

Wesleyana and British Methodism

Frank Baker

On 26 November, 1753, John Wesley was warned by his Quaker doctor that his life was in severe danger from consumption unless he left London for the country. Wisely he obeyed Dr. Fothergill's instructions, immediately taking a coach to Lewisham. Settled comfortably that evening among good friends, yet "not knowing how it might please God to dispose of me"—as he wrote in his famous *Journal*—he composed an inscription for the tombstone that threatened, in order "to prevent vile panegyric." In that simple self-composed epitaph he recalled his rescue as a boy of eight from the blazing rectory at Epworth, describing himself as "a brand plucked out of the burning." The epitaph was never used, however. A month later Wesley returned briefly to London en route to the west, where he slowly recuperated at a health resort on the outskirts of Bristol. During his convalescence—he was four months without preaching—he prepared the first rough draft of his *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*. Recovered, he continued to travel and preach and write for nearly forty years. When eventually he died in 1791, aged 87, the epitaph with which he himself had lived for more than half a normal lifetime was quite naturally bypassed, and every monument and memorial to him did contain some panegyric, though happily none of it was "vile," but almost as factual and restrained as he himself would have wished.

In a sense the writer of this essay has for some years been living with what may be his own epitaph, and may be pardoned for hoping that he will continue to do so for many years to come, though he can hardly expect to equal John Wesley's record. The title "Frank Baker Collection" has something of a posthumous ring about it, and the former owner still experiences a ghostly sense of unreality as he sees the printed label in books no longer on his shelves, yet which he is still able to use. This is indeed making the best of both worlds! In several respects it is highly satisfying to view one's own memorial and even be privileged to assist in its strengthen-

ing and enhancement. From time to time, however, there are minor complications, such as attempting to write impartially and impersonally about one's own collection. This is, in fact, the second major article which Frank Baker has been invited to prepare upon the books and papers which have occupied so much time and thought during most of his mature life. Because the theme is the same, there will be inevitable echoes of the article in *Library Notes* for December, 1962, and even though the autobiographical note is more subdued, it will undoubtedly be distinguished as a background hum.

"The Frank Baker Collection of Wesleyana and British Methodism" originated in a desire to secure and preserve the fullest documentation possible about the Wesleys and the movement springing from their evangelical zeal, especially British Methodism, of which the compiler was and remains an ordained minister. This desire was first stimulated by writing a prize essay in 1936 on "John Wesley's *Christian Library*," which introduced him to one of the most fascinating and compelling characters of the long Christian centuries, and at the same time to the excitement of historical and bibliographical research. The dilettante collector of old books—he had begun at fourteen with a copy of Addison's *Spectator*—had at last found a focal point for his zeal. This zeal was quickened during the years 1939-1944, while his country was in the throes of the Second World War, and many books without a wide appeal or obvious value were being rounded up in salvage drives and pulped to make paper for current needs. (In England at that time old theology could be bought in many non-specialist shops for one-hundredth of the prices now asked by antiquarian book dealers.)

In addition to, and confessedly more important than, the desire to preserve books for posterity, was the personal quest for the tools of research in the field which increasingly compelled his attention. This became the more urgent when as Registrar (from 1943) and as General Secretary (from 1949) of the Wesley Historical Society he was constantly being called upon to answer queries about many aspects of Methodist history. At that time the British Methodist Conference employed no full-time archivist or librarian, although it possessed easily the best collection of Methodist manuscripts and printed material in the world. Agitation for a full-time archivist and adequate research facilities resulted in the writer's being set to organize an Archives Commission, which officially explored the situation and made its recommendations to the Conference. After frustrating doubts and delays over finance American generosity finally tipped the scales, and in 1960 the commission's report was implemented by the inauguration of the present Archives and Research Centre in London.

