

## Chapter 4

### CHARLES WESLEY'S LETTERS

Frank Baker

The letters of John Wesley have remained treasured personal relics and prized historical documents for two centuries. As precious symbols of the founder of Methodism they have been eagerly sought throughout the world, and cherished for their literary content as well as their increasing commercial value: their direct simplicity, their forthright challenge, their homely wit, their concern for human sin and sorrow. No such fame has come to the letters of Charles Wesley. Just as the hymns of brother Charles undoubtedly overshadowed those of John, so the journals and letters of John overshadowed those of Charles. Yet if we are to understand John Wesley fully, let alone understand early Methodism, we must not neglect the prose writings of Charles. True, for over a hundred and forty years the bulk of Charles's journals have been known—but not well known—along with a hundred of his letters. The latter have been tantalizing and little used by scholars, however, because most of them are incompletely dated. Few people know these few Charles Wesley letters well. Fewer still realize the literary and historical treasure lying hidden in the other six hundred extant. On countless occasions, these may add a new dimension to the familiar words of John, or offer a revealing glance at both the cooperation and the rivalry between the two brothers.

Too seldom do people think about Charles Wesley as his own person, though many surmise that he was by no means a pale imitation or echo of his older brother. Too many think that Charles was relatively content to retire into his hymnwriting hermitage a few years after Methodism had reached its full stride, was mildly annoyed at the innovations of his iconoclastic brother, but preferred to remain safely ensconced within the fold of upper class religiosity. Only a minority of scholars have realized the deep divisions of character between the two brothers, divisions which split at least one solid English Methodist family into two rival groups, the

Johnites and the Charlesites. Such was the family of Dr. John S. Simon (1843–1933), major authority on British Methodist law and discipline, and author in his later years of an innovative five-volume biography of John Wesley. One of his Johnite children was Elsie S. Harrison (née 'Grace Elizabeth') best known for *Son to Susanna: The private life of John Wesley* (1937). Describing a literary contretemps in which I was embroiled with her over forty years ago can harm no one now, and may dramatically reveal the contrasts perceived between the two brothers even then.

In the June 1945 issue of the *Proceedings* of the Wesley Historical Society appeared a letter written (apparently) by John Wesley which was clearly of major importance. It was written as he approached the coast of Georgia on his missionary venture, "On board the *Sim[m]onds* off the Island of Tibey in Georgia, February 5, 1736." It began: "God has brought an unhappy unthankful wretch hither, thro' a thousand dangers, to renew his complaints, and loath[e] the life which has been preserved by a series of miracles. . . . In vain have I fled from myself to America; I still groan under the intolerable weight of inherent misery! . . . Go where I will, I carry my Hell about me. . . ." This was no forgery. But was it really penned by John? To Mrs. Elsie Harrison was assigned the task of interpreting this letter, at the cost of some psychological somersaults: "The John Wesley we know," she wrote, "is as steady as a rock, and takes an even pace with God for more than fifty years of life. The nervous turmoil and introspection of this letter seem to belong to a different man altogether from the Wesley of Aldersgate Street."<sup>1</sup>

As soon as possible I visited the Methodist Mission House, to which the letter had been donated—those were not the days when you might hope for a photocopy by return of post! Immediately I saw that the letter's handwriting was not in fact that of John Wesley, but of Charles. In an article for the *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* I explained the major differences in calligraphy and in substance from what I had expected to find in a letter from John.<sup>2</sup> With some timidity I informed Mrs. Harrison of her error. She was delighted, and wrote: "What good news about that letter! It was very puzzling coming from John, and it took a real effort of the mind to make it fit him, but to think that it was my old enemy Charles all the time is in one way a great relief and in another makes me feel that I owe John an apology. . . ."<sup>3</sup>

The two brothers were indeed different people, yet very close. Just over two hundred letters remain of the huge correspondence passing between John and Charles Wesley from 1724 to 1788. Clearly these letters are very important in throwing light on the changing moods of both brothers, their theological convictions, their literary labors, joint and separate, their dreams and problems, their contrasting and some-

times conflicting personalities. This interwoven correspondence is of major significance in its contribution to our understanding of the movement whose leadership they shared, especially as in 1746 John legally named Charles as his successor in charge of Methodism upon his own death, nor ever revoked that decision, in spite of their differences.<sup>4</sup>

