

Proceedings of The Charles Wesley Society 1997

Published in the United States by
The Charles Wesley Society, 1999

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Introduction

In the article, “Charles Wesley’s Bristol Hymns and Poems,” the author addresses Wesley’s literary productivity during the years he lived in Bristol, England, which were some of the most productive of his life. Here it was that he settled after marrying Sarah Gwynne in 1749. From that time until they moved to London in 1771, he published more than one-fourth of his total poetic output during his entire lifetime. Among Wesley’s numerous works during this period are some poetical works of considerable length: *Short Hymns on Select Passages of the Holy Scriptures* (1762), a two-volume devotional commentary on the Bible, *Hymns on the Trinity* (1767), and *Hymns for the Use of Families, and on various occasions*. One finds hymns and poems linked to the Christian year, to specific occasions, and others to natural occurrences, events (e.g., the earthquake of March 8, 1750), and persons (e.g., George Whitefield). In 1755 some of his poetry writing took on a different character. Moving beyond hymn writing, Wesley began composing lengthy poetic epistles to various friends on subjects which were of interest to him. Some of these hymns are extremely insightful as regards Charles Wesley’s theology, moral fiber, and personal relationships. This article is a careful chronological survey of Charles Wesley’s published and unpublished poetical works between the years 1749 and 1771.

Some years ago John A. Newton wrote an article, “The Ecumenical Wesley,” for the periodical *The Ecumenical Review*, which was concerned with John Wesley. In “Charles Wesley, Ecumenical Hymnographer” Newton turns to the poet-priest-brother, Charles, in whose hymns he finds the same ecumenical emphasis that characterizes John’s writings. Newton describes the political violence and religious turmoil in which Charles Wesley uttered the cry for tolerance, peace, and unity. While Charles Wesley is not viewed as a twentieth-century ecumenist, he is seen as a contributor to present-day ecumenism by creating a lyrical corpus of the central doctrines of the Christian faith, by emphasizing Christ-like love, or *agape*, as that which unifies, and by creating a lyrical theology that is sung world-wide.

Not very much has been written about Sarah Wesley (Sally, Jr.), daughter of Charles and Sarah (Gwynne) Wesley. She was one of the three children, of the eight born to the Wesleys, who survived the first year of life. Five died at birth or in the first year of infancy. We know more of her brothers, Charles, Jr., and Samuel, both musicians, than of Sally, Jr. In the article “Sarah Wesley, Woman of Her Times” Wilma J. Quantrille paints an interesting picture of this bright and talented woman, setting her in the family, literary, and intellectual contexts of her time. She was a gifted woman who circulated among some of the literary elite of her day, and who also wrote poetry. A significant debt is owed her for the care with which she preserved many of the Charles Wesley family papers.

In the article “Mon tres cher Ami” Peter Forsaith examines the letters of John Fletcher, friend and “Methodist” preacher, who was born in Switzerland. Forsaith

“Mon tres cher Ami”

Peter S. Forsaith

It is fifty years since Frank Baker produced his *Charles Wesley as Revealed by His Letters*,¹ in which John Fletcher receives but two mentions—and the correspondence between them is not even cited. Yet it is clear from the sizable archive of letters surviving that there was a constant exchange of letters between them for nearly three decades—from 1757 to Fletcher’s early death in 1785.

In this article we shall consider Fletcher’s letters to Charles Wesley between 1758 and 1765, focus on some themes from those letters, and I shall make some observations about the relationship between them and the influence Charles had on Fletcher. My prime purpose is to give a flavor of these writings, for they reveal a very different Fletcher from the austere ascetic of legend and a tender relationship between Methodism’s poet and its saint.

First, by way of introduction, some facts and figures, for the archive of Fletcher–Charles Wesley letters presents some interesting features to the researcher.

