

AMERICAN METHODISM: BEGINNINGS AND ENDS

By Frank Baker

“The time has come,” the Walrus said,
“To talk of many things,
Of shoes—and ships—and sealing-wax—
Of cabbages—and kings—
And why the sea is boiling hot—
And whether pigs have wings.”

So wrote Lewis Carroll in *Alice through the Looking Glass*. It is the best example I know of combining things that have no logical connection. I must admit at the outset that that is what I plan to do. I am not playing fair with the English language until I make this confession about my title. For I use “beginning” in the dimension of time, and “end” in the dimension of meaning. I do not intend to describe how American Methodism began and then to prophesy when and how it must surely end. I want to look at its beginnings from the point of view of their ends rather than their endings. For purpose is more important than power, and meaning than money. Through two centuries Methodism has certainly grown bigger and richer. Has it grown better? Has it fulfilled its original purposes, even though transformed to meet the needs of changing generations? Sometimes we become so obsessed by size that we lose all appreciation of shape and color. I personally would rather contemplate a dandelion than the biggest aspidistra in the world.

In contemplating early American Methodism, however, I am traveling in my time machine back beyond its birth to its conception. The bicentennial of the birth was celebrated with some splendor in 1966. The conception occurred thirty years earlier, when two Anglican priests, married to mother church, set up house with her on American soil, and began raising a spiritual family under the most puzzling as well as trying circumstances. I plan to study a few aspects of this missionary venture in some detail, and much more briefly to note how these particular features developed, for better or for worse, in later American Methodism, both of the 1760's and the 1960's.

The “beginnings” which I shall suggest as among the more important “ends” of early Methodism are these: (1) Piety, (2) Evangelism, (3) Warmhearted Worship, (4) Fellowship, (5) Discipline, (6) Lay Leadership, and (7) Community Service.

1. Piety

The first characteristic of the brand of religion that John and Charles Wesley brought to Georgia is *piety*. This is not a word that

we use much nowadays, no more than we do the other possible title for this section—*holiness*. Both seem to imply that we are better than other people because of our own efforts—and very proud of it:

Little Jack Wesley
 Sat in the vestry
 Looking for pie in the sky;
 He put in his thumb
 And pulled out a plum
 And said, "What a good boy am I!"

It is of course true that Wesley does tell us about his self-inflicted spiritual discipline, but it is in no spirit of self-righteousness. At twenty-two he had been ordained a clergyman of the Church of England, and had sincerely dedicated himself to God, not only in his outward actions but in his inward motives. Ten years later, when he offered himself to Georgia, he was even more devout. Listen to his own critical appraisal of himself, written three years later: "I diligently strove against all sin. I omitted no sort of self-denial which I thought lawful. I carefully used, both in public and in private, all the means of grace at all opportunities. I omitted no occasion of doing good; I for that reason suffered evil. And all this I knew to be nothing, unless as it was directed toward inward holiness. Accordingly this, the image of God, was what I aimed at in all, by doing His will, not my own."¹

Not many of us could in honesty echo such intense words. John Wesley meant business when he came to Georgia, and that business was to encourage the pursuit of holiness. It was not a popular goal for the busy and often materialistic colonists, most of whom had left debts behind them in England, and were now scraping a bare living by arduous labors while threatened by aggression from the French and Spanish alike. Wesley's first sermon was on I Cor. 13.3, from St. Paul's hymn to Christian love. He did not emphasize mere neighborliness, but a warm love for God. He reminded his hearers of a dying parishioner who exhorted his friends, "Think of heaven, talk of heaven: all the time is lost when we are not thinking of heaven." Approvingly Wesley added, "Now this was the voice of love."²

Even after Wesley realized that spiritual peace does not necessarily come from the diligent pursuit of holiness, but from a humble acceptance of God's free and undeserved love, he refused to deny the need for piety. Indeed he elevated it into one of the hallmarks

¹ John Wesley, *Journal*, Standard Edition, ed. N. Curnock, London, 1938, Vol. I, p. 468.

