

45. "A Caution Against Bigotry," Standard Sermons, II, pp. 122, 124; "Catholic Spirit," Standard Sermons, II, p. 141.

CHAPTER V

THE OXFORD EDITION OF WESLEY'S WORKS
AND ITS TEXT

Frank Baker

As some of you know from experience, and as others may reasonably surmise, I have written on Wesley's Works before. Three times, in 1970, 1971, and 1972, I fulfilled requests for articles surveying the project.¹ Each of these was written from a slightly different angle, but covered the same basic material. And here we are again, in 1974, on the eve of the publication of our first volume. On this occasion I propose to divide what I have to say into two parts: first (for those who have miraculously escaped reading about the project earlier), a compressed summary of the Oxford Edition as a whole; and secondly, something quite new, a somewhat more detailed study of one of its more important features, the recovery of a scholarly text, and what this has to tell us about Wesley.

Perhaps I can best begin by quoting from the preamble to each unit, prepared by the Board of Directors:

This edition of the works of John Wesley reflects the quickened interest in the heritage of Christian thought that has characterized both ecumenical churchmanship and dominant theological perspectives during the last half-century. A fully critical presentation of his writings has long been

a desideratum in order to furnish documentary sources illustrating his contributions to both catholic and evangelical Christianity.

Several scholars, notably Professor Albert C. Outler, Professor Franz Hildebrandt, Dean Merri-
mon Cuninggim, and Dean Robert E. Cushman, dis-
cussed the possibility of such an edition. Under
the leadership of Dean Cushman, a Board of Direc-
tors was formed in 1960, composed of the deans of
four sponsoring theological schools of Methodist-re-
lated universities in the United States (Drew, Duke,
Emory, and Southern Methodist). They appointed
an Editorial Committee to formulate plans, and en-
listed an international and interdenominational team
of scholars for the 'Wesley's Works Editorial Pro-
ject.' The Delegates of the Oxford University
Press agreed to undertake publication.

The works were divided into units of cognate ma-
terial, with a separate editor (or joint editors) re-
sponsible for each unit. Dr. Frank Baker was ap-
pointed textual editor for the whole project, with
responsibility for supplying each unit editor with a
collated critical text for his consideration and use.
The text seeks to represent Wesley's thought in its
fullest and most deliberate expression, in so far as
this can be determined from the available evidence.
Substantive variant readings in any British edition
published during Wesley's lifetime are shown in the
appendixes of the units, preceded by a summary of
the problem faced and the solutions reached in the
complex task of securing and presenting Wesley's
text. The aim throughout is to enable Wesley to be
read with maximum ease and understanding, and
with minimal intrusion by the editor.

It was decided that the edition should include all
Wesley's original or mainly original prose works,
together with one volume devoted to his Collection
of Hymns for the Use of the People Called Method-
ists, and another to his extensive work as editor
and publisher of extracts from the writings of oth-
ers. An essential feature of the project is a bibli-
ography outlining the historical settings of over 450
items published by Wesley and his brother Charles,
sometimes jointly, sometimes separately. The bib-

liography also offers full analytical data for identi-
fying each of the 2,000 editions published during
the lifetime of John Wesley, and notes the location
of copies. An index is supplied for each unit, and
a general index for the whole edition.

During the decade 1961-1970, planning was car-
ried forward by the editorial Committee under the
chairmanship of Dean Joseph D. Quillian, Jr. In-
ternational conferences were convened in 1966 and
1970, bringing together all available unit editors
with the committee, who thus completed their task
of achieving a common mind upon editorial prin-
ciples and procedures. . . . Other sponsoring bodies
were successively added to the original four: The
Board of Higher Education and Ministry and The
Commission on Archives and History of the United
Methodist Church, and Boston University School of
Theology.

Financial support has also been given by and will still be
needed from many private individuals and foundations to meet
the cost of the editorial processes, estimated at about
\$250,000.