If the writer had not promised by then to come to Duke, he might well have accepted the invitation to become the first full-time archivist of the

British Methodist Conference. Already he had amassed a research collection along similar lines to that of the Conference, several tons of books and pamphlets and papers which he carted around with him to his various appointments as a minister in the full pastoral work. The bulk of these form the Frank Baker Collection, sold to Duke in 1961 when it became clear that in the providence of God he was called to serve the interests of Methodist history at this institution rather than in England. Already he had prepared a skeleton Methodist bibliography, some forty thousand slips describing the holdings in Methodist history of the major British Methodist libraries as well as of many others which he had contrived to explore. Already he had transcribed thousands of documents in various British collections, and thus had a priceless accumulation of reference material upon the many facets of British Methodist history. These latter categories, along with other file material, books, and pamphlets, are still in his private library, but have been bequeathed to Duke University.

When the major part of his collection was sold to Duke in 1961, the writer had no hesitation in suggesting that it should not be preserved as a distinct unity but incorporated into the various appropriate sections of the regular library holdings, whether in the Divinity School, the Manuscript Department, the Rare Book Room, or upon the open shelves of the Perkins Library. This seemed especially desirable because (as will be seen) the books were by no means confined to the Wesleys and Methodism, but included much illustrative background material in other fields. As an integral part of the library it is fully accessible to students and researchers—or will be when completely catalogued. The Baker Collection is therefore best considered in conjunction with the Library's prior and subsequent holdings in the field of Wesleyana and British Methodism. The fact that it is thus incorporated into a living academic organism subdues the collector's misgivings that he along with his collection might be regarded as a somewhat curious embalmed bibliographical specimen; indeed, it confers a pleasant feeling of corporate immortality.

Although the Library's original holdings in the field of Wesleyana and British Methodism were comparatively small, they were by no means negligible. Inevitably the Baker Collection contained some duplicates, though the overlapping was minimal. In a number of instances the library was able to fill gaps in the Baker holdings. Thus one Duke edition added to six Baker editions gives the Library one of two complete collections in the world of all the editions published by Wesley himself of his important *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*. To crown all, Mrs. Charles Prothro, of Wichita Falls, Texas, who three years ago purchased at auction the proof sheets of the first edition of 1755 containing the manuscript annotations of Wesley, his "corrector of the press," and others, has generously

supplied a photocopy of the 760 quarto pages in addition to the one which she gave to the Perkins School of Theology at Dallas.

The Baker Collection as originally purchased by the Library in 1961 has, in fact, undergone considerable augmentation during the intervening years, both through the collector's continuing personal acquisitions (which will eventually be offered to the University) and through the purchase of microfilms and photocopies (as well as a few originals) by the Library itself. This strengthening has taken place especially in the realm of eighteenth-century editions of the publications of the Wesleys. In this category the Library now possesses easily the most nearly complete accumulation in the world—fittingly so in view of the key position which the Duke Divinity School maintains in furthering the publication by the Oxford University Press over the ensuing decade or so of the Oxford Edition of Wesley's Works in about thirty volumes.

An essential preliminary to preparing a definitive edition of Wesley's works is the discovering of all the works which, in fact, he published, as well as locating copies of all the editions which he might personally have revised. In the case of Wesley this is enormously difficult, if not impossible. For one thing, his close collaboration with his brother Charles, notably during their earlier years, makes it almost imperative to deal jointly with their works. In addition, they frequently issued their publications anonymously. John especially was editor as well as author, and sometimes so incorporated the work of others into his own (or his own into that of others) that it is often difficult to classify neatly as an original or an edited piece. Even when he prepared an avowed "extract" from some other writer, he usually so transformed the book by extensive abridgments and rewriting as to make it an original production. (Copyright laws in those days were not so troublesome, and in this matter Wesley believed that the spiritual end justified the literary means.) Altogether, the Wesleys seem to have written and edited some 450 distinct items, from a fifty-volume *Christian Library* to several single-sheet pieces of religious propaganda. In addition, they sponsored a further fifty books by other authors without any editing and issued some fifty separate catalogues of their publications and similar publishing ephemera. Extended search has failed to turn up copies of eighteen minor works which they are known to have published, and of the better known works at least fifty contemporary editions seem to have appeared completely.