- In manuscript, 86 letters survive from Fletcher (most in Methodist Archives, Manchester): in the other direction, to my knowledge only one survives before 1776, when Fletcher’s health collapsed, and he left Madeley. Later he writes to Lady Huntingdon:

My Lady

Before I left Madeley, as I was not sure of returning there again, and was obliged to put my keys into the hands of strangers, I thought it advisable to destroy my loose papers; among them were a variety of letters from my friends, and as my

NOTE: In these references I have used Prof. Patrick Streiff’s system of abbreviation. Thus:

O—original
f—French
location:

A—copy

e—English

- 1 Cliff College
- 2 Methodist Archives, John Rylands Library, Manchester
- 3 Methodist Church (Overseas Division) [now at S.O.A.S., University of London]
- 4 John Wesley’s Chapel, the “New Room,” Bristol
- 5 Shropshire County Archives, Shrewsbury
- 6 Wesley’s Chapel, London
- 7 Westminster College (The Cheshunt Foundation), Cambridge
- 8 William Perkins Library, Duke University, Durham, N.C.
- 9 Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia

to which I add:

- 10 Wesley College, Bristol
- 11 Methodist Archives and History Center, Drew University, N.J.

¹Frank Baker, *Charles Wesley as Revealed by His Letters* Epworth 1948 (rev. ed. CWS 1995).

*weak state of health and the short time I had to prepare for my journey, did not permit me to sort them; Yours, My Lady, shared the common fate.*²

Hence the one-sided nature of the archive—we have to assume that Charles’s also “shared the common fate.”

- Charles Wesley evidently docketed his letters systematically as he received them; most are also numbered sequentially in a later hand (Sally’s?)—but this presents another difficulty. There is (with one exception) a complete gap between letters 40 (October 1765) and 41 (August 1770). The gap in the archive was probably not a gap in the correspondence, and the loss of these letters probably happened fairly early.
- Charles Wesley also occasionally annotated the letters in shorthand.
- A further feature is that, especially after about 1763, there is a marked non-correlation between published letters and those surviving in MSS. In examining the correspondence, I shall concentrate on unpublished material.
- But the real enigma is that from August 1758 until the end of 1770, the correspondence, certainly on Fletcher’s side, was in French. The letters have never been published, and rarely quoted, as they were originally written. The translations have often been poor, and excessively edited.

Why they corresponded in French is not known: the two tenable theories are (1) for reasons of secrecy, or (2) to “brush up” their French. There is little evidence for either, although in a letter of August 1761, Fletcher quotes to Charles Wesley in French from a letter John Wesley has written him (presumably in English):

Votre frere ma fait la grace de m'ecrire dernièrement l'extrait de sa lettre est: "Vous n'etes pas propre a etre seul, vous ferés et recevrez plus de bien parmi nous, venez et si vous ne voulez pas etre mon egal je serai au deffous de vous" &C³

This is somewhat sensitive material, which would support the “secrecy” theory.

My opinion is that in the late 1750s Fletcher was ministering with Charles Wesley to French-speaking congregations in London, and they decided that it would be a good practice to write regularly in French.

To complicate matters, the French is not always what one would expect from a native French speaker, given Fletcher’s Swiss origin. By the time of these letters he had become, however, a naturalized English citizen. The vagaries of spelling, punctuation, and handwriting hinder the researcher’s progress, and may well puzzle the reader of this article. Here quotations from Fletcher are reproduced as exactly as possible—even down to his apparent inability to spell “Madeley” correctly at one point. Much may be put down to the haste in which

²John Fletcher to the Countess of Huntingdon (Hereafter cited as “JF-CofH”) May 28, 1777 (Cheshunt Archives).

³John Fletcher to Charles Wesley (Hereafter cited as “JF-CW”) August 19, 1761 [Of2: Fl. vol. 14] “Your brother has done me the goodness to write to me at last, the extract from his letter is *You are not fit to be alone, you will do and receive much better among us, come and if you do not want to be my equal I will be below you.*

he appears to have written the letters, but it is difficult to account entirely for the chaotic use of language in a person clearly so well-read and articulate. A fuller discussion of this must await another opportunity.

Although the correspondence starts in 1757, with a letter which Frank Baker has addressed,⁴ we start in August 1758, when Fletcher wrote his first known letter in French to Charles:

Mon cher Monsieur

Already they are corresponding in French; already Fletcher is conscious of his perceived spiritual shortcomings (. . . *j'emploie avec Marthe presque tous les moments que je devois passer avec Marie . . .*). He “signs off” *Puisse l'amour de Jesus remplir toute la capacité de votre âme*⁵

But four months later, Boxing Day, it is in English again, as Fletcher asks Charles Wesley's advice about an offer of a parish. Already his heart is set on Madeley.