Methodists are most fortunate in having rich primary sources to supply them with a documented framework for their early history. They have manuscript or printed records of the deliberations of their annual conferences from 1744. These records are checked and augmented by the autobiographical commentary of John Wesley's own printed *Journal*, and this again is enriched at another level by his thousands of private letters. The literary remains of Charles have been far less readily accessible. His journal was not published until long after his death, and even then it was far more uneven, and petered out in 1756—coincident with major ecclesiastical and theological problems arising between the two brothers. For the major treasure of Charles Wesley's manuscript verse and the minor treasure of his journals and letters we are indebted to the zeal and pertinacity of Thomas Jackson, Connexional Editor in 1824–1842. Jackson had become a close friend of Charles Wesley's family in the declining years of their "genteel poverty," and himself financed the purchase of Charles Wesley's manuscripts for a reluctant Conference in 1829.<sup>5</sup>

Owing mainly to Jackson's zeal there have been preserved for posterity in the Methodist Archives, Manchester, even though disordered and often fragmentary, some five hundred of Charles Wesley's letters. A further hundred holographs are scattered elsewhere in England and America, and a similar number are based on copies printed in various publications old and new. The remarkable thing is that over eighty percent may be studied in Charles Wesley's own handwriting, even if we exclude from these figures the thirty replies which he endorsed in shorthand on letters which he had just received—whose transcription is often treacherous.

It seems desirable to conduct a rapid survey of his early domestic correspondence. His first three surviving letters (1728–29) were written from Christ Church, Oxford, to his older brother John (serving as their father's curate in Epworth and Wroot), and the fourth from the home of their elder brother Samuel in Westminster. Between 1731 and 1735 most of his extant letters were to his brother Samuel, with one to their father. During his few months in Georgia again it was mainly correspondence with John in Georgia or Samuel in Westminster, those to John with passages in Latin, Greek, and Byrom's shorthand as a protection against curious eyes. After John's return to England he and Samuel

remained Charles's chief correspondents until Samuel's death in 1739. Other evangelicals had joined the list, including Samuel's former Westminster neighbor, James Hutton, and of course from 1737 onwards, George Whitefield. No letter survives to his mother, who died in 1742, but until 1744 John had taken over as almost his sole correspondent. In 1740 his preaching itinerancy had taken Charles to Wales, in 1742 to Northumberland (which he described as "the rude, populous north"), in 1743 to the Midlands, and later that year to Devon and Cornwall. In general, however, like his brother, Charles moved between the two foci of London and Bristol. As he went he gathered up correspondents, though nothing like as many as did his elder brother John.

On August 8, 1747, William Lunell welcomed John Wesley on an exploratory visit to the infant Methodist society in Dublin, but seeing the great promise—spiced with danger—John speedily sent for his brother Charles to take over. John arranged to meet Charles in Wales on his way out, at Garth, the home of Marmaduke Gwynne, a devout Welsh magistrate converted under Howell Harris. While waiting at their rendezvous Charles fell helplessly in love with the Gwynnes' third daughter, Sally: he was thirty-nine, she twenty. Before he left for Ireland they had made a prayer-pact, and from Dublin on September 17, 1747, Charles wrote the first of some hundreds of letters to Sally, assuring her, "My heart is deeply engaged for you. . . ."<sup>6</sup> He spent a fruitful six months building up the Methodist cause in Dublin, with one week's evangelistic excursion inland to Tyrrellspass and Athlone. In March 1748 John Wesley returned to assist and then take over from Charles, who had laid a firm foundation amid heroic labours and severe persecution. After six months' absence, a physical wreck, Charles Wesley struggled back to Garth on March 25, 1748, when "all ran to nurse me . . . [and] quickly put me to bed"—for a week. A year later, with some difficulty, John managed to assuage the financial fears of Mr. and Mrs. Gwynne about marrying their daughter to an impecunious preacher by standing guarantor for an annual literary income of 100 pounds for the couple. On April 8, 1749, Sally Gwynne and Charles Wesley were married by John Wesley, and set up their home in Bristol.<sup>7</sup>

The courtship letters of Charles Wesley to Sally Gwynne form a saga in themselves, running the gamut of emotions from ecstasy to despair and back again, punctuated by breathless verse, including some poems which were included in the two volumes of *Poems* by which in 1749 Charles sought to prove that his brother's literary confidence was not misplaced. Volume 2 included a poem written to her in a letter from Cork on September 17, 1748—the anniversary of his first letter to Sally from Dublin:

