Proceedings
OF THE
Wesley Historical Society
*Editor:* E. ALAN ROSE, B.A.

**Volume XLVII** **February 1989**

# CHARLES WESLEY'S PRODUCTIVITY AS A RELIGIOUS POET

PERHAPS I have in part helped to promulgate a myth about Charles Wesley's limited productivity of high-quality verse by speaking of "the classic hymns" of Methodism. It is true, of course, that the volumes of poems published jointly by John and Charles Wesley during the period 1739-46 contain a very high proportion of their most popular hymns. They also contain, however, many humdrum compositions, and a large number of poems which are known only through small selections, such as "O for a thousand tongues". Relatively few such unwieldy pieces were written (let alone published) after 1750. It needs stressing, however, that for the last forty years of his life Charles Wesley (1707-88), having secured independence from his brother's publishing, continued to write and publish verse at an equally rapid pace, and that a very high proportion of his output continued to be of excellent quality, although a far smaller proportion found its way into print and into popular use. After his publication in 1762 of **Short Hymns on Selected Passages of the Holy Scriptures** he printed very few of his great accumulation of manuscripts. Fewer than 15 per cent of the five thousand written during his last quarter of a century were published. Yet modern producers of hymn-books continue to search for — and easily to discover — relatively unknown but excellent hymns by Charles, though they usually find it extremely difficult to persuade their committees to publish them, because Methodism is already embarrassed by the riches of its published heritage.

With the multitude of hymns which have been enumerated in Julian's **Dictionary of Hymnology,** and the thousands of modern hymns which are increasingly clamouring for entry, why is it that the richest cache of potentially great hymns in the world remains unused except by a few discerning scholars? The facts of their

writing, their limited publication, and their gradual unveiling before the public, need to be studied before any reply should be attempted.

The classical period of Charles Wesley's hymns undoubtedly began with his spiritual awakening — "The Day of Pentecost", as he headed in large script his journal for Sunday, 21st May, 1738. This almost immediately transformed Charles Wesley's already great talent for translating Latin verse into decasyllabic couplets to an outpouring of religious lyrics. On 24th May John Wesley and a troop of friends from the Aldersgate gathering broke in upon the sick Charles, declaring, "I believe." Charles's journal continued: "We sang the hymn" — Charles's first fruits, still not identified with absolute certainty — "with great joy, and parted with prayer."

This epochal event led to the series of **Hymns and Sacred Poems** published over the names of the two brothers, in 1739 (with three editions that year), 1740, and 1742. John also included a batch of seventeen "Poems . . . by the Revd. Mr. John and Charles Wesley" in Volume 3 of his **Collection of Moral and Sacred Poems** (1744), and the two brothers issued jointly **Hymns on the Lord's Supper** in 1745 and **Hymns of Petition and Thanksgiving for the Promise of the Father** in 1746. Altogether from 1739 to 1746 about five hundred hymns were published jointly by the two brothers, with no indication of their individual authorship. These constitute the "classical hymns" of Methodism. Were they in fact mainly by Charles? The answer is a resounding "Yes". Did these hymns exhaust Charles Wesley's religious muse? The answer is an equally resounding "No"!

If we are to fully envisage Charles Wesley's fecundity, however, we need to combine his production both of printed works and of unpublished manuscript poems. We shall, of course, count those poems only in their primary sources, ignoring the many duplications in collected hymn-books. We note that some of the manuscript poems were left unfinished, or are found in more than one version. Although in the nature of the case such statistics can only be approximate, it is clear that we have a total approaching nine thousand, or about 180 per year for the fifty years from 1739 to 1788. It is certain that the rate of production was not even, though it is impossible to document the details, for many poems were not published until years after their first draft was written. Similarly, although we have Charles's own endorsed dates for his major collections of manuscript hymns on the Gospels and Acts, we cannot be sure that no earlier compositions were incorporated, and those volumes underwent seven thorough revisions between 1774 and 1787. Charles remained constantly at work with his poems,

both old and new. During the last five years of his poetical career (1784-8) he appears to have produced almost exactly the same number of poems as during the first (1739-43) — over three hundred. The amazing high point of his productivity was 1762-6, when he wrote no fewer than 6,248 scriptural hymns — an average of 1,250 a year!