The following June, it is to *Mon cher Frere, ou plutôt Mon cher Pere*;⁶ then the correspondence starts in earnest. In the next six and a half years (March 22, 1759–October 8, 1765) there are forty-seven letters—at least one every two months on average. This period covers

- Fletcher's agonizing over his vocation and employment
- Early years in Madeley
 - settling into a parish ministry
 - encountering opposition
 - experiencing some success
 - ministry further afield
- the Maxfield–Bell episode.

Fletcher in 1759 was considering his future very seriously. His time as tutor to the Hills was at an end, but his next step was unclear. Charles Wesley made a proposition for him to occupy himself over the winter of 1759–60, possibly spiritual exercises or perhaps ministry in London, even suggesting *un salaire—Quelle idée monstrueux!* His parents wrote asking him to return to Switzerland . . . *Que Repondre? . . . ubi Christiani ibi patria . . . mais . . . une Mere est longtemps mere.* (At the close of that letter he wrote *j'attens une reponse en François.*)⁷

⁴*Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 33(1961), 25ff. (Hereafter cited as “*PWHS.*”)

⁵August 16, 1758 [Of4 New Room] “My dear Sir . . . I spend with Martha nearly all the time I should spend with Mary. . . . Let the love of Jesus completely fill all of your soul.”

⁶JF–CW June 1, 1759 [Of2: Fl. vol. 82] “My dear Brother, or rather, My dear Father.”

⁷JF–CW September 4, 1759 [Of2: Fl. vol. 4] “a salary—what a monstrous idea . . .” “How should I respond? . . . where there are Christians, there is my country . . . but . . . a Mother is mother for a long time.” “I await a reply in French.”

His next includes a hymn in French—possibly Charles Wesley had been encouraging him to try his hand at verse. After 9 verses *La Suite une autre fois*—but we know of no more.⁸

Unusually for the eighteenth century, Fletcher kept no journal and eschewed any writing which might be interpreted as personal aggrandizement; we depend on his surviving letters as the only reliable source for his life.

He considered Lady Huntingdon's offer to tutor *le Jeune Inham*, as late as mid-September 1760, but constantly in the background is the thought of Madeley—then on September 26, 1760, he transcribes to Charles Wesley part of the letter he has just written to the Countess (in English): he has been offered Madeley parish.

*Cependant je suis interieurm. en suspens, mon cœur recule a l'idée detre ici seul opposé par mes superieurs haï par mes voisins & meprisé de tout le monde: sans grace, sans talents, sans resolution pourai je resister aux attaques. . . .*⁹

Formal English translations hardly convey the vitality of the writing. What is clear is that Fletcher was already confiding to Charles some of his deepest concerns, and this continued into the years ahead.

Six months later, for instance, *Vous me demandez les particularites des epreuves dont je vous ai fait mention dans ma derniere*¹⁰ and goes on to describe in detail an intense nocturnal spiritual experience. Then he writes of *ma nouvelle converte* orders some books, and omits his normal greetings *Le mefsager mattend et le papier me manque*.

The next letter starts on more mundane matters:

Reponse à vos questions.

- 1 *Je mange de la viande 4 ou 5 fois si mes dents le permettent*
- 2 *Je mange a mon souper du pain & du beurre, ou du miel*
- 3 *Je suis toujours le meme ou plutot mieux.*
- 4 *Je bois de la biere.*
- 5 *Je paie le boucher chaque jour que j'achette de la viande*
- 6 *Je tiens mes contes afses exactement.*
- 7 *Je n'ai pas encore examine quelle sera ma depense aiant en plusieurs depenses accidentelles qui j'espere ne reviendront plus. J'ai acheté un cheval.*¹¹

⁸JF-CW October 24, 1759 [Of2: Fl. vol. 7] "The rest another time."

⁹JF-CW September 26, 1760 [Of] "Nevertheless I am inwardly in suspense, my heart recoils at the idea of being here alone, opposed by my seniors, hated by my neighbors, and mistaken by all the world: without grace, without talents, without resolve to enable me to resist attack."

