus', which is not even to be found in the monumental *Oxford English Dictionary*. Many other terms, for figures of thought

or speech which are much more complicated, have no place in
our larger dictionaries. We therefore tend to overlook the fact
that these were among the commonplaces of literary appre-
ciation and practice in past centuries. It will not be possible
here to do more than name a few of the more common
rhetorical devices by which Wesley transmitted both energy
and polish to his verse.

To follow Holmes's *Art of Rhetoric*, there were three main
classes of such devices—tropes, figures, and 'fine turns'. He
lists seven main tropes, or 'saying one thing and meaning
another': metaphor, its extension the allegory, metonymy,
synecdoche, irony, hyperbole, and catachresis. In describing
each principal trope he mentions other minor ones associated
with them, and goes on to refer to other devices sometimes
classed as tropes. This abnormal usage of words in order to
convey a vivid mental image is, of course, basic to the creative
vision of poetry, and many interesting examples can be found
in Wesley, whereby he gives poetic force to abstract state-
ments. Sometimes this is in single phrases such as 'our inward
Eden'.[1] At other times Wesley uses a more fully developed
metaphor, as when he describes the Incarnation of our Lord
in terms of undressing and dressing, a metaphor dignified, as
well as somewhat disguised, by his use of slightly uncommon
words:

> He laid his glory by,
> He wrapped him in our clay.[2]

The same poem furnishes an example of one of his favourite
sea-going metaphors of 'sounding the depths':

> See in that Infant's face
> The depths of deity,
> And labour while ye gaze
> To sound the mystery.

1. *Hymns for the use of families*, 1767, No. 124: *Poetical Works*, VII.
149.

2. 'Let earth and heaven combine' from the *Nativity Hymns*, No. 5:
Poetical Works, IV. 109–10.

This occurs in much simpler form in 'Come, Holy Ghost, our
hearts inspire':

> And sound, with all Thy saints below,
> The depths of Love Divine.

Although on occasion Charles Wesley mixed his metaphors or
at least passed too rapidly from one to another, we find many
examples of carefully sustained metaphors which almost be-
come allegorical. Such is that in 'Rejoice for a brother
deceased':

> Our brother the haven hath gained,
> Outflying the tempest and wind;
>
> .   .   .   .   .
> And left his companions behind;
> Still tossed on a sea of distress,
> Hard toiling to make the blest shore.
>
> .   .   .   .   .
> There all the ship's company meet,
> Who sailed with the Saviour beneath.
>
> .   .   .   .   .
> The voyage of life's at an end.

Metaphor is undoubtedly the most important of the 'tropes'
used by Wesley as by most poets, though examples of others
constantly occur. For instance there is the antonomasia of
'Come all ye Magdalens in lust' in 'Where shall my wond'ring
soul begin', where a proper noun is used as a general epithet;
there is the synecdoche of 'The mournful, broken hearts
rejoice' in 'O for a thousand tongues', where a part is used
instead of the whole; and there is the somewhat annoying
metonymy of speaking about 'the stony' instead of 'the
stony heart', as in 'Sinners, obey the Gospel word'. Hyper-
bole is a favourite device, as in the soaring anapaestics por-
traying the ecstasies of conversion, for which no ordinary
language is sufficient:

I rode on the sky
(Freely justified I!)
Nor envied Elijah his seat;
My soul mounted higher
In a chariot of fire,
And the moon it was under my feet.[3]

John Holmes lists twenty 'principal and most moving figures in speech' and many more either related to these, or unrelated but of only minor importance, to which he adds the terms brought over into rhetoric from grammar and logic. Again a few examples must suffice. It is by now a commonplace to point out Wesley's use of exclamation marks—ecphonesis, to use the rhetorician's term. It was impossible to confine the rapture of the Christian experience of God to a mere statement of fact, and sometimes it could only be expressed (and quite imperfectly at that) by a series of exclamatory phrases which had ceased to form part of a normal sentence. A good example, even though the actual punctuation marks are mainly commas, is to be found in the closing four stanzas of 'Sinners, obey the Gospel word'. The invitation in stanza six to accept 'the plenitude of gospel grace' is followed by a series of nineteen phrases suggesting varied aspects of the regenerate life, which tumble over one another so rapidly that they have the force of a series of exclamations rather than the elaborations of a prior statement:

A pardon written with His blood,
The favour and the peace of God,
The seeing eye, the feeling sense,
The mystic joy of penitence;

The godly grief, the pleasing smart,
The meltings of a broken heart,

3. 'How happy are they', *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, 1749, I. 123–5: *Poetical Works*, IV. 409.

The tears that speak your sins forgiv'n,
The sighs that waft your soul to heav'n.

The guiltless shame, the sweet distress,
Th'unutterable tenderness,
The genuine meek humility,
The wonder, why such love to me!

Th'o'erwhelming pow'r of saving grace,
The sight that veils the seraph's face,
The speechless awe that dares not move,
And all the silent heaven of love![4]

The device of hypotyposis or 'lively description' serves to bring a scene immediately before our eyes, as in Wesley's 'Hymn for Ascension Day' ('Hail the day that sees Him rise'):

See! He lifts his hands above!
See! He shews the prints of love!
Hark! His gracious lips bestow
Blessings on his church below!

Wesley's parentheses are often masterly:

He left his Father's throne above,
(So free, so infinite his grace!)
Emptied himself of all but love,
And bled for Adam's helpless race.[5]

One of his favourite mannerisms in this category is to paint a damning generalized picture of sin—or of God's forgiving grace—and then to bring himself into the picture in a dramatic final parenthesis. In 'Where shall my wond'ring soul begin' the sixth stanza offers salvation to harlots and murderers, and closes 'He died for crimes like yours—and

4. There is a similar construction in the closing two stanzas of 'Thou hidden Source of calm repose'. See also the second chapter of G. H. Findlay's *Christ's Standard Bearer*.
5. 'And can it be, that I should gain'.

mine.' Wesley can even make a periphrasis add energy to his lines instead of obscuring and weakening them, though he is very sparing in his use of circumlocutions, preferring direct phrases. In the much-discussed 'Ah! lovely appearance of death' he pictures the powdered, rouged, and bedizened ladies of fashion, contrasting them very unfavourably with the bare and seemingly brutal simplicity of death:

> Not all the gay pageants that breathe
> Can with a dead body compare.

Perhaps the sentiment no longer commands our admiration, but we can still feel (when we realize what he's about) the force of the contrast between the deliberately elaborate periphrasis of 'the gay pageants that breathe' and the direct- ness of 'dead body'.

Figures of thought and speech involving a contrast held a particular attraction for Charles Wesley—or perhaps we should say that only thus could he approach an adequate expression of the basic paradoxes of the Christian faith. Simple contrasts of ideas, or antitheses, are woven into most of his verse. Sometimes they are obvious and normal, as that between the verbs and the nouns in:

> Raise the fallen, cheer the faint,
> Heal the sick, and lead the blind.[6]

Often they are much more subtle. 'How happy are the little flock', one of the *Hymns for the Year 1756*, furnishes several examples. The opening lines of stanza 3 contain a simple statement:

> The plague, and dearth, and din of war
> Our Saviour's swift approach declare,
> And bid our hearts arise.

The following three lines continue the same theme, with the

6. 'Jesu, lover of my soul'.

1755 earthquakes as the subject this time, but with far more subtlety:

> Earth's basis shook confirms our hope,
> Its cities' fall but lifts us up,
> To meet Thee in the skies.

The contrast between the physical fall of the city and the spiritual rise of the Christian soul is on quite a different level from 'Raise the fallen, cheer the faint', and the other anti- thesis may very well have been missed, namely that between 'shook' (then grammatically acceptable for 'shaken') and 'confirms', which still retained something of the physical solidity of its original Latin meaning, and was certainly so used here by Wesley. The following stanza repeats the claim that these cataclysmic events foreshadow the Second Advent of Christ, and encloses within the statement antithetical demonstrations from the four calamities already listed:

> Thy tokens we with joy confess,
> The war proclaims the Prince of Peace,
> The earthquake speaks thy power,
> The famine all thy fulness brings,
> The plague presents thy healing wings,
> And nature's final hour.

Occasionally such antitheses are practically indistinguish- able from paradox:

> Dead is all the life they live,
> Dark their light, while void of thee.[7]

The pure paradox or self-contradiction is also to be found, as in 'Jesus, the first and last':

> Yet when the work is done,
> The work is but begun.

7. 'See the Day-spring from afar', *Poetical Works*, I. 158–9.

The antithesis also shades off into the oxymoron or combination for special effects of words which seem to be contradictory. Many examples could be given, from 'the guiltless shame, the sweet distress' of the regenerate experience quoted above, and 'Wrestling Jacob's' 'confident in self-despair', to 'their humbled Lord' and 'th'invisible appears' of 'Glory be to God on high'. Some would limit the term oxymoron to 'adjective + noun' or 'adverb + adjective', as in 'Victim divine' and 'death divine'[8] or—a phrase which describes the strange blend of opposites to be found in his own verse—'I want a calmly-fervent zeal'.[9] It may bear the wider connotation, however, and so can be applied to antitheses pushed to the *n*th degree, as in 'Impassive, He suffers; Immortal, He dies.'[1] Whatever terminology is used the terse vigour and imaginative power of such phrases cannot be gainsaid. And once again it is the supreme mysteries of the Incarnation and the Atonement which constantly demand expression in this way—for how can an Eternal Being either be born or die? Typical of Wesley's approach in the *Nativity Hymns* is the couplet in 'Glory be to God on high':

> Being's Source *begins to* be,
> And God himself is *born*!

In many ways the most interesting group of Wesley's rhetorical devices comprises those classed by Holmes as 'fine turns', in other words the various types of repetition. These not only add strength and vigour to individual phrases, but also serve to bind together both lines and stanzas. Holmes names fourteen 'chief repetitions', and adds eight minor types. One of the simplest forms is common to most poets, namely anaphora, or the repetition of the same word at the

8. 'Victim Divine, thy grace we claim', and 'God of unexampled grace', both from *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*.
9. 'For a preacher of the gospel', in *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, 1740, from which was extracted the hymn 'Give me the faith which can remove.'
1. 'All ye that pass by'.

beginning of consecutive phrases or sentences, or (in the case of poetry) lines. One example from Wesley must suffice:

> Enough for all, enough for each,
> Enough for evermore.[2]

The immediate repetition of a word or phrase within the same sentence, or epizeuxis, is another common method of securing emphasis, as in 'Who for me, for me hast died'.[3] Less common generally, but frequent in Wesley, is epanadiplosis, beginning and ending a clause or line with the same word, as in 'Come, Desire of nations, come',[4] 'Hide me, O my Saviour hide',[5] and one from the funeral hymn 'Happy soul, thy days are ended':

> Go, by angel-guards attended,
> To the sight of Jesus go!

Repetition of a word or words at the end of lines or phrases is known as epistrophe. A good example is the opening stanza of 'Free Grace':

> And can it be, that I should gain
> An interest in the Saviour's blood!
> Died He for me?—who caused his pain!
> For me?—who him to death pursued.
> Amazing love! how can it be
> That thou, my God, shouldst die for me?

It will be noticed that the phrase 'for me', although in each case it comes at the end of a phrase—indeed in the second instance it constitutes the complete phrase—is actually introduced in three different positions in the line, and only

2. 'Thy causeless unexhausted love' from *Scripture Hymns*, I. 53–4—altered to 'Thy ceaseless . . .' in the 1780 *Collection*.
3. 'O filial deity'.
4. 'Hark, how all the welkin rings'—altered by George Whitefield to 'Hark, the herald angels sing'.
5. 'Jesu, Lover of my soul'.

comes at the end when it is most needed for emphasis, in the very last line. One reason is that Wesley (like his father before him, *vide* his *Essay on Poetry*) knew the dangers of double rhymes, except in humorous verse. The other, and chief reason, is that Wesley used subtlety in his repetitions, so that they knocked at the back door of the subconscious mind, and gained admittance without the master of the house always being aware of how the divine visitation had occurred. Even more subtle is the effect of wonder created in the same stanza by the mesodiplosis or repetition of the phrase 'can it be' in the middle of successive sentences, once near the beginning of a line and once at the end, first with the note of questioning predominant and then with the note of awed astonishment at something that really has happened.

