

Proceedings

OF THE

Wesley Historical Society

Editor: Rev. JOHN C. BOWMER, M.A., B.D., Ph.D.

Volume XLII

May 1980

JOHN WESLEY AND BISHOP JOSEPH BUTLER

A Fragment of John Wesley's Manuscript Journal 16th to 24th August 1739

AS a spiritual check, and following the advice of Bishop Jeremy Taylor, John Wesley began on 5th April 1725 to keep a daily diary, for his personal use only, written sometimes in cipher or in abbreviated longhand with several symbols such as \bar{u} for but, and later in Byrom's shorthand, with only an occasional word in longhand. This diary he continued until 23rd February 1791—a week before his death—though the period from 9th August 1741 to 30th November 1782 is not represented even by fragments.

From about the same early period, and again stretching through most of his life, he would prepare occasional memoranda (or "narratives", to use his own frequent word) of the more significant events in his life—sometimes writing up a detailed report of an interview or an incident immediately after its occurrence, sometimes stringing together in literary form a series of related happenings over months or years, such as the 1738 account of his long spiritual pilgrimage.

Overlapping with these in some respects was the continuous manuscript journal which Wesley began to keep in Georgia, if not earlier, and apparently maintained throughout the major part of his life—a connected account of the major happenings of his daily activity, following the outlines of the diary, but expanded by the incorporation of individual memoranda (or portions of them), fuller details, and occasional improving reflections. This manuscript journal might sometimes have a strictly utilitarian purpose, such as at least one such document which served as a kind of brief for his defence before the grand jury in Savannah, delineating in great detail his relationships with Sophy Hopkey over a lengthy period. In general, however, these manuscript journals were designed for the information and encouragement of his friends and followers, like the "missionary

letters" still multiplied by missionaries overseas as personal reports to sponsors and supporters. Wesley himself transcribed sections of his journals to send as journal-letters, often introduced with a covering letter, and interspersed with personal comments and additional details. These were sent to key individuals such as his brother Charles and James Hutton, and by them circulated to others or read in his societies. The complete manuscript journals, covering much longer periods than the week or two to which the journal-letters were limited, were also circulated among a group of intimates.

In 1740 Wesley felt reluctantly compelled to publish some selections from this varied autobiographical material, though at the same time he was anxious to avoid the over-exposure in which his pupil George Whitefield had engaged, whose somewhat maudlin excesses had focused an unfriendly public spotlight on Methodism. That summer Wesley published an *Extract* from his journal as an antidote to the poisonous slander being spread about his Georgia years by a Bristol merchant, Robert Williams—not simply to defend his own reputation, but to protect the growing Methodist community, especially in Bristol.¹ He followed this rapidly with another *Extract*, designed this time both to set forth his own spiritual credentials and to counteract the dangerous tendencies which he now saw in Moravianism; in this he drew heavily on a lengthy journal-memorandum covering his visit to Herrnhut.

Wesley strongly doubted the wisdom of pursuing this publishing project any farther, in spite of the welcome given to the first two *Extracts*. For two years he delayed, discussed, debated the issue, until eventually he was convinced by his friends that in spite of the danger that it might be considered as an evidence of spiritual pride, and would certainly furnish ammunition for his enemies, he ought to publish further selections from his journal, to form a continuing apologia for his evangelism and his societies. The sources for such *Extracts* were rapidly accumulating—copies of letters, files of letters received, memoranda, manuscript journals, all of which helped to fill out the sometimes bare bones of his diary. Most of the documents which he published have disappeared, since it was his policy to discard material which had served its main purpose in that way, and can now only be reconstructed from the printed *Journal*. Such is the case, for instance, with his spiritual biography from Epworth to Aldersgate—a fact made especially tantalizing because the experience of 24th May 1738 fell in a period for which his diary also is missing.