More important, of course, is the quality. Here it is difficult to apply a reliable yardstick, except their public use within Methodism. We must accept the fact, of course, that this public is in general conservative, and cannot be expected to warm to a hymn, no matter how excellent, to which it has not become accustomed, and especially if the words are not firmly wedded to a popular tune. Every individual, every congregation, every denomination, has its saturation-point, which is often surprisingly low, even with the Methodists who were "born in song". Unfortunately, as merit or fashion may encourage the use of a new hymn, one of the old ones is almost certain to become disused and die — though a few live on for ever. This hymnological law it was, not the intrinsic excellence of the hymns themselves, which prevented Methodism from ever absorbing the overflowing cornucopia of Charles Wesley's genius, and eventually transformed the massive production of printed verse into an even more massive accumulation of neglected manuscripts. This law also it was which dictated that through the generations, in spite of regular attrition, the older favourites continued to form the basic nucleus of the popular repertoire of hymns.

The committee which chose the 823 hymns of the latest Methodist hymn-book, **Hymns and Psalms** (1983) was both ecumenical and adventurous, but of necessity still subject to the demands of tradition. The number of Wesley hymns which they chose for inclusion clearly reflects the steady decrease in popular usage from the high point of the 1876 hymn-book, when out of a total 1,026 there were 724 by Charles Wesley. In 1904, of 981 hymns 446 were credited to Charles Wesley. In 1933 this was reduced to 243 of 984. **Hymns and Psalms** in 1983 has 156 out of 823. All this undoubtedly reflects the proportion of Wesley hymns held in wide esteem among Methodists, and may furnish a touchstone, if not of literary excellence, at any rate of appreciation by church leaders at different periods who were in touch with the tastes of their congregations. By studying what they have chosen we can gain a fair estimate of the hymns which continue in popular use 250 years after the spiritual awakening of their composers.

It is no surprise to discover that the Wesley hymns chosen for **Hymns and Psalms,** as for other hymn-books of all denominations,

are heavily weighted in favour of those which were produced and became popular during Charles Wesley's first decade, 1739-48. Out of the 156 chosen in 1983, no fewer than 96 come from this period, whilst there are 35 from the second decade, 1749-58, and 25 from the third decade, 1759-68. This means that approximately 60 per cent were chosen from the first decade, 22 per cent from the second, and 16 per cent from the third. None at all have come into continuing popular use from the fourth and fifth decades.

We shall make no attempt to refer to all these hymns, of course, but will simply select some of the better-known ones from specific publications drawn on during each decade. In all instances the first line will be followed within parentheses by the number assigned in **Hymns and Psalms.** This should at the very least demonstrate that wide acceptance persisted for selections from Charles Wesley's hymns throughout his first three decades. After that we should turn to the far more limited utilization of the publications and accumulating manuscripts of his closing two decades, of which only a few slowly filtered into the hymn-books, and thus reached the attention of the general public.

Printed from the **Hymns and Sacred Poems** of 1739 we have "And can it be that I should gain" (216), "Christ the Lord is risen today" (193), and "Hark! the herald-angels sing" (106), with George Whitefield's 1753 alteration of the opening couplet from Wesley's original, 'Hark how all the welkin rings/Glory to the King of kings'. From the 1740 book with the same title come "Christ, from whom all blessings flow" (764), "Christ, whose glory fills the skies" (457), "Come, Holy Ghost, our hearts inspire" (469), "Jesu, Lover of my soul" (528 — with Wesley's "Jesu" changed in **Hymns and Psalms** to "Jesus", in American style), and "O for a thousand tongues to sing" (for the first time in a major Methodist hymn-book not numbered 1, but 744, represented by eight of the original eighteen verses). Charles Wesley's 1741 anti-Calvinist manifesto on universal salvation—**Hymns on God's Everlasting Love**—furnishes "Father, whose everlasting love" (520 — five of its seventeen verses). From the **Hymns and Sacred Poems** of 1742 come "Arise my soul, arise" (217), "Come, O thou Traveller unknown" (434 — no fewer than twelve of the original fourteen verses), "O for a heart to praise my God" (536), "O what shall I do my Saviour to praise" (569), and "Soldiers of Christ, arise" (719 — seven of the original sixteen verses, divided into two parts).