Both in range and size the new edition will be far
larger than the 14 volumes prepared by Thomas Jackson,
1829-31, which remains the best available edition. The units,
volume numbers, and editors, are as follows:

- I. Sermons on Several Occasions, Vols. 1-4, Prof. Albert
C. Outler, Southern Methodist University, Dallas.
(This includes new sermons from manuscript sources.)
- II. Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament, Vols. 5-6,
Prof. John Lawson, Emory University, Atlanta.
- III. The Hymnbook, Vol. 7, Dr. Franz Hildebrandt, of Ed-
inburgh, formerly of Drew, with Dr. Oliver A. Beck-
erlegge of Cheshunt, England, and Prof. James O.
Dale, of McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario.
- IV. Prayers Private and Public, Vol. 8, Rev. A. Raymond
George of Wesley College, Bristol, England (who will

edit Wesley's Sunday Service of the Methodists), and Rev. Gordon S. Wakefield, of Manchester, England.

- V. The Methodist Societies: History, Nature and Design, Vol. 9, Prof. J. Hamby Barton, of Southwestern College Winfield, Kansas, and Rev. Rupert E. Davies, of Bristol, England.

The Methodist Societies: The Conference, Vol. 10 (including all the annual Minutes and the Large Minutes), Dr. John C. Bowmer and Rev. Norman P. Goldhawk, both of London, England.

- VI. Doctrinal Writings: The Appeals to Men of Reason and Religion, Vol. 11, Prof. Gerald R. Cragg, of Andover Newton Theological School, Newton Center, Mass. (Published February 1976.)

Doctrinal Writings: Theological Treatises, Vol. 12, Prof. John Deschner, of Southern Methodist University, Dallas.

Doctrinal Writings: The Defence of Christianity, Vol. 13, Bishop William R. Cannon, of Atlanta.

- VII. Pastoral, Ethical, and Instructional Writings, Vols. 14-15, Prof. A. Lamar Cooper, of Southern Methodist University, Dallas.
- VIII. Natural Philosophy and Medicine, Vol. 16, editor not yet appointed.
- IX. Editorial Works, Vol. 17, Prof. T. Walter Herbert, of the University of Florida, Gainesville.
- X. Journal and Diaries, Vols. 18-24, Prof. W. Reginald Ward, of Durham University, England, and Prof. Richard P. Heitzenrater, of Centre College of Kentucky, Danville, Kentucky.
- XI. Letters, Vols. 25-31, Prof. Frank Baker, of Duke University, Durham, N.C.
- XII. Bibliography, Vols. 32-3, Prof. Baker.
- XIII. General Index and Miscellanea, Vol. 34, Mr. John Vickers, of Bognor Regis, England.

The unit editors are charged with the task of helping the reader to understand and appreciate Wesley's text. Each unit will contain a scholarly introduction placing the works in that unit in their historical setting, and showing their significance in Christian life and thought. There will also be a brief introduction to the major individual items in each unit. Supporting these introductions will be footnotes identifying quotations, persons, events, literary usages, and the like. There may also be appendixes of relevant material in addition to the one depicting the textual history and listing the variant readings in each work.

Although this may not seem important to the general reader, in comparison with the general editorial assistance offered, a major contribution of the new edition is the securing of an accurate text. The general reader may also be pardoned for not regarding analytical bibliography and textual criticism as exhilarating pursuits--or even pursuits that are readily comprehensible. The concentrated and prolonged study of minutiae offers many a dull moment. Compared to that of the bibliographer or textual editor, the task of historian or theologian is a joy-ride. I should really say bibliographer and textual editor, for the one must know the problems and needs and tools and purposes of the other, if the end product, the text itself, is to be satisfactory. And yet, they are essential, or a joint bibliographer/textual editor is essential, to any major venture in publishing the works of any historical figure. Every scholarly household should maintain at least one. For he--and here I am trying to straddle the sexist fence--he is the handmaid of higher learning.

Thomas Jackson's edition, which has been reprinted thirty or forty times, was based largely on Wesley's later editions, especially those which bore his manuscript correc-

tions. Nehemiah Curnock's valuable edition of the Journal also used later editions, conflating their text with the manuscript accounts which survive for some of the earlier passages. Curnock heeded the advice of Richard Green, that because of its inaccuracies the first edition should be "practically discarded."