² John Wesley, *Works*, ed. T. Jackson, London, n.d., Vol. VII, p. 499; italics added.

of Methodist theology, and constantly urged preachers and people alike to "Go on to perfection."

It is perhaps significant that the American Methodist societies developed under the influence of British emigrants in the 1760's, in the very decade when holiness or Christian perfection was becoming a battle cry in British Methodism, leading many to extremes, but leaving none indifferent. Captain Thomas Webb made this the main challenge of his homespun but eloquent sermons. In New York he urged his hearers that justification by faith was not enough, not even for the Apostles: "You must be sanctified. But you are not. You are only Christians in part. You have not received the Holy Ghost. I know it. I can feel your spirits hanging about me like so much dead flesh."³ The sincerity of such preaching often hit the target missed by eloquent sermons. Joseph Pilmoor, one of the first two regular itinerant preachers sent by Wesley to America, wrote of Webb: "His preaching, though incorrect and irregular, is accompanied with wonderful power."⁴

A century later the Methodists both in Britain and in America became too respectable for holiness, especially when it was over-emphasized and under-illustrated by fanatics. It is good to know that after the passage of still another century Methodist theologians are once more exploring the important truths emphasized in Wesley's teaching on Christian perfection. So much for our thinking. But what about our Christian living? Do we not still place too much importance on respectability, rather than on warm piety? Let us remember that piety does not mean a particular set of supposedly religious actions, but lives completely dedicated to God's purposes, or (as Wesley once described it) "loving God with all our heart, and serving him with all our strength."⁵ In that sense our Methodist forefathers—even John Wesley before his heart was strangely warmed—can provide us with both a message and a challenge.

2. *Evangelism*

From the beginnings of Methodism in America, also, even under the Wesleys, the movement stood for evangelism. Whatever their own personal defects, both brothers were genuinely missionary-minded. We usually emphasize one half only of John's self-criticism as he returned to England: "I went to America, to convert the Indians; but, oh, who shall convert me?" We gather that Wesley was not converted, but slide over the fact that he was nevertheless sincerely anxious to convert the Indians. He was doing what I have been doing—using the same word in two senses. He had al-

³ John Fletcher Hurst, *History of Methodism*, London, 1901, Vol. III, p. 1252.

⁴ John P. Lockwood, *The Western Pioneers*, London, 1881, p. 93.

⁵ Wesley, *Letters*, Standard Edition, ed. J. Telford, London, 1931, Vol. III, p. 168.

ready completely dedicated his life to God, and thus experiences at least the measure of spiritual peace that comes from being a true servant of God. It was to this dedicated Christian life that he wanted to introduce the Indians, just as he had urged it upon his careless companions at Oxford, where, indeed, they considered him a pious busybody, over-zealous in his evangelism. This missionary zeal he summarized thus: "I advised others to be religious according to that scheme of religion by which I modeled my own life."⁶ Now, however, the Moravians had shown him "a more excellent way."⁷ He wished to be a *son* of God rather than a *servant*. Soon he had a richer gospel to preach, and immeasurably greater spiritual resources to drive his message home. Already he had been preaching the gospel as he knew it for ten years. Now, with heart strangely warmed and a new dimension to his gospel, he became an evangelist with spiritual power.

Though eventually disillusioned, it is almost pathetic to see how eagerly John Wesley tried to evangelize the Indians, even though he envisioned it leading to a martyr's death. He wrote letters pleading for help in this immensely important work, feeling that his own missionary zeal and opportunities were being stifled by the administration of too large a parish. He sent back his brother Charles and Benjamin Ingham to recruit more evangelists, and eventually a response came in the person of George Whitefield. After arriving Whitefield paid sincere though possibly exaggerated tribute to his former tutor: "The good Mr. John Wesley has done in America, under God, is inexpressible. His name is very precious among the people; and he has laid such a foundation that I hope neither men nor devils will ever be able to shake."⁸ Whitefield himself, however, proclaimed the gospel in America with far more obvious success than Wesley, keeping alive the missionary enthusiasm of Methodism for a generation. Eventually some at least of those who formed the Methodist societies in the 1760's acknowledged that spiritual impulse originally came through him.