Another less common device popular with Wesley is that of using the last word or phrase of one clause as the first of the following, thus securing both the emphasis of an important point and the continuity of the argument:

> Earnest thou of joys divine,
> Joys divine on me bestowed.[6]

This echoing of an announced theme is very useful as a means of binding stanzas together, as may be seen in closing and opening lines of stanzas 3 and 4 of 'The Love-Feast' ('Come, and let us sweetly join'):

> .   .   .   .   .
>
> We our dying Lord confess,
> We are Jesu's witnesses.
>
> Witnesses that Christ hath died,
> We with him are crucified.
>
> .   .   .   .   .

People have racked their brains to find a descriptive title for this feature of Wesley's verse. Mr Findlay (who has garnered

6. 'Hear, Holy Spirit, hear'.

seventy examples from the 1876 *Collection*) uses what he agrees is the 'rather obscure heading' of 'last and first words'.[7] Wesley himself knew the name of this most useful rhetorical tool, and we need not be ashamed of using it—or rather them—after him. The alternative technical terms for this device are anadiplosis and epanastrophe.

The rhetoricians distinguished several less obvious forms of repetition, but we will mention only three more. The repetition of a phrase in reverse order was known as antistrophe. It occurs in a number of Wesley's well-known hymns, as in 'Thine to ours, and ours to thine'[8], and constantly forced itself upon him in his Trinitarian verse—'One in Three, and Three in One' or 'Three in One, and One in Three'.[9] (The corresponding pattern in thoughts rather than words is chiasmus, mentioned below.) Ringing the changes on different forms of the same word was known by the Latin term *traductio*, an example of which is found in 'For the Anniversary Day of One's Conversion'. from which 'O for a thousand tongues' is extracted:

> My second, real, living life
> I then began to live.

Familiar to all writers of verse, of good and especially of bad, is the other device of repetition which we shall mention, the refrain or (as the rhetoricians termed it) epimone. Wesley's use of the refrain really demands an essay in itself. He uses it in strict moderation, knowing how easily a refrain can become forced or feeble, or the cloak for poverty of thought or craftsmanship. Wesley's are always strong phrases which readily stand up to repetition in a prominent position, though they are often movingly simple, like that to 'O Love Divine, what hast Thou done?' which is an adapta-

7. *Christ's Standard Bearer*, pp. 38–9.
8. 'Hark, the herald angels sing'.
9. 'Father, Son and Holy Ghost', from *Hymns on the Lord's Supper*, and 'Praise the Father for his love', from *Hymns for Children*.

tion from Ignatius' *Epistle to the Romans*—'My Lord, my Love is crucified'. He never allows a refrain to be repeated too frequently, as may well be seen from the variations of the last line in 'Wrestling Jacob'. And he is adept at transforming a strong refrain into an even stronger climax. A good example is 'Rejoice, the Lord is king', whose opening word is taken up in the refrain:

> Lift up your heart, lift up your voice,
> Rejoice, again I say, rejoice.

We notice how this refrain is itself consolidated by the balanced phrases with their anaphora in the first line, and by the epanadiplosis in the second line, in which he simply follows another orator trained in the schools of rhetoric, St Paul.[1] After five such refrains the poem is rounded off with a new couplet that takes us from earth to heaven but finishes on that same trumpet-word with which the poem began, an extended epanadiplosis:

> We soon shall hear th'archangel's voice,
> The trump of God shall sound, Rejoice.

So far we have looked at fairly straightforward examples of the basic types of 'fine turns' or repetition. With an ear as sensitive and a mind as resourceful as Charles Wesley's, however, the real mastery is shown in the combination of such devices, and in their extension to other devices which have as yet been given no name. 'For the Anniversary Day of One's Conversion' echoes Luther's comment on St Paul, which meant so much in the deepened spiritual experiences both of John and Charles Wesley. We see not only the ringing of the changes on *me* and *my* (traductio), and the powerful wrenching of the correct grammatical order of the words (anastrophe) in order to underline the marvel of God's doing that for *him*; there is also a modified anaphora and a double epizeuxis:

1. Phil. 4.[4]

> I felt my Lord's atoning blood
> Close to *my* soul applied;
> *Me, me* he loved—the Son of God
> For *me*, for *me* He died!²

Wesley's anaphora itself is frequently, we might almost say usually, accompanied by a subtle change, not only in the word-music, but in the meaning also. It is not *mere* repetition but repetition with a difference, or—as the Greeks and the rhetoricians termed it—antanaclasis. Here is an example combined with antistrophe. The last line of stanza 8 of 'Christ the Lord is ris'n today' runs 'Hid our life with Christ in God!' Most of these words are repeated in the first line of the following stanza: 'Hid; till Christ our life appear'. Not only is the sequence of words changed, however—a completely new meaning is given to the phrase 'our life', which in the first instance has a human, in the second a divine, connotation. Many similar examples could be quoted where an echo is combined with a slight change both in words and meaning, as in 'Jesu, Lover of my soul':

> All my trust on thee is stayed;
> All my help from thee I bring.

Here the change is from passive to active, from rest to movement. Again in 'Father, whose everlasting love':

> We all *must* own that God is true;
> We all *may* feel, that God is love.

Here the shift within the basic repetition is from universal compulsion to individual choice. This is a frequent sequence of thought with Wesley—'For all the world—and me!'

One very interesting feature of Wesley's repetitions is a progression by which several words of one line are taken up

2. Cf. John Wesley's italicizing of the personal pronouns in his account of the warmed heart experience of 24th May, 1738: 'an assurance was given me that he had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death.'

and extended in the following line—a kind of enlarged and extended anadiplosis which might perhaps be termed epiploce. Stanza 2 of 'God of unexampled love' ends 'Was never love like thine!' This is taken up in the opening line of stanza 3, with the addition of the term 'sorrow' and the amplification of 'thine':

> Never love nor sorrow was
> Like that my Jesus showed.

Often the patterns of repetition are interlaced in such a way that it is almost impossible to notice them all at a first reading, though all have their unrealized impact. A good example is furnished by the following stanza from 'O Love Divine, how sweet thou art':

> Thy only love do I require
> Nothing on earth beneath desire,
> Nothing in heaven above:
> Let earth and heaven, and all things go,
> Give me thine only love to know,
> Give me thine only love.

The bold repetition of all but the last two words of the fifth line as the closing line strikes immediately. We realize on examination that the whole stanza furnishes an example of epanadiplosis, the same phrase being used for the beginning and the end—with the slight variation of 'thy' to 'thine'. Then we see that Charles Wesley has also contrived to give us an intermediate stage by using that same key phrase 'thine only love' in the very middle of the penultimate line, just as it is at the beginning of the opening line and the closing of the last line. Then, perhaps, we notice the anaphora of 'Nothing . . . Nothing', linked in turn with the antithetical 'earth beneath' and 'heaven above', which are then gathered together in one phrase, 'earth and heaven'.

This latter device of accumulating single ideas for sum-

marizing as a compound unity is paralleled by the more frequently employed reverse procedure—announcing the compound idea first, and then developing separately each component. An example of this is provided in 'Come on, my partners in distress', where the closing lines of the first stanza read:

> And look beyond the vale of tears
> To that celestial hill.

The verb and preposition are each taken up (in reverse order) and expanded in the opening lines of the following stanza:

> Beyond the bounds of time, and space,
> Look forward to that happy place,
> The saints' secure abode.

When (as often) Charles Wesley wants to emphasize the universality of Christ's saviourhood, he keeps hammering the word 'all' and the phrase 'for all' into our minds, yet with all his insistence contrives to vary his theme so skilfully that the reader or singer does not fully realize how his subconscious mind is being bombarded. (Let us call this, as does Holmes, 'tautotes', and reserve 'tautology' for clumsiness in repetition, which Wesley's is certainly not.) In 'Let earth and heaven agree' stanza 6 introduces the theme quietly:

> For me, and all mankind,
> The Lamb of God was slain . . .
> Loving to all, he none pass'd by . . .

(In passing we note that the 'all' is in fact implicit in the closing negative clause.) Stanza 7 ends on the same note: 'What thou for all mankind hast done!' Stanza 8 repeats the word 'all' in the second syllable of each of the last three lines, but in each case with a different word of introduction:

For this alone I breathe
    To spread the gospel-sound,
Glad tidings of thy death
    To all the nations round;
Who all *may* feel thy blood applied,
Since all are freely justified.

At last in stanza 9, before the quiet closing 'amen' of stanza 10, the full battery is brought into play, taking up the simple second syllable 'all' in the second line (with yet another introductory word) and letting it expand into an emphatic 'for all' (introduced in stanza 7) at the end of the fourth line. The phrase is hammered home at the beginning of the following line, and for good measure there is a two-fold repetition to open the last line:

O for a trumpet-voice,
    On all the world to call,
To bid their hearts rejoice
    In him, who died for all!
For all, my Lord was crucified,
For all, for all my Saviour died.

The devices of repetition crowd one upon another—tautotes, anadiplosis, anaphora, epizeuxis. Yet though the effect is there and is strongly felt, we are conscious of no straining after effect. Indeed it is hard to realize that just over half of the last fifteen words consist of 'for all'. This is indeed the art that conceals art!

Sometimes *two* words are thus woven into a pattern of repetition, a double tautotes, with many of the associated 'fine turns'. In the third stanza of 'Father, Son, and Holy Ghost' Wesley has already played upon the theme 'all', and this is continued and even intensified in the following stanza, with the addition of a twin theme, 'take', introduced by an epanadiplosis on the preparatory word 'claim'—the just demand that leads to the only adequate response. The

marriage of the two key words as 'take all' is hinted at or assumed throughout, though we never see the pair thus side by side:

If so poor a worm as I
    May to thy great glory live,
All my actions sanctify,
    All my words and thoughts receive:
Claim me, for thy service claim
All I have, and all I am.

Take my soul and body's powers,
    Take my mem'ry, mind, and will,
All my goods, and all my hours,
    All I know, and all I feel,
All I think, and speak, and do;
Take my heart—but make it new.

It will be seen that repetition is one of the chief means by which Charles Wesley ensures the powerful impact of the best of his verse. This also is one of the secrets of its continuity and cohesion. It is necessary to examine in a little more detail the architecture both of stanza and of poem, bearing in mind the fact that repetition provides the basic mortar binding together the whole structure and its several components.

EIGHT

STRUCTURE

CHARLES WESLEY'S education had involved another important mental discipline which is less common today, though by no means so rare as the study of rhetoric. He was trained, and to a small extent helped to train others, in the art of logic, though in this field he never pretended to be the equal of his brother John. The very *size* of his stanzas was conditioned by his logical approach. He wanted a stanza in which a theme could be announced, developed, and satisfactorily summarized, preferably with a foreshadowing of the theme for the following stanza. He therefore showed a marked preference for the longer stanza rather than for the somewhat cramping limits of the conventional four lines. On the other hand he carefully avoided as too heavy for lyrical verse the iambic pentameters so beloved of later hymn-writers, and only used lines of more than eight syllables in strongly reflective poems or in his anapaestics, where the length was counteracted by the speed. Such was his fondness for lengthy stanzas that he not only doubled the 8 8.8.8 8.8 metre, but even the already doubled short metre (6.6.8.6) so as to make a stanza of sixteen lines. Yet he mercifully allowed a central pause. This stanzaic caesura is to be found also in most of his eight-lined stanzas—which is why later editors have so easily halved them, though not always without some slight disruption of their thought. Charles Wesley wrote several hundreds of poems in four-lined stanzas, but so appreciated intellectual elbow-room that of his total production of some 27,000 stanzas the over-all average is almost exactly six lines per stanza.