Breath[e]s as in us both One Soul  
 When most distinct in Place:  
 Interposing Oceans roll,  
 Nor hinder our Embrace:  
 Each as on *his* Mountain stands,  
 Reach our Hearts across the Flood,  
 Join our Hearts, if not our Hands,  
 And sing the Pard'ning God.<sup>8</sup>

My favorite in this category, however, is "Thou God of Truth and Love," a perfect wedding hymn which unfortunately is not easily available to United Methodist congregations, though British Methodists still use it in *Hymns and Psalms*. Charles originally wrote:

Didst Thou not make us One  
 That Both might One remain,  
 Together travel on,  
 And bear each others' Pain,  
 Till Both Thine utmost Goodness prove  
 And rise renew'd in perfect Love.

In John Wesley's *1780 Collection* "both" was changed to "we" and "all," but that did not destroy its matrimonial suitability. I well remember a visiting guest preacher in my English church vestry telling how he and his wife had used "Thou God of Truth and Love" as their own wedding hymn. I responded that this was most appropriate, because it was in fact a love poem written by Charles Wesley for his future bride—only to be deflated by my wife Nellie on my arrival home, "But don't you remember, we used it as *our* wedding hymn!"<sup>9</sup>

The length of time that I take to recount the beginnings of Charles Wesley's major correspondence is by no means disproportionate, for over one-third of all his extant letters were written to Sally Gwynne, fifty-three before their marriage, a hundred and ninety-three after! Indeed, if we add letters to their close relatives, almost four hundred (57%) of Charles Wesley's surviving seven hundred letters may be classified as "family letters"!

And it is, of course, a fascinating family, replete with interesting sidelights. Even more important is the fact that Charles Wesley's family letters introduce us to a largely new cast of characters, and new scenery. It is a tremendous gain to our knowledge of the second largest center of British Methodism that for twenty years Sally Wesley was domiciled in Bristol, and thus brought into daily touch with all its leading members and most of its major themes, which she faithfully relayed to her

husband. At the same time, with her own family connections, she moved in a somewhat higher echelon of society, whose members were nevertheless still evangelical in outlook, and learning to live comfortably with the Methodists, though they moved more naturally among the leisurely and well-to-do ranks of the Church of England, with a generous sprinkling of titled people among their visiting acquaintances. In the sample letter of 1760 which we quote later, for example, we meet seven names which are not found in the index to Telford's collection of John Wesley's letters. Another incidental bonus of these family letters is that they help us to extend the chronological framework, enabling us to compile a dated outline of Charles Wesley's life, even after the cessation of his journal, comparable to the invaluable daily *Itinerary* of John Wesley's life as prepared by Richard Green on the basis of John's *Journal* and letters.

As Charles helps us to meet new people on the periphery of Methodism, in a new stratum of society, so it can only make for the enriching of our knowledge of the Methodist movement that through his letters there should come out into the open the tensions between the two brothers. Perhaps it is especially important to realize that there were those who genuinely supported Charles against John in his distrust of the ambitions of the preachers, his differing views of Christian perfection, his even fiercer loyalty to the conventions of the Church of England. Many have too often been inclined almost automatically to align themselves with John, as undoubtedly the greater leader. It is salutary to see more clearly the viewpoint of Charles and his supporters, and to discover in greater detail the actual elements in and the results of the tensions between them.

It is quite impossible, of course, to characterize sufficiently the flavor of the many letters to Sally Gwynne, either during the two hectic years of courtship, or during almost forty years of married life, either during the twenty-two years spent in No. 4 Charles Street, Bristol (while Charles passed much of his time in London), or the closing years from 1771, when they shared the London house leased by friendly Mrs. Gumley, No. 1 Chesterfield Street (off Marylebone Road). They had moved to London both because of Charles's declining health and in order to give their boys the best chance of musical development.

Charles still remained an itinerant preacher of sorts, however, and rare was the year for which no letter to Sally survives—and often there are many. She never knew just how he would address her: "My ever-dearest Sally," "My dear partner," "My beloved friend," or no salutation at all—but the longing for her presence always shows through, even when the dark notes of sorrow are there, or his underlying obsession with death. They are conversational, even gossipy letters, jumping from one

point to another like a traveller bubbling over with his varied news and queries. At least one sample should be given (the text is presented with abbreviations extended and words styled in the same format as that of the Bicentennial Edition of *The Works of John Wesley*):

London, Moorfields, January 3, 1760.