Both the lay pioneers of American Methodism in the 1760's and the itinerant preachers sent to consolidate the societies were ardent evangelists. When Joseph Pilmoor first saw North Carolina, for instance, he exclaimed: "O that the great Master of the Vineyard would raise up and thrust out laborers unto His field such as will not hold their peace day nor night, but constantly run to and fro that the knowledge of God be increased, and poor wandering sinners brought into the fold of Christ."⁹ The early Methodist

⁶ Wesley, *Journal*, I, 418, 467.

⁷ *Ibid.*, I, 470.

⁸ George Whitefield, *Journals*, London, 1960, p. 157.

⁹ Emory Stevens Bucke (ed.), *History of American Methodism*, Nashville, 1964, Vol. I, p. 88.

preachers, in fact, were such fiery evangelists that many quickly burned themselves out.

It is good to know that in these present days the spirit of evangelism is still one of the signs of a good Methodist, even though that evangelism may assume—and indeed *should* assume—different forms to suit a different age. Men and women still need good news, and if indeed we have a living experience of God we must share it.

3. Warmhearted Worship

Another hallmark of early Methodism in America was the revolution in worship. Wesley's Sunday program in Savannah involved one service after another, under peculiar difficulties. In Savannah he was host as well as priest, for until the church was built (for which he was raising money) all services were held in the parsonage. Because of the mixed population one part of his varied pastoral responsibility was learning not only German—French he already knew—but Spanish and Italian, in order better to serve his flock. Most Methodist ministers today would shudder at the mere thought of his regular Sunday activities among the immigrants. Let Wesley tell his own story: "The English service lasted from five to half hour past six [a.m., of course; Wesley believed in early morning worship!]. The Italian (with a few Vaudois) began at nine. The second service for the English (including the sermon and Holy Communion) continued from half an hour past ten till about half an hour past twelve. The French service began at one. [N.B. Not much time for lunch!] At two I catechised the children. About three began the English service. After this was ended I joined with as many as my largest room would hold in reading, prayer, and singing praise. And about six the service of the Germans began: at which I was glad to be present, not as a teacher, but as a learner."¹⁰

Several aspects of worship found important expression during Wesley's Georgia ministry. His stress upon sacramental worship, a feature of the Holy Club, was continued here, enriched by experimental hymn singing. It was also in Georgia that he first witnessed a love feast, which soon became one of the outstanding spiritual gatherings of Methodism on both sides of the Atlantic. Most important of all, however, was the introduction of hymn singing into the regular public services. While here Wesley published America's first hymnbook, largely in order to bring more spontaneity into worship. He loved the Book of Psalms, though he was not over fond of the metrical versions. Sternhold and Hopkins' version he regarded as the direst doggerel, and although he never to my knowledge mentioned the Bay Psalm Book which had

¹⁰ John Wesley, *Concise Ecclesiastical History*, London, 1781, Vol. IV, p. 174.

sufficed New England for nearly a century, he would certainly not consider it adequate for truly warmhearted worship. He was one with Isaac Watts in wishing to spiritualize the Psalms and apply them to modern conditions, and he was also prepared to use hymns of human composition as a supplement to the Scriptures. He had long been of this mind, and hymn singing was one of the regular devotional exercises of the Holy Club at Oxford.

