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S T Kimbrough, Jr.
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Charles Wesley, Junior Prodigal Child, Unfulfilled Adult

Gareth Lloyd

Charles Wesley junior (1757–1834) is one of the least well-known members of his family, despite the musical brilliance which was displayed at an exceptionally early age, which have provoked comparisons with his contemporary Mozart. He never subsequently lived up to this promise either as a composer or performer and it is in this aspect of his story that the interest principally lies. The fascination which is regularly aroused by unfulfilled precocious talent is increased in Charles's case by his illustrious family background and the comparisons that can be drawn with his younger brother Samuel (1766–1837) and nephew Samuel Sebastian (1810–76), noted musicians and composers in their own right. Charles's life makes for an interesting study of genius thwarted by psychological and external factors as he sought to come to terms with his peculiar gifts and the restrictions and opportunities presented by his family name.

Charles was born on December 11, 1757, in Bristol, the son of the famous Methodist evangelist and hymnwriter Charles Wesley (1707–88) and his wife Sarah (1726–1822). He was the third of eight children, and the oldest of three who survived to maturity.¹ His younger brother Samuel recalled in later years that the musical ability so marked in himself and his brother was inherited from both their parents;² their father he says “was extremely fond of music” and when young “I believe performed a little on the flute.” It would appear however to have been primarily from their mother's side of the family, the Gwynnes of Brecknockshire in Wales, that the two boys inherited their ability; Sarah was an accomplished performer on the guitar and harpsichord and also, according to Samuel, possessed considerable vocal talent with a particular gift for performing Handel's oratorios, a musical taste which she passed on to her oldest surviving son. Sarah's sister Rebecca Gwynne was also a talented musician, perhaps a reflection of the greater opportunities afforded by the wealthy Gwynne household compared with the financially straitened Wesleys.

The earliest reference to Charles is contained in a letter of January 8, 1758, to Sarah from one of her female relations, expressing the hope that she was feeling better after the birth of her son.³ The family were at this time living close to 20/21 Charles Street, Bristol, possibly number 19.⁴ They did not move to 4 Charles

¹The three children who survived to adulthood were Charles (1757), Sarah (1759) and Samuel (1766). Jacky (1752) died at the age of sixteen months; Martha Maria (1755) aged four weeks; Susanna (1761) at eleven months; Selina (1764) aged five weeks; and John James (1768), aged seven months.

²*Dictionary of National Biography* (entry for Charles (1757–1834)).

³DDWes 1/75. All abbreviations beginning with “DD” refer to the current “Finding List” of the Methodist Archives, John Rylands Library, University of Manchester, England.

⁴Robert W. Brown, *Charles Wesley: Hymn-writer* (1993).

Street, the site of the recently established Charles Wesley's House and Heritage Centre, until 1766.

Bristol at this time was one of Europe's great mercantile cities, a center of transatlantic commerce particularly the slave trade and a stronghold of Methodism since the movement's earliest days. Charles Street was in a quite fashionable district not far from the Methodist chapel at the New Room in the Horsefair where the family would have worshiped. They also attended services at their Anglican parish church of St. James where the couple's children were baptized and where those who died in infancy were interred. Charles's sister Sally was also to receive her final resting place there more than fifty years later. During Charles's pre-teenage years his father spent long periods away from home exercising oversight of the London Methodist societies and it is through his letters to his wife that we receive the greatest insight into the environment in which Charles junior and his siblings were raised.

The most detailed account of Charles's early musical experiences was written down by his father sometime during the 1770s or early 1780s⁵ and subsequently printed by Thomas Jackson.⁶ Charles senior states the following:

He was two years and three quarters old when I first observed his strong inclination to music. He then surprised me by playing a tune readily, and in just time. Soon after, he played several, whatever his mother sang, or whatever he heard in the streets.