In order to render the Oxford Edition of Wesley's Works as definitive as possible the writer has for ten years been engaged in an exhausting search for eighteenth-century editions of the Wesleys' publications, undertaken with the generous coöperation and support of Dean Robert E. Cushman of the Duke Divinity School and the other Directors of the Wesley project.

aided also by grants from the Research Council of Duke University. In the course of these researches he has personally explored the resources of most of the major libraries of the Western hemisphere, as well as hundreds of intermediate and minor ones. By correspondence, union catalogues, duplicated index cards, and similar means, details of the Wesley holdings in many other collections have been secured. In 1966 he published an interim *Union Catalogue of the Publications of John and Charles Wesley*. The exploration continues, and new entries are constantly being added to the master copy of the *Union Catalogue*. The augmented Duke collection forms the reference core for the two-volume Wesley bibliography which will constitute the first unit of the Oxford Edition of Wesley's Works, and also for preparing a definitive collated text for the remaining volumes.

Because of these bibliographical activities the writer is in a peculiar position to estimate the comparative strength of the Wesleyana collections of libraries throughout the world, though he has learned that unique items may turn up in the most unexpected places. (Examples are the 1761 French edition of a sermon by Charles Wesley in the Milwaukee Public Library and John Wesley's anonymous printed appeal for support for American Methodism, which led to the sending of his first itinerant preachers in 1769 —of this an uncatalogued copy was discovered in a Baptist library in Oxford.) Extant copies are known of some 1,900 distinct editions of Wesley's publications appearing during his lifetime, and of a further 300 which appeared before 1800. Only thirty-six libraries in the world possess an accumulation of more than one hundred of these early editions, even the Library of Congress holding only 109.¹ Only twelve libraries hold collections of more than four hundred distinct editions, of which five are in England, one in Northern Ireland, four in the U.S.A., one in Canada, and one in Australia.

It is appropriate that the largest collection of Wesleyana is that in the Methodist Archives, London, England, with 1,393 distinct editions, 46 of them unique. The next largest collection in the world is that at Duke, with 1,315 items, 41 of them apparently the only copies in the world, while scores more are unique on the American continent. Next comes the collection at Drew University, Madison, New Jersey, with 741 items, including 13 which are unique, followed by Garrett Theological Seminary, Evanston, Illinois, with 602 (6 unique), Richmond College, Surrey, England, with 585 (14 unique), Victoria University, Toronto, Canada, with 532

¹ It will be understood that the figures quoted may be slightly inaccurate. Because of changes in library holdings, debatable borderline decisions, and human fallibility, such figures can perhaps never be absolutely correct. They have been carefully and impartially compiled, however, on principles which do accurately reflect the relative strength in this field of the libraries named.

(3 unique), and Queens College, of Melbourne, Australia, with 516 (2 unique). Duke not only has the largest collection on this continent but also contains almost as many editions as the two next largest collections (both American, it will be noted) added together. Through the coöperation of the library officials here and elsewhere, to these holdings of original works have been added several hundreds of items on microfilm or photocopied, so that Duke now has easily the most nearly complete collection in the world of the material necessary to document the complex and fruitful publishing career of the Wesleys. The Collection contains also several hundred nineteenth- and twentieth-century editions of their works out of a total of about three thousand, though these are of far less scholarly importance.

As might expected, the Wesleyana Collection at Duke possesses not only all-round strength, but also some special features of its own. Richard Green, the former bibliographer of the Wesleys, specialized in first editions and did not realize the importance of securing also later editions which may possibly have contained Wesley's revisions. As a result his own collection, which was purchased by Victoria University, Toronto, comprises one of the largest accumulations of first editions—though it can now be shown that several items, especially among the undated anonymous works, are not in fact the first editions that he thought they were. Victoria University possesses, however, 354 of the earliest extant editions, and the Methodist Archives in London 383. In this category (mainly through more numerous ephemera) Duke has the largest holdings in the world, with 391.