Wesley's friendship with the Moravians on board the *Simmonds* and in Georgia introduced him to the far greater riches of German sacred song, and he began selecting the most spiritual and translating them into sympathetic English verse. These he introduced into his parish services in Savannah. Together with compositions from the pen of Isaac Watts and others—seventy in all—he had them printed at Charleston, S. C., as *A Collection of Psalms and Hymns*. Two of the official complaints made against him by the ruling clique in Savannah concerned his enthusiasm for hymn singing and his use of this book, even at Holy Communion. He was charged with "introducing into the church and service at the Altar compositions of psalms and hymns not inspected or authorized by any proper judicature."¹¹ This was far from the cold High Church ritualism of which with some justice we accuse Wesley. This was warmhearted and adventurous Methodism, unafraid to lay claim to the devotional aids of any wing of the church universal, from the hymns of a Roman Catholic priest, John Austin, to those of a rank Dissenter, Isaac Watts. Included in that pioneer hymnal was a hymn by Wesley's own father, "On the Crucifixion," supposedly found on a loose sheet of paper after the fire at the Epworth rectory in 1709, and here published for the first time. There is stirring pathos in the hymn, which Wesley's American congregation certainly sang at Communion:

Behold the Saviour of Mankind,
Nail'd to the shameful Tree!
How vast the Love that him inclin'd
To bleed and die for thee.¹²

This breathes more than pathos, however. Here is the gospel: Behold the Savior, who died for thee. One wonders whether even in Georgia this hymn was used for evangelistic purposes, as it certainly was soon after the Wesleys returned to England.

The American Methodists of the 1760's also possessed a singing faith and maintained a warmhearted worship as an adjunct of their

¹¹ Wesley, *Journal*, I, 385.

¹² *John Wesley's First Hymn-Book* (Ed. Frank Baker and George W. Williams), Charleston and London, 1964; see especially pp. 46-7, xxxii; cf. Charles Wesley, *Journal*, ed. T. Jackson, London, 1849, Vol. I, p. 123.

evangelism. The first publication of Robert Williams, the Irish lay preacher from whose saddlebags sprang the Methodist Book Concern, was Charles Wesley's *Hymns for the Nativity of Our Lord* (1769), and this was followed in 1770 by a revised edition of John Wesley's *Collection of Psalms and Hymns*, and two other hymnals.¹³

Like the British version, American Methodism was born in song. The scene has now changed somewhat. Many of us have become accustomed to a more decorous worship than our grandparents knew, and frequently to lovely choral singing. An Englishman may voice some nostalgia, however, for the four or five congregational hymns that he used to sing in every service, for which the most tastefully rendered anthems prove an unsatisfying substitute. Letting a choir sing your praises to God is like making love by remote control, and I for one believe in personal contact both in the physical and the spiritual realms.

4. Fellowship

Even more significant than piety, evangelism, and warmhearted worship was another element planted in American religion by Wesley—fellowship. Indeed it is because of this rather than anything else that we can follow him in claiming that genuine Methodism began in Georgia in 1736. As he looked back over the years in his *Concise Ecclesiastical History* he spoke of three "rises" or experimental beginnings for Methodism. The first was in 1729, the Holy Club, as an extension of whose activities the young missionaries came to America. "The second," he continued, "was at Savannah, in April, 1736, when twenty or thirty persons met at my house. . . . The last was at London, on [1st May, 1738], when forty or fifty of us agreed to meet together every Wednesday evening, in order to a free conversation, begun and ended with singing and prayer."¹⁴ This was not regular church worship, but something both different and extra—a meeting for Christian fellowship in a setting of devout informality. It was this that constituted the hallmark of Methodism. For Wesley Methodism was not a *church* but a *society*, a meeting of those who desired friendly spiritual intimacy in order to build each other up in the faith. This was not a religious duty imposed on everyone, like public worship, but an additional opportunity for those only who sought it. Wesley says of this first Methodist society in America: "I now advised the serious part of the congregation [only them!] to form themselves into a sort of little society, and to meet once or twice a week in order to instruct, exhort, and reprove one another. And out of these I selected a smaller num-

¹³ Frank Baker, *Union Catalogue of the Publications of John and Charles Wesley*, Durham, N. C., 1966, ## 30, 105, 165.