¹⁰JF-CW March 10, 1761 [Of2: Fl. vol. 10] "You ask me for details of the trials of which I made mention to you in my last . . ." "my new convert . . ." "the postman is waiting and the paper is running out."

¹¹JF-CW April 27, 1761 ([Of2: Fl. vol. 13] "Reply to your questions.

- 1 I eat meat 4 or 5 times if my teeth allow it
- 2 I eat for my supper bread and butter, or honey
- 3 I am always the same or rather better.
- 4 I drink beer.
- 5 I pay the butcher each day I buy meat
- 6 I keep my accounts sufficiently precise.
- 7 I have not looked again at what my outgoings will be, having had many unforeseen expenses which I hope will not recur. I have bought a horse."

Then Fletcher relates progress in the parish; preaching on Sunday evenings, a couple of small Societies—and so it continues through those early years in Madeley as his ministry developed and he encountered both encouragement and opposition.

Occasionally it is relieved by personal news:

October 12, 1761—*Vous avez un Eleve! cela m'a surpris, mais ma surprise a cessé quand j'ai lu Son nom: & cependant je doute si Mastr L--n me pouvoit reconcilier avec l'idée que j'ai du preceptorat et des inquietudes qui l'accompagnent.*¹²

The following May:

*J'ai reçu votre lettre & la triste nouvelle de la mort de mon filleule Suky: que vous dirai-je sur le sujet? vous connoissez trop bien le monde dangereux du quel le Seigneur la rappellé, pour lui envier long tems le bonheur précoe au quel il l'a introduite: Nous sommes toujours dans la valée des larmes & des miseres, et Dieu à ésuie toutes larmes de ses yeux efsuions les notres aussi bien que nous pouvons, & hatons nous de marcher sur ses traces; J'espere que la fatigue & la douleur n'abatront pas tout à fait votre epouse, Saluez la de ma part & dites lui que je voudrois de tout mon coeur porter une partie de son fardau.*¹³

The same month he also faced prosecution for his Societies: *Nos troubles ont augmenté depuis ma dernière. The Lord of the Mannor dit toujours qu'il me fera pull my gown over my ears. Mon plus grand enemy apres lui, est un Ecclesiastique qui demeure dans Madeley Wood.*¹⁴ This is not untypical of Fletcher's occasional mixing of French and English.

One recurring feature of the letters is Charles's repeated intention to visit Madeley. In June 1762, Fletcher writes

Vous m'avez promis une visite et quand je Suis dispose à la recevoir vous la refusez; j'ai ete tenté de juger que vos offres étoient des épreuves, et que vous ne parliez de me venir voir que pour découvrir si la crainte servile dont vous m'accusates l'Été dernier domine encore dans mon cœur. Quoi qu'il en soit si vous alez à Londres avec toute votre famille vous avec une raison pour ne pas venir à Madeley immédiatement, mais souvenez vous que je ne vous degage point de votre

¹²JF-CW October 12, 1761 ([Of2: Fl. vol. 84) "You have a Pupil! That surprised me, but my surprise ceased when I read his name, and yet I doubt whether Master L--n will be able to reconcile me to the notion I have of tutoring and the misgivings which go with it."

¹³JF-CW May 16, 1762 [Of2: Fl. vol. 16) "I have received your letter and the sad news of my god-daughter's Suky's death: what can I say to you about it? you know very well the dangerous world from which the Lord has recalled her to long be jealous for her of that early joy into which he has taken her: We are always in the valley of tears and misery, and God has wiped away every tear from our eyes[:] wipe away ours as we are able and hasten to walk in his tracks. I hope that the weariness and the sadness does not altogether beat down your wife, Greet her from me and tell her that I would want with my heart to carry a part of her burden."

¹⁴*Ibid.*: "Our troubles are enlarged since my last . . . the Lord of the Manor constantly says that he will make me *pull my gown over my ears*. My greatest opponent after him is a *Clergyman* who lives in Madeley Wood."