It is quite clear that the published *Journal* contains only selections prepared from these varied sources in accordance with principles visualized fairly clearly by Wesley, though never stated in detail. In general he intended, he said, "openly to declare to all mankind what it is that the 'Methodists' (so called) have done and are doing", giving "a bare recital of those facts", and relating "simple truth in

¹ See Frank Baker: "The Birth of John Wesley's *Journal*", in *Methodist History*, viii, No. 2 (January 1970), pp. 25-32.

as inoffensive a manner as I can".² The specific principles of selection by which this guiding purpose was implemented become clearer when one studies Wesley's publishing in general, and in particular when one compares the published *Journal* with the manuscript sources which have survived. Almost always a surviving holograph page which was available to Wesley when compiling his *Journal* will bring to light information additional to that in the *Journal*—sometimes quite important information. It is obvious that Wesley carefully considered questions of personal privacy and public *mores*; he balanced the virtues of brevity and completeness, weighed spiritual and social usefulness against interest and variety. One prudential principle comes out very clearly: especially during the first decade of the Methodist societies he was very guarded indeed in any printed references to the hierarchy of the Church of England, and accounts of unfriendly encounters with bishops and other influential clergy were expunged from the manuscripts which he prepared for publication.³

Thus to my knowledge there is not a word in any work published by Wesley about any of the three interviews he had in 1739 with Dr. Joseph Butler (1692-1752), Bishop of Bristol, although he twice made complimentary references to Butler's *Analogy of Religion* in his *Journal*—on 21st January 1746 and on 20th May 1768. The first interview, in the summer, lasted a quarter of an hour; the second and third, on 16th and 18th August, over an hour each. What was generally thought to be that of 18th August—but now turns out to have taken place on the 16th—was a dramatic confrontation between the young clergyman with his newly-warmed heart and his eager experimental evangelism, facing up boldly, almost impertinently, to the cold logic and traditional middle-aged churchmanship of the bishop. The interview is best known from Nehemiah Curnock's edition of Wesley's *Journal* (ii, pp. 256-7), who copied it from Henry Moore's *Life of Wesley* (i, pp. 413-15), complaining that the original document used by Moore (and John Whitehead before him)⁴ had disappeared. What neither Whitehead nor Moore said, and what Curnock's inability to discover the manuscript prevented him from saying, was that the famous interview was itself incomplete, that it was the second interview rather than the third, that the contents of the third were also extant (and also important), and that both of these were not isolated memoranda in Wesley's hand, but portions only of a lengthy manuscript journal. Probably, from the verbal similarity in the entries for 17th, 20th, and 22nd August, this was the very document from which Wesley transcribed passages for his published *Journal* iii. He omitted from the manuscript, however, not only his accounts of the two interviews, but a description of his action over a threatened attempt on his life in Bristol, and his attendance at public worship which seemed providentially to prepare

² *Journal* iii, 12th August 1738 to 1st November 1739, Preface.

³ Frank Baker: *John Wesley and the Church of England* (Epworth Press, 1970), pp. 70-3.

⁴ See his *Life of Wesley* (1792, 1796), ii, pp. 118-21.

him for some unpleasant chiding by the bishop and his immediate colleagues, including the redoubtable Josiah Tucker (1712-99), later Dean of Gloucester, who was at that time the bishop's domestic chaplain. It was indeed Wesley's private criticism on 16th August of one of Tucker's sermons which had precipitated Butler's summons of Wesley for trial by committee.

Curnock's fear that "the manuscript was sent to the press and had perished" was indeed unfounded, and it still remains in the Colman Collection, which came from Henry Moore as one of Wesley's literary executors, and now resides with the Methodist Archives in the John Rylands University Library in Manchester. It comprises five duodecimo leaves with their versos blank, followed by another inscribed on both sides, the whole numbered 19-24, with the second leaf not numbered in the sequence. The manuscript from which this fragment survives may probably have been devoted to Wesley's Bristol ministry only. It seems likely that the opening eighteen pages contained not only an account of the occasion and beginning of his second interview with Butler on 16th August, but considerably more: though hardly a summary in similar detail of the second period of Wesley's Bristol ministry, from 19th June onwards, yet it may well have continued at least until he left for London on 1st September. The actual function played by this document in the mysterious tapestry of Wesley's writing and publication of *Journal* iii remains uncertain, but we can indeed be grateful for this piece of literary flotsam, which opens after the beginning of a famous and important interview, and closes in the middle of a sentence describing a Friday afternoon prayer-meeting.