As noted above, the Baker Collection is especially strong in ephemera, containing the largest accumulations in the world of the contemporary catalogues of the Wesleys' publications, of circular letters, and of the "penny *Minutes*" of their annual conferences—in this latter instance the only known complete run, from 1765-1791, roughly bound together by the original recipient, Robert Costerdine, one of Wesley's preachers. Here also is one of the three complete collections of Wesley's "Large Minutes," in which periodically from 1749 he summarized the decisions made at his conferences. (The others are in London and Toronto.)

Wesley prepared a handful of tracts under titles such as *Remember the Sabbath Day*, *Swear Not At All*, and *A Word to a Drunkard*. Almost uniformly these were published anonymously and with no hint of the place of publication, the printer, or the date. In the nature of the case it was their sad lot to be discarded—after perusal, one hopes. Inevitably they have become exceedingly rare. Of over 120 editions identified (of which the Library holds either photocopies or microfilms for purposes of collation) most are scattered throughout the world in unique copies, and it is almost certain that other editions will yet be discovered. The greatest accumulations of originals are in the Methodist Archives, London, with 51, and at

Duke, with 46; the next largest accumulation is the twenty-two retained in Wesley's personal London library, which came into the possession of Richmond College, Surrey.

The Duke collection is strong also in the more obviously important, indeed essential, larger publications. It shares with the Methodist Archives, London, the distinction of holding (as noted above) a complete collection of all six editions of the *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament* published by Wesley himself. It vies with the London Methodist headquarters in its holdings of Wesley's sermons, both as collected in volumes by him and as issued either originally or subsequently in pamphlet form. Wesley's doctrinal and controversial writings are almost uniformly complete in all their contemporary editions. The same is true of Wesley's *Journal*, originally published in twenty-one separate extracts, of which Duke has the first editions of twenty as well as eleven editions unknown to Richard Green. The few gaps in these basic works have almost all been supplied on microfilm or by photocopy, so that Duke is unrivalled as the center where the many textual problems presented by Wesley's writings may be solved.

Although there is no immediate prospect of publishing a definitive edition of the Wesleys' multitudinous hymns, when that time comes, the Duke holdings will be found the best on the American continent—even better than those at Garrett Theological Seminary, which is especially strong in Wesley hymnology. The Oxford Edition of Wesley's Works will contain, however, editions of two of the Wesleys' better known publications in this area, the *Hymns on the Lord's Supper* (1745) and *A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People called Methodists* (1780). The Baker Collection contains all nine editions of the first and all seven of the second published during the lifetime of John Wesley—in each case a distinction shared only by the Methodist Archives in London. Duke also has the best collection on this continent of Wesley's musical publications, though only slightly better than the collection at Garrett and at Drew; it lacks only the second edition of *Hymns on the Great Festivals*, specially composed for Charles Wesley by John Frederick Lampe.

John Wesley's publications ranged very widely in subject matter, and it is impracticable here to touch upon more than a few. Best known of his political pamphlets—perhaps we should say "most notorious"—is *A Calm Address to our American Colonies* (1775), of which the collection contains the basic four of the twenty-two different editions now identified: here, uniquely, several libraries hold copies of more editions—The Library of Congress (9), the British Museum (8), Yale University (7), the Methodist Archives, London (6), and Harvard University (5). Wesley's excursions into literature are not as widely known as those into politics. Present in the