My dear Sally's wish has been often mine, to have died in my infancy. I escaped many such thoughts last Saturday, by forgetting it was my birthday till night, when Mr. Fletcher's prayer put me in mind of it. Yesterday I dined alone with my faithful friend and yours, L[ady] H[untingdon], and passed the evening with her in close conference. We could not part till past eleven. I have not had such a time this many a month.

This morning I breakfasted at Lady Piers, and dined at Mrs. Lloyd's with Mrs. Gumley and Miss Derby. The length of the entertainment, and very trifling conversation, tired me to death. I am escaped hither to write to my beloved partner.

Next to feeling Christ present, the most desirable state is *to feel Christ absent*. This we often do: O that we did it always!

You are not too old to be cured of the rheumatism, if you have resolution to use the remedy of constant exercise. I threaten you hard, if we leaven[?], "leave" or "live" over the winter, and I get a sure horse to carry double or treble.

Can the boy [Charles] walk? It is a question often asked me. You will tell me when his face is well; and how Sally continues. I presume you now begin seriously to think of weaning her.

What says Mr. Hooper to my coming to pray with his wife, before she takes her flight?

How is Mrs. Arthurs?

My love to F. Vigor and all others. You *see* what haste I am in. To the Lord I commend you and yours.

Adieu.

Mr. Caslon told me he had wrote to Mr. Farley that he could not send him the Syriac types till he informed him how many of every letter he wanted.

I must desire you yourself to take 100 of the *Earthquake* hymns out of my study, and give them to Mr. Francis Gilbert to bring me when he returns.<sup>10</sup>

Unfortunately there is a serious problem in utilizing fully Wesley's letters to his wife. They were written for her alone, not for posterity. Therefore he was extremely careless about dating them. In spite of many internal clues, there is some uncertainty even in the actual *order* of a group of twelve provisionally dated forty years ago in the month between December 23, 1748, and January 21, 1749.<sup>11</sup> (During the tightly packed year of 1748 Charles wrote twenty-three courtship letters to Sally, during 1749 a further twenty-seven, with nine to her as his wife. Only in five

years do his total extant letters to all correspondents exceed thirty: 1748 (32), 1749 (51), 1750 (33), 1755 (38), and 1760 (32); in only three others do there survive more than twenty, 1756, 1759, and 1785. Even the seemingly more certain dates of some letters within such sequences may eventually turn out to be mistaken, however, as the interlacing of further clues lead to more convincing probabilities. Most dates must therefore remain provisional for as long as possible before publication, and must constantly be checked and rechecked as new evidence becomes available. Near certainty in dating is frequent, absolute certainty rare.

Nor should we downplay the value of the letters written outside the family circle. We have already shown how Charles's pioneer ministry in Ireland was of great historical importance, and more detail about this is reflected in his letters. In general, however, Ireland was left henceforth to John (and later to Thomas Coke), while Charles shuttled backwards and forwards between Bristol and London as second in command for his brother. Occasionally he undertook important expeditions for John elsewhere, both recruiting lay preachers and keeping them under firm discipline. In 1751 John assigned to Charles the specific responsibility of "purging the preachers" in the course of touring the Midlands and the North of England, and his letters reflect his prosecution of this task, with some passages to John disguised in shorthand.<sup>12</sup> He was so enthusiastic—and occasionally impetuous—in his task, that he found himself in trouble through preachers whom he had dismissed, and eventually in hot water with his brother.

Charles was afraid that the clerical ambitions of the lay preachers were edging John to the brink of a separation from the Church of England, and that the only remedy might be to send them back to their worldly trades. He confided these fears to his friend the Countess of Huntingdon, and claimed that to safeguard the Church he wanted to "break [John's] power" and frustrate his "rashness and credulity" from allowing his preachers to inveigle him into forming a separate "sect or religion" within the Church. This letter was intercepted, and a copy handed to John, who chided Charles on December 4, 1751.<sup>13</sup>