In preparing this new edition, however, the Editorial Board believed that it was essential to explore the facts more fully than had ever been done before. First we tried to secure every work prepared by Wesley in every edition published during his lifetime, with the special intention of discovering any alterations for which he might have been responsible. (The original manuscripts of his works seem to have been destroyed upon publication, and only two sets of proof sheets have survived.)² One edition of each work (usually the first), was typed out, and all the other editions, together with any printed errata or manuscript revisions, were then collated with it, and the variant readings entered up, using letter symbols to indicate the editions in which each variant occurred. A careful study of the patterns of occurrence of these readings, more especially of obvious errors, enabled us to determine the relationships between the different editions, and to produce for each publication a stemma depicting the genealogical descent of its text. This same process also indicated clearly which editions underwent major revisions of such a character that they must surely have been carried out by Wesley himself. It also became clear that many variants were introduced by the fallibility of printers, and by the idiosyncrasies of the sub-editors or proofreaders to whom Wesley regularly entrusted the care of his literary productions, especially in their later editions. For many careless, infelicitous, or unnecessary alterations, however,

Wesley himself was responsible.

The result of this lengthy and arduous research was to throw us back for the most reliable text away from Wesley's latest editions, even with his manuscript alterations, away from his own 32-volume collected edition of his Works, issued 1771-4, back in nearly every case to the first edition, obviously the nearest to his manuscript. This, therefore, will usually form the basis of our presentation of his text. With it will be incorporated, however, all Wesley's major revisions of fact and of viewpoint, while all substantive changes of wording discovered in every edition which may have been revised by Wesley will be recorded in appendices. Thus we shall offer the general reader what we believe represents Wesley's most fully deliberate expression of his thought. At the same time, however, we shall enable the scholar to visualize the stages through which the text passed, and to evaluate personally the significance of every substantive variant reading from it. In fact, only a fraction of this definitive text will differ greatly from the traditional text. Nevertheless, the enormous undertaking is justified by the attempt to recover the freshness of Wesley's original thought, freed from the accretions of decades of error. There have also been compensatory gains (which could have been achieved in no other way), in gaining a fuller knowledge of Wesley's literary practices, and illuminating several aspects of his life, character, and thought. To a few examples of these we now turn.

Wesley's editors have constantly been plagued by the fact that he was always on the run. This was the chief complaint made against him by Dr. Samuel Johnson, who liked to get his feet stretched out for a long and leisurely conversation, but soon found Wesley looking at his watch and announcing that he had another appointment.³ Similarly, Wesley wrote

on the run, and it was only during brief snatched intervals that he was able to revise his writings. Even the character of his original works was conditioned by his full pastoral timetable. They were occasional, such as sermons and tracts, or cumulative, like his Journal, rather than large systematic works. His only major systematic works were derivative from the writings of others. Publishing was an extension of his preaching ministry, but he was rarely able to give it his undivided attention for long.

As a result of this haste, numerous errors crept into his manuscripts, and still more into his printed works, some never to be removed. Nor were these merely slips in spelling, in grammar, in syntax, which in any case must be judged against the best practice of his own day rather than that of ours, so that many phrases which ring uncomfortably in our ears were euphonious at the time. He was also guilty, however, of hardly ever checking his references, so that thousands of quotations, from the Bible as well as from general and classical literature, are garbled, sometimes to the extent of being almost unrecognizable. We find frequent errors of fact, over-hasty statements of opinion, and sentences which are far from producing that plain and pointed English for which he always strove and which he usually produced. Two examples will suffice.

In his Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament, writing of Christians who because they are God's elect should therefore lead exemplary lives, he penned the sentence: "Holiness is the consequence of their election, and God's superior love of their holiness." He apparently intended to say that these Christians were holy because God had elected them, and God had elected them because he was loving. The first part he stated accurately enough--that God's election

led to men's holiness--but then went on to say in fact that men's holiness in its turn led to God's superior love! ("Holiness is the consequence of their election, and God's superior love ['the consequence,' understood] of their holiness.")⁴ He was in his early fifties when he wrote that sentence, which has never yet been corrected. Less understandable is a factual error made ten years earlier, which again has gone uncorrected. In A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion he claimed correctly that he had been ordained deacon in 1725, but went on to state that his ordination as priest occurred one year later, instead of three.⁵ It must be admitted, however, that Wesley had a poor memory for dates, and often made mistakes in such relatively unimportant details.