*promesse, et que j'en attens l'accomplissement que des que la providence vous ouvrira lavoie.*¹⁵

Neither was Charles Wesley the world's best correspondent:

Mon cher Monsieur

*Il y a 2 mois que j'attens avec impatience de vos nouvelles—mais en vain. êtes vous en vie—paralitique—gouteux—parefseux—ou si occupé que vous n'avez pas de temps d'ecrire une ligne à vos amis à Madeley—? Si vous n'avez pas le tems de leur écrire une ligne, écrivez leur un mot Valeo—ou bien—Ægroto, Dieu veuille que ce soit le premier!*¹⁶

August 22, 1762: *Je vous prie de me donner un detail de l'Etat de votre Santé, & de celui de l'Eglise M--te. Que dites vous de M--d's Scheme. . . . Ne trouvez-vous pas quelques vrais temoins (en apparence) parmi la foule des 300? Que dites vous de Bell? Est-il reformé?*¹⁷ Charles Wesley had been seriously ill, and the Maxfield–Bell situation (to which we shall return later) was at crisis point. At this point Fletcher was possibly considering marriage to a widow, and the rumor has got about: he was evidently feeling out of touch with the world: *Je vous reitere ma promesse de ne me pas marier sans votre avis et de ne pas quitter Madeley sans vous consulter. Qui vous a mis dans la tete ces soupçons? Il est certain que depuis quelques mois j'ai de tems en tems des scrupules.*¹⁸

Sometimes domestic matters occupied Fletcher. His predecessor had recommended a servant, *mais elle est depensiere badine & spirituellement Morte.* So he employed Mrs. Sarah Wood whom he had known in London *qui me paroît avoit la tranquillité le Serieuse la prudence et la fidelité que je souhaiterois dans une domestique.*¹⁹ However, two years on came a crisis:

Voici l'abregé de notre conversation—Sarah Comment-vous portez vous ce matin—Reponse, I will not answer you, I wish you was never to speak to me, I wish

¹⁵JF–CW June 8, 1762 [Of2: Fl. vol. 17] “You have promised me a visit and when I am ready to receive you you turn it down; I am tempted to consider that your offers are tests, and that you only speak of coming to see me to discover whether the abject fear of which you accused me last summer still rules my heart. Be that as it may if you go to London with all your family you have a reason not to come to Madeley immediately, but remember that you can never break your promise and that I await the fulfillment of what Providence led you to vow.”

¹⁶JF–CW June 21, 1763 [Of2: Fl. vol. 28] “For 2 months I have waited impatiently for your news—but in vain. Are you alive—paralyzed—gouty—idle—or so busy that you don't have time to write a line to your friends at Madeley—? If you do not have the time to write them a line, write them one word—healthy—or else—sick. God willing it is the first!”

¹⁷JF–CW August 22, 1762 [Of2: Fl. vol. 85] “I pray you to give me a *detail of the state of your health, and of that of the M(ethodis)t Church.* What do you say of M(axfield)d's scheme Don't you find some true witnesses (in appearance) among the mass of 300. What do you say of Bell? Has he reformed?”

¹⁸*Ibid.*: “I reiterate my promise to you not to marry without your advice and not to leave Madeley without consulting you. Who has put these suspicions into your head? Certainly during several months I have from time to time had scruples.”

¹⁹JF–CW September 26, 1760 (*op. cit.* 9) “she is a slapdash housekeeper and spiritually dead”; “who seems to me to have the peace, seriousness, wisdom, and commitment I would hope for in a servant.”

I never saw you, I wish I was a hundred mile off: Question—Qu'estce qui vous rend de si mauvaise humeur You—Yourself—you do everything you can to mortify me—Tout ce que je peux! Et qu'ai-je fait? Last Sunday you asked Ketty to read a verse (the milkmaid who begins to Spell) and you ask'd me not. And yesterday when I read a chapt: you could not bear it, it was like poison to you: You interrupted me &c. Il est vrai que je vous arretai une fois pour faire une observation que je croiois edifiante pour vous & pour moi &c. mais non pour vous mortifier. Apres quelques accusations encore moins terribles plus triviales que ces deux, je lui ai dit—Si vous ne pouvez ni vivre en paix ni me laisser vivre en paix, il faut que nous nous quittions et je vous reitere l'offre que je vous fis il y a 18 mois, de payer les frais de votre retour à Londre & de vous continuer vos gages jusqua ce que vous ayez retrouvè des pratiques. . . . Je crois que je suis ne pour etre le jouet des caprices du sexe. . . .²⁰

With that letter Fletcher enclosed payment *pour trois livres d'hymnes* and ends *Saluez votre Chere Epouse & benifsez Dieu de n'être pas tombé entre les mains d'une Sarah telle que la mienne.*²¹ Fletcher rarely finishes a letter without greetings to *voire Chere Epouse* and to *la petite famille*, or in this case *J'espere que ma fileuille est de l'humeur de sa mere et que Charles vous donne du contentem.* Fletcher's relationship was with the whole family (and of course Sarah was his contemporary): he was godfather to young Sally.