There follow (still from this first decade) a number of hymns from smaller sources: "Ye servants of God, your master proclaim" (278) from the 1744 **Hymns for Times of Trouble and Persecution;**

"Behold the servant of the Lord" (788), from John Wesley's **Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion** (1745); two from the 1745 **Hymns on the Lord's Supper,** "Jesu, we thus obey" (614 — changed to "Jesus"), and "Victim, divine, thy grace we claim" (629); "Come, thou long-expected Jesus" (81), from **Hymns for the Nativity of our Lord** (1745); "Father of everlasting grace", from **"Hymns of Petition and Thanksgiving** (1746); "Rejoice! the Lord is King" (243), from **Hymns for our Lord's Resurrection** (1746), whose popularity was certainly enhanced during the nineteenth century by the tune **Gopsal** which Handel wrote for it. We close with four selections from Charles Wesley's 1747 publication, **Hymns for those that seek and those that have Redemption in the Blood of Jesus Christ:** "All praise to our redeeming Lord" (753), "Come, sinners, to the gospel feast" (460 — six out of twenty-four verses), "Happy the man that finds the grace" (674), and "Love divine, all loves excelling" (267).

The major product of the second decade (1749-58) was Charles Wesley's two volumes entitled (again) **Hymns and Sacred Poems,** published by subscription in 1749 to demonstrate to the anxious parents of his young bride, Sarah Gwynne, that in his poetry he had financial resources with which to support her. Many of them had been transformed from courtship poems into hymns of Christian fellowship. Volume 1 contained 209 numbered items; Volume 2, 266. From these we note a few of those included in **Hymns and Psalms:** "Forth in thy name, O Lord, I go" (381), "Give me the faith which can remove" (767), "Meet and right it is to sing" (781), "My God, I am thine" (563), "See how great a flame aspires" (781), "See, Jesu, thy disciples see" (763, using "Jesus"), and "Thou God of truth and love" (394 — a former courtship poem). Two examples from Charles's **Hymns for New Year's Day, 1750,** have come into general use: "Come, let us anew/Our journey pursue" (354), and "Sing to the great Jehovah's praise" (360). To this period also belongs "Lo, he comes with clouds descending" (241) from **Hymns of Intercession for all mankind (1758).**

The big publishing event of the third decade (1759-68) was the appearance of the two volumes of **Short Hymns on Select Passages of the Holy Scriptures.** Because they were indeed "short", sometimes a group of single-verse hymns on contiguous scriptural texts, these volumes between them contained 1,478 numbered hymns on the Old Testament, followed by 870 on the New Testament, a total of 2,348. The period opened, however, in 1759, with a second volume of **Funeral Hymns,** of which the opening hymn was one of Wesley's personal favourites still remaining in **Hymns and Psalms:** "Come, let us join our friends above" (812); gone, however, in a new age, are the lilting anapæstic favourites

from the volume of **Funeral Hymns** published during the first decade (1742) to celebrate those old Methodists whose reputation was to "die well" — "Rejoice for a brother deceased", which had been present in 1933, but joined the outdated "Ah! lovely appearance of death", which had disappeared even in 1876. Several **Short Hymns** survive from 1762: "A charge to keep I have" (785), "Be it my only wisdom here" (786), "Captain of Israel's host, and Guide" (62), "Lord, in the strength of grace" (800), "O Thou who camest from above", "Thou Shepherd of Israel, and mine" (750), and "Thy ceaseless, unexhausted love" (62 - changed from the original "causeless" by John, in the second edition of the 1780 **Collection**). "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild", which had been published as early as 1742, was revised in 1763 for **Hymns for Children,** and in 1983 appears with five out of the original fourteen verses, opening with verse 13, "Loving Jesu, gentle Lamb" (738 — with "Jesus" for "Jesu"). The flood-tide of the middle sixties, as we have seen, was responsible for more than half of Wesley's lifetime production, from whose manuscript riches one out of a handful which was included in 1983 may be noted: "Stupendous height of heavenly love" (462) was inserted from Charles Wesley's manuscript hymns on Luke, written in 1766; this was first introduced to Methodism in the 1831 Supplement to the 1780 **Collection.** From **Hymns for the use of Families and on various occasions** (1767) comes "With glorious clouds encompassed round" (184).