Wesley's own manuscript errors, however, are infinitesimal compared with those of his printers. Even with the best of printers errors are bound to occur, but Wesley was occasionally served--or thwarted--by some of the worst. In the fourth volume of his collected Sermons a lengthy passage defining sin and Christian perfection was omitted from one issue--the very issue which later he used as the basis for his collected Works, though happily this passage was recovered from the other issue and appears in later editions of his Sermons.⁶ The Works themselves were very poorly printed, and the errata sheets prepared for each of the 32 volumes--but often not bound with them--deal with only the tip of the iceberg. The printer even managed to omit one whole extract of Wesley's Journal, covering two years!⁷

Unfortunately, the hurried efforts of Wesley or his appointed sub-editors to read the proofs frequently compounded these errors with makeshift corrections which made superficial sense but hardly ever achieved the force of the original,

and occasionally obscured the whole point of a statement. A simple case is found in Wesley's sermon, "Of Evil Angels." He wrote, "the very name of Satan, successor of Michael." But it was January, 1783, and he was 79, and wrote in a somewhat shaky hand, so that in setting up the text the compositor misread the word "successor" and introduced a new being to the heavenly--or hellish--hierarchy: "the very name of Satan, Lucess, or Michael." This was corrected back to "Satan, successor of Michael" both in Wesley's personal copy of The Arminian Magazine and in the printed errata issued in 1786. Yet when he collected his later sermons for publication in 1788, Wesley overlooked these errata, and made a hasty guess, altering "Lucess" into something a little like it, "Lucifer." This minimized the nonsense by supplying another name for the evil angel Satan, but left both of them as synonymous with the good angel, Michael. Jackson's edition, and therefore all subsequent texts, dutifully followed Wesley's manifestly incorrect correction.⁸

A similar case involved not the misreading of a manuscript but the misplacement of a whole line of manuscript or type by the printer. In 1745, in A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, Wesley spoke of three things which were necessary to justification: faith, which was "proximately necessary"; repentance, which was "remotely" necessary; and "the fruits of repentance, still more remotely, as they are necessary to repentance." The printer omitted the word "faith" from the end of the second clause, and all but "repentance" which ended the third clause, so that the third clause was in effect swallowed up in the second, to read, "repentance, remotely, as it is necessary to the increase or continuance of repentance." This was, of course, nonsense, and in the following edition the closing word was replaced by

"faith." An errata slip had been prepared restoring the genuine text, but this was overlooked, so that all subsequent editions, including all editions of Wesley's Works, have omitted one of the factors which Wesley claimed was necessary, even though remotely, to true justification.⁹

With this background for the Wesley text it is not surprising that sometimes conjectural emendations are needed, whether through the carelessness of Wesley himself, of his printers, or a combination of both. In many instances a word within brackets must be supplied to turn poor sense or absolute nonsense into the good sense which Wesley apparently intended. In old age his handwriting was at times almost illegible, and even those familiar with it had to guess, with the aid of context, the identity of individual words. In the case of his letters many of the errors which have crept into Telford's edition can be corrected by comparison with other extant letters from the same period. Where the original manuscripts have disappeared, however, we cannot usually travel beyond the realm of conjecture. In his last sermon, completed January 17, 1791, Wesley wrote of the joys of conversing in heaven with Adam, with Abraham, with Moses, with David, the prophets, the apostles, the martyrs, the saints, the angels. He continued (according to the editor and printer of The Arminian Magazine), "Above all the name of creature owns, with Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant." The context, together with a similar passage in a sermon of 1788, checked by a study of Wesley's handwriting at the time, suggests that by the addition of one missing word, "with," and readily acceptable changes in others, we can supply a conjectural emendation which at least makes sense: "Above all [with] the Lord of creation himself, with Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant."¹⁰