¹⁴ Wesley, *Concise Ecclesiastical History*, IV, 175.

ber for a more intimate union with each other: in order to which I met them together at my house every Sunday in the afternoon." This very small group was the "band" (though Wesley does not use the word) formed on the basis of Moravian practice. Here is another important feature of later Methodism first tried out on American soil.¹⁵

The intimate and searching fellowship of the band never seems to have taken hold fully in American Methodism, although it was explained in the *Discipline* and was urged by Francis Asbury. The more easygoing friendliness of the class meeting proved more congenial, as indeed it did in Britain, where it began in 1742 as a by-product of a fund raising scheme. Members of the class, prompted by their respected leader, would in turn speak of their religious experience, and receive his word of encouragement or advice. Fellowship, organized under whatever name, continued to be recognized as of supreme importance for spiritual growth.

Here it seems clear that we have slipped from the high standards of our forebears. Methodism both in Britain and America retains its strong emphasis upon social contacts, and seeks to provide a friendly, "homey" atmosphere in its churches. But the class meeting has almost disappeared, and its place has not fully been taken by anything else. The nearest approach is the adult Sunday school class, where the emphasis is usually upon teaching rather than upon spiritual sharing. Maybe we still have something to learn about our Methodist heritage, and some new experiments to make in spiritual fellowship.

5. Discipline

Another familiar feature of American Methodism was introduced in Georgia—discipline. Everyone knows that Wesley was compulsively addicted to rules. Only by spiritual discipline could a man be kept in God's ways. The Holy Club had rules for its members. In Savannah John Wesley kept a vigilant eye on the morals of his parishioners. He even made special rules for his relations with Sophy Hopkey, inscribed in shorthand inside the cover of one of his diaries, one of which reads, "Touch her not."¹⁶ Small wonder that Sophy herself was subject to discipline.

Everybody in Savannah knew that John Wesley was running his parish according to the strict time-honored regulations not only of the Church of England but of the Apostolic Church, so far as those regulations could be discovered. At the very outset of his ministry Wesley had publicly announced his disciplinary prin-

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 170. There is some confusion here, for the Sunday afternoon gathering described on p. 174 was apparently for the whole "society," not for the "band" alone.

¹⁶ This diary is now preserved at Emory University.

ciples, and had already repelled several from communion before he took the crucial step of refusing communion to Sophy Hopkey. The letter of the law was firmly on his side, and avoiding this painful and potentially explosive step might well have ruined his whole insistence upon spiritual discipline. If unpopular or impracticable rules do exist they should either be kept or scrapped. As a result of Wesley's repelling Sophy Hopkey from the Lord's Supper he was in effect driven from Georgia. Yet, though bitterly disappointed and distressed, he was not ashamed of himself. He had courageously done what he had to do. He had kept the faith as he knew it.¹⁷

Back in England, as the Methodist societies developed, Wesley realized even more the need for discipline, and in 1743 issued his famous *General Rules* for Methodists, which went through over thirty editions during his lifetime, and many more later. On the first Sunday evening after arriving in America as John Wesley's official representative in 1769 Joseph Pilmoor "met the little Society [in Philadelphia] . . . and exhorted them to walk worthy of their high calling, and adorn the Gospel of Christ." On the second Sunday evening he "read and explained the *Rules* of the Society to a vast multitude of serious people."¹⁸ Those rules soon became, and still remain, an integral part of American Methodism's administrative handbook, aptly named the *Discipline*.

Maybe not all of us are familiar with the complexities of our official *Discipline*, and perhaps there is no need that we should be. All of us, however, need to keep in spiritual training if we are to endure hardship as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. In these days of prosperity and "permissiveness" our eighteenth century forefathers could teach us something about discipline. May we be ready to learn from them!