From his birth she used to quiet and amuse him with the harpsichord; but he would never suffer her to play with one hand only, taking the other and putting it on the keys before he could speak. When he played himself, she used to tie him up by his back-string to the chair . . . Whatever tune it was, he always put a true bass to it. From the beginning he played without study or hesitation.⁷

His parents not unnaturally were taken aback by the boy's ability, and word of this phenomenon spread among their circle of friends in Bristol and Wales. Mary Baldwin, Sarah's sister, wrote on 14 July 1761 saying that Charles's "surprising performance on the spinet"⁸ remained fresh in their memory⁹ while Hugh Pine in a letter of September 1761 referred to Charles, who was still three months shy of his fourth birthday, as the "little musician."¹⁰

Interest in musical circles was also aroused. John Broderip (1710–85), the organist of Wells Cathedral, heard Charles at a very early stage and foretold that the boy would be a great musician.¹¹ Charles senior took his son to London at the age of four and Broderip's opinion was confirmed by John Beard (*ca.* 1716–91),

⁵DDCW 8/2.

⁶*The Journal of the Rev. Charles Wesley . . .* (hereafter referred to as CWJ), edited by Thomas Jackson (London), volume 2;151–152.

⁷CWJ 2;151.

⁸A spinet was a keyed musical instrument common in 18th century England. It was similar to a harpsichord but smaller.

⁹DDWes 1/72.

¹⁰DDWF 24/14.

¹¹DDCW 8/2.

the manager of Covent Garden. Beard offered to procure him a place among the choristers of the Chapel Royal, but Charles senior refused on the grounds that he had no thoughts at the time of raising his son as a musician. The boy was also introduced to the famous blind organist John Stanley (1714–86) who declared that he had never met anyone with so great a musical talent at such a young age.

After his return to Bristol, Charles was permitted in his father's words to

ramble on, till he was near six. Then we gave him Mr Rooke for a master; a man of no name, but very good natured; who let him run on ad libitum, while he sat by, more to observe than control . . . I always saw the importance (if he was to be a musician) of placing him under the best master that could be got, and also one who was an admirer of Handel, as my son preferred him to all the world. But I saw no likelihood of my ever being able to procure him the first masters, or of purchasing the most excellent music, and other necessary means of acquiring so costly an art . . . nevertheless he went on with the assistance of nature, and his two favourite authors Handel and Corelli till he was ten years old.¹²

Charles's parents have been criticized for the way that they allowed their son's ability to develop in such an untutored fashion during his most formative years. Unlike his near contemporary Mozart, he was not required to form habits of self discipline or given the theoretical instruction which would have stood him in good stead. In hindsight, the decision to reject the offer of a place at the Chapel Royal, deprived the boy of the chance of a wider musical education than was possible in Bristol.

Undoubtedly financial constraints were an issue. Charles senior had been raised in an environment where there was an ever-present threat of debtors' prison and concern over living within the family's means was a constant worry in his letters home. His wife although from a wealthy background did not bring into the marriage the money which could have given Charles the specialized education necessary. There were also other considerations; professional musicianship in the eighteenth century was not well regarded socially. Charles and Sarah numbered members of the aristocracy among their friends and Sarah herself was from a prominent gentry family, one which included Deputy Lieutenants of the county and a colonial governor. In such circles musicianship was regarded as a valuable social attribute but to make one's living from it was for lower orders of society.

A more pressing consideration was the rejection by evangelicals of many aspects of popular secular entertainment. These were regarded as distractions from more spiritual concerns that could lead to frivolous pleasure-seeking and even immorality. Many musicians found employment at theaters like London's Vauxhall Gardens or Bristol's Assembly Room, places where prostitutes were known to ply their trade. This was undoubtedly a consideration for Charles senior, who had as a young student himself been tempted by the charms of an actress.¹³

¹²CWJ 2:152.

¹³Gill, Frederick, *Charles Wesley: The First Methodist* (London 1964), 35.

Charles's early years would appear to have been happy ones. To the end of his life he retained a great affection for the city of Bristol, re-visiting his childhood haunts on many occasions. Unlike his brother Samuel, he showed no signs of adolescent rebellion and his relationship with his parents remained close until the end of their lives. His father's letters do sometimes indicate a rigid approach to his children as for example when he told Sarah that he loved their son as much as she did but whereas she "makes the most of a little love by showing it, I make the least of a great deal by hiding it."¹⁴ The effect of such statements is however moderated by his obvious deep concern for his children's welfare and the affection which he displayed on other occasions, such as when he wrote in July 1763 to beg Sarah to bring Charles and Sally to London as it was almost nine weeks since had he had had a kiss from either of them.¹⁵ He did have a tendency to preach to his children, as one might expect, particularly when they reached their adolescent years but while this was a source of deep irritation to Samuel, it appears to have had little effect on Charles or Sally.