Charles continued to undermine John's apparent drift away from the Church of England by fiery letters to clergy otherwise friendly to Methodism, realizing that their advocacy would make a far greater impact upon John than his own. Three letters in rapid succession to Walter Sellon, formerly a master at Wesley's Kingswood School, now in a parish, secured a valuable advocate.<sup>14</sup> John prepared a document to discuss at the 1755 Conference, "Ought we to separate from the Church of England?"<sup>15</sup> This at least deferred the issue, but it remained a nagging problem for years. Charles also enrolled other allies, Samuel Walker of

Truro, William Grimshaw of Haworth, and Henry Venn of Huddersfield, to discuss with him and his brother the issue of separation.<sup>16</sup> In a shorthand addition to one of his journal-letters to John, Charles informed him—prophetically—“The short remains of my life are devoted to this very thing, to follow your sons . . . with buckets of water, and quench the flame of strife and division which they have or may kindle.”<sup>17</sup>

A goodly proportion of his letters continued to address this theme, especially when in 1760 the threat raised its head in a new form. Many Methodist lay preachers were securing preaching licenses under the Toleration Act, at the cost of sixpence and the legal fiction of declaring themselves to be “Protestants dissenting from the Church of England.” On that authority three of them were administering the Lord’s Supper in Norwich. Charles sent angry letters to his brother, sarcastic letters to his wife, pastoral letters to Methodist societies in major cities, pleading letters to preachers whose loyalty he doubted, and rousing challenges to leading laymen. His letter to William Grimshaw brought forth a letter threatening to “disown all connection with the Methodists,” and Charles’s public reading of that letter in the London society “put them in a flame.” All this was to such good effect that the Norwich offenders were scolded, Grimshaw remained among the Methodists, and at the ensuing Conference there was “love and unanimity.”<sup>18</sup> Undoubtedly Charles Wesley’s letters changed the course of Methodist history.

He was unable, however, to prevent John Wesley’s major defiance of Church order, no matter how much he brandished the pronouncement of the Lord Chief Justice (his old school friend, William Murray, later Lord Mansfield), “Ordination is Separation.” The spiritual needs of the American Methodists in 1784 overrode any legal niceties, and John Wesley remained unrepentant about his ordination of Thomas Coke, Anglican priest already, and his right hand man in Methodism, supplanting even brother Charles as the vicarious provider of Methodist episcopacy for America. John Wesley’s secret ordinations in Bristol split the Society there in two, and there was a rash of correspondence between Charles and the protesting “Old Planners,” especially Henry Durbin, the publication of whose eight letters to Charles, 1784–85, with Charles’s endorsed shorthand replies, will open up an important new sub-chapter in the history of Bristol Methodism, especially supported by related letters to other Bristol Methodists. All this was to little avail, however. John Wesley was unrepentant, and was eventually persuaded—perhaps over-persuaded—to add ordinations for Scotland, and even England.<sup>19</sup>

Although it is impracticable to touch on all the lesser themes which merit attention, it seems clearly desirable to glance at some of them from the years when the journal is no longer available. We will sample

different themes to different recipients in chronological order, with the assurance that it would have been simple to multiply these examples many times.

We begin with three extracts from Charles Wesley’s thirty letters to his three surviving children, in the order of their seniority. To Charles, aged twenty-four, July 23, 1781:

I only wish to leave you in the narrow way to life. But what has a man of fashion to do with that? After all, then, you must be content to be a gentleman only. . . . Aspiring, living above themselves, in one word, ambition, is the ruin of the nation. It is natural to us, especially to youth. But what is religion for, if not to conquer our passion? If you and your brother and sister would enter the kingdom of heaven, you must leave ambition, vanity, pride, behind you; and be of the few, not of the many.<sup>20</sup>

To Sally, April 8, 1773, aged fourteen:

Go to bed at nine; and you may rise at six with ease. It is good for soul, body, and estate to rise early.

I allow you a month longer to get the fourth [of Edward Young’s] *Night Thoughts* by heart.

Return our love to M[rs.] Vigor, Jenkins, Farley, and all inquirers.