None of the **Hymns and Psalms** of 1983 come from works printed by the Wesleys later than this of 1767. During Wesley's fourth writing decade, 1769-78, there was a temporary slackening of his pace, a total of under two hundred poems — his least productive decade. Noteworthy was **An Elegy on the late Reverend George Whitefield, M.A.** (1771), **Preparation for death, in several hymns** (1772), and several miscellaneous manuscript collections of "Funeral Hymns", "Preparation for Death", "Hymns for Love", "Hymns of Intercession", and a number of satirical poems on political themes.

Strangely enough, Charles Wesley's closing decade, 1779-88, was far more productive than that preceding, in political satire as well as in religious verse. He published several small works: **Hymns written in the time of the tumults** [the Gordon riots] (1780), **The Protestant Association. Written in the time of the tumults** (1781), **Hymns for the National Fast, Feb 2, 1782, Hymns for the Nation in 1782,** and **Prayers for Condemned Malefactors** (1785). He also prepared and revised masses of manuscripts, on the American War, on his son Samuel when for a time he became a Roman Catholic, on his brother John's ordinations of preachers for America, and hymns for the Methodist preachers, as well as more scriptural hymns and miscellaneous hymns, with over five hundred new and original items.

Henry Moore, who was a preacher in his middle thirties, recollects vividly the eccentric poet during the period 1784-6, when he himself was stationed in London:

> When he was nearly fourscore . . . he rode every day (clothed for winter even in summer) a little horse, grey with age. When he mounted, if a subject struck him, he proceeded to expand, and put it in order. He would write a hymn thus given him on a card (kept for the purpose) with his pencil, in shorthand. Not infrequently he has come to our house in the City Road, and having left the pony in the garden in front, he would enter, crying out, "Pen and ink! Pen and ink!" These being supplied, he wrote the hymn he had been composing. When this was done, he would look round on those present, and salute them with much kindness, ask after their health, give out a short hymn, and thus put all in mind of eternity.[1]

Three or four years later he dictated his last poem to his wife "when he came in faint and drooping from taking an airing in a coach", a few days before his death:

> In age and feebleness extreme,
> Who shall a helpless worm redeem?
> Jesus, my only hope thou art,
> Strength of my failing flesh and heart,
> O could I catch a smile from thee,
> And drop into eternity![2]

John Wesley salvaged none of the hymns from these last two decades for his 1780 **Collection,** nor even for the two **Pocket Hymn Books** of 1785 and 1787 — and probably did not even attempt it. Eight months after the death of Charles on 29th March, 1788, however, his eighty-five year old brother John spent the better part of two weeks working through — and editing — his brother's manuscripts, especially those on the Psalms, and on the Gospels and Acts, the latter comprising "five volumes in quarto, containing eighteen or nineteen hundred pages." He reported the results of his exploratory survey on 10th December, 1788:

> Many of these are little, if any, inferior to his former poems, having the same justness and strength of thought, with the same beauty of expression; yea, the same keenness of wit on proper occasions, as bright and piercing as ever.

After completing the exercise he was a little more critical:

> Some are bad, some mean [i.e. average], some most excellently good. They give the true sense of Scripture, always in good English, generally in good verse; many of them are equal to most, if not to any, he ever

[1] Henry Moore: **Life of the Rev. John Wesley** (London, for Kershaw, 2 vols.), ii, p. 369.

