



DISCOVERY

edited by
Frederick E. Maser

It is a privilege to welcome once again to the pages of DISCOVERY Dr. Frank Baker, one of the world's leading authorities on the Wesleys and British Methodism. Dr. Baker is Professor of English Church History at the Divinity School, Duke University, and the author of numerous books, the most recent of which is *John Wesley and The Church of England*. He has also written many articles for learned journals and is in demand as a lecturer and speaker.

Two of the three letters upon which Dr. Baker comments, I bought at auction in England through the able assistance of Bernard Quaritch Ltd., who executed my bid. The third letter, concerning Samuel's marital difficulties, was laid in a beautifully bound, extra illustrated volume of Eliza Clarke's *Susanna Wesley*. This was purchased at auction in America through my good friend Sidney Hamer, Proprietor of the Leamington Book Shop, at that time in Washington, D.C., but now in Fredericksburg, Virginia.

Samuel Wesley, Musician

by Frank Baker

The youngest child of Charles Wesley to survive into maturity is too little known to Methodists, though familiar in the world of music. Samuel Wesley (1766-1837), like his elder brother Charles (1757-1834), was a musical prodigy courted by nobility and summoned to play before King George III. He was instrumental in bringing the works of John Sebastian Bach before the English public, and named his best known son after Bach—Samuel Sebastian Wesley (1810-1876). The hymn tunes and anthems of Samuel are still familiar to church musicians, although those of his son Samuel Sebastian are much more familiar. S. S. Wesley, indeed, has been claimed by some as Britain's best church musician, and he certainly merits one of the leading places in their ranks.

Perhaps one of the reasons why Samuel Wesley has been left in obscurity by Methodists is that he was the black sheep of the Wes-

ley family. Not only did he become a Roman Catholic for some years; not only was he never at home in Methodism; not only was he an eccentric—he kept a mistress. Dr. Charles Wesley (1793-1859), Dean of the Chapel Royal, was one of his three legitimate children, but Dr. Samuel Sebastian Wesley headed the list of seven illegitimate offspring. It is one of the strange ironies of fate that his illegitimate line seems to have been the only one of the Epworth branch of the Wesley family to preserve the surname "Wesley" down to the present day.

Dr. Frederick E. Maser has acquired three letters of Samuel Wesley the musician which not only have real interest of themselves, but succeed in filling in some gaps in our fairly extensive knowledge of his life—for which the curious reader should consult James T. Lightwood, *Samuel Wesley, Musician* (London: Epworth Press, 1937). Two of the letters were written in 1824 to "A. Pettet, Esq., Norwich." Samuel had visited Norwich in 1814, and (as Lightwood says, pp. 180-1), "found a congenial companion in Alfred Pettet, organist for many years at St. Mancroft, where he succeeded J. C. Beckwith, who held the position at the time of Wesley's visit. A tablet in the church commemorates his long service in the cause of church music. Hearing that Wesley was about to visit Yarmouth, Pettet asked him to spend a few days with him at his home 'near the Castlehill,' Norwich." In a typically friendly and jocular letter Wesley accepted the invitation. This letter (printed in Lightwood's work) does not reveal the fact that he had been through a long period of depression. In 1816 signs of insanity appeared. Although (according to the standard musical work of reference, Grove's *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, supplement to revised edition, 1954, pp. 262-5), "Wesley was indisputably the greatest English organist of his day," he was aging, and experienced some difficulty in securing engagements. In 1817 he unsuccessfully attempted suicide. This depression was worsened by his mother's death in 1822—at the ripe old age of ninety-six.

Early in 1824 the position of organist at St. George's Hanover Square, London, became vacant, and Wesley wrote to his friend Vincent Novello (founder of the great music publishing house) asking for support, though his application nevertheless proved unsuccessful. His fruitful years, however, were by no means over. The two letters here presented show that Wesley's musical pen had not completely dried during this long desolate period. His main purpose in writing to Pettet seems to have been to give news about (and then to send) an anthem with a woman's solo part which the Norwich organist seems to have commissioned. He also mentions that the delay in completing this chore had been partially caused by his work on a much larger composition—a choral service—which was first performed in St. Paul's Cathedral on Saturday, April 3,

1824. At the same time he takes the opportunity of mentioning a prospectus being printed for a forthcoming musical publication, just possibly his volume of *Original Hymn Tunes*, designed as a musical companion to his uncle John's famous *Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People called Methodists* (1780), though in fact this volume did not appear until 1828. The letters follow:

Euston Street,
March 18, 1824.