Without any doubt the correct setting for its opening is that recorded in Wesley's diary for Thursday, 16th August 1739:

10.15, Writ; 11. With the Bishop, the Dean there, religious talk;
12.15, At home . . .

We follow Wesley's own practice of presenting the dialogue, viz. by giving Wesley's own words within quotation marks and the bishop's without. Abbreviations have been extended and spelling modernized in accordance with the styling principles of the Oxford edition of Wesley's *Works*.

Why, sir, our faith itself is a good work. It is a virtuous temper of mind.

"My lord, whatever faith is, our Church asserts, We are justified by faith alone. But how it can be called a good work I see not. It is the gift of God, and a gift that presupposes nothing in us but sin and misery."

How, sir! Then you make God a tyrannical being, if he justifies some without any goodness in them preceding, and does not justify all. If these are not justified on account of some moral goodness in them, why are not those justified too?

"Because, my lord, they resist his Spirit, because they will not come unto him that they may have life; because they suffer him not to work in them both to will and to do. They cannot be saved because they will not believe."

Sir, what do you mean by faith ?

" My lord, by justifying faith I mean a conviction wrought in a man by the Holy Ghost that Christ hath loved *him*, and given himself for *him*, and that through Christ *his* sins are forgiven."

I believe some good men have this, but not all. But how do you prove this to be the justifying faith taught by our Church ?

" My lord, from her Homily on Salvation, where she describes it thus : '*A sure trust and confidence which a man hath in God, that through the merits of Christ his sins are forgiven, and he reconciled to the favour of God.*'"

Why, sir, this [is] quite another thing.

" My lord, I conceive it to be the very same."

Mr. Wesley, I will deal plainly with you. I once thought Mr. Whitefield and you well-meaning men. But I can't think so now. For I have heard more of you—matters of fact, sir. And Mr. Whitefield says in his *Journal*, " There are promises still to be fulfilled in me." Sir, the pretending to extraordinary revelations and gifts of the Holy Ghost is a horrid thing, a very horrid thing.

" My lord, for what Mr. Whitefield says Mr. Whitefield and not I is accountable. I pretend to no extraordinary revelations and gifts of the Holy Ghost—none but what every Christian may receive, and ought to expect and pray for. But I do not wonder your lordship has heard facts asserted which, if true, would prove the contrary. Nor do I wonder that your lordship, believing them true, should alter the opinion you once had of me. A quarter of an hour I spent with your lordship before.⁶ And about an hour now. And perhaps you have never conversed one other hour with anyone who spoke in my favour. But how many with those who spoke on the other side ! So that your lordship could not but think as you do.

" But pray, my lord, what are those facts you have heard ?"

I hear you administer the sacrament in your societies.

" My lord, I never did yet, and I believe never shall."

I hear, too, many people fall into fits in your societies, and that you pray over them.

" I do so, my lord. When any show by strong cries and tears that their soul is in deep anguish, I frequently pray to God to deliver them from it. And our prayer is often answered in that hour."

Very extraordinary indeed ! Well, sir, since you ask my advice, I will give it you very freely. You have no business here. You are not commissioned to preach in this diocese. Therefore I advise you to go hence.

" My lord, my business on earth is to do what good I can. Wherever therefore I think I can do most good, there must I stay so long as I think so. At present I think I can do most good here. Therefore here I stay.

" As to my preaching here, a dispensation of the gospel is committed to me, and woe is me if I preach not the gospel, wheresoever I am in the habitable world. Your lordship knows, being ordained a priest, by

⁶ The occasion of this earlier brief interview is not known, but it seems certainly to have been in Bristol between 31st March and 12th June or between 22nd June and 8th August 1739.

the commission then received I am a priest of the Church Universal. And being ordained as Fellow of a College, I was not limited to any particular cure, but have an indeterminate commission, to preach the Word of God to any part of the Church of England.⁶

"I do not therefore conceive that in preaching here by this commission I break any human law. When I am convinced I do, then it will be time to ask, 'Shall I obey God or man?' But if I should be convinced in the meanwhile that I could advance the glory of God and the salvation of souls in any other place more than in Bristol and the parts adjoining, in that hour, by God's help, I will go hence; which till then I may not do."