[2] Frank Baker (ed.): **Representative Verse of Charles Wesley** (London: Epworth Press, 1962), pp. 375-6.

wrote; but some still savour of that poisonous mysticism with which we were both not a little tainted before we went to America. This gave a gloomy case, first to his mind, and then to many of his verses: this made him frequently describe religion as a melancholy thing . . . and [he was] strongly persuaded in favour of solitude.[3]

In spite of his theological criticism, John realized that here was a new task for his closing years. In the monthly issues of his **Arminian Magazine** from March 1779 to March 1783 he had reprinted eighty-six items from his brother's insufficiently-known **Short Hymns on Select Passages of the Holy Scriptures** of 1762. He decided that he must follow a similar course in drawing attention to the treasure buried in his brother's manuscripts. In posthumous tribute he launched a new monthly feature in the **Magazine,** a numbered section of "Short Hymns" from his brother's Scripture manuscripts. These began in the issue of May 1789, preceded by a similar tribute to their high quality: "Many of these are in no way inferior to those that have been already published." It seems clear that he made sufficient preparations in advance of his death so that they continued to appear (with a gap during the years 1793 to 1796) until July 1802. These comprised selections from Matthew 1 to 8, and Psalms 6, 16, 19-23, 25-28, 30, 37, 40, 43, 48, 60-63, 68, 70, 84, 91, 98, 117, 119, 129, 138, 146, and 149 — including in Psalm 119 poems on each of the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet.[4]

This was a mere drop in a bucket, however, and did not affect the basic content of the hymn-books. For forty years after Charles Wesley's death the reprinting of the 1780 **Collection** and the 1787 **Pocket Hymn Book** based on Robert Spence's pirated edition became more and more chaotic, with a rash of uncoordinated and often unsupervised editions of very varied merit. The death of John Wesley in 1791 had removed his still firm editing hand from the control. By that time Charles had almost been forgotten by the Methodist majority.

Charles Wesley's manuscripts might so easily have been lost — journals, letters, hymns and sacred poems. He had voluntarily though reluctantly slipped into the background of Methodist administration, complaining (for the most part privately) about his brother John's experimental formation of a society which was rapidly bursting the bonds of the national Church, no matter how revered: the preachers, he felt, were proving too powerful not only for him but for John. His widow survived long after his death, until 1822, financially supported in large measure by a Methodist

[3] **Journal,** 10th-23rd December 1788, with diary.

[4] See Baker, op. cit. pp. 383-4; for manuscript poems first printed in the **Magazine,** see pp. 244-5, 252-3, 295-6, 296-7, 376.

Conference loyal to brother John's promises of sustenance from their published works, though aided also by altruistic friends such as William Wilberforce. Their two surviving sons had both been musical prodigies: Charles (1757-1834), magical at the organ keyboard, unfortunately had no firm grasp of worldly matters; Samuel (1766-1837) had in effect given up Methodism for music, surrounded by a large brood of children, some by his wife, more by his mistress. Sarah Wesley (1759-1828), was a woman of creative intelligence and literary gifts, who had broken off an early romance, and remained in charge of the household which eventually comprised her aged mother and unmarried brother. By her naive will in 1827 she appointed her older brother Charles her sole executor and residuary legatee — no mention was made of her father's manuscripts.

Fortunately for Methodism their Connexional Editor from 1824 to 1842 was Thomas Jackson (1783-1873), a voracious reader with a sense of history and an enormous capacity for hard work. He had become a close friend of the Wesley household in their "genteel poverty" — his words — and speedily overcame Sarah Wesley's initial reticence as she displayed some of the father's literary treasures. Sarah died in 1828, but Jackson comforted and guided her brother Charles in such a kindly and responsible way that he was able to negotiate the sale of the Charles Wesley manuscripts to the 1829 Conference — of which some members did not seem sure that they really wanted them, for immediate funds to purchase them were refused by the Book Steward, so that Jackson assumed personal responsibility for borrowing the money, and thus preserved the possibilty of their purchase for Methodism.[5]