Charles senior had very strong views on education and he decided that his sons and daughter would be taught at home in isolation from the corrupting influence of other children. We do not know in detail what form that education took, although they certainly received an excellent grounding in basic literacy skills, geography, French, and classics. During his home visits to Bristol, Charles senior instructed his children in much the same way that he would have been taught at Epworth by his parents. Their education started early in life; on May 28, 1763, when Charles was aged three and one half years, his father wrote to Sarah saying that if the boy could read well by the time that he returned from London, then he might teach him to write.¹⁶ Just over a month later he wrote again, saying that he expected Charles to be able to repeat several hymns.¹⁷ Presumably in their father's absence, Sarah took on the tutor's role.¹⁸ In the absence of other children to interact with, Charles and his sister Sally, his junior by almost two years, developed an exceptionally close relationship which was never to diminish.

The Wesley household would have been in most respects typical of the middle class home of the time. A relatively large comfortable Georgian house, one of the main features of which would have been a music room containing several instruments including an harpsichord. The family's servants are known to have included a manservant who doubled up as a coachman, a nursemaid, and at least one general maid. During the 1770s the maid was Prudence Box and the manservant was called Isaac—the family correspondence reveal that both of these were

¹⁴DDWes 4/42.

¹⁵DDWes 7/90.

¹⁶DDCW 7/106.

¹⁷DDCW 7/90.

¹⁸There is a suggestion in the family correspondence that Charles senior taught other children also at what he termed his "grammar school."

treated very much as members of the family. The children were also permitted to keep pets including rabbits and a cat.

There are interesting indications in the family papers of how Charles's personality was developing. His lack of willfulness was remarked upon by his father as early as June 1759¹⁹ and he was singularly unaffected by all the attention which his musical talent received.²⁰ At the time this was a source of pride to his parents but it perhaps indicates a certain lack of awareness on Charles's part of the enormity of the gift with which he had been blessed. It may also be the case that lack of contact with other children blunted his competitive edge to such an extent that he was never able to drive himself to progress either in life or music. Indolence and a certain emotional immaturity were to be Charles's defining adult characteristics.

At the age of ten, Charles returned to London with his father to again seek the advice of prominent musicians. The reaction once more was enthusiastic and it was suggested that the boy be sent to be trained overseas—an option which was immediately dismissed. However, an offer of tuition by the organist and master of harpsichord at the Royal court Joseph Kelway (d. 1784) was accepted and for four years, Charles spent long periods in London with his father, staying either at the Methodist headquarters at the Foundery²¹ or in private lodgings.²² A record of what would have probably been a typical day's musical instruction survives from 1774 in Charles senior's hand; it consisted of composition in the morning, harpsichord in the afternoon and organ in the evening.²³ The works played included pieces by Handel, Corelli, Purcell, Kelway, Geminiani, Scarlatti, and Boyce. In addition to lessons under Kelway and the organist John Worgan (1724–90), Charles attended performances of oratorios and gave impromptu displays of his own, often at dinner parties of his father's friends.

It was at about this time also that Charles began to perform in public, something for which his father was sharply criticized in some circles.²⁴ A Bristol Quaker wrote anonymously to Charles senior in 1769, criticizing him for allowing his son to become a "poor simple twidler to pleas a giddy unthinking multitude."²⁵ Another Bristol resident Eleanor Larouche pointed out the contradiction inherent in Charles senior attacking people for attending entertainment at Princes Street Theatre, while allowing his son to perform in public. In his rather spirited reply (the criticism had evidently struck home), Charles declared that he had wanted his son to be a clergyman but that nature obviously intended him to be a musician. Moreover, the boy's father was not against music as such but rather its

¹⁹DDCW 5/93.

²⁰DDWes 7/18.

²¹DDWes 1/63.

²²DDWes 4/41.

²³DDCW 9/8.

²⁴DDWes 4/73.

²⁵DDWes 4/72.

abuse. In any case, the concert had been at the special request of a “person in distress.”²⁶

In 1772 the Wesley family moved to Chesterfield Street in London. Six-year-old Samuel was also displaying precocious musical gifts and their parents, having learned from Charles’s experience, felt that their education would benefit from full-time residence in the capital.