The letters in the years from 1763 to 1765 (generally unpublished) are characterized by growing confidence in Fletcher's personality and ministry, and continue as a mixture of spiritual reflection, commentary on the parish, on Methodism, and the little details of life.

On November 30, 1762—*Parmi les livres qui composent ma Biblioteque les œuvres du Pere Guillore un Jesuite. Je suis ettoné d'y trouver tant de bonnes choses. . . .*²²

July 26, 1763—Trials and blessings: Sarah Wood again *who said to me to the last she had rather starve than to be beholden to me, est cependant revenue à Londre et a demandé l'argent à Mr. Buhet sur mon conte . . . Donnez nous de vos cheres nouvelles et souvenez vous de nous dans vos prieres. . . .*²³

²⁰JF-CW September 4, 1762 [Of2: Fl. vol. 18] "Here is a précis of our conversation—Sarah, how are you this morning / What has put you into such a bad temper / Everything I can! And what have I done? / It is true that I stopped you once to make an observation which I believed edifying for you and for me but not to humiliate you. After several such similarly trivial accusations I said to her—If you are not able to live in peace nor to allow me to live in peace, we need to part and I repeat the offer I made 18 months ago to pay the cost of your return to London and to continue your wages until you are able to recover your custom. . . . I think that I am unable to play the games of whims of that sex."

²¹*Ibid.*: "your three books of hymns"; "Salute your dear Wife and bless God you are not fallen into the hands of a Sarah like mine . . ." "I hope that my god-daughter has her mother's temperament and that Charles brings you contentment."

²²JF-CW November 30, 1762 [Of2: Fl. vol. 21] "Amongst the books which make up my Library [are] the works of Father Guillore a Jesuit. I am surprised to find in them so many good things."

²³JF-CW July 26, 1763 [Of2: Fl. vol. 22] ". . . is meanwhile returned to London and demanding money from Mr. Buhet on my account. . . . Give us your dear news and remember us in your prayers." (Was Mr. Buhet his banker?)

June 3, 1764—*J'ai fait visite aux ministres des Paroisses où j'ai été ~~prech~~ exhorter, Deux m'ont reçu civilemt. & le 3e n'étoit pas au Logis. . . . La Paroisse d'Wombridge où je suis le plus Souvent, est ce qu'on appelle a lawless place, indépendante de nos Eveques Anglois & sous la jurisdiction d'un Eveque Irlandois. . . .*

Que pensés vous de la Justice imputée dans le sens de Mr. Whitefield & Harvey. . . . Je voudrais embrasser l'Antinomianisme Evangelique sans nourrir l'Antinomianisme diabolique. Ouvrés moi votre cœur sur cet Article.²⁴

August 22, 1764—He is pleading that he can't respond to Charles Wesley's invitation *contenue dans votre dernière*—presumably to visit him—the pressures of ministry (*les publiques Burials, Xnings*) preclude this. However, he does report that *Tout attaché que je suis a Madeley Shropshire dimanche derniere j'en fus absent pour la premiere fois le dimanche* and preached for Mr. Stillingfleet at West Bromwich—a round trip in the day of 55 miles *et je me trouvai aussi frais que quand je partis le matin.*

Mon principal but en allant a W. Bromwich étoit d'engager Mr. Stillingfleet a entrer dans l'union dont votre frere a formé le plan. Mais, dit il, "there is nothing in it" Je le trouvai fort aigré par la demarche de votre frere qui a acheté de Wheatley le tabernacle qu'il avoit bâti y dans la Paroisse de Mr. Stillingfleet.²⁵

Criticism of "votre frere" also recurs in these letters.