At least a few Methodist leaders saw in this acquisition an opportunity to put Methodist worship on a sounder footing by means of an officially sponsored Supplement to the 1780 volume utilizing some of the new Wesley material. The Conference agreed, reimbursed Jackson, and appointed him to prepare the Supplement in conjunction with Jabez Bunting, his predecessor, and Richard Watson. In their deliberations, Jackson noted that both Bunting and Watson favoured more hymns by Isaac Watts, though he personally preferred more by Charles Wesley:

> I thought that . . . the space occupied by some of [Watts's] compositions would have been better occupied by terse and spirited productions of Charles Wesley's genius. My associates judged otherwise; and two to one were formidable odds.[6]

[5] Thomas Jackson: **Recollections of my own life and times** (London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1873), pp. 227-30.

[6] ibid., p. 231.

Eventually the Advertisement to the Supplement (dated 9th November, 1830) announced that they had included "several . . . hymns . . . selected from the papers of Mr Charles Wesley", and warned potential pirates that these hymns had been copyrighted at Stationers' Hall. Altogether the 208 hymns in the Supplement inserted nineteen from Wesley's manuscripts. Of these three survived into the 1983 volume: "Great is our redeeming Lord" (No. 438 in **Hymns and Psalms**)[7] "Jesus, the word bestow" (768),[8] and "Stupendous height of heavenly love" (462)[9] the first of these, it will be noted, may well have taken its cue from John Wesley's tribute to his brother in the **Arminian Magazine** rather than from the manuscripts themselves.

The greatest hymnological adventure in utilizing Charles Wesley's manuscripts, however, came as a direct result of George Osborn's collected edition of the Wesleys' **Poetical Works** (1868-73), almost half of which (volumes 8-13) was given over to the **Short Hymns** of 1762, interspersed with manuscript scriptural hymns. The Conference of 1874 appointed a Committee to prepare a new hymn-book. Although this was in part to supply the varying needs of changing times, the Preface to the 1876 **Collection** reveals a major aspect of its preparation:

> Many poems of Charles Wesley . . . which up to a late period only existed in manuscript, are now presented for congregational use; and by the force and sublimity of thought, the depth and tenderness of feeling, and the spirit of fervent piety displayed in them, will fully vindicate the judgement of John Wesley respecting his brother's poetical remains.

This 1876 volume, like that of 1831, did some revising of the 1780 contents, but is chiefly remarkable for its huge Supplement, Hymns 540-1026. No fewer than 58 were incorporated from Charles Wesley's manuscripts, in addition to No. 153, which replaced one moved from the main hymn-book. In addition to the three already noted as having first been printed in 1831, the following four appeared in 1983 after their first printing in 1876: "Jesus the good shepherd is" (263)[10], "Omnipotent Redeemer" (440), [11] , "Thee will I praise with all my heart" (14) [12], and "What shall I render to my God." (703)[13].

[7] Psalm xlviii, **Arminian magazine,** 1797, p. 614; **Poetical Works,** viii, pp. 111-14.

[8] MS., Acts xix. 20, p. 389; **Poetical Works,** xiv, p. 22. This was dropped in 1933, restored in 1983.

[9] MS., Luke i. 78, pp. 20-1; **Poetical Works,** xi, pp. 114-15.

[10] Psalm xxiii, **Arminian Magazine,** 1800, p. 242; **Poetical Works,** viii, p. 46.

[11] MS., Acts xxi. 20, pp. 431-2; **Poetical Works,** xii, p. 387.

[12] Psalm ix, **Poetical Works,** viii, p. 17 (first).

[13] Psalm cxvi, Part 2, **Poetical Works,** viii, p. 202.