Thus in many ways the careful study of the transmission of Wesley's text enables us to visualize his literary practices, and thus better to understand the text itself. In the process of this study, however, we also learn much about other aspects of his life, character, and thought. His skill in Greek is frequently underlined, as when in his Explanatory Notes he comes to 1 Cor. 10:12, where the Authorized version, which usually formed the basis of his own translation, reads, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall." In the New English Bible this is transformed into the racy, "If you feel sure that you are standing firm, beware!" Wesley felt his way carefully to a less vigorous approximation to this kind of translation. At the proof stage he dropped the word "thinketh"; the passage then read, "Let him that standeth take heed lest he fall." Wesley pointed out in a note that in "the common translation . . . the word translated 'thinketh' most certainly strengthens, rather than weakens, the sense. Perhaps it should be translated, 'he that most assuredly standeth.'" In the second edition he thus amended the translation itself, and dropped the note.¹¹

The careful collation of the early editions reveals the fact that Wesley also had a sound working knowledge of Hebrew. He could trust himself to set down Hebrew words and phrases from memory, though his scholarship was not sufficiently detailed for him to be letter-perfect. Thus in the first edition of A Farther Appeal he spells ruach (spirit), with a central aleph instead of a waw,¹² and in his sermon, "The Way to the Kingdom," he quotes Ps. 32:1 as "blessed, or rather happy, is the man," adding to the Hebrew ha'ish (the man), which in fact was not present in the original text.¹³ These minor errors, which must surely have been derived by the printer from Wesley's original manuscript,

were eventually corrected, but they are errors which demonstrate not only Wesley's unreadiness to check his references, but also his familiarity with Hebrew and its limitations.

Another trait of his character revealed by this kind of study is his uneasiness about a tendency to sarcasm, which at times he deems it necessary to correct, whether for reasons of kindness or of prudence. In his Letter to the Lord Bishop of London (1747), for instance, Wesley included comments which on cooler reflection seemed sufficiently indiscreet for him to consider scrapping the whole edition, until his brother Charles suggested striking out the passages by hand and selling the pamphlet privately. One passage which was thus struck through and disappeared from later editions was the second part of a sentence in which Wesley challenged Edmund Gibson--one of the most learned men of the day--"O my lord, are these the words of a father of the Church, or of a boy in the third class of Westminster School?"¹⁴

It is to Wesley's credit, however, that he was not afraid to admit that he had been mistaken. Comparison of the different editions brings to light many areas of thought in which he changed his mind. In the first flush of enthusiasm after his heart was "strangely warmed" on May 24, 1738, he prepared the second extract from his Journal, in which he spoke of himself as not having been a Christian, as having no faith, until that day. Thirty years later he not only realized that he had overstated the case, but that he ought to make public confession of his error. The gist of what he tried to say was this: "I certainly then had the faith of a servant, though not the faith of a son." Unfortunately, by the time that he had resolved to put this right in Vol. 26 of his collected Works, the volume was in print. Again unfortunately, the errata sheet in which he made his corrections was issued

separately from the volume itself, so that the differing viewpoint was largely overlooked. He therefore tried a new tactic. In 1775 he published a new 5th edition of the Journal itself, with a new set of specially written footnotes pointing out his changed views of his own spiritual condition in early 1738. This also was for the most part neglected by future editors like Thomas Jackson and Nehemiah Curnock, so that Wesley's eager but belated attempt to publicize his altered viewpoint was almost totally lost.¹⁵

As we have seen, The Oxford Edition of Wesley's Works is a project engaging in various capacities scholars from several different nations and different denominations, though the bulk of the key workers are Methodists from the U.S.A. and England. The textual history of Wesley's writings emphasizes his own growing ecumenicity, as may be seen in his attitude towards the Roman Catholic Church. In the original edition of An Earnest Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion Wesley strongly criticized that Church, but became confused in his dates, and therefore in quoting the canons of the Council of Trent offered the opinion that "the very design of the Council [was] . . . to anathematize the Church of England" for issuing its First Book of Homilies--which in fact was issued later. When an opponent pointed out the error Wesley agreed that he had written hastily, "not having the book by [him]." Thereupon he drastically revised the erring section, but through lax control he was not successful in preventing the original incorrect passage from appearing in the majority of the remaining nine editions issued during his lifetime.¹⁶