Collection is the second edition of his *Complete English Dictionary* (1764), showing the influence of Dr. Samuel Johnson's famous work which had been published shortly after Wesley's first edition of 1753. (It is hardly fair to compare the two, however, for Wesley's was little more than a short list with brief definitions of "most of those hard words which are found in the best English writers.") Wesley helped foster the memory of many literary giants by his extracts from their works, and the collection includes his *Extract from Milton's Paradise Lost* (1763) and *Select Parts of Mr. Herbert's Sacred Poems* (1773). Wesley even published a drastic abridgment of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1744), which went through six editions during his lifetime; of these the library holds all but the second. John Wesley was a successful and highly influential practitioner of folk medicine, and his *Primitive Physick*, first published in 1747, has passed through almost a hundred editions, including thirty during his lifetime, of which ten are in the Baker Collection, exceeded in number only by two London libraries, those of the Methodist Archives (14) and the Wellcome Medical Historical Library (15). Another unusual project was Wesley's scientific compendium, *A Survey of the Wisdom of God in the Creation*, successively enlarged from two volumes in 1763 to three in 1770 and five in 1777 and 1784; Duke is one of the two libraries in the world which own complete sets of all four editions, the other being—the reader might by now expect the added words "of course"—the Methodist Archives in London.

In order to fill in the background for a careful study of the Wesleys' life and thought several other facets of the Collection were developed, some of which have been greatly enriched by the Library's earlier holdings and subsequent accessions. The stock from which the Wesleys sprang is strongly represented by twenty rare publications of their father, the Rev. Samuel Wesley, rector of Epworth; by the even rarer anonymous publication of their mother Susanna; and by a further twenty writings by their elder brother Samuel and later members of the family. Clearly indicated were the publications of the Wesleys' coadjutors, especially men like George Whitefield (80 items); John Fletcher, valiant defender of Wesley's Arminianism (70 items); and Thomas Coke, ambitious administrator of Methodism in the name of Wesley and enthusiastic pioneer of Methodism overseas (35 items). Printed attacks on Methodism throw important light on the work of the Wesleys and Whitefield, and these formed the subject of Richard Green's *Anti-Methodist Publications Issued during the Eighteenth Century* (1902); of these the collection contains over two hundred, including fifteen not seen by Green and twenty-one not even known to him, to which the Library is constantly adding photocopies and microfilms, so that Duke now has more of this material available to students than any other library in the world. Other British denominations are well represented by many

key works. In order to recapture the flavor and texture of the age it is necessary also to study such things as school text-books, trade manuals, guidebooks, directories, encyclopedias, maps, periodicals, newspapers, the writings of minor poets and minor theologians and pamphleteers. In this general area of background material the original Baker Collection was quite strong; and as there has been remarkably little duplicating with the Library's former holdings, the overall effect of the integration of resources has been to strengthen both.

Charles Wesley was the great hymn-writer of the evangelical revival (as well as a true poet), and a student of early Methodism can hardly escape involvement with the vast and complex realm of hymnology beyond the publications and period of the Wesleys. Julian's monumental *Dictionary of Hymnology* witnesses that it would theoretically be possible to fill even Duke's great library solely with material relating to hymns. Although the Baker holdings may therefore seem a mere drop in a bucket—though a *theoretical* bucket, be it noted—the thousand or so hymnological volumes in the collection added to the Library's former and subsequent holdings make it one of the best in the nation, containing a handful of the extremely rare early tune books of other compilers as well as the Wesleys.

As in America, Methodism in Britain did not develop into the nineteenth century without controversies and divisions; and these are represented generously both by official documents as well as by pamphlets, books, and periodicals. Members of the offshoots were both less numerous and less prosperous and their publications therefore much rarer than those of the mainstream Wesleyan Methodists. The Duke holdings for these denominations are almost certainly the strongest on this continent, including most of the colorful pamphlet literature spawned by internal controversies, a complete run of the annual *Minutes* of the Methodist New Connexion (1797-1907), and long runs of those of the Primitive Methodists and of the Wesleyan Methodist Association, the latter merging into those of the United Methodist Free Churches. Nor are related bodies overlooked: the Collection contains one of the few complete runs of the *Journal* of the Historical Society of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Church, now the Presbyterian Church of Wales (1916 to the present date). Included also are many rare early publications of the British Moravians, including a copy of the massive 1754 *Collection of Hymns* which formerly belonged to the hymnwriter John Newton and bears his autograph as well as manuscript notes on the authorship of the hymns by a subsequent Moravian owner, George Livius.