Mr. Mather me dit Dimanche dernier qu'il avoit été invité d'aller to the Coal Pit Bank . . . je la refusai sous pretexte que Mr. Hatton & Moi somme plus à même prendre soin de cet endroit que lui vû qu'il est entre nos deux paroisses. . . . Votre frère ne me dit rien sur l'article d'introduire ses predicateurs dans la voisinage et je n'eus garde de remuer la cendre. On a été plus tranquille plus reconcilié sur son apparance a Madeley (John Wesley had—at last—visited the previous month) que je ne l'aurois cru. Il n'y a qu'un de nos Church-wardens qui menace beaucoup ouvertement.²⁶

²⁴JF–CW June 3, 1764 [Of2: Fl. vol. 102] "I have visited the ministers of the Parishes where I have exhorted, Two received me civilly and the 3rd was not at home. . . . The Parish of Wombridge where I am most often is what one calls a lawless place, independent of our English Bishops and under the jurisdiction of an Irish Bishop. . . .

"What do you think of *imputed righteousness* in Mr. Whitefield and Harvey's sense. . . . I would want to embrace Evangelical Antinomianism without fostering devilish Antinomianism. Open your heart to me on that Article."

²⁵JF–CW August 22, 1764 [Of2: Fl. vol 86] "As attached as I am to Madeley Shropshire last Sunday I went absent for the first time on a Sunday . . ." "and I found myself as fresh as when I left in the morning . . ." "my principal target in going to West Bromwich was to enlist Mr. Stillingfleet to join the union of which your brother has formed the plan. 'But,' said he 'there is nothing in it' I found him greatly soured by your brother's move who has bought from Wheatley the tabernacle which he built in Mr. Stillingfleet's Parish."

²⁶JF–CW August 22, 1764 [*ibid.*] "Mr. Mather told me last Sunday that he has been invited to go to the Coal Pit Bank. . . . I refused [the request] on pretext that Mr. Hatton and myself are both similarly taking care of that place which he has seen is between our two parishes. . . . Your brother said nothing about this item of introducing preachers into the neighborhood and I took good care not to stir the ash. All was peace and harmony at his appearance at Madeley which I would not have believed. Not one of our Church-wardens threatened him openly."

He reports another visitor in his next letter (January 31, 1765)—Howell Harris: *Je suppose que Son dessein etoit de m'engager à aller à Treveca pour être quelque chose, Maitre, ou Soumaitre dans le nouveau College. Je lui dis que comme j'étois sur que la providence m'avoit place ici, je n'osois pas quitter mon Porte sans un Ordre particulier et bien marqué de mon divin Maitre . . .*²⁷

That April he again has hopes of Charles visiting *depuis milieu d'Avril jusqu'au 6e. de may*. His preaching at the Coal-Pit Bank came to a climax on Easter Day:

*Le Jour de Paque apres avoir servi mon Eglise j'alla[is] to the Coal-Pit-Bank environ 5 miles mesurés de Madeley, l'Endroit ou j'ai exhorté les dimanches Soir depuis quelques mois, & la je sacrifiai le dernier lambeau de ma reputation, la maison etant plaine & le nombre des Auditeurs etant plus grand dehors que dedans je prechai sub dio, pour la premiere fois. Our timorous people think all is over now, & I shall surely be turned out of my Living: Pour ce qui me regarde je suis tranquille & j'attens l'Evenement sans inquietude.*²⁸

After a couple of other matters he closes the letter: *Apportez a Set of your hymns for Mrs. Power, not the Scriptural ones, she hath them.*²⁹

At the end of that month, he is still awaiting Charles's visit (*les chemin seront secs & passables*). He has been to Worcester for *une petite conférence*. He had gathered a small group of Evangelical clergy together from the West Midlands area, perhaps in response to John Wesley's circular letter. (I have treated this matter elsewhere.³⁰) At this first meeting *Nous passames notre temps à faire des regles*³¹—plus ça change!

A French lady (*une Dame Française*) in London knows a German Baron *qu'il a fait rimprimer une grande quantité de votre discours sur la Regeneration, & qu'il le veut faire traduire en Allemand*. . . . Fletcher wants permission to send him also *votre Sermon Reveille toi toi qui dors*.³²

He also gives Charles Wesley an account of his *demarche que j'ai faite at the Coal Pit Banck*: he and the minister of the next parish, Mr. Hatton, had built up separate groups of converts in this "no man's land" between their parishes.