The 1770s and 1780s saw the Wesley brothers consolidate their musical reputations. They performed extensively, often as a duet in select gatherings of their parents’ friends. Such a constant parading of their talent does not appear to have bothered Charles, but it caused enormous resentment in his brother who in later years made the following significant statement; “My father’s first mistake was forcing me into the company of Mr [Martin] Madan’s²⁷ friends, who carried me about as a rare show. This soured my temper towards him at an early age. I contracted a dislike of my father’s conduct, which grew with my growth and strengthened with my strength.”²⁸ It is apparent that Samuel, from an early age was sensitive, even volatile, to a degree that was entirely missing from his brother, while this may have helped his progression into a more accomplished musician and composer, it did not result in domestic happiness.

It was at this time that Charles embarked on a relationship with the British Royal family which lasted until almost the end of his life. King George III heard him play as a teenager²⁹ and was so enthusiastic that Charles was regularly summoned thereafter to perform at court. Samuel later wrote that he had heard his brother say that the King himself often turned over the pages of the score while he played.³⁰ Several manuscript accounts of these command performances survive,³¹ together with the programs, sometimes annotated by the King.³² Samuel also recalled that Charles was regarded as the Royal organist and was described as such in court circulars. In 1810 he was appointed organist to the Prince Regent and he performed for the Prince after he was crowned King George IV as late as 1829. Royal patronage did not result in financial benefit or further Charles’s career to an appreciable extent. He petitioned the court on several occasions for a pension or stipend³³ but with no result. The Royal family appears to have genuinely liked Charles, who had a very personable nature, and his association with

²⁶DDWes 4/73.

²⁷Martin Madan (1726–90); Anglican evangelical, possessed of extensive musical gifts. As chaplain to the Lock Hospital in London, he introduced an annual oratorio and published an influential collection of hymns and psalms in 1760.

²⁸DDCW 6/93Q.

²⁹DDCW 6/50.

³⁰DDWF 15/61.

³¹DDWF 21/19.

³²DDWF 20/6.

³³DDWF 20/8.

the court albeit on the periphery, lasted for fifty years, but it was never a source of great advantage, so in one sense his father's reservations were proved right.

From the mid-1770s, the brothers participated in a series of concerts, which from 1779 were held at their London home in Chesterfield Street. The subscribers consisted of members of the gentry and aristocracy and included the evangelical member of the government Lord Dartmouth, General Oglethorpe, founder of the colony of Georgia, the Duke and Duchess of Ancaster, Lord George Gordon (whose followers ironically threatened to burn the Wesleys' home several years later as part of the infamous no popery riots), the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Durham.³⁴ Concerts were advertised by means of fly-sheets,³⁵ several of which have survived, and cost three guineas for a ticket which gained admission to a series of seven. The audience was promised recitals of "ancient" music, especially compositions by Handel, Corelli, Geminiani, and Scarlatti as well as more modern works. The Wesleys also performed their own compositions particularly organ Voluntaries, extempore lessons on the harpsichord and duets for two organs. In a letter to his brother John, Charles senior, obviously feeling quite defensive about the concerts, explained that they were a valuable source of income to further the boys' musical training and also a useful platform to gain experience in public performance.

After 1786 the concert series, which appears to have been popular, was discontinued for reasons which have not survived. It is possible that Charles senior's gradual decline as he approached his eightieth year was a factor, but another reason could have been a diminishing of the popular appeal of the Wesley brothers. At the age of twenty-nine Charles junior could no longer be regarded as a young prodigy, while twenty year old Samuel was causing major domestic angst with a rebellion against his parents' values epitomized by a short-lived "conversion" to Roman Catholicism and by drunken violent rages.

In one sense the Chesterfield Street concerts represented the height of Charles's musical career. With the exception of his Royal Command performances which were irregular and did not result in material benefit, he was never again to have access to the potential patronage represented by an audience which included members of the government, high ranking church dignitaries and aristocrats. Henceforth Charles was regarded as little more than a talented organist who had failed to live up to his early potential either by his playing or his compositions.

Other aspects of Charles's personal development were also becoming apparent. In 1782 his father wrote to him complaining that thoughts of marriage had not made him more serious, but rather "more light, more unadvisable, more distracted" and this had diminished his father's wish to see him settled.³⁶ This is

³⁴DDCW 6/59.

³⁵DDWes 7/41.