Within the stanzas themselves we find an orderly synchronization of thought and verse. In general every line contains a complete idea, is in fact a clause or a sentence. Similarly every stanza is a paragraph, and the whole poem is a logically constructed essay in verse, or—to use the contemporary word of his grammar school and university days—a 'theme'. Charles Wesley seldom uses the run-on line or enjambment in order to link his lines together—indeed in the opinion of Dr Bett this is one of the differentiae between the verse of John and Charles Wesley. Instead he uses the devices of repetition and similar figures, either of speech or of thought. Corresponding with the verbal device of anaphora is the figure of thought termed parison. This balancing of clauses is the reverse of antithesis, where the thought of one forms a contrast to the thought of the other. Wesley normally combines it with some kind of verbal repetition. One example has already been quoted in the refrain of 'Rejoice, the Lord is king!'—'Lift up your heart, lift up your voice'. Others will readily come to mind: 'fightings without, and fears within' (from 'And are we yet alive'), and

> Publish at his wondrous birth
> Praise in heaven and peace on earth.[3]

Parison is a favourite device with Wesley for knitting more closely the looser texture of the longer anapaestic line, as in 'Your debt he has paid, and your work he hath done' from 'All ye that pass by', and the following from an unpublished hymn for workers:

> Come let us away,
> And his summons obey
> Who justly demands
> The sweat of our brows, and the work of our hands.[4]

Mr Manning has already drawn attention to Charles Wesley's skilful use of chiasmus. This device, whose name

3. 'Sing, ye ransomed nations sing', from *Nativity Hymns*.
4. *Representative Verse*, pp. 149–50.

comes from the Greek letter X or 'chi', is the crossing of clauses in the pattern $\frac{A}{B} \times \frac{B}{A}$. It is almost the equivalent in thought of the verbal figure of antistrophe. The pattern ABBA is often readily distinguishable, as in the For + persons: mercy: : mercy: For + person of:

> For all thy tender mercies are
> If mercy is for me.[5]

Only slightly less obvious are the four nouns of the opening lines of 'The Universal love of Christ':

> Let earth and heaven agree,
> Angels and men be joined. . . .

As Mr Manning points out, even in that supposedly non-literary poem, 'Jesu, Lover of my soul', there is a very interesting example—nor is this the only one in the hymn:

> Just, and holy is Thy name   A
> I am all unrighteousness,   B
> False, and full of sin I am,   B
> Thou art full of truth, and grace. A

Not only is there the crossed pattern in the four lines as a whole—Saviour: Sinner: : Sinner: Saviour. Mr Manning indicates further examples of chiasmus in these same four lines: one in each of the two pairs AA, BB—personal pronoun: epithet: : epithet: personal pronoun.[6] Actually there are two further examples of a similar type (not noted by Mr Manning) in each of the *consecutive* pairs of lines, AB, BA, in this case epithet: personal pronoun: : personal pronoun: epithet, this time with antithetical instead of parallel ideas.

The question immediately arises, 'Did Wesley think all

5. 'What shall I do my God to love', a hymn extracted from the poem 'After a recovery', *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, 1749, I. 162–4.
6. *The Hymns of Wesley and Watts*, pp. 21–3; ch. Findlay, *Christ's Standard Bearer*, p. 32.

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this out?' The answer must be, I believe, 'No, at least not all of it.' But his mind was so accustomed to manipulating the intertwined formulae of logic as well as the figures of rhetoric that his sentences often quite unconsciously assumed this form of patterns within patterns. Almost always the chiasmus in grammatical arrangement is combined with an antithesis in meaning, as in 'Sow in tears, in joy to reap'[7] and 'Who built the skies, On earth he lies' from the *Nativity Hymns*.[8] The chiasmus is one of the natural outworkings both of the essential paradoxes of the Christian faith and of the antithetical processes of Charles Wesley's literary art.

With this sense of balance in thought as well as in word we are not surprised to note how carefully Charles Wesley articulates his stanzas. As an example we may quote the opening stanza of the 'Hymn of Thanksgiving to the Father' from the *Hymns and Sacred Poems of 1739*—which incidentally provides a chiasmus in lines 1–2, another in lines 3–4, and a parison in lines 5–6:

> Thee, O my God and King,
> My Father, Thee I sing!
> Hear well-pleased the joyous sound,
> Praise from earth and heav'n receive;
> Lost, I now in Christ am found,
> Dead, by faith in Christ I live.

This stanza is in two distinct sections, as are all the stanzas in this poem, and almost every stanza which Wesley wrote in this particular mixture of iambic and trochaic verse. The opening iambic couplet introduces the theme—in this case a statement of intention—and the succeeding trochaic quatrain develops that theme, in this instance first by expanding the idea of praise introduced in 'sing', and then by showing the reason for that praise, the restoration of a modern prodigal to his heavenly Father through faith in Christ. The fol-

7. 'When our redeeming Lord', *Poetical Works*, VIII. 241–3.
8. 'Join all ye joyful nations'.

lowing stanza similarly announces the theme of 'father and son' carried over from this one, and then develops it by an extension of the idea of the wandering of the son and the welcome of the father. And so it goes on, the careful articulation of each stanza, and of the stanzas into the poem as a whole.

In this 6 6.8.8.8.8 stanzaic pattern the turning-point in Wesley's thought is almost always the close of the first couplet, where the iambics change to trochaics, thought thus carefully matching metre—or *vice versa*! In other stanzaic patterns the articulation of Charles Wesley's thought is quite different, though it is always present—there is no woolliness in his thinking, no meandering. Specific stanza-forms were chosen (doubtless almost unconsciously) because they matched specific lines of thought. Thus Wesley's favourite 8.8.8.8.8 8 iambic metre announces and develops the thought during the first four lines and usually clinches the argument in the closing couplet. Looking for an example at random the first stanza on which my eye fell was in the trochaic counterpart of the metre which I sought:

> Christ, whose glory fills the skies,
> Christ, the true, the only light,
> Sun of righteousness, arise,
> Triumph o'er the shades of night:
> Day-spring from on high, be near:
> Day-star, in my heart appear.

Here the theme of Christ the 'light of the world' is introduced by the invocation in lines 1–2 and developed into a general prayer in lines 3–4; in the parison of the closing couplet the movement from the general to the particular is clinched by the direct appeal, 'in *my* heart appear'.

Wherever we look in Charles Wesley's verse we find this careful development of thought. He does not simply choose his subject and walk round it, describing it from different viewpoints as he comes to them; even less does he drift on by

the undisciplined process of the association of ideas; he analyses his theme carefully, and moves in logical succession from one aspect to another. Movement, indeed, is one of the great characteristics of his verse. It is not merely evocative of emotion in a vague way, but takes us step by step along a planned pathway to a definite goal. This is what Mr Manning means when he speaks of the 'liturgical action' of 'Victim Divine', but which he describes perhaps even more felicitously as a 'dramatic and architectural' quality.[9] For it has the virtues of both these realms of art—there is the balanced integration of a carefully designed building, and there is the purposeful movement of a good play. Constantly we are reminded of the technique of drama. We see the plot unfold before our eyes, stanza-scene after stanza-scene to the final dénouement—always an important feature of his verse.

Sometimes this dénouement is unexpected, more often a heightening of emotion at the inevitable climax, sometimes the evocation of a mood of calm resolution to follow the new insight or challenge that has been presented. Like all dramatists, Wesley watched his curtain lines, though one could hardly expect them all to be of equal quality. Mr Manning points out how in 'See how great a flame aspires' every stanza closes with 'a knock-out blow'—'all the preceding lines lead by steps to an emphatic concluding phrase.'[1] Even more powerful is the closing phrase of stanza 7 of 'Come on, my partners in distress'. where Wesley describes the imagined rapture of heaven:

> The Father shining on his throne,
> The glorious co-eternal Son,
> The Spirit one and seven,
> Conspire our rapture to complete,
> And lo! we fall before his feet,
> And silence heightens heaven.

9. *The Hymns of Wesley and Watts*, p. 69.
1. ibid., pp. 39–40.

There is theological and scriptural allusion there in plenty
to keep us busy for some time; in addition, if we've got our
allusions right, and if we've ever been hushed in a soaring
Gothic cathedral, we can hardly miss the awe and the right-
ness of the last line.

It is not surprising that Dr Davie quotes Wesley as an
illustration of Ezra Pound's definition of 'scenario' in liter-
ary construction—'so arranging the circumstance that some
perfectly simple speech, perception, dogmatic statement
appears in abnormal vigour'. Dr Davie draws attention
to 'the poignant simplicity which is one of [Wesley's] best
effects, . . . brought about by sudden and calculated descent
from a relatively elaborate level of language', similar to
King Lear's 'Pray you, undo this button'. As an example
he quotes the following:

> Sinners, believe the gospel word,
>   Jesus is come your souls to save!
> Jesus is come, your common Lord;
>   Pardon ye all through him may have,
> May now be saved, whoever will;
> This man receiveth sinners still.[2]

His comment is: 'The piercing directness of that last line is
an achievement in literary form.'[3] That this is quite deliber-
ate is confirmed by the fact that in this particular stanza
Wesley deserts his normal articulation for this form, and
instead of pairing his thoughts for a closing couplet makes
the last line stand starkly alone.

Wesley's closing lines are frequently epigrammatic,
especially in his satirical verse, but also in his more devo-
tional poems. In 'Thee, O my God and King', noted above,
he follows the closing words of his prototype, the parable of

the Prodigal Son, but makes them evangelical, personal, and
epigrammatic, by means of two balanced antitheses:

> Lost, I now in Christ am found,
> Dead, by faith in Christ I live.

A poem on the death of his second child closes on a typical
note, though hardly one that we should expect in such a
context:

> Love our Eden here would prove,
> Love would make our heaven above.[4]

Love is frequently his closing thought, occasionally in vivid
phraseology, such as the closing line of a poem on prayer:
'In speechless eloquence of love'.[5] One of his unpublished
poems is a rebuke to those who boast of their Christian per-
fection, and one feels that the challenging antitheses of the
closing epigram are worthy of a better cause:

> Humility your whole delight,
>   And your ambition's utmost height
>   To weep at Jesus' feet.[6]

Actually Charles Wesley was at his most epigrammatic
in his satirical verse, especially upon subjects which moved
him greatly, as did the controversy over predestination.
'The Horrible Decree' contains some outstanding examples
of vigorous closing lines to the double short metre stanzas:

> And mockest with a fruitless call
> Whom Thou hast doomed to die.

> . . . . . .

> Thou shew'st him heaven, and say'st, Go in—
> And thrusts him into hell.

Indeed the whole of what Charles Wesley calls the 'other
gospel' of the fiend is a sustained epigram, one of the most

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2. This stanza begins a cento in common use until the *Methodist Hymn-
book* of 1904; it comes from 'See, sinners, in the gospel glass', No. 10 in
Hymns on God's Everlasting Love, 1741.

3. *Purity of Diction in English Verse*, pp. 72–3.

4. *Representative Verse*, pp. 282–4.   5. *Poetical Works*, X. 177.

6. *Representative Verse*, pp. 215–16.

powerful pieces of theological invective in the English lan-
guage:

> Sinners, abhor the fiend,
> His *other* Gospel hear:
> 'The God of truth did not intend
> 'The thing his words declare;
> 'He offers grace to all,
> 'Which most cannot embrace,
> 'Mocked with an ineffectual call
> 'And insufficient grace.
>
> 'The righteous God consigned
> 'Them over to their doom,
> 'And sent the Saviour of mankind
> 'To damn them from the womb;
> 'To damn for falling short
> 'Of what they could not do,
> 'For not believing the report
> 'Of that which was not true.
>
> 'The God of love *passed by*
> 'The most of those that fell,
> 'Ordained poor reprobates to die,
> 'And forced them into hell.
> 'He did not do the deed
> (Some have more mildly raved),
> 'He did not *damn* them—but decreed
> 'They never should be saved.'[7]

Dr Newton Flew has enabled us to see another frequent
element in the structure of Charles Wesley's verse, not this
time dramatic but homiletic. He was, of course, a preacher,
both a logical, a challenging, and a forceful preacher, and it
seems obvious (once someone has pointed it out!) that he
should prepare many of his poems along the same lines as
his sermons. One of the best examples is 'What shall I do

7. *Poetical Works*, III. 34–8.

my God to love', even though it is a hymn adopted (and
slightly adapted) from the closing stanzas of a longer poem.
In this closing section he is thinking of Ephesians 3^{18-19}:
'To apprehend . . . the breadth and length and height and
depth, and to know the love of Christ which passeth know-
ledge.' He announces his text and even outlines his points
in the opening stanza:

> What shall I do by God to love,
> My loving God to praise!
> The length, and breadth, and height to prove,
> And depth of sovereign grace!

The following stanza is his 'firstly'—the *length* of God's love,
which 'to all extends'. Next comes his 'secondly', its *breadth*
—'Throughout the world its breadth is known, Wide as
infinity'. Then his 'thirdly', the *height*, both of his own sin,
'grown up to heaven', but also, and even higher still, 'far
above the skies', of the soaring mercies of God in Christ.
And 'fourthly', 'The *depth* of all-redeeming love', in two
stanzas, the second of which (usually omitted from the hymn-
books) underlines this idea of depth—'Deeper than hell . . .
Deeper than inbred sin'. Having made his points, like any
evengelical preacher Charles Wesley 'applies' them in a prayer
of supplication. For a final knock-down blow (again omitted
from most hymn-books) he works his spatial relationships
into a paradox parallel to—though quite different in content
from—St Paul's paradox about knowing the love which
passes knowledge:

> And *sink* me to perfection's height,
> The *depth* of humble love.[8]

Sometimes the sermon remains in embryo, as in an in-
stance quoted by Mr Findlay, who points out that the re-

8. R. Newton Flew, *The Hymns of Charles Wesley: a study of their struc-
ture* (1953), pp. 18–25, 56–9.

peated 'Thou' opening three of the lines is for all the world
like a preacher announcing his 'heads':

> Saviour in temptation Thou:
> Thou hast saved me heretofore,
> Thou from sin dost save me now,
> Thou shalt save me evermore.[9]

(Nor should we overlook the concealed artistry of this qua-
train: the two basic words, 'Thou' and 'save' are both intro-
duced in the opening line, in reverse order, so that there is
not only both the anaphora and the anadiplosis on 'Thou',
and the traductio and mesodiplosis on 'Saviour', 'saved',
'save', but also a chiasmus between 'Saviour' and 'Thou'
in the opening line and in each of the following three lines.)
    Wesley is not unique in achieving this kind of structure,
of course. There are even more notable examples in Chris-
topher Smart's *A Song to David*. Indeed they are *too* notable
—the machinery tends to creak. The opening lines of stanza
4 furnish us with a catalogue of David's virtues:

> Great, valiant, pious, good, and clean,
> Sublime, contemplative, serene,
> Strong, constant, pleasant, wise!

The following twelve stanzas each deal (in the same order)
with one of these virtues, and to ensure that the reader does
not miss the point, each epithet opens its respective stanza,
isolated by a dash. Charles Wesley is never as obvious as
that, and is a far greater artist as a result.
    We can be left in no doubt that Wesley was adept in the
marshalling of thoughts, as he was of words, and (as we shall
see) of sounds. Yet at the same time he was exceedingly
versatile in varying the methods of his structure in accor-
dance with the material that he was using and the purpose
for which it was intended. He was undoubtedly a master

9. *Christ's Standard Bearer*, p. 37; *Poetical Works*, II. 294.

craftsman in verse. This mastery becomes the more impres-
sive when we consider those deft touches of musical mortar
with which he bonded together his structure of thought,
whether in stanza or in poem—the 'patterns of sound', to
use Mr Findlay's phrase. Wesley's skilful use of repetition
for the purpose of emphasis has been sufficiently illustrated,
but its use for cohesion has only been hinted at. Many ex-
amples could be quoted both of stanzas and of whole poems
whose theological theme is accompanied by a musical theme
which renders the verse both continuous and compact.
One of each must suffice. For a stanza we turn to the follow-
ing, based on Ephesians 4$^{4-6}$:

> Build us in one body up,
> Called in one high calling's hope;
> One the Spirit whom we claim,
> One the pure, baptismal flame,
> One the faith, and common Lord,
> One the Father lives, adored
> Over, through, and in us all,
> God incomprehensible.[1]

The theme is announced in the opening line, and is taken up
by the fivefold repetition of 'one' in the five following lines.
Wesley is careful, however, not to overdo this repetition,
allowing St Paul's 'one Lord' to enter in disguise—'One the
faith, and common Lord'—even though 'One the faith and
one the Lord' would have fitted the metre perfectly and
would have been nearer to his scriptural original.
    This disciplined use of repetition, constantly varied just
before it is becoming too obvious, is one of Wesley's strong
points, appreciated all the more when turning from Chris-
topher Smart. Stanzas 51–71 of *A Song to David* overdo the
word 'ADORATION' (always printed in capitals), and the
following stanzas dwell at length on the adjectives 'sweet'

1. 'The Communion of Saints', Part I, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1740),
p. 188.

(72–4), 'strong', (75–7), 'beauteous' (78–80), 'precious' (81–3), 'glorious' (84–6), and their comparatives. It is all a little too mechanical and obvious, as if he were saying, 'See how clever I am!' Wesley is much more subtle and self-effacing. His delicately modulated repetitions are one of the great secrets of the success of his 'Come, O thou Traveller unknown', underlining its deep emotion, yet never allowing that emotion to become maudlin. (This is the poem, of course, of which Isaac Watts said, 'That single poem, *Wrestling Jacob*, was worth all the verses he himself had written'.)[2] The twin themes of the struggle and the stranger are thus announced in the closing couplets of stanzas 1 and 2:

> With thee all night I mean to stay,
> And wrestle till the break of day.

And:

> But who, I ask thee, who art thou?
> Tell me thy name, and tell me now.

The succeeding three stanzas all end with the same combination of these two themes:

> Wrestling I will not let thee go,
> Till I thy name, thy nature know.

This refrain is omitted from stanza 6, and only partially taken up in the closing couplet of stanza 7:

> I stand, and will not let thee go,
> Till I thy name, thy nature know.

Stanza 8 provides a hesitant answer to half of this recurrent question:

> And tell me, if thy name is Love.

The following stanza triumphantly transforms the question

2. *Representative Verse*, 37–9.

into a proclamation, the order of the elements being also reversed:

> Thy nature, and thy name is Love.

The constant ringing triumph of this same line closes each of the remaining five stanzas, always with a varied introductory line lest the refrain become too mechanical. This is only one element in the poem's literary achievement, but it is a very important one, as it is in many another of Wesley's most successful poems. His poems are integrated artistic structures, not random heaps of building blocks, no matter how decorative.

NINE

METRE

ANOTHER major factor in the literary achievement of
Charles Wesley is his metrical versatility and even—the
word is not too strong—genius. Although he could make no
great musical claims as vocalist, instrumentalist, or composer,
his musical sons acknowledged that his ear was impeccable.
And because there was music in his soul, lilting, rapturous,
divine music, he could not be confined to the humdrum in
verse. The lyric was his *métier*. Both his inventiveness and
his mastery in lyrical form were without parallel in the verse
of that century, and perhaps only paralleled by Shelley in
the century that followed. George Herbert in the previous
century exhibited far more metrical variety than Wesley,
but it was the metrical variety of the philosopher-poet,
undoubtedly sincere, yet remarkable for its boundless
ingenuity rather than for true lyrical quality. The Wesleys
appreciated Herbert's poetry, but when John Wesley
utilized examples for congregational singing he found it
desirable to restrain their metrical exuberance by drastic
editing. A list of the metres used by Wesley, with some
introductory notes on technical details, is given in *Represen-
tative Verse of Charles Wesley*. (Here, as there, I use the term
'metre' to cover the varying combinations in length of line,
number of lines, syllabic accentuation, and rhyming pattern,
which comprise the mechanics of verse-making, or prosody.)[3]

3. *Representative Verse*, pp. 396–403. The first 'Attempt at a Classifica-
tion of Charles Wesley's Metres' was made in a valuable article by the Rev.
Dr O. A. Beckerlegge, in the *London Quarterly Review*, Vol. 169 (1944),
pp. 219–27. To this I remain greatly indebted, even though fuller research
has made it necessary to amplify, rearrange, and very occasionally correct,
Dr Beckerlegge's pioneer study.

It is sufficient here to make some general observations about
his important place in the story of English prosody, and to
illustrate this by some statistics.

The basic nature of English verse has not yet been settled
with anything like unanimity, and it seems that in any final
formula T. S. Omond's plea for scansion by time-spaces will
need to be incorporated with the conventional scansion by
syllabic accent. At the very least, however, the conventional
description of basically iambic, trochaic, anapaestic, and
dactylic feet, with their variants, provides a convenient yard-
stick, even though English prosodists may eventually decide
to transfer to some as yet unaccepted alternative metrical
system—though in fact this seems far less likely than a trans-
fer of our weights and measures apparatus to the metric
system. Let us use what we have while we wait for something
better, but realize that it has its drawbacks, and is not fool-
proof.

By far the greatest bulk of Charles Wesley's verse is in the
traditional iambic measure, dignified, safe, though capable
of great beauty and power in the hands of an accomplished
poet. This is where most versifiers both begin and end. Even
the great Isaac Watts rarely ventured outside iambics. His
thousand poems include only twenty-two in trochaic metres
and five in anapaestics, while his iambics themselves are
almost confined to common, long, and short metre. In the
best-known collections—the *Psalms* and the *Hymns and
Spiritual Songs*—only thirty out of some seven hundred
compositions are not in these three basic metres, these thirty
being spread over four other metres: 8 8.8.8 8.8; 6 6.8.6 6.8;
6.6.6.6.4.4 4.4; and 10 10.10 10.10 10. Even when we turn
to his famous *Horae Lyricae*, so deservedly praised by Dr
Samuel Johnson, apart from the thirty-eight pindarics,
whose irregular forms place them in a different category,
only thirteen examples of eight other metres are to be found.
The *Divine Songs* are restricted to the conventional, but the
Moral Songs add five examples of four anapaestic stanza-

forms, and three examples of two trochaic stanza-forms. To summarize, Watts used twenty different stanza-forms, in addition to pindarics and three varieties of couplets. It is fairly clear that he was capable of much more in the way of lyrical experiment, but his position as a pioneer of hymn-writing, at a time when few tunes were available, restricted nine-tenths of his production to the three common iambic forms. With Charles Wesley both the spiritual impulse and the metrical versatility were greater, and the result was a burst of new measures, for some of which the tunes were specially composed, while the remainder were an enrichment of religious verse rather than of congregational worship.

Charles Wesley used no fewer than forty-five iambic metres, and in each of fifteen of them wrote over a thousand lines of verse. The most prolific of all was his favourite form of six eights—8.8.8.8.8 8, rhyming ABABCC. In this metre he composed over eleven hundred poems, a total of nearly twenty-three thousand lines, most of them with a vigour, a flexibility, yet a disciplined compactness, that proved this to be the instrument fittest for his hand. This, the metre of 'Wrestling Jacob', represents over one-tenth of his total output. His next most prolific form was the old romance metre, 8 8.6.8 8.6, rhyming AABCCB, a metre which moves more rapidly than 8.8.8.8.8 8, but loses in sturdiness what it gains in speed. In this, the metre of Smart's *Song to David*, Charles Wesley wrote over twenty thousand lines in nine hundred poems, including 'O Love Divine, how sweet thou art', and 'Be it my only wisdom here'. The iambic metres next most popular with him were (in order of preference) the cross-rhyming double long metre ('O Thou who camest from above' in its original double form), the double short metre ('Soldiers of Christ arise' and other magnificent marching poems), and the double common metre ('All praise to our redeeming Lord' and 'Sing to the great Jehovah's praise' in their original double form). The production here ranges from just over to just under thirteen thousand lines each. The only rival to

these forms was one of the mixed iambic-trochaic metres. Only after these firm favourites with their six or eight lines do we come to the four-lined stanzas: common metre (seven thousand lines), and the cross-rhymed long metre (nine thousand lines). The consecutive-rhyming long metre comes well below nine other metres with twenty-five hundred lines, and the four-lined short metre is among the 'also-rans' with a mere 364 lines.

Putting aside the many experiments which Charles Wesley did not follow up to any great extent, it seems desirable to draw attention to three other iambic metres of which he made considerable use. Only once did he employ the rather flimsy form 6.6.6.6, and very rarely its doubled or consecutively rhyming variations. When strengthened and clinched with a closing octosyllabic couplet, however, it became one of his favourite stanza-forms, used to great effect in 'Let earth and heaven agree', 'Arise, my soul arise', and 'Rejoice, the Lord is king'. Altogether he wrote over three thousand lines in this metre, and a mere 198 in the consecutively rhymed variant, 6 6.6 6.8 8. Wesley wrote almost two thousand lines in the form 7.6.7.6.7.6.7.6, yet never seemed thoroughly happy in it, certainly not as happy as was Cowper in his 'Sometimes a light surprises'. Dr Beckerlegge suggests that Wesley may have been influenced to its use by German example, though he points out that it was also the medium (in continuous form) for Vaughan's 'My soul, there is a country'. In one other even more unusual (and apparently original) stanza-form Wesley did achieve real success. This was the metre of 'Head of thy church triumphant', 7.7.4 4.7.7 D, in which each half stanza is introduced by one of the unrhyming lines so uncommon in Charles Wesley's verse. In this metre he wrote forty poems amounting to over one thousand lines.

Although the bulk of Charles Wesley's verse was written in iambic measures, however, and although the form 8.8.8.8.8 8 was both his most prolific and his most generally successful, his more original contributions to the development of English

prosody were in other types of metre, where his output was not so great in quantity and on the whole not on such a consistently high level of quality. He wrote over one thousand poems (some twenty-two thousand lines) in sixteen trochaic metres, in seven of them writing over one thousand lines each. Again his favourite was an eight-lined stanza—eight sevens, cross-rhymed—in which he wrote over seven thousand lines. The best known example is 'Jesu, Lover of my soul'. One of his more interesting experiments in trochaics is the 8.3 3.6 metre, which he seems to have introduced into English from the German, though John Cennick was also a pioneer in its use—it is the metre of Cennick's 'Ere I sleep, for every favour'.

It is now fairly well known that Charles Wesley played an important part in introducing some anapaestic metres into religious verse, and into hymns in particular, though Professor Elton is hardly accurate in speaking of 'his favourite lolloping anapaestics'. We have seen that Watts wrote five anapaestic poems. Even Prior and Swift, to whom is generally assigned the chief merit for elevating anapaestics from their crudest and clumsiest form in the street ballad to an instrument fit for drawing-room satire, fell very far short of Charles Wesley. Actually their entire combined output of anapaestics does not match in quantity the ninety poems published by Wesley in his most popular anapaestic form. Moreover, his technical mastery is far in advance of theirs, and it is only with Wesley that we really get away from the rather loose elevens and twelves, either in couplets or in stanza-form, to something more taut and shapely. Of the type of stanza formed from two short lines followed by a long one the solitary examples in Prior and Swift (each of whom seems to have written only one) is in the form 5 5.9.5 5.9. Neither has anything to compare with Wesley's regular eight eights, which he wisely and skilfully disciplined to a uniformly iambic opening, thus avoiding the looseness which sometimes characterizes Shenstone's 'Pastoral Ballad' of 1743—Wesley's pos-

sible model. Wesley's popularization of the anapaest in his hymns seems to have been at least as important in improving its status as the somewhat hesitant use made of it by secular poets, and he was a pioneer in making it the medium for the irrepressible lilt of emotions which burst the bonds of conventional verse, as they did of conventional religion. If not responsible for its introduction, it fell to his lot to bring it under firmer discipline and to train it for unaccustomed tasks.

Wesley's experimentation with anapaests began in 1741 with what became easily his most productive form, 5.5.5.5.-6.5.6.5, cross-rhymed, and occasionally set out as 10 10.11 11. It was, of course, an adaptation of the old anapaestic ballad form, with the introduction of what we may call regularized variety, making the stanza both more satisfying aesthetically and more amenable to congregational use. In this form he wrote no fewer than four thousand lines, his hymns including 'O heavenly king' and 'Ye servants of God'. The only other of his eleven anapaestic metres which top the thousand-line mark are the cross-rhyming eight eights mentioned above (exemplified by 'Thou Shepherd of Israel' and the best known of his *funeral* hymns) and the doubled 5 5.5 11 metre of the well known watch-night hymn 'Come, let us anew'. Altogether Wesley wrote some ten thousand lines of anapaestic, or rather iambic-anapaestic verse.

Even more important for the student of prosody is Charles Wesley's fertile experimentation with mixed metres, especially with mixed iambic and trochaic. Once the ear has become accustomed to the syncopated rhythm of these alternations between a rising and a falling beat, there is no gainsaying the force and virility of their challenge. Wesley's first introduction to this alternating beat almost certainly came through the singing of the Moravians, but he made it completely his own, both simplifying it by concentrating on a few basic patterns, and at the same time extending the application of those patterns. His first such experiment was published in 1739, with the form 6 6.7.7.7.7, an opening

iambic couplet quickened and strengthened by a cross-rhymed trochaic quatrain. This remained one of his favourite metres, in which he wrote 168 poems, a total of nearly four thousand lines, including 'O Filial Deity'.[4] He next discovered the robust 7.6.7.6.7.7.7.6, cross-rhymed throughout, but with a group of three consecutive trochaic lines opening the second half and breaking the alternating trochaic-iambic sequence. In this he wrote thirty-five hundred lines, including 'God of unexampled grace', and 'Meet and right it is to sing'. He much preferred, however, the variant on which he quickly embarked, in which the alternation both of rhyme and of beat was constant throughout, the fourth trochaic seven being replaced by an iambic eight. This metre was used also by John Cennick from the same year of 1741 in which Wesley published his first example. Altogether Wesley wrote over ten thousand lines in this metre, which thus ranks as his sixth most prolific. Among the 680 poems are 'Lamb of God, whose bleeding love' and 'God of glorious majesty'.[5] None of his other mixed metres occur very frequently, with the exception of one which at first seems like a variant of the romance metre, 8 8.6.8 8.6, the second line being altered from an iambic eight to a trochaic seven. This alteration, however, was undoubtedly an attempt—and a successful attempt—to secure an effect quite distinct from the smoothly running iambics, and Wesley wrote sixty-seven poems (nearly fifteen hundred lines) with this as the basic pattern. Of this, as of the other mixed metres, it is easy to point to a typical ex-

4. I am fairly confident that he also wrote 'Thee, O my God and king', although it has always been claimed for John Wesley, on the mistaken assumption that Charles never translated German hymns. See *Representative Verse*, pp. 4–5.

5. Mr Findlay has pointed out (*Christ's Standard Bearer*, p. 22) that this metre can be regarded as trochaic throughout by looking upon the iambic lines as a continuation of the trochaic lines; they would then be described as 13 13.7.7.13 and 13 13.15 13. The same is true of some other of the mixed metres. Nevertheless it seems clear that they were a different *genre*, certainly not to be explained as an accidental or prudential chopping up of a poem with over-lengthy lines.

ample, 'Far from my native land removed', but not to a widely known example, because these unconventional mixtures have not been readily assimilated as hymns, no matter how effective they may be as poems. In mixed metres in general Wesley wrote some twenty thousand lines, about the same as his output in trochaic verse.

Charles Wesley hardly ever ventured into dactylic verse, though (as we shall see) he frequently used an opening choriambus as a variant in his iambic verse, which conveys the dactylic effect of a galloping horse, to whom the iambic reins are speedily applied. He has one famous example of a combination of dactylic and trochaic feet in a hymn written (according to tradition) for use by an open air congregation that was being disturbed by drunken sailors singing 'one of their lewd songs called "Nancy Dawson" ', the metre being that of 'Here we go round the mulberry bush', and Wesley's opening line, 'Listed into the cause of sin'.[6]

The eighteenth century was the age of the couplet, and this was almost certainly the vehicle for most of Wesley's lost translations from the classics, as well as much of his reflective and satirical verse. About one hundred such poems are extant, containing over seven thousand lines. Although he experimented in iambic sixes, trochaic sevens, and iambic-anapaestic thirteens, his favourite form of couplets was iambic decasyllables, often with a closing alexandrine. This accounts for fifty poems, a total of over four thousand lines, including his critical *Epistle to the Reverend Mr John Wesley* (1755). Although he also wrote many regular octosyllabic couplets, for much of his political satire he preferred the looser 'Hudibrastics', a mixture of eights and nines, with an occasional longer line. Of these there are thirty examples, comprising about twenty-five hundred lines.

One further minor classification of Wesley's verse may be described as 'varied metres', in the sense that he moves from

6. For a discussion and a parallel presentation of Wesley's original and revised versions of this hymn, see *Representative Verse*, pp. 117–21.

one to another within the same poem, in order to achieve some
particular effect. One interesting example occurs in the
Hymns and Sacred Poems of 1742, a verse paraphrase of
Isaiah 52[7-10]. The introductory exclamations—'How beauti-
ful upon the mountains' &c, verses 7–8, are represented in
five stanzas of steady cross-rhyming long metre, but the
exhortation 'Break forth into singing' (verse 9) is the signal
for him to burst into four stanzas of lilting anapaestics.[7]
Even more interesting is a poem discovered at Duke Univer-
sity after *Representative Verse* had reached the page-proof
stage. This consists of a series of short lyrics with various
stanzaic patterns that form a complex unit with a clear pro-
gression in thought, the subject being the death of an un-
known Christian. Charles Wesley has no pindaric ode to
match those of Isaac Watts, but this document shows that
he did in fact experiment with a less elaborate form of ode.[8]

7. Set out as 10 10.11 11. See *Representative Verse*, pp. 36–7.
8. op. cit., pp. 376–78 and illustration facing p. 377.

TEN

MODULATIONS

THERE is one very important footnote that should be added
to any study of Charles Wesley's command of metre. He was
for the most part in such perfect command that he never let
it dictate to him. In other words he was a poet, rather than a
versifier terrified lest an accent might fall 'incorrectly'. Any
musician knows that if he remains in the same key for too
long monotony sets in. This he avoids by modulations, pas-
sages in a different though related key, passages short or
long, obvious or subtly concealed beneath the melody, vary-
ing both with the occasion and with the technical command
and musical sensitivity of the composer. The same kind of
thing is true in verse. 'Modulations', as we may call them, are
obviously more necessary in longer lines and longer poems,
which otherwise would degenerate to a jog-trot. The need
is not quite so self-evident in shorter lyrics, but even here
their complete absence has a sterilizing effect.

Hymns are in a peculiar category, because they are made
for singing to relatively simple tunes, to which each stanza
must conform. Hymn writers in general, therefore, tend to
ignore (or to remain in ignorance of) the values of modulation.
The slavery to the tune is one very important reason for the
widespread assumption that hymns cannot be poetry, an
assumption based on the (sometimes unrealized) nature of
poetry as a constantly varying compromise between the
naturalness of common speech and the artificiality of strictly
metrical speech; at the one extreme lies prose, at the other
the hurdy-gurdy. It is broadly true that hymns with no modu-
lations are as unsatisfactory for reading as those with exces-
sive or violent modulations are for singing. For the hymn

writer with a feeling for poetry the motto should be 'modulation in moderation'.

Charles Wesley was not simply a hymn writer with a feeling for poetry, however, but a true poet who wrote hymns. In his couplets modulation is therefore inevitable, and the same is true of his 'sacred poems', i.e. the 'hymns' which were in fact not really intended for regular congregational singing. Even in the true hymns, however, modulation is present. The syncopated beat of the mixed metres is itself a form of modulation. It is to be found also in hymns where it is both unexpected and unrealised, being overlaid by the beat of the music, which is normally remembered even when the verse is being read. If we *do* conscientiously try to dismiss the tune from our head for the moment, however, we can hardly fail to realize the variations in stress and duration of corresponding syllables. One of the most frequent modulations in Wesley's iambic verse—as in iambic verse generally—is the use of an opening choriambus, or a foot consisting of a trochee followed by an iambus.[9] This is one of the methods by which he injects trochaic vigour into the otherwise docile iambics of the double short metre, witness:

Soldiers of Christ, arise,
And put your armour on,
Strong in the strength which God supplies
Through his eternal Son;
Strong in the Lord of hosts,
And in his mighty power,
Who in the strength of Jesus trusts
Is more than conqueror.

This is by no means 'regular' verse, as many unsuspecting folk assume. Out of the eight lines four begin with the deliberately misplaced beat of a choriambus—the first, third, fifth, and seventh. This looks at first almost like a regular

9. Called by Mr Findlay (*Christ's Standard Bearer*, pp. 25–6), a 'hammerhead'.

pattern of misplaced beats, but no! In the second stanza it is the first and seventh lines only, in the third stanza the first, third, and seventh, while the fourth line opens with what is more like a spondee. In the fourth stanza only the first line begins with a choriambus, and in the fifth there are two pyrrhic feet, consisting of relatively unstressed syllables. Usually these accentual variations are not sufficiently marked to cause a worshipper discomfort. In this particular instance the hymn has been set in the *Methodist Hymn Book* to a tune which follows the misplaced accentuation of this first stanza, and so misfires (though only slightly) in other stanzas. This 'hymn', of course, was in fact originally written as a lengthy poem, in the course of which Wesley felt it necessary, as well as permissible, to vary his scheme of accentuation.

The opening choriambus is by no means confined to this metre, as may be seen from the first lines of two of the famous hymns upon his conversion—'Where shall my wond'ring soul begin' and 'O for a thousand tongues to sing'. The *Methodist Hymn-Book* has unfortunately tried to squeeze the other famous conversion hymn into the same mould, as represented by the tune *Sagina*. 'And can it be that I should gain', however, is a perfectly regular iambic, and only the closing stanzas have an introductory choriambus, though this same modulation is to be found in other parts of the hymn. Often it is combined with less noticeable variations, as in 'Pardon, and holiness, and heaven'. Here, in addition to the opening choriambus, there is a distinct lightening of the emphasis on '-ness', where the beat would regularly fall, though there is a compensatory lengthening of this syllable through the presence of a closing sibilant.

This brief discussion of only one form of modulation—though probably the most important—enables us to see that there is more of the mystery of music in many of Charles Wesley's hymns than is at first obvious, especially when the ear is deafened by a familiar tune. That Wesley's use of

modulation is significant in the general history of prosody
may be seen by quoting some words from Mr Sampson's
Concise Cambridge History of English Literature: 'To us the
substitution of a three-syllabled foot for a two-syllabled
foot and the replacing of an "iamb" with its "rise" by a
"trochee" with its "fall" are neither faults nor anomalies,
but the touches that transmute metre into rhythm. In
listening to Chatterton and Blake and Coleridge we must not
take these things for granted; we must make an imaginative
retreat in audition, and hear the liberties of the new poetry
as they first fell upon ears attuned to the regularity and
smoothness practised by the poets who came after Pope, and
prescribed by the theorists who formulated the principles
they expected the poets to practice. But the end of the
century saw many signs of revolt against mechanical regular-
ity.'[1] In fact the signs had been there long before the poets
named; indeed in the variety and freedom of his rhythm as
well as in the rapturous content of his verse Charles Wesley
may be regarded as one of the heralds of the Romantic
Revival. It is somewhat strange that in spite of his recognition
of Charles Wesley's literary stature Mr Sampson seems to
have missed the fact that in this matter of 'substitution'
(as he prefers to call it) Wesley was in the vanguard of the
reformers.[2]

As a pendant I should perhaps add that not all the modu-
lations which today we find in Wesley's verse are intentional.
Many result from a shift in accent since his day. One example
may be given. In 'Come, sinners, to the Gospel feast' Charles
Wesley wrote the following balanced iambic couplet, each
line opening with a choriambus:

> This is the time, no more delay,
> This is the acceptable day.

1. op. cit., p. 774.
2. There had been many others before him, of course, even among the
hymn-writers—witness Bishop Thomas Ken's well-known Morning and
Evening Hymns, and Watts's 'Our God, our help in ages past'.

The lines are perfectly all right so long as we stress the first
syllable of 'acceptable', as did eighteenth century English-
men. With the modern shifting of the accent to the second
syllable, however, the effect is to have one stressed followed
by three unstressed syllables, and the line is thrown out of
joint. In actual fact Methodists did try to sing this until
1933, when the line was amended to 'This is the Lord's
accepted day'. Not every such example was amended, how-
ever. In No. 156 of the 1933 hymn-book a similar line is left
unchanged, so that it reads like an anapaestic rather than
an iambic line:

> Make this the acceptable hour;
> Come, O my soul's physician Thou!

The chief sinners in this matter of shifted accent are listed by
Dr Bett as 'ac'ceptable', 'ce'mented', 'con'fessor', 'obdu'rate',
and 'suc'cessor'.[3]

3. *The Hymns of Methodism*, pp. 54–6.

RHYMES

MOST of us find it far easier to detect the music of the rhyme than the more subtle music of the rhythm with its variations in stress and tempo. Charles Wesley recognized rhythm as a far more important element in poetry than rhyme, even though he seems never to have experimented in blank verse, and never took the easy way followed by Watts and others of being content with two rhyming lines per quatrain. It is, I believe, his matured sense of the respective importance of these elements of rhythm and rhyme, rather than his subordination of poetry to piety (as suggested by G. H. Vallins) that leads to the frequent imperfection of his rhymes. If rhyme had impressed him as supremely important he would have thrown overboard many otherwise worthy lines, or at least remodelled them. He knew, however, that rhyme was a useful auxiliary rather than of the essence of poetry, and so (as Vallins succinctly remarks) 'he used it as a servant, but did not submit to it as a master'.[4]

Some Charles Wesley enthusiasts have proclaimed him as a master of rhyme in a quite different sense: they can find no spot or blemish in this aspect of his verse. Alas! this is surely blind (or deaf) worship! I admit, of course, that several cautions must be entered before criticizing the rhymes of Wesley's day—or, for that matter, of any day but our own. Many rhymes perfectly acceptable to an eighteenth century ear sound clumsy now because of changing usages in ordinary speech. Sometimes these changes are mere nuances of pronunciation, but occasionally they are much more obtrusive, involving not only the transformation of vowel sounds but

4. *The Wesleys and the English Language* (1957), p. 85.

also (as we have seen) the shift of the accent from one syllable to another. Dr Bett carefully analyses both aspects of this subject, and points out the following as perfectly good rhymes for the meticulous Pope and his contemporaries: 'join/mine' and 'oil/smile', 'shower/pour', 'wound/found', 'convert/heart', 'great/feet', 'God/rod' *and* 'God/road'.[5]

Another possible source of unjustified criticism is the failure to recognize the poets' agreement that an 'eye-rhyme' like 'come/home' might occasionally serve as an understudy for an 'ear-rhyme'. Obviously this is a convention which must not be abused, for poetry is after all an appeal to the ear, even when it approaches the ear silently by way of the eye and the mind.

There is yet another point of criticism to be considered in this matter of Wesley's rhymes. A number of them are perfect to the ear, but not to the mind, because they break accepted grammatical conventions. As an example we turn to the second stanza of 'Jesus, united by thy grace', which would doubtless be much more popular but for one jarring word:

> Still let us own our common Lord,
> And bear thine easy yoke,
> A band of love, a threefold cord,
> Which never can be broke.

This sounds either careless or criminal to the literary purist of today, yet caused no offence in Wesley's own time. His contemporaries knew that 'broke' had not merely hobbled in to patch up the rhyme—it was a valid alternative for 'broken'. Within, as well as at the end of his lines, Charles Wesley continually uses unfamiliar grammatical forms, or, more frequently, familiar forms in unfamiliar settings. He chooses each particular form for a particular reason, whether it be rhythm, rhyme, or music, but we can be sure that in

5. *The Hymns of Methodism*, pp. 50–6. The variations in accent were noted on the previous page.

almost every case no-one in his own day would adjudge him guilty of a solecism. It is always wise when meeting any peculiar grammatical usage in the writings of either of the Wesley brothers (or of other scholarly writers in that and previous ages) to assume that it is an example of differing customs rather than of differing standards. The Wesleys lived in a period of grammatical flux, and in his verse Charles Wesley sometimes made the best of both worlds. The fluidity was most noticeable in the past participle, which was frequently assimilated to the past tense—Gray's famous *Elegy* was originally described as 'wrote in a country church-yard'.[6]

When all the excuses have been made, however, Charles Wesley must plead guilty to having written, writ, or wrote many imperfect rhymes. Without labouring the point, we may instance the opening stanza of a well-known hymn where *every* rhyme is faulty, though one is an 'eye-rhyme':

> Behold the servant of the Lord!
> I wait thy guiding hand to feel,
> To hear, and keep thine every word,
> To prove, and do thy perfect will.
> Joyful from all my works to cease,
> Glad to fulfil all righteousness.

Wesley, like most other writers of English verse, found it difficult to secure enough varied and pleasing feminine rhymes—the double rhymes consisting of an accented followed by an unaccented syllable. In any case he much preferred the masculine ending, quite apart from the fact that because the accent was on the closing syllable it was necessary to seek a rhyme for that syllable alone. Indeed because

6. See further Chapter 8, 'Eighteenth-Century Language', in J. H. Whiteley's *Wesley's England*, especially pp. 232–7; cf. Bett, *The Hymns of Methodism*, pp. 47–9, G. H. Vallins, *The Wesleys and the English Language*, pp. 21–4, 50–68, and the poem of Dr Byrom's quoted in part by both Whiteley and Bett, which will be found in the *Gentleman's Magazine*, Vol. 28 (1758), p. 487.

of this strong preference it is usually possible to say from a glance at the syllabic structure of his stanzas whether they are iambic, trochaic, or mixed: six or eight syllables normally mean three or four iambic feet, ending with an accented syllable; seven usually mean three trochaic feet, again ending with an accented monosyllable; and a combination of six and/or eight with seven normally implies a combination of iambic and trochaic, in each case with closing accents for each line. This is by no means invariable, of course, with a poet of his versatility, but it is true in well over ninety per cent of his verse.

Nevertheless Wesley was at least moderately successful with the feminine rhyme, especially in the lighter form of Hudibrastic verse, where such rhymes as 'walk in/talking' and 'wearing/appear in' do not seem so incongruous as they might do in hymns, even hymns in the lighthearted anapaestic measure. As a matter of fact both examples quoted *do* appear in a hymn, and a well-known one—'O what shall I do my Saviour to praise', from *Hymns and Sacred Poems* of 1742. They are there printed as *internal* rhymes, however, where mere assonance might suffice. If we turn to the trochaic forms which forced him to frequent feminine rhymes we see Wesley beset with the same kind of difficulty, and often apparently not really worried whether he overcomes it smoothly or not. His best known hymn in that metre is probably 'Love Divine, all loves excelling'. In that poem he uses the following imperfect feminine rhymes: 'compassion/salvation', 'deliver/never', 'blessing/ceasing', 'glory/before Thee'. I do not add 'Spirit/inherit' because this *was* an acceptable rhyme, the contemporary pronunciation of 'spirit' approximating to 'sperit'. Occasionally his feminine rhymes consist of diphthongs like 'fires/desires', which is tolerable, and 'cares/snares', which to a modern ear certainly sounds like a masculine rhyme.

It is noteworthy that the rare stanza-forms in which Wesley used an unrhyming line were so framed in order to

avoid the necessity of an added feminine rhyme, namely the iambic 7.7.4 4.7 D, and the related iambic-anapaestic variant 7.7.5 5.8; the unrhyming line in the trochaic example, 8.7.8.7.4.7, also has a feminine ending. Only in the first form noted did Wesley write any considerable number of poems— forty, a total of over one thousand lines. It led him to some strange expedients, as may be seen by looking at his most well-known hymn in that metre, 'Head of thy church triumphant': 'adore Thee/glory', 'fire/nigher', 'favour/ever', 'Stephen/heaven'. It also led to the ingenuity of the 'verb plus preposition' rhyme in one of his *Hymns for Times of Trouble*:

> Some put their trust in chariots,
> And horses some rely on,
> But God alone
> Our help we own,
> God is the strength of Sion.

We may sum up Wesley's attitude to feminine rhymes by saying that he did not really enjoy himself when he was writing under this type of discipline, and much preferred the strong masculine ending. Altogether he wrote a mere three hundred poems in metres which called for them, out of a total of some nine thousand.

A few sentences at least should be added about the more subtle forms of verbal music. To Wesley's sensitive ear individual words had a musical as well as a factual content, and occasionally their musical outweighed their intellectual value. We never find him deserting sense for sound, but he frequently rejected a word of simple sense and simple music for another which was harder to understand but contained more subtle or more rousing music. This is true of his classical vocabulary, examples being the beauty of 'amaranthine' and the sinewy strength of polysyllables like 'inextinguishable' and 'incomprehensible'. It is true also of his use of many biblical names such as Jeshurun and Zerubbabel. This also

was an important factor in his manuscript revisions. Even his images were as likely to appeal to the ear as to the eye, for as a handmaid of religion music attracted him far more than did art.[7]

7. See J. E. Rattenbury, *The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley's Hymns*, p. 53. Even the example of motes dancing in a sunbeam which Dr Rattenbury quotes as a visual word-picture was in fact taken direct from a German original, see *Representative Verse*, pp. 170–2.

TWELVE

POEMS OR HYMNS?

IT can be proved conclusively that Charles Wesley wrote far more than 'between six and seven thousand hymns', even after subtracting John Wesley's known contribution and after defining a hymn as 'a lyrical poem with mainly religious content', thus disqualifying the few hundreds of his nine thousand poems which are not even faintly religious. On the other hand it can also be demonstrated that the use of a still narrower definition will reduce Charles Wesley's quota of hymns to the more modest proportions of some three or four thousand—the actual figure will depend in part on the assessment of many borderline cases, and must therefore be left somewhat vague. Nor is this simply a matter of statistics, so that what is lost on the roundabouts of one definition is gained on the swings of another. Not only Charles Wesley but the literate public at large has suffered from the conventional attitude that Charles Wesley was a hymn writer who occasionally stumbled into the realms of poetry in those hymns. Professor H. N. Fairchild, for instance, in the second volume of his *Religious Trends in English Poetry* (1942), confesses that 'the hymns of Charles Wesley . . . may so often be regarded as personal religious lyrics, and good ones, that here I have been tempted to abandon my policy of excluding hymnody from the scope of these studies'. He adds in a footnote that his scheme does not prevent him from glancing 'at the hymns of poets like Cowper, who also wrote non-liturgical religious poetry'. Yet in actual fact Charles Wesley wrote much more 'non-liturgical religious poetry' than did Cowper, and Professor Fairchild might therefore with an easy conscience have followed his intuition. Far from being a writer

of hymns only, albeit very good ones, we believe that Charles Wesley was primarily a devotional poet, though he deliberately diverted much of his output for congregational use, and other poems were so diverted for him. He wrote, however, because he *had* to, not mainly because he wanted to supply singable spiritual ditties for the people called Methodists. Both his hymns and his poetry are better understood and appreciated if this is borne in mind.

Some attempt at defining a hymn is obviously necessary if we are to assess Charles Wesley's position in the history of religious verse. How should a hymn be defined? (Perhaps we should ask instead, 'How *can* a hymn be defined?' for even Julian's *Dictionary of Hymnology* makes no attempt to tell us what hymns really are!) The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* offers the following definition: 'song of praise to God; spec[ifically] a metrical composition adapted to be sung in a religious service.' The first part of this definition (based on that of St Augustine) is both too general and too restricted, for it overlooks the frequent elements of confession or prayer in hymns. The specific definition brings us much nearer to what most of us understand by the term, though it seems nevertheless desirable to essay a closer analysis of the elements of such a composition. The normal English hymn can be distinguished from related species of verse, I suggest, by reference to four criteria, two concerned with its content and two with its form:

1. It is *religious*, an act of worship.

2. It is *communal* in its approach to religion, containing sentiments which may be shared by a group of people, even though they may all be expected to sing 'I' instead of 'we'.

3. It is *lyrical*, written to be sung, not chanted or intoned.

4. It is comparatively *regular* both in metre and in structure, and consists of at least two stanzas.

All these criteria may admit of slight variation, but they form the basic ingredients of what we usually recognize as a hymn, a species which includes the variety known as the

'metrical psalm'. If all four elements are not present to a marked degree, then it would be better to speak of the composition by some specific name appropriate to its special function, such as anthem, chant, chorus, doxology, or else (to use Charles Wesley's own term) as a 'sacred poem'.

No such definition can be so absolutely satisfactory as to erect a watertight barrier between hymns and poems, and there will still be room for disagreement in its application to particular examples. In practice, also, many of Charles Wesley's compositions slip without warning from one category to another. In spite of overlapping and uncertainty, however, the religious verse of Charles Wesley undoubtedly falls into two main categories. It seems clear also that Charles Wesley himself fully recognized this fact. The first two volumes of religious verse edited and published by John Wesley (in 1737 and 1738) were both entitled *A Collection of Psalms and Hymns*. When Charles Wesley began to share the responsibility for publication in the following year his name appeared on an altered title-page—*Hymns and Sacred Poems*. Three volumes with this title and over the names of the two brothers appeared in rapid succession, in 1739, 1740, and 1742, and a further anonymous one—mainly a selection from the 1739 volume for use in Ireland—in 1747. To make the responsibility for this title clearer, Charles Wesley used it for the two-volume work which was published in his name alone in 1749. John Wesley's own predilection seems to have been for 'Collection'—one might say that he was the born editor as Charles was the born creator. John issued another *Collection of Psalms and Hymns* in 1741, and this title was retained even after the second edition of 1743 saw the addition of Charles Wesley's name to the title-page and the filling out of the work with his poems. Nor did John forsake the word in issuing his three-volume anthology in 1744—it was still a 'Collection' of 'Moral and Sacred Poems'. The same key word designated his most famous 1780 hymn-book—*A Collection of Hymns for the use of the People called Methodists*.

The religious lyrics in which Charles Wesley excelled were described by him, therefore, as 'Hymns and Sacred Poems', the two terms flowing into each other rather than forming mutually exclusive categories. Their varied character may be illustrated from the contents of the 1749 volumes. Perhaps half are hymns in the specific sense as defined above; a few are paraphrases of scripture; and a great many are poems written on particular occasions, such as 'After a deliverance from death by the fall of an house', or 'Written in going to Wakefield to answer a charge of treason'. While recognizing and proclaiming that his compositions were by no means all hymns, however, Charles Wesley does tend to use the term 'hymn' in a generic rather than in a specific sense. Of the 455 pieces in the two volumes, 392 are explicitly described by that term. In actual fact most critics would probably agree that many of these are really 'sacred poems', even though parts of them at least might have been used on rare occasions as hymns. For Charles Wesley himself, as for others, there were many compositions at each end of the scale which were quite distinct from each other, and must be classed either as hymns or as sacred poems. In the middle, however, were many which could be described as both or either, and the choice of term would depend on the use made of the composition—a sacred poem could be sung as a hymn, and a hymn could be used in private like a devotional poem. Because of this extensive overlapping Charles Wesley eventually came to use the shorter and simpler term 'hymn' as a generic term embracing the 'sacred poem'. Both instalments of *Hymns on God's Everlasting Love* (1741) contain items which cannot possibly be described as hymns in any specific sense; perhaps Wesley considered *Hymns and Sacred Poems on God's Everlasting Love* as a possible title, but if so he rejected it in the interests of brevity. Similarly, although the first *Funeral Hymns* (1746) did in fact consist exclusively of hymns (many of them with a strongly individual connotation), the second series (1759) contains many which are really elegies, though

it seems just possible that they may have been used on a
single occasion in public worship. In his *Short Hymns on
Select Passages of the Holy Scriptures* Charles Wesley finally
gave up any idea of discriminating between the two categor-
ies. The bulk of the collection consists of poems which are
either irregular in form, complicated in metre, or far from
communal in theme, and in fact very few were ever used as
hymns. The term 'sacred poem', however, had been dropped,
apparently for good, and the literary world henceforth
thought of Charles Wesley as a 'mere' writer of hymns. For
this erroneous conclusion he himself must clearly carry a
share of the responsibility.

JOHN OR CHARLES WESLEY?

BETWEEN 1739 and 1745 John and Charles Wesley pub-
lished five volumes as joint authors, with no indication of the
extent of their respective contributions. These five volumes,
together with John Wesley's *Collection of Moral and Sacred
Poems* of 1744, which again contained compositions of un-
differentiated Wesley authorship, between them offer some
seven hundred poems which are either original or are adapta-
tions from earlier poets. These seven hundred pieces include
many of the best known Methodist hymns, as well as some
of the most valued sacred poems. After this date it seems that
John Wesley wrote hardly any verse (an exception is his
lament for the loss of Grace Murray in 1749) and confined
himself to editing earlier poems for the successive general
hymn-books of Methodism—in addition to praising or criticiz-
ing, as occasion prompted, particular examples of his
brother's lavish output. In agreeing not to distinguish their
respective contributions to the joint publications the brothers
did nothing to ease the lot of inquisitive students anxious to
bestow credit where it truly belongs.

The great bulk of Wesley verse can be assumed or almost
proved to be by Charles Wesley. Huge masses of it are extant
in his manuscript, sometimes in two or three stages of com-
position. There are sufficient clues for us to be almost sure
that most of the anonymous productions are pure Charles
Wesley. For example John Wesley wrote to Charles in 1762:
'Pray tell Brother Sheen I am hugely displeased at his re-
printing the Nativity hymns and omitting the very best
hymn in the collection, [that word again!] "All glory to God
in the sky, &c." I beg they may never more be printed with-

out it. Omit one or two, and I will thank you. They are *namby-pambical.*[8] It can hardly be doubted that John Wesley had no responsibility either for writing or for publishing *Hymns for the Nativity of our Lord*! That early and important nucleus of one-twelfth of the total production of the brothers, however, remains a problem, a problem which is perhaps insoluble in every detail, though some of its features are gradually becoming clearer.

In *The Hymns of Methodism* Dr Henry Bett made the bold experiment of isolating the known compositions of John Wesley and seeking for some canons of judgement by which they might be distinguished from those of Charles. He began with the assumption that all the known thirty-three poems translated from the German were by John, and these form the bulk of the known John Wesley corpus. I have given reason and example for disputing this assumption, believing that Charles Wesley did in fact both read and translate from the German. Granted that Dr Bett did not know of the items in Charles's manuscript hymn-books entitled 'From the German', even the proof he adduces from John Wesley's references to their early Moravian contacts can be turned against his assumption. John wrote: 'Every day we conversed with them, and consulted them on all occasions. I translated many of their hymns. . . .' 'We conversed . . . I translated'. Certainly John Wesley was responsible for most of the translations, but Charles Wesley also was a potential translator, having learned German in order to converse with the Moravians, and pondered following his brother to Germany.[9] On the basis of this disproven assumption that Charles did not translate hymns from the German I would claim for him (mainly on metrical grounds) 'Thou, Jesu, art our King'—which would give Charles Wesley a stake even in the 1738 *Collection of Psalms and Hymns*. Nevertheless it is impossible to dissent from Dr Bett's main contention, that in

8. *Letters*, ed. John Telford (1931), Vol. 4, p. 166.
9. *Representative Verse*, pp. 167–72.

general the translations both from German and Spanish may be assumed to be the work of John Wesley. To these translations Dr Bett added 'Father of all! whose powerful voice' and the Grace Murray poem.[1] There are available also a few juvenile poems of John's, making a total of some sixteen hundred lines of verse, inadequate for dogmatizing, yet useful for assessing tendencies.

The 'canons' formulated by Dr Bett after a detailed comparison of this 'Johannine corpus' with Charles Wesley's *Hymns and Sacred Poems* of 1749 are as follows. John Wesley's verse shows:

1. A strong preference for simpler measures.
2. A preference for couplet rhyming. (After some criticism by Dr Rattenbury, Dr Bett agreed that this criterion should not be stressed as much as the others.)
3. Division of an octosyllabic line into two equal feet, with a central pause, Charles Wesley's lines being more fluent.
4. A tendency to elaborate and repeat a thought, Charles being freer and more spontaneous.
5. A tendency to begin a succession of lines with parallel expressions.
6. Frequent enjambment.
7. A minor point: the last verse echoing the first.
8. Another minor point: the use of favourite words such as 'duteous', 'dauntless', 'boundless'.

To these original 'canons' further study led Dr Bett to add others, which may be summarized thus:

9. Avoidance of noun-verb compounds and 'all-' compounds.
10. Avoidance of polysyllabic words, of which Charles Wesley was fond.
11. Use of adjectives beginning with 'un-', Charles preferring 'in-'.

1. I think that we might almost certainly add also to the work of John the forty-three adaptations from George Herbert's poems.

12. Use of triads of nouns and less frequently of verbs.
13. 'A certain stiffness of movement'.
14. Formal phrases of 'poetic diction', such as 'ethereal blue', and 'solar fire'.
15. The use of 'I'd', and 'I'll'.

In addition to these specific clues to the authorship of one or other of the brothers Dr Bett made the valid point that there was a tendency in the jointly-published volumes for compositions by the same author to be arranged in blocks rather than singly.

Testing the 1780 *Collection* by these canons Dr Bett came to the conclusion that nine-tenths of the hymns therein were by Charles. We should expect at least this, and really more, from the tenor of John Wesley's famous preface. Dr Bett also named sixteen hymns which he believed to be by John, including several which have traditionally been thought to be by Charles Wesley, including 'And can it be, that I should gain'.

Much study is still necessary before anything like certainty can be achieved on many of these conjectures. We should be on much safer ground if we were able to formulate canons based on the ascertained work of Charles Wesley, particularly if this were done in such a way as to reveal the variations brought by maturity and old age. Although I personally cannot pretend to have undertaken the necessary detailed study, after reading 180,000 lines of his verse, and collating many thousands of them many times over, and in addition compiling huge masses of statistics subdivided in several ways, I have found myself with certain beliefs which may at least be mentioned as pointers. Two warnings must first be issued, however: I have included all but the undisputed work of John as if it were by Charles; and I have (with one exception) assumed for general purposes that work in the handwriting of Charles Wesley was actually of his composition, although in fact this is not a universally valid assumption.

From study spreading over some years, though nothing

like so many as those which Dr Bett devoted to the subject in a more microscopic way, I believe that we should discount or at the very least treat with severe caution Dr Bett's 'canons' numbered 4, 5, 7, 9, and 12. As I have mentioned elsewhere, there is a strong tendency in Charles Wesley toward longer stanzas, and particularly toward a doubling of the normal CM, SM, and LM—though there is also evidence to suggest that in his earlier years he wrote much in the ordinary long metre. There is, I believe, a strong tendency in Charles Wesley to prefer cross-rhyming (Dr Bett's term is 'alternate rhyme') to consecutive-rhyming. This is revealed in a very strong preference for the six eights rhyme-pattern of ABABCC, and a comparative shying away from the form AABCCB except in its doubled form. I think that we may take it that almost without exception the verse in anapaestic and mixed metres is by Charles Wesley, and nearly all of that in trochaic metres. This is really a confirmation of Dr Bett's point about John Wesley's preference for 'simpler measures', in which I would insert the word 'iambic'. It is also necessary, as Dr Rattenbury pointed out, to take note of the actual content of the poems, and to place them alongside the known predispositions and temperaments of the two brothers: in this way I believe that we find confirmation for Charles Wesley's authorship of the translation from the German of 'Melt, happy soul, in Jesu's blood'. Even when these points are added to those marshalled by Dr Bett, however, they remain for the most part 'tendencies', whose force in isolation is small, though fairly strong when several or most are combined. As Dr Rattenbury claimed, of the hymns published during the first ten years of the Methodist Revival not more than fifty can at present be shown to be by John, and I think it unlikely that the total number was over one hundred.[2]

2. Bett, *The Hymns of Methodism*, pp. 21–33; Rattenbury, *The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley's Hymns*, pp. 21–5, 58–84. Cf. Flew, *The Hymns of Charles Wesley*, pp. 26–31.

FOURTEEN

EXPLORING CHARLES WESLEY

As will have been realized from some of the statistics given above, the student of Charles Wesley is in a situation similar to that of the archeologist exploring an ancient city. Time and money usually permit only the opening of trenches in likely areas in the attempt to secure representative cross-sections of the centuries of deposit, though occasionally this can be followed up by the systematic excavation of the whole site. Similarly few researchers can be expected to sift through the huge accumulations, published and unpublished, of Charles Wesley's verse, in the hope of discovering some artifact that will establish a pet theory, or maybe of hitting upon some treasures that will lead to new knowledge in literature, history, or theology. Small wonder that the general student has been as frightened of Charles Wesley in the past as he has been of archeology. It was with him in mind that this introduction to Charles Wesley was originally written to accompany a cross-section of his verses compiled upon specific principles. A consideration of those principles will probably further increase our general understanding of Wesley's work, as well as helping us to decide whether our next step should be to study such an anthology, a specific group of hymns, the whole thirteen volumes of the *Poetical Works*, or—some other subject.

In *Representative Verse of Charles Wesley* two-thirds of the 335 selected items come under the general heading of 'Hymns and Sacred Poems'. They were deliberately separated into these two categories in order to illustrate Wesley in his character of 'sacred poet' as well as of hymn writer. Those included in Part I are almost all hymns which have come into fairly common use either throughout the English-speaking churches or at least in Methodist worship. A few are examples of 'sacred poems' of which a part has regularly been used as a hymn. Such are 'For the Anniversary Day of One's Conversion', a personal poem from which was extracted the hymn 'O for a thousand tongues to sing', and 'Father, whose everlasting love' (which Dr Bett believed was by John Wesley), a theological manifesto abridged for congregational worship. There are also examples of hymns sung on particular occasions only, or by quite restricted groups, as well as verses undoubtedly written for communal singing but never actually published by Wesley, like 'Stupendous height of heavenly love'.

Under the heading of 'Sacred Poems' Part II contains items of a purely personal character, or those where the biblical or theological or devotional content seems to have been shaped for individual rather than congregational use. Just as some in Part I might well have been placed in Part II, so some of these 'Sacred Poems' might have appeared among the 'Hymns'. Examples are 'Thou God of truth and love', composed as a personal love poem, the pronouns later altered to fit it for general Christian fellowship, and 'How can a sinner *know*', written as a defence of Methodist teaching on the doctrine of assurance, and later simplified metrically so that it was suitable for congregational worship.

The third part of the anthology also uses one of Charles Wesley's own titles—'Miscellaneous Poems'. Into this section have been gathered examples of poems written on events in Wesley's personal life, as also on controversial, ecclesiastical, political, and topical subjects. (Again there is overlapping, and many of these might have been included in Part II, especially some of the personal and theological poems.) Dr J. E. Rattenbury believed that it would be possible to reconstruct Charles Wesley's life from his poems, and long before his death gave me the extensive materials that he had collected to illustrate this theme. In *Representative Verse* I

have made a deliberate attempt to select poems which be-
sides their intrinsic merits also combine to present a brief
summary of Wesley's personal and family history, and of his
reactions to some of the main events in the ecclesiastical,
political, social, and cultural history of the eighteenth cen-
tury. For that purpose I retained in Part III some com-
positions which were undoubtedly written and used as
'hymns' for specific national occasions such as the 1745 Re-
bellion, the Seven Years War, and the War of American
Independence. As might be expected, hardly any of these
hymns have come into general use.

Inequality is inevitable in such a vast output of verse as
that of Charles Wesley, but it is a mistake to assume that
most of it must be of poor quality, so that a few outstanding
poems will naturally rise to the surface while the remainder
can safely be forgotten. One of the surprising things is how
different critics will make different choices even of the high-
lights of Charles Wesley's verse, and what some rate as pass-
ably good are placed by others among his very best. The
position seems to be that the *majority* of Charles Wesley's
verse is both technically competent and contains a spark of
real poetic genius. Dr Rattenbury has not overstated the
case: 'It would be possible today to publish hundreds of his
forgotten hymns which, if their authorship were unrecog-
nized, would be hailed as exceptionally fine, and if wedded to
melodious tunes would certainly become popular.'[3] But
nobody, not even a Methodist, wants to sing hymns by one
man all the time: and nobody, not even the most ardent
Charles Wesley enthusiast, wants to read sacred poems by one
man all the time. Some process of arbitrary choice is there-
fore forced upon the reader, and this usually takes the form
of selection—and rejection—by non-literary criteria, inci-
dental features of a poem, particularly of its subject-matter,
which either attract or repel. Even Professor Elton, after
speaking of Wesley's 'favourite lolloping anapaestics' as

3. *The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley's Hymns*, p. 60.

being 'dangerous', proceeds to quote a stanza to which his
main objection seems to be the use of the word 'worm' as
applied to a human being in the manner typical of an eight-
eenth-century evangelist. Similar references to blood and
bowels inevitably repel most modern readers, but we must
recognize this as a prejudice arising from cultural changes
rather than some poetical defect inherent in the words them-
selves. From the point of view of poetry proper it would be
more pertinent to draw attention to Charles Wesley's accept-
ance of much of the poetic licence normal in his day, of which
the outstanding example is his frequent transformation by
elision of 'spirit' into a monosyllable.

While it is possible, therefore, to isolate a small group of
Wesley's hymns on the grounds of their popularity, it is im-
possible to do so on grounds of poetic merit alone. A. E.
Bailey's *The Gospel in Hymns* attempts the first task, on the
basis of ten American and Canadian hymnals. Similarly
Arthur Temple's *Hymns we Love* lists one hundred hymns
shown to be most popular throughout the English-speaking
world by the evidence of radio hymn-singing programmes.
But if ten informed lovers of Wesley's verse were asked to
choose his fifty best hymns there is not the slightest doubt
that every list would be different—though there would cer-
tainly be considerable overlapping. Nor would the situation
be greatly altered if the choice were enlarged to one hundred,
two hundred, or even more.

The selection of the examples for *Representative Verse of
Charles Wesley* was not guided by the criterion that it must
contain only 'the best'. Indeed there are a number of items
which are among his poorest, yet for one reason or another
are 'representative'. This is the operative word. Several inter-
twining principles have been observed. The poems have been
chosen from all periods of Charles Wesley's life, springing from
many different moods, upon widely varying subjects, from
almost every one of his fifty publications and many of his
unpublished manuscripts, and representing each of his

hundred metres. Subjects and metres which commanded a major proportion of his writing are given a weightier share in the anthology. One of his hymn-tracts—the *Nativity Hymns* which John Wesley criticized—is presented in its entirety. Two of his longer works in decasyllabic couplets—the *Epistles* to John Wesley and to George Whitefield—are also given in full. An honest attempt has been made to offer 'representative verse' rather than a collection of purple passages. Nor has there been any attempt to weed out the occasional limping stanza from an otherwise attractive poem: every poem selected has been given in its entirety with the sole exception of the lengthy *Elegy* on Whitefield (which has been reduced by about half) and the inclusion of 'Part I' only of a few of the longer poems written in several parts.

CONCLUSION

POETRY is sometimes described as the compromise between the demands of a regular adherence to a metrical form and the opposing urge of a mind fired by strong emotions. True poetry is the result of extreme tension. Without the discipline of metre the emotion might be expressed in lyrical prose; without the emotion it would remain an exercise in verse.

In the verse of Charles Wesley at his best we see the happiest results of this tension. On the one hand there is the classical restraint, the chaste, often sombre diction, strangely allied with the artificiality of the rhetorician's stock-in-trade. On the other there is the wide range of deep and high emotions, covering the realms of the family and public life, but at their most intense in the alternating longings, despairs, and raptures of the soul's contact with God. These emotions burst the fetters of conventional verse, demanding expression in a rich and daring variety of lyrical forms.

It is true of Wesley as of Wordsworth that his reputation has suffered because he allowed much of his weaker writing to survive. With him a live metaphor sometimes degenerates into a dead cliché; he is guilty of many flat lines, many clumsy, a few maudlin. John Wesley's pungent criticism of his brother's often-corrected manuscript hymns on the Gospels and the Acts applies to his work as a whole: 'Some are bad, some mean, some most excellently good'—though it should be noted that 'mean' signified 'average'. My final word, however, must be to echo John Wesley's considered tribute to the spirit of poetry breathing through his brother's verse, even though he rated this as second in importance to

the spirit of piety: 'Lastly, I desire men of taste to judge (these are the only competent judges;) whether there is not in some of the following verses, the true spirit of poetry: such as cannot be acquired by art and labour; but must be the gift of nature.'[4]

4. John Wesley's *Journal* (Standard Edn.), VII. 456–7; *Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People called Methodists* (1780), Preface.

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INDEX