Can you begin the day better than with prayer and the Scripture? What benefit have you reaped from your band? The knowledge of yourself; or the desire to know Jesus Christ? . . .<sup>21</sup>

To Samuel, March 6, 1773, aged seven:

Come now, my good friend Samuel, and let us reason together. . . . You should now begin to live by reason and religion. There should be sense even in your play and diversions. Therefore I have furnished you with maps and books and harpsichord. Every day get something by heart—whatever your mother recommends. Every day read one or more chapters in the Bible. I suppose your mother will take you now, in the place of your brother, to be her chaplain, to read the psalms and lessons when your sister does not. Mr. Fry must carry you on in your writing. I don’t doubt your improvement both in that, and music. God will raise you up friends when I am in my grave, where I shall be very soon—but your heavenly Father lives for ever: and you *may* live for ever with him; and *will*, I hope, when you die. . . .<sup>22</sup>

To one of their preachers, Thomas Lee, who had labored since 1752 mainly in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire, Charles Wesley wrote on February 12, 1760:

Few preachers are strong in body. We *live* by the gospel; by waiting upon the Lord we renew our strength. Yet we should use the means of health, strict temperance, and exact regularity.

I am ready long ago to visit my oldest and dearest friends in the north. If it be a work prepared for me to walk in before I have finished my course, strength will be given, and my way pointed out. . . .<sup>23</sup>

Described by John Wesley as "one of the best preachers in England," Joseph Cownley frequently labored in Newcastle. To him Charles Wesley wrote July 1, 1764, from London:

You might have heard of another of my prophecies six years ago: "that a new sect of French Prophets or Ranters would arise, and out of the witnesses of perfection. . . ."

The flood of delusion is much subsided here: and I trust in the Lord he will not suffer the folly and credulity of any man to raise it again. . . .

When I left London last year the number of the witnesses was five hundred. Half of them have since recanted. Those who live another year may expect to see them all convinced of their own great imperfection.

You believe a man perfect because he says, "I am": that's the very reason for which I believe and am sure he is not perfect. How then are you and I exactly of one mind? . . .<sup>24</sup>

Much controversy was raised in Bristol by critics of an organ recital given by Charles Wesley, Jr., aged eleven. His father replied to Eleanor Laroche on February 8, 1769:

Madam. . . .

I always designed my son for a clergyman. Nature has marked him for a musician, which appeared from his earliest infancy. My friends advised me not to cross his inclination. Indeed, I could not, if I would. There is no way of hindering his being a musician but cutting off his fingers. As he is particularly fond of church music I suppose, if he lives, he will be an organist. In order to this he must be instructed. Instruction implies his playing and hearing the best music both in private and public.

Yet he might not have appeared so soon in the music room . . . had not a person in distress requested it. And believe me, Madam, the boy was better pleased with helping a poor man than with any applauses he might meet there. . . .<sup>25</sup>

James Hutton, a dear evangelical friend of the Wesleys' early years in London, and one of their first publishers, drifted away when he became a leading Moravian. They had come together again in close friendship when Charles Wesley came to live permanently in London. Wesley wrote to him on Christmas Day, 1773:

God will look to that matter of successors. He buries his workmen, and still carries on his work. Let him send by whom he will send. Rather than they should degenerate into a dead formal sect I pray God the very name of Moravian and Methodist may die together! But I believe with Amos Comenius that God has a special regard to the Church of England;

that, when the oak casts its leaves, the holy seed will be the substance thereof; and that our Lord will have a true church, a living people in this island, till He comes to set up his universal kingdom.<sup>26</sup>

To William Perronet, son of the Rev. Vincent Perronet of Shoreham, a close family friend, written from Bristol, January 23, 1774:

P.S. I have had with me this month or more two very extraordinary scholars and catechumens: two African Princes, carried off from Old Calabar [Nigeria] by a Bristol Captain, after they had seen him and his crew massacre their brother and three hundred of their poor countrymen. They have been six years in slavery, made their escape hither, were thrown into irons, but rescued by Lord Mansfield, and are to be sent honourably back to their brother, King of Calabar. This morning I baptized them. They received both the outward visible sign, and the inward spiritual grace, in a wonderful manner and measure.<sup>27</sup>

On November 12, 1781, John William Fletcher, aged fifty-two, married Mary Bosanquet, aged forty-two. On March 13, 1782, after they had moved from her home, Cross Hall, near Leeds, to his parish, Madeley, in Shropshire, Charles Wesley wrote a letter to them both, with a special note to her:

Yours, I believe, is one of the few marriages that are made in heaven. Better late than never. My friend had thoughts of proposing to you (I am his witness) twenty years ago: but he bare false witness against himself, that he sought not you but yours. . . . I sincerely rejoice that he has at last found out his twin-soul. . . .