³⁶DDCW 7/37.

almost certainly a reference to the episode later referred to by his sister in a letter of the 1820s³⁷ where she states that her brother had once fallen in love with an “amiable girl of low birth.” The match was strongly opposed by Sarah Wesley and the Gwynne side of the family and the relationship was ended. Charles senior’s observation concerning his son’s emotional suitability for marriage adds a different angle to what could be regarded as simple snobbery on the part of Charles’s genteel mother. Other aspects of Charles’s personality were to become apparent which would lead one to consider that his failure to marry was probably no bad thing.

Charles Wesley senior died on March 29, 1788. One of his final pieces of advice to his oldest son had been to urge him not to seek a royal appointment as organist at Windsor Chapel Royal—the old man had previously described the Hanoverian court as a “nest of hornets.”³⁸ This can also be seen as a turning point in Charles’s career for while the English court was not known as a hotbed of artistic patronage or creativity, it would have given Charles a status in the music world and a steady source of income. It is interesting that Charles himself was aware of this—on March 25, 1788, just four days before his father died, he wrote to Canon Dr. Shepherd saying that he would not seek the Windsor Chapel post out of deference to his father’s wishes, but that if it were offered to him, he would accept.³⁹ The post however went to someone else and was only one of many such disappointments.

During the decade which followed, Charles applied unsuccessfully for several other organists’ appointments.⁴⁰ Given his reputation and his undoubted talent, it is appropriate to wonder why he was so unsuccessful. There was certainly residual anti-Wesley feeling in certain circles; one is reminded of the famous story of how Charles was turned down for appointment to St. Paul’s with the words “we do not want any Wesleys here.” Charles’s lack of drive and ambition was also a factor. In 1796 a family friend approached the Duke of Norfolk and the Earl of Dartmouth to ask for assistance in getting Charles the appointment of organist at Charterhouse School—she wrote to the Wesleys afterwards to say that she knew that Charles’s retiring nature would have prevented him from making an approach on his own behalf.⁴¹

Charles’s adult living was made by giving music lessons, occasional recitals and more regular employment as the organist at several London chapels namely Surrey, South Street, Welbeck, Chelsea Hospital and finally Marylebone parish church.⁴² It added up to a reasonable income but it was not one would have expected from the young genius of thirty years before.

³⁷DDWes 1/58.

³⁸DDWes 4/23.

³⁹DDWes 6/95.

⁴⁰DDWF 21/15,17.

⁴¹DDWes 1/116.

⁴²*Dictionary of National Biography*.

Charles's output as a composer was almost negligible. His earliest published work were five string quartets which he wrote about 1778 and six keyboard concertos from the same period. Erik Routley in his book *The Musical Wesleys* describes them as juvenalia possessing little intrinsic merit. He also wrote organ voluntaries dedicated to the Prince Regent and which must therefore date from after 1811. Among his other works are a set of variations for the piano dedicated to the Princess Charlotte, music to Caractacus and a number of glees, anthems, and hymn tunes. Very little has been written about Charles as a composer, which is in itself a reflection of the quality of his work. His compositions made little impact even in their own day and they have long since been forgotten. His abiding characteristic was conservatism. A dedicated lover of Handel, he paid little attention to developments in central Europe where Mozart and Beethoven were changing the course of world music. England during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was a musical backwater. It is possible that had Charles been trained on the continent as had been suggested in his youth, he would have progressed, but the answer to that question will never be known. It is interesting that Charles's brother Samuel and nephew Samuel Sebastian both produced works of much greater value despite the fact that Charles unquestionably possessed more natural ability in his earlier years. The essential difference appears to have been the greater ambition that they both displayed.

Sarah Wesley survived her husband by thirty-four years, dying in 1822 at the age of 96. Charles and Sally lived with her in Chesterfield Street for much of that time. Their brother Samuel had married shortly after their father's death but the relationship proved very unhappy and ended in a formal separation in 1812⁴³ amidst mutual accusations of domestic violence.⁴⁴ Charles and Sally were to assist their brother a great deal in the years which followed, providing financial support and helping to raise his three children.