6. Lay Leadership

One thing the story of early Methodism in America surely emphasizes—the importance of dedicated laymen. This was especially true of the events commemorated during the bicentenary of 1966. In Maryland an immigrant Irish farmer preached and organized a class meeting at his home in Sam's Creek, and built a log meeting house for the growing congregation. His barnstorming preaching tours took him even into Delaware, Virginia, and Pennsylvania, so that his farm was neglected and his family was in need. He was a layman of courage and of independence—so much independence

¹⁷ Wesley's comment after interviewing a somewhat lax freelance minister who visited Savannah and undermined his strictness about baptisms and marriages was: "O Discipline, where art thou to be found? Not in England, nor (as yet) in America." It was apparently this man who had irregularly performed Sophy Hopkey's marriage. See *Journal*, I, 271.

¹⁸ Lockwood, *op. cit.*, 83-4, 87.

that he took upon himself to baptize children and to administer the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. In New York an Irish carpenter who had turned his hand to teaching was aroused by a pious housewife to begin preaching, and a Methodist society resulted. In Philadelphia two of Whitefield's converts, a shoemaker and a soft drink salesman, maintained a Methodist class meeting until another layman, a retired British army officer, helped them consolidate the work. "Captain" Thomas Webb thus linked together the labors of Robert Strawbridge, Philip Embury, Barbara Heck, Edward Evans, and James Emerson. He was the chief agent of progress in the work at New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore, as well as the pioneer in other places, especially New Jersey.

Another Irish layman with a wandering commission was Robert Williams, who sold his horse to pay his debts before embarking for the New World with the magnificent capital of a loaf of bread and a bottle of milk—and his trust in God. It was he, as we have said, who laid the foundation stone for the Methodist Publishing House. One more layman should be mentioned—Thomas Taylor, another British immigrant, a non-preacher. He served as a catalyst, pleading with Wesley to send over full-time itinerant preachers to reap the harvest whose seed had so faithfully been sown by the laymen. One of the most exciting of my discoveries during a recent sabbatical leave for Wesley research in the British Isles was an eight-page pamphlet in which Wesley reprinted Taylor's letter in order to drum up support both in money and in men for the infant Methodist cause in America.¹⁹

While we are paying our tribute to the Methodist laymen of the 1760's, however, let us not forget that here again Wesley himself had led the way. One of his companions to Georgia was a layman—the other three were ordained clergymen. Charles Delamotte was a young sugar merchant coming out on business. He was American Methodism's first Sunday school teacher and lay leader, possibly her first lay preacher. Certainly he carried a heavy burden of responsibility for Wesley's work in Savannah, especially after the departure of Charles Wesley and Benjamin Ingham for other areas. On February 16, 1737 John Wesley wrote to a friend in Oxford: "I have now no fellow labourer [in Savannah] but Mr. Delamotte, who has taken charge of between thirty and forty children." These he not only taught "to read, write, and cast accounts," but also instructed them in the Christian faith. After the three ministers one by one left Georgia it was Delamotte who kept the spiritual work going, and who welcomed George Whitefield as their successor. Thomas Causton brought a lawsuit against Delamotte also, in order completely to crush "that monster Wesley and his crew." On this

¹⁹ Cf. *Methodist History*, January, 1965, 3-15.

occasion, however, the grand jury dismissed the charge as motivated by "spite and malice against Mr. Wesley." A few months later, however, Charles Delamotte also left for England, leaving the work to Whitefield's oversight.²⁰

Truly laymen have played an honored part in American Methodist history. We cannot but rejoice to see how their dedicated labors at the present time lend strength to almost every major Methodist activity. It is largely to Methodism that people look when they want to realize the full spiritual potential of the laity. Even here, however, we must not remain complacent. There is still more that the layman could do. I think especially of those many two- and three-point rural charges where too often a service is not held unless a minister can be present. This is neither original Methodism nor modern Methodism at its best.