My friend's longer or shorter continuance here will depend chiefly on his adviseableness. He is (I know, and he knows) a mule by nature: but is become by grace, and by the Wisdom from above, easy to be entreated. Be a little child yourself, and he will be led by you into all that is right. As to the measure of his labours, we will allow him a vote, and private judgment—but then the last resource must be with you. You have a negative. And while he hearkens to the voice of his wife, he will live, and prosper.<sup>28</sup>

To Samuel Seabury, first bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church of America, consecrated at Aberdeen 14 November 1784, Charles Wesley wrote on September 12, 1785:

Rt. Revd. Sir,

I rejoice with all the Church of God that He has blessed your going out and your coming in; has been with you in the ship, and brought you safe to the haven where you would be.

The bearer of this, Mr. [Joseph] Pilmore, thinks himself called to America. I think so too, having searched with my best diligence into his character through life. It will bear the severest scrutiny. He seems to me a man of good understanding and sincere piety; has some share of learning;

much prudence as well as zeal; and is in one word (as far as I can judge) a vessel fit for the Master's use.

I cannot help hoping great good from his ministry, if you should count him worthy of Holy Orders. Of all our Preachers in America, he was the most useful and most successful. Beloved and esteemed by the Methodists, he is the most likely man to bring back those deluded sheep into the fold.

The eye cannot say to the foot, I have no need of thee. The great Apostle asked all his flock to pray for him. Your fold and ours make but one and the same flock: therefore you are remembered in all our prayers public and private: and our Lord, we doubt not, lays our burthen upon your heart. Earnestly desiring your faithful prayers, and apostolical blessing, I humbly subscribe myself,

Rt. Revd. Sir,  
Your meanest Servant and Son,  
Charles Wesley.<sup>29</sup>

We close with an incidental tribute to the Rev. Vincent Perronet, whom Charles Wesley termed "The Archbishop of Methodism," and John Wesley "that venerable saint." He was their most intimate adviser on many problems private and public, their agreed arbitrator on points of tension between them such as the status of the preachers. After fifty-seven years as vicar of Shoreham, Kent, Perronet died May 9, 1785, aged ninety-one, after constant attendance by his granddaughter "Betsy," whose mother, Perronet's daughter Elizabeth, had in 1749 married William Briggs, a customs officer and John Wesley's London steward. Charles Wesley had buried Perronet, and he replies to Betsy's mourning letter a year later, on April 28, 1786:

"Sad anniversary of his *translation*", do you call it, and your "loss irreparable"? The day was the most joyful and happy he ever knew; and your loss is momentary, and reparable in a happy eternity. We ought only to rejoice and give thanks for his having been lent to the world near a century. Therefore from this time, observe, I can allow you to mourn no more.

I am always glad to hear of your affairs. You need take no thought for the morrow, but say, "In all my ways I acknowledge thee; and thou shalt direct my paths." My wife and daughter join in true love for you, with, my dear Betsy, your faithful friend and servant, [C.W.]<sup>30</sup>

## Chapter 5

### CHARLES WESLEY'S OTHER PROSE WRITINGS

Thomas R. Albin

Charles Wesley is best known for his prodigious poetical output—but *who knows Charles Wesley?* Elsewhere in this volume, Frank Baker has informed us that Charles's personal correspondence numbers more than 600 letters in all. In this essay, I would like to offer a brief review of four other genres of prose writings authored by this youngest son of Samuel and Susanna Wesley. The journals, sermons, tracts, and other miscellaneous writings of Charles Wesley each reveal an important aspect of his multifaceted character. Each distinctive genre of literature provides a unique window of insight into the nature and character of the author, as well as invaluable insights into the history, theology, and ethos of the early days of the Methodist movement.

#### *The Journal*

Charles Wesley's practice of keeping a spiritual journal began at Oxford during the time his brother John was serving as their father's curate in Wroot. Charles wrote to John in 1729 requesting advice on how to

write a diary of my actions . . . . If you would direct me to the same or a like method with your own, I would gladly follow it, for I'm fully convinced of the usefulness of such an undertaking.<sup>1</sup>

Later in 1729 John was recalled to his teaching position in Oxford and together the brothers shared their method of journal keeping with other members of the University who joined the religious study and service group that came to be known as "the Methodists." When the Wesley brothers departed for their mission to the American colony of Georgia in 1735, they continued to keep journals and began to extract portions of it for their family and friends in England. The practice of