Like the all-important nucleus of Wesleyana, the collection of items connected with later British Methodism is strong in ephemera, the tracts and circulars and reports which illustrate the daily life of a religious community and which have a much higher mortality rate than the more

obviously "important" bound volumes. Items in two categories were especially sought in order to document this grassroots life—biographies of Methodists, both ministerial and lay, and local histories of Methodist churches and circuits.

To summarize the bare statistics: the printed material in the Collection comprises about 2,000 items of Wesleyana, about 8,000 concerned directly with British Methodism, and some 4,000 which may be termed "background material" of one kind and another. This total of about 14,000 original items is constantly being augmented by gift and purchase and by the securing of photocopies—the latter on the principle that service to the potential student is of far greater importance than the pride and financial security conferred by the possession of originals, especially when these are becoming increasingly scarce and almost impossibly expensive. For its eighteenth-century holdings in this field the Library is demonstrably the best on the American continent, and in some aspects the best in the world. The nineteenth-century holdings also are among the best on this continent, rivalled only by the collections at Drew and Garrett, though again in some sections they are as strong as any in the world.

The manuscript side of the Collection has followed lines similar to those of the printed material, though with much greater limitations. The ten John Wesley manuscripts are outnumbered in many collections, but the 28 letters by Charles Wesley comprise probably the second largest collection in the world. There are many letters by other members of the Wesley family and about fifty items connected with Charles Wesley's daughter Sarah, including the largest known collection of her original verse. Other Methodist leaders are worthily represented. To quote the earlier article in *Library Notes*:

Forty items connected with the Rev. John Fletcher include a series of sixteen important letters written to Joseph Benson on the Calvinist controversy, 1771-1781. Eighteen items associated with Selina, Countess of Huntingdon, also include ten letters to Joseph Benson, 1769-1771, concerning his work as master of her college at Trevecca. Dr. Adam Clarke is represented by twenty-five letters and about forty other items, including his children's baptismal certificates, signed by him. One especially interesting item is a lengthy religious covenant drawn up by George Osborn in 1803, containing his signed renewals up to 1834. The letter-book of Mrs. Sarah Crosby, Wesley's first woman preacher, includes copies of letters to and from him, otherwise unknown.

The diary of an early Methodist preacher in Yorkshire, 1755-1757, describes visits of Wesley and other preachers to the area and his own activities as preacher and teacher, and throws light on social conditions. Another diary is that of Wesley's steward at the New Room, Bristol, 1752-1754, the latter part of which deals with an internal controversy within Methodism upon ordination and church government.

One of the "fashions" of nineteenth-century collectors of *Methodistica* was to compile volumes of portraits and letters of Presidents of the Wesleyan Conference, beginning with Wesley himself. Dozens of such volumes are in existence, some of which are extremely valuable; this collection includes two. Much more unusual is a four-volume collection of over two thousand letters written by Wesleyan ministers of the nineteenth century.

Other letters and documents of ordinary Methodists, even of Wesley's day, make a total of about five thousand manuscripts.

In the article above quoted the writer spoke of coöperating with the librarian and staff of the Perkins Library "so that eventually Duke may have, not simply one of the best four or five such collections in the world, but one of the best two." With the many acquisitions of the last seven years, both in originals and in photocopies, including massive microfilming of important British manuscript accumulations, that hoped-for time seems clearly to have arrived. This fact is cause for congratulation, but not for complacency. As in most human affairs, there is still room for improvement.