²⁷JF-CW January 31, 1765 [Of2: Fl. vol. 24] "I suppose that his plan was to engage me to go to Trevecca for something, Master or Assistant master in the new College. I said to him that as I was sure that providence had placed me here, I dare not desert my post without a *specific* and *unmistakable* order from my divine Master. . . ."

²⁸JF-CW April 12, 1765 (Of2: Fl. vol. 25) "from the middle of April until 6th May. . . ." "On Easter Day after having served my Church I went to the Coal-Pit-Bank about 5 miles distance from Madeley, the place where I had exhorted on Sunday evenings over several months, & there I sacrificed the last remnant of my reputation, the house was full and the number of hearers was larger outside than in. . . . As far as I am concerned I am at peace and I await the event without anxiety."

²⁹*Ibid.*

³⁰Wesley Historical Society (West Midlands Branch) *Silver Jubilee Miscellany* 1990.

³¹JF-CW April 29, 1765 [Of2: Fl. vol. 26] "the roads are *dry and passable*. . . . We spent our time making the rules."

³²*Ibid.*: "who has reprinted a large quantity of your discourse on Regeneration, and which he wants to translate into German. . . ." "your sermon Awake Thou that Sleepest."

Quand les jours sont devenues grands—Mr. Hatton a cessé de venir sa congregation s'est donc jointe à la mienne & le jour amenant beaucoup de nouveaux auditeurs—Il étoit presque impossible de respirer dans la maison Le Jour de Paque elle étoit pleine & comme il y avoit 3 fois plus de monde au dehors que dedans, ils me prièrent d'exhorter devant la maison, ce que je fis & ce que j'ai continué de faire depuis ce jour là. Je laisse le consequences au Seigneur.³³

May 10, 1765: Still no Charles Wesley visit—*Il est heureux que j'aie appris à ne conter sur rien, autrement j'aurais fort méconté à l'Egard de la visite que j'attendois de vous.*³⁴ But Charles Wesley might see him in London first (this letter is addressed to The Foundery, but redirected to Bristol).

Il se pourra que je vous aille voir moi même à Londres car l'on parle beaucoup de m'expulser de Madeley pour ~~par~~ avoir prêché en plain air. Je suis tranquille cependant,

*Dimanche dernier Mr. Ireland fut ici & m'accompagna to my field preaching: l'expression française parmi nos freres protestants de Languedoc, est prêcher au desert.*³⁵

August 8th: *Mon cher Ami—J'attens en vain de vos nouvelles de Londres ou de Bristol, car pendant long tems je n'ai pas sur où vous étiez. On me dit que vous êtes à Londres à présent, & le vous écris pour vous rappeler votre promesse de prendre Madeley pour un de vos qêtes quand vous retournerés à Bristol. C'est le Mois d'Aoust; et c'est assez pour vous, Cependant si vous n'oubliez pas votre promesses.*³⁶

Maxfield's stay in Madeley has released Fletcher to spend four Sundays preaching around the Black Country:

Le 1r. Dans l'Eglise de Darlaston—le 2d. dans 2 Eglises de Staffordshire, ou plutôt dans le Cimetiere de la dernière: ou je me hazardai de suivre votre coutume, le Clerk nous m'ayant refusé l'entrée de l'Eglise de meme qu'à environ 16 cents auditeurs. Le 3m. Dimanche Jetois invité à prêcher à Tipton près de Wednesbury mais le Recteur envoya ordre au suffragant de ne pas m'admettre dans sa chaise.

³³*Ibid.*: "When the days became long Mr. Hatton ceased to go to his congregation, which has joined with mine and the following day had many new hearers—It was almost impossible to breathe in the house. On Easter Day it was full and as there were 3 times more outside than in, they pressed me to exhort in front of the house, which I did and which I have continued to do since then. I leave the consequences to the Lord."

³⁴JF-CW May 10, 1765 [Of2: Fl. vol. 27] "It's good I have learned not to count on anything, otherwise I would have been