Fri. 17. Many of our society met, as we had appointed, at one in the afternoon, and agreed that "all the members of our society should obey the Church to which we belong, by observing all Fridays in the year as days of fasting or abstinence". We likewise [agreed] that as many of us as could, without prejudice to their necessary business, should meet every Friday, and join in prayer from one to three o'clock.

Sat. 18. A note was sent me, part of which was as follows:

"While you are here, I must entreat you to be careful which way you go out of town. For there are two persons who have resolved to take your life."

I immediately writ a line to each of those persons, desiring to know whether they were so resolved or not. And received an answer from each, disavowing any such thought. My time is in thy hand,⁷ O Lord!

In the afternoon I was sent for by the bishop. I went first to the College Prayers. Those words in the Psalms I could not but observe: "If the Lord had not helped me, it had not failed but my soul had been put to silence. But when I said, My foot hath slipped, thy mercy, O Lord, held me up."⁸

Part of the First Lesson was: "O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel. Therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me. . . . If thou warn the wicked of his way, to turn from it, if he do not turn from it, he shall die in his iniquity, but thou hast delivered thy soul."⁹

In the Second Lesson were those words:

"Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? But if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye, and be not afraid of their terror, neither be ye troubled. . . . Having a good conscience, that whereas they speak evil of you, as of evil-doers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ!"¹⁰

After service I went to the bishop, with whom were Mr. Tucker (minister of All Saints),¹¹ Mr. Sutton (minister of St. Austin's),¹² and the chancellor.¹³

⁶ Originally "particularly of the Church of England", altered to "in any part of . . .", and then to "to any part of . . .".

⁷ Psalm xxxi. 17 (Book of Common Prayer). ⁸ Psalm xciv. 17-18 (ibid.).

⁹ Ezekiel xxxiii. 7-9 (the closing words becoming one of Wesley's favourite texts). ¹⁰ 1 Peter iii. 13-16. ¹¹ See p. 96.

¹² John Sutton (c. 1692-1745), M.A., Canon of Bristol from 1723, and vicar of St. Augustine's, Bristol, from 1734.

¹³ The Chancellor of the Diocese of Bristol was Carew Reynell (1698-1745), later Bishop of Derry.

The conversation lasted about an hour. The most material part of it was to this effect :

(The bishop) : Mr. Wesley, you have brought me a complaint in form against one of my clergy. You yesterday accused Mr. Tucker of affirming that there needs no atonement for original sin. Did you bring this complaint, or did you not ?

I answered,

“ My lord, you wholly mis-state the case. I did not bring any complaint in form. I only desired your lordship’s advice, how to proceed in a case of difficulty which I related.”

Nay, Mr. Wesley, you did bring it as matter of complaint. For when I said, “ You have no right to make complaint against my clergy,” you said you “ thought everyone had a right to complain against those who taught false doctrine ”.

“ But, my lord, did I not immediately add, ‘ But I do not bring this as matter of complaint ’ ?

“ I cannot peremptorily say whether I said or not, ‘ Mr. T[ucker] affirmed, there needs no atonement for original sin.’ I told your lordship then, ‘ I can’t be exact as to the words.’ And when you said I ‘ must be so, in bringing a complaint ’, I replied again, ‘ I do not bring a complaint, but desire direction for my private conscience.’

“ But this, my lord, was not the chief point I spoke of. But little was said upon it. The thing I insisted on then, as I do now, and which your lordship spoke largely upon, was this :

“ Mr. T[ucker] affirmed, We are justified on account of our own righteousness. This I then maintained, as I do now, to be false doctrine, and contrary to the doctrine of the Church of England.”

In answer to this his lordship read some paragraphs in Mr. T[ucker]’s sermon, all of which seemed to me to carry that sense, although it was not advanced in express terms. His lordship took occasion from them to offer several reasons why there must be something good in us, before God could justify us, some morally good temper, on account of which God justified some and not others.