Wesley also tried to soften the impact of other statements written in the heat of emotion as well as in the grip of strong prejudice against the Roman Catholic Church,

which mellowed as he grew older. Thus in his Journal for May 24, 1738, in the course of describing his spiritual pilgrimage up to that epochal day, he spoke of the unhappy influence upon him of the mystic writers, adding the comment, "who I declare in my cool judgment, and in the presence of the Most High God, I believe to be one great Antichrist." In the 1765 and later editions he retained a reference to the effect of the mystics upon him, but omitted this stern early judgment, which is therefore not to be found in modern editions of his Works or of his Journal. Similarly, in his Sermon on Salvation by Faith, 1738, he spoke about "all the errors of that apostate Church," but his collected Sermons (first published 1746) omitted the word "apostate," though he took no pains to expunge the harsh epithet from the many separate editions of the sermon which continued to appear.

Such was Wesley's basic honesty, as well as his burning passion for God, that we believe he would be happy to know that at long last we shall be able to read and understand more fully the writings in which he revealed himself to the world as he proclaimed the gospel, and to see him warts and all!

NOTES

1. Methodist History, Vol. VIII, Number 4 (July, 1970), pp. 48-8; Duke Divinity School Review, XXXVI, pp. 87-99 (Spring, 1971); The Methodist Churchman, Vol. 15, No. 3 (May, 1972).
2. The Doctrine of Original Sin, owned by Prof. Albert C. Outler, and Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament, owned by Mrs. E. P. Prothro, and deposited in Bridwell Library, Perkins School of Theology, Dallas.

3. James Boswell, Boswell's Life of Samuel Johnson, edited by George B. Hill (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1889), Vol. III, p. 261.
4. In this instance we suggest the conjectural emendation, "God's superior love [the cause] of their [election]," with a footnote ["original, election"].
5. A Farther Appeal, Part I, VI. 1, p. 176 of Vol. 11, new edition.
6. Sermons, Vol. IV, 1760, including "Thoughts on Christian Perfection," pp. 237-67, in the issue by John Grabham, of Bristol, which contains 36 questions; and pp. 237-68 in that by John Grabham and William Pine, which contains 38.
7. Works, Vol. 29, 1774, which omitted Journal VIII, partly through misnumbering, moving from July 20, 1749 straight to November 2, 1751.
8. See Arminian Magazine, VI, p. 120 (March, 1783); cf. Sermons (1788), VI, p. 129, and Works, ed. Thomas Jackson, VI, p. 372.
9. See new edition, Vol. 11, p. 117; the omission is continued in Wesley's letter to Horne, *ibid*, p. 451. Similarly, in the Explanatory Notes the printer of the 2nd edition dropped a line of type in Gal. 3:22n, which happened to be a complete parenthesis describing his intention of the clause, "the Scripture hath concluded all under sin": "(not only all men, but all they have, do, and are)." This was never recovered.
10. The Arminian Magazine, XIV, p. 402 (August, 1791); cf. Works, ed. T. Jackson, VII, pp. 234, 331-2. For another conjectural emendation see note 4 above.
11. Wesley similarly anticipated modern translations in a host of other instances such as Matt. 6:22, "The eye is the lamp of the body," and Matt. 13:25, "the enemy came and sowed tares," amended at the proof stage to "darnel."
12. Part I, I.6, p. 108; cf. III.5 and note, p. 125.
13. "The Way to the Kingdom" I:11; cf. Works, ed. Jack-

- son, V, p. 80, though he omits Wesley's original Hebrew.
14. A Letter to the Lord Bishop of London, par. 6, 11, pp. 338, 343 of new edition.
15. Frank Baker, "Aldersgate and Wesley's Editors," London Quarterly Review, Vol. 191, pp. 310-19 (Oct. 1966). Cf. Explanatory Notes, John 9:16, "How can a man that is a sinner do such miracles?" To this the first two editions of 1755 and 1757 append the note, "a man that is a sinner, that is, such a sinner as to be incapable of being sent by God"; in 1760 this was softened to the note which became traditional, "a sinner, that is, one living in wilful sin."
16. par. 58; see new edition, pp. 68-9.