The picture that one gets of Charles as he approached middle age is that of an essentially good-natured gentle man, characterized by a certain immaturity and excessive emotional dependence on his sister. The family papers indicate that he did not like to be separated from her for long⁴⁵ and it is clear that Sally, who appears to have been very well-balanced in contrast to her two brothers, provided his life with a measure of stability. The two frequently traveled together to visit friends in other areas of the country, perhaps as a means of saving on cost; one such excursion was in 1799 to Hastings in Kent. Writing to her mother in London, Sally stated that Little Danvers the child of the family with whom they were staying, liked Charles a great deal referring to him as "Brother Cheesecake" and that the child would like to visit them in London.⁴⁶ It appears that in his rela-

⁴³DDCW6/88.

⁴⁴DDWes15/7.

⁴⁵DDWes6/71.

⁴⁶DDWF14/18.

tions with children, Charles, who was forty years of age at the time, was able to conquer his natural reticence, perhaps one result of his being deprived at a young age of the company of his peers. He seems to have retained a childlike quality himself. In 1803 he visited Gravesend, again with Sally and their nephew Charles. Despite the rain and the cold, he insisted on sitting at the front with the coach driver.⁴⁷ The Methodist minister and historian Thomas Jackson, who knew him well, said, "In music, he was an angel, in everything else a child."⁴⁸

He took a keen interest in the welfare of Samuel's children particularly his eldest nephew Charles junior (1793–1859) who later served as chaplain to Queen Victoria. The boy often stayed with the Wesleys during school vacations,⁴⁹ perhaps to keep him at a distance from the wreck of his parents' marriage and Charles was later to comment that Sally had virtually raised him. In their relations with their sister-in-law Charlotte, Charles and Sally genuinely tried to steer a neutral course⁵⁰ and the family papers reveal that they were only too aware of how difficult Samuel could be.⁵¹ Inevitably they were forced eventually to take sides and this resulted in a bitter exchange of correspondence⁵² with Charlotte who appears to have her own share of emotional problems. The result was an at least partial estrangement from their brother's children.⁵³ Despite these difficulties Charles to the end of his life placed himself at the disposal of his nephews in their attempts to gain employment.⁵⁴ He does not appear to have had any kind of relationship with his brother's seven illegitimate children by his former housekeeper, who of course included the famous organist and composer of church music ~~Samuel Sebastian Wesley (1810–76)~~. In the only surviving reference by Charles to Samuel's common-law wife, Sarah Suter, he referred to her as that person "with whom my brother resides."⁵⁵ This was despite the fact that by that time, Samuel and Sarah had been in a stable relationship for over twenty years.

A significant insight into Charles's personality is contained in the following description written by an anonymous acquaintance in the early nineteenth century:

Mr C Westley is as good natured a soul as ever breathed: brimful of vanity he is nevertheless three times as agreeable as any other person that had so large a share. He possesses quickness of thought and sharpness of apprehension which cultivated in his earlier periods of life would probably have settled into poignancy of wit and inexhaustible memory. Buried in music he knows no heaven beyond his harpsichord and unemployed with that, he passes his time in dress mimicking ridiculous

⁴⁷DDWF14/21.

⁴⁸*Encyclopedia of World Methodism* (1974).

⁴⁹DDWF 16/2.

⁵⁰DDWes 6/34.

⁵¹DDWF 20/5.

⁵²DDWes 6/86.

⁵³DDWF 25/7.

⁵⁴DDWF 15/43.

⁵⁵DDWF 20/37.

characters, sacrificing his spirits and voice at the altar of good humor and buffoonery, or recounts the anecdotes of people of fashion.

As he never thought deeply on any subject, the death of his mistress would cost him 45 tears, and as no domestic mischance can possibly render him unhappy above 24 hours, he passes an unthinking and consequently a happy life, making every thing of pleasure and nothing of disappointment.⁵⁶

The second half of this description is certainly exaggerated. Beneath the happy-go-lucky surface Charles had his fair share of domestic problems in the last decade of his life and he could not have been unaware that his early potential had never been realized.⁵⁷ It is nevertheless a revealing character sketch by a person who evidently knew him well.