Dear Sir,

I thank you for your kind Letter, regretting at the same Time that I cannot *at this Writing* send the MS. which I design for you, but which shall be ready shortly.—from your former Letter I understood that a Month from that Date would be sufficiently soon to suit your Purpose; so that I did not proceed so promptly to the Adaptation I explained to you as I should have done had you named an earlier Period.

I transmit herewith the Prospectus of my intended Publication, nothing doubting that you will aid its Progress in your Part of the World by a good Word, and I think my good Friends Eggar and Pymas will feel similarly disposed.

The Service is soon to be performed at St. Paul's, so you may supposed me in dread Anxiety for the Verdict of the learned Canons, Vicars-Choral, Vergers, Bellows Blower etc.

With best Respects to Mrs. P.

believe me, my dear Sir,

most truly Yours

S Wesley

[Addressed on the verso:]

A Pettet Esq.

Dear Sir

There is a good Latin Proverb, "He who gives promptly, gives twice:" (Bis dat, qui citò dat) and which ought to make me ashamed of having detained you in such tedious Expectation of my Minims and Crotchets: however, at last here they are, and I yet trust will arrive in Time to save you and your Engraver from serious Inconvenience: I thought you would prefer the Canto Part written in the G rather than the C Clef (as it originally was) the Generality of female Amateurs not being so well versed in the Use of the Latter.—

The sole Reason of your not obtaining the Anthem earlier has been the Necessity I have been under of transcribing the Voice Parts of my Service for the Choir at St. Paul's, where it was performed for the first Time on Saturday last, and (for a *Coup d'Essai*,) very respectably: it will soon be repeated on a Sunday,

for I am pleased to say that the Dons were mightily tickled with it.

With kind Regards to Mrs. P. believe me remaining

Dear Sir

very sincerely Yours

S Wesley

Euston Street

Tuesday, 6 of Ap.

1824.

[Addressed on verso:] To

A.Pettet Esq.

Norwich

The third letter is to his brother Charles, and illustrates some Wesley family problems. It was written in 1829, just over a year after the death of their sister Sarah (1759-1828). Sally had been almost a mother to Charles, even though she was two years younger. As far as money was concerned he was a complete innocent, and the letter refers to the anxiety felt by his intimates about his financial welfare. He was now living in Edgeware Road, London, in a lodging-house owned by two maiden ladies. Miss Eliza Telitha Tooth (mentioned in the letter) was executrix to Sarah Wesley. Her father, Samuel Tooth, had built City Road Chapel, London; he was also an excellent business man, and served for many years as chief financial steward of the City Road society. Eliza Tooth inherited much of her father's drive and acumen: she and her sister Lydia ran a boarding school. She was indeed a valuable ally for Charles Wesley to have in his bereft old age.

Samuel Wesley himself was much more self-reliant, but he also had his problems. As is understandable, unlike his elder brother and his deceased sister, he was not favored by the Methodists in general, and indeed was frequently the subject of ill-natured gossip—some of which may be indicated in the opening sentence of the letter. He also was fortunate to secure the support of Eliza Tooth. He had married Charlotte Martin in 1793, but their happiness was short-lived, and after several years of living apart, in 1812 Wesley secured a legal separation, though he continued to pay alimony for the rest of her life. He then fell in love with his housekeeper, Sarah Suter, and they lived as man and wife for many years, while he occasionally toyed with the idea of a divorce from his legal wife. Little is known about either his wife or his mistress, but this letter makes it clear that in spite of a rumor that Mrs. Samuel Wesley had died she was in fact still alive, and still draining his slim financial resources.

Euston Street 16
Monday June 1, 1829

Dear Charles

I thank you for your punctual Attention which has (just in time) prevented the personal Attack to which I must have submitted by another Day's Delay.—Miss Tooth was with me on Saturday Afternoon, & behaved not only in a Lady-like, but a friendly & Sincere Manner, assuring me that she felt as cordially interested in my Welfare as in Yours, & expressing the kindest Attachment to all our Family, which indeed she has inherited both from her Father & Mother.—I have promised to visit her, & also to procure any Information I can concerning your Property in the Funds.

Believe me Charles when I tell you that you have not in the World a Friend who more sincerely rejoices in your Health & Prosperity than

Your faithful (& shamefully misrepresented Brother)
S Wesley

P.S. You are mistaken concerning Mrs. W. She (it appears from what I heard Yesterday) is not dead, & the Alimony of £25 pr. Annum is still a Drawback on my scanty Income.