He then said, The sermon was a very good sermon, and there was no room to complain of it ; and that (to speak in the mildest terms) I had been guilty of great want of candour and Christian charity. Mr. T[ucker] added that in preaching on that text (“ Thou shalt bruise his head, and he shall bruise thy heel ”)¹⁴ he had no occasion to speak of the guilt of original sin, and therefore it was not his business to speak of the atonement for it. I asked, “ Sir, do you think it needs any ? I will take your word.” To this he gave no answer.

Mon. 20. I preached at the Brickyard to a much larger congregation than usual, on those words, “ Oughtest not thou to have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, as I had pity on thee ? ”¹⁵ *Wed. 22.* I was with several that were in great sorrow and heaviness, two of whom, upon prayer made to God for them, were filled with peace and joy. In the afternoon I endeavoured at Baptist Mills to guard the weak against the

¹⁴ cf. Genesis iii. 15 : “ It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.”

¹⁵ Matthew xviii. 33.

more dangerous extreme, levity of spirit or behaviour, from, "I said of laughter, It is mad; and of mirth, What doth it?"¹⁶

Thur. 23. I received a comfortable [letter] from Mr. Ingham, concerning the progress of the Gospel in Yorkshire. *Fri.* 24. About forty of our society met at one, and spent an hour or two in prayer, especially for those that —

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¹⁶ Ecclesiastes ii. 2.

The Wesley Historical Society Lectures

TWENTY years ago we published a list of our Annual Lectures, 1934-59 (see *Proceedings*, xxiii, p. 91 f.). The following completes the series to 1979.

- *26. George Lawton: *Shropshire Saint: A Study in the Ministry and Spirituality of Fletcher of Madeley*. (Liverpool, 1960)
- *27. John C. Bowmer: *The Lord's Supper in Methodism, 1791-1860*. (Bradford, 1961)
- *28. Arthur D. Cummings: *Portrait in Pottery*. (Stoke-on-Trent, 1962)
- 29. George W. Dolbey: *The Development of Architecture in Methodism from 1738 to 1840*. (Preston, 1963)
- *30. John A. Vickers: *Thomas Coke, Apostle of Methodism*. (Sheffield, 1964)
- *31. Thomas Shaw: *The Bible Christians*. (Plymouth, 1965)
- *32. Gordon S. Wakefield: *The Spiritual Life in the Methodist Tradition, from the death of Wesley to the Second World War*. (Wolverhampton, 1966)
- *33. Frederick Hunter: *The Wesleys and Catholicity* (Middlesbrough, 1967)
- †34. A. Kingsley Lloyd: *The Labourer's Hire: The Payment and Deployment of the early Methodist Preachers, 1744-1813*. (London, 1968)
- †35. William Strawson: *Methodist Theology, 1850-1950*. (Birmingham, 1969)
- 36. J. Leonard Waddy: *John Wesley and the Wednesbury Riots*. (Manchester, 1970). Published by World Methodist Historical Society.
- †37. Maldwyn L. Edwards: *John Wesley, the reluctant lover*. (Harrogate, 1971)
- 38. Michael S. Edwards: *S.E. Keeble and Methodist Social Thinking, 1880-1939*. (Nottingham, 1972). One of our own publications.
- 39. Frederick Jeffery: *Methodism in the Irish situation*. (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1973). Published by our Irish Branch.
- 40. Francis B. Westbrook: *Some Early Methodist Tune Books*. (Bristol, 1974). One of our own publications.
- *41. Ian Sellers: *Adam Clarke and the Eternal Sonship*. (Liverpool, 1975). Published privately.
- †42. David A. Gowland: *Samuel Warren and the Methodist Reformers of Lancashire*. (Preston, 1976)
- 43. Henry D. Rack: *Wesleyanism and "the World" in the later Nineteenth Century*. (Hull, 1977). (*Proceedings*, xlii, pp. 35 ff.)
- 44. Joanna M. G. Dawson: *The People at the Grass Roots within the Great Haworth Round, 1738-91*. (Bradford, 1978). Published by our Yorkshire Branch.
- †45. W. Reginald Ward: *The Origins of Religious Revival: The international setting of Early Methodism*. (London, 1979)

* Out of print. † Not published.