After their mother's death, Charles and Sally shared lodgings in the center of London. In a letter of 1824 she remarked that their joint income was sufficient to board comfortably but not to maintain an establishment of their own.⁵⁸ Samuel's tangled domestic affairs continued to be the biggest single source of concern during the 1820s. Perpetually in debt and in arrears on maintenance payments to his estranged wife, he constantly begged his brother and sister for loans which were of course never repaid.⁵⁹ His excessive drinking⁶⁰ and mental instability, which sometimes bordered on insanity,⁶¹ exacerbated the already strained relations with his long-suffering brother and sister to the extent that eventually Sally refused to respond to his letters.⁶²

During a visit to Bristol, Sally Wesley died on September 19, 1828, probably of cancer of the throat. Charles who had been with her was heartbroken—she was not only his sister but his constant companion and the most stable influence in his life. Samuel was concerned over the terms of his sister's will, no doubt with his own self-interest in mind. He wrote to his lawyer in November 1828⁶³ expressing his fear that pressure would be applied to his brother by the people with whom he was staying. It is significant that Samuel was unsure of his brother's address and it appears that by this time the two communicated only through third parties. In 1829 Samuel wrote to Eliza Tooth asking her to approach Charles for a loan, as a writ had been sworn out against him and he had only just managed to escape arrest⁶⁴ by a posse of constables who had placed his house under siege. The letter was written from the house of a friend where he was in hiding. The two brothers did occasionally dine together and Charles periodically

⁵⁶DDCW 6/85a.

⁵⁷DDWes 1/61.

⁵⁸DDWes 6/16.

⁵⁹DDWF 14/33 and DDCW 6/85.

⁶⁰DDWF 20/37.

⁶¹DDWF 20/37.

⁶²DDWF 20/34.

⁶³DDWF 15/38a.

⁶⁴DDWF 15/41.

expressed concern over his brother's health⁶⁵ but any intimacy that had existed between them had long since vanished.

After Sally's death, Charles reached out into their circle of Methodist friends for comfort, in a fashion reminiscent of his one-time dependence on his sister. This is tied up with the final working out of Charles's spiritual development. As a young man, he was indifferent to religious matters. His father had often expressed concern over his children's lack of progress in what he considered the most important aspect of life—in one letter of June 1785 he had observed that only Sally had "some desire for salvation, but she seeks rather than strives."⁶⁶ As Charles grew older, he drew on religion as a source of comfort, reading from the Bible to his mother during her final years and occasionally attending Methodist worship.⁶⁷ In 1826 Sally, herself a member of a Methodist class, referred to her brother's good relations with the Methodists and to the fact that he did not like to dine with anyone else as his placid nature prevented him from reproving bad talk. Unlike his father and uncle, Charles had no very deep thoughts about theology or the Church; his views would probably have been typical of the conventional Anglican-Methodist of his day. Religion for him was a comfort rather than a burning passion.

Charles's health began to fail in the early 1830s. His eyesight which had always been weak (this appears to have been a Gwynne family trait), deteriorated still further⁶⁸ and must have had an effect on his playing powers which were probably in decline anyway. In 1832 he wrote that the Marylebone parish vestry were considering reducing his wages by half and this is the last reference in his surviving letters to musical matters. He died on May 23 1834 and was buried alongside his parents at Marylebone.⁶⁹ Samuel survived him by three years.

It could be argued without fear of contradiction that the life of Charles Wesley junior was unfulfilled. A musical prodigy, his talent was not allowed to develop, frustrated by external circumstances and his own lack of ambition. It will never be known what he could have achieved had he been raised in a more sympathetic environment and there lies the tragedy of his life. As it is, by his thirtieth birthday he had done everything musically of which he was capable. On a personal level, Charles appears to have been an attractive character; within his particular circle of friends he was well-liked for his sense of fun, amiable eccentricities, and gentle nature. Like his father and uncle before him, he possessed abundant charm but he totally lacked their drive and determination. One senses that Charles was regarded by some of his friends with the affectionate contempt due to a man who never really left his childhood behind him and of whom it was said that through-

⁶⁵DDWF 20/37.

⁶⁶DDCW 1/75.

⁶⁷DDWes 6/74.

⁶⁸DDWF 20/43c.

⁶⁹Information provided by the churchwardens of Marylebone Parish Church, London.

out his life it is doubtful whether he was able to dress himself without assistance.⁷⁰ The most naturally gifted of his remarkable family, it ultimately counted for very little and all that we are left with is a man who was decent, honorable, and God-fearing—perhaps that was all he ever really wanted.

⁷⁰Erik Routley, *The Musical Wesleys* (London 1968), 63.