The manuscript sources used in 1876 were quite varied, but mainly the New Testament volumes, fifteen items from Matthew, two from Mark, five from Luke, two from John, and sixteen from Acts. There were seven from the "Scriptural Hymns" of 1783 (four from the Old Testament, three from the New). There were two from "Miscellaneous Hymns", two from "Preparation for Death", four from manuscripts of the Psalms, two from the Richmond manuscript, and two others from other sources. It is important to note, however, that none of these hymns appear to have been drawn from the original manuscripts themselves, but all from Osborn's collected edition of the **Poetical Works.**

Yet a further century of attrition has reduced these 59 hymns from Charles Wesley's thousands of manuscripts in 1876 to 27 in 1904, and then to eleven in 1933 and seven in 1983! Surely a pathetic posthumous tribute! Does this imply an adverse comment on the spiritual and poetical value of those manuscripts? Had Charles Wesley slipped through over-production? We do not think so. Nor can we blame the loss wholly on an impoverished taste in Methodist congregations. The strange and somewhat saddening phenomenon is, we believe, chiefly the almost inevitable result of the lowering saturation-point even of Methodist congregations.

This can be stated in another way. Only great hymns survive beyond their own generation. And a great hymn demands three elements: a clear spiritual message, craftsmanship of the highest order, and an indefinable something which we may term familiarity, or even luck. Charles's message was the many-faceted offers of God in the Bible, constantly renewed through all generations and cultures; probably 80 per cent of his poems are firmly grounded in the Scriptures, as direct exposition or clear application, many of them versified outlines of Matthew Henry's famous **Commentary.** Of Charles's craftsmanship there can be no question, even though he occasionally nodded. The more we study him, the more we marvel at his blend of stolid Anglo-Saxon and imaginative multi-syllabic Latin, of figures of speech, of repetitive and interwoven patterns of thought, of rhyme and onomatopœia, of rhythm and modulation. Throughout half a century he continued to write many thousands of potentially great hymns and sacred poems, liberally sprinkled with memorable phrases and choice verses. But he wrote too many for a large proportion to become truly great by frequent congregational use. To be published and popular, however, was in one sense irrelevant. The primary need was that he must write. It was his major God-given talent, and when inspiration struck, he must develop in verse God's word to him, and leave the eventual results of that writing to God.

One of John Wesley's original intentions for his 1780 **Collection** (noted in his Preface, section 8) was that it should not only be used in public worship but in private devotion, and this has been widely fulfilled by the Methodist people:

> I would recommend it to every truly pious reader: as a means of raising or quickening the spirit of devotion, of confirming his faith, of enlivening his hope, and of kindling or increasing his love to God and man. When poetry thus keeps its place, as the handmaid of piety, it shall attain, not a poor perishable wreath, but a crown that fadeth not away.

Similarly the penultimate paragraph of its continuation in the 1876 **Collection,** with its garnered grains from the rich harvest of Wesley's manuscripts, was even more specific:

> The people called Methodists were supposed by their Founder to have many uses for good hymns besides singing them in public assemblies . . .
>
> Here also will be found some adapted to personal and private, rather than to collective worship.

Even while the number of Charles Wesley's hymns appearing in hymn-books is being reduced, the number of devotional anthologies featuring his hymns increases: as I write there are on my desk three valuable ones for 1987.[14]

Doubtless the speedy appearance of three more large volumes containing the hitherto unpublished manuscript poems of Charles Wesley will be speedily followed by the addition therefrom of items in further anthologies, thus adding them to the common currency of the spiritual life. There is at least some consolation for those who lament the neglect of many hundreds of Charles Wesley's best hymns, first printed in his own day or in ours. Lovers of his verse continue and will continue to "discover" in their private reading gems of inspiration, and occasionally share them in greeting cards, in hymns printed for local worship, in anthologies. Thus Charles Wesley still proclaims his searching spiritual message in memorable words, if not to the congregation at worship, at least in the sacred silence of the study.

FRANK BAKER

[14] John Lawson: **A Thousand Tongues: The Wesley hymns as a guide to scriptural teaching** (Exeter: Paternoster Press); S. T. Kimbrough: **Lost in wonder: Charles Wesley, the meaning of his hymns today** (Nashville, Tennessee: The Upper Room); Timothy Dudley-Smith: **A Flame of Love: A personal choice of Charles Wesley's verse** (London: SPCK) (cf. **Bulletin** 173 (The Hymn Society of Great Britain and Ireland, October 1987, pp. 258-9, "Adventures in anthologizing Charles Wesley").