

"Collection of Receipts"

In Wesley's Day

ON August 1, 1745, John Wesley, together with his brother Charles, the Rev. John Hodges, and a number of laymen, met at the New Room in the Horsefair, Bristol. It was the beginning of the second Methodist Conference. On that same day John Wesley launched out into his career as Poor Man's Doctor. Henceforth he was to minister to bodies, as well as souls, and through the one to reach the other.

Methodist sick-visitors had for months been regularly devoting themselves to London's poor, both Methodists and non-Methodists, armed with Wesley's precept, "Be cleanly in all you do for the sick." Obviously, however, much more than this was needed, and needed desperately. Wesley set out to prescribe, and supply, medicine for the poor. Accordingly he prepared a seventeen-page pamphlet that was to sell for twopence, with the title, *A Collection of Receipts (sic) for the Use of the Poor*. Strangely enough, intended as it was for uneducated people, it bore on the title-page a Latin motto, from Terence—*Homo sum: humani nihil a me alienum puto* ("I am a man, and count nothing human out of my province"—a secular version of "The world is my parish.")

The preface ("advertisement" as it was then termed) to this anonymous pamphlet is dated August 1, 1745, and is characteristic of Wesley:—

"I suppose there are very few infallible medicines, but believe most of those which follow will fail as seldom as any, and much more seldom than the costly ones in common use. From a vast number, I have selected those, which are not only cheap, but safe—very few of them, if they do no good, being likely to do much harm. For most distempers, I have set down several. If one does not help, another may. And they may generally be tried

one (at some distance) after another, using the easiest and simplest first."

And what about the "Receipts" themselves? Well, those readers who are fortunate enough to come across a copy of this rare pamphlet, and who search therein for old-fashioned and seemingly superstitious remedies, will find them, though it is easy to exaggerate this by comparing Wesley with practitioners of our day instead of with those of his own. As a remedy for headache the sufferer is advised to "Wear Green hemlock that is tender, thickly spread on the soles of your feet. Shift it every day." For an ague one remedy is to—

"spread soft wax, about the thickness of a crown piece, large enough to cover the wrist. On this spread the leaves of the tops of Rue, not yet fully open'd. Let this plaister lie on the wrist five or six days."

The influence of Dr. Cheyne of Bath, with his belief, in the virtues of a light diet, clean habits, and plenty of exercise, is seen in Wesley's remedy for gout: "Use little fish, no strong drink, and much exercise."

While the Conference was debating the fundamentals of Methodist theology, the Bristol printer, Felix Farley, was busy setting up Wesley's first medical venture. Apparently he did it very quickly, for before the week was out the Conference decided that it would be well to "keep a little stock of medicines at London, Bristol, and Newcastle, according to the *Collection of Receipts*." The following month Wesley was at Newcastle, and entrusted John Gooding with the duty of printing a second edition of the pamphlet.

Little more appears to have happened until December 5, 1746, when the London Dispensary (probably the first of its kind in the country) was opened at the Foundery, shortly to be followed by one at Bristol. Another year passed, and the *Collection of Receipts* was amended and expanded into the famous *Primitive Physick*, which was to become the "doctor's book" of almost every poor home for a hundred years. F.B.

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