7. Community Service

It would be comparatively simple to dwell upon other aspects of our continuing Methodist witness which were sketched out in those early days of the 1730's and the 1760's, such as the insistence upon a Bible-based religion, upon personal Christian experience, upon freedom of thought. I will be content with mentioning one more—service to the community. Even in Wesley's day this took several forms, and takes more now.

Wesley's career as a physician seems to have begun in Georgia. One part of his preparation as a colonial missionary was research into medical literature and practice in order that he might be prepared for those occasions when as the only educated man available he had to deal with accident or illness. His reading and experience were eventually gathered together in the well-known medical handbook *Primitive Physic*, which was reprinted in Philadelphia as early as 1764, and went through many American editions once Methodism was soundly established here.

As we have seen, Wesley founded a school in Savannah, putting Charles Delamotte in charge. This was the forerunner not only of Wesley's schools in England, but of the wonderful educational program of American Methodism, from the founding of the college at Abingdon, Maryland in 1787 by Asbury and Coke, right up to the present day. Wesley's genuine care for the children, as well as his imagination, is revealed by a Georgia incident. The school at Savannah was intended for *all* children, and some were so poor that they attended lessons with bare feet, to be jeered at by the better shod. Charles Delamotte, unable to prevent this petty persecution, asked Wesley's advice. Wesley took over as teacher, and the following morning himself appeared at school without shoes. A few

²⁰ Cf. *Methodist History*, October, 1963, 8.

days of this example put the better-provided children to shame. Even this incident was later turned against Wesley, however, the ruling clique criticizing his severe austerity in going about with bare feet, carefully ignoring the fact that it was undertaken as a silent rebuke to their own children.²¹

Wesley in fact earned a reputation in Georgia as a social reformer. He constantly attacked immorality, drunkenness, and the attempts to introduce slavery. He urged a reform of the laws of inheritance so as to protect the smaller landowners. He even began to dabble a little in politics—another cause of criticism from some of his parishioners. In July, 1736 he wrote to one of the Georgia Trustees: "By what I have seen during my short stay here I am convinced that I have long been under a great mistake in thinking no circumstances could make it the duty of a Christian priest to do anything else but preach the gospel. . . . It is from this conviction that I have taken some pains to enquire into the great controversy now subsisting between Carolina and Georgia." (He sided with Georgia in maintaining that by British law Carolina merchants had no right to trade with Georgia Indians without first securing a Georgia license.) Once again he was endangering his reputation, but once again doing it at the call of conscience. Forty years later he rejoined the fray, and once more on the side of British law and King George—though history and the American love of liberty have proved him wrong. Yet the courage to take an unpopular stand at the call of conscience, even in political matters, is something bred into our American Methodism even from the earliest days.

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Wesley in Georgia, and our Methodist forebears of two hundred years ago, blazed many trails which we have followed to our advantage or deserted to our loss. Of no less importance than their examples in specific areas of worship and witness, however, is their attitude of mind: a reverence for the past, especially for the Bible and the primitive church, tempered by a readiness to venture forth into the religious unknown at the call of God. Wesley, staunch English monarchist and Anglican though he was, both respected and encouraged the urge for freedom to serve God in accustomed or unaccustomed ways. His last official statement to his American followers as they were on the verge of founding a church independent of his own control recognized that a strange providence might be at work even in the American Revolution. His final words, with which he may fitly close, contain both blessing and challenge: "As our American brethren are now totally disentangled both from

²¹ John S. Simon, *John Wesley and the Religious Societies*, London, 1921, pp. 153-4.

the state and from the English hierarchy, we dare not entangle them again either with the one or the other. They are now at full liberty simply to follow the Scriptures and the primitive church. And we judge it best that they should stand fast in that liberty wherewith God has so strangely made them free.”²²

²² Wesley, *Letters*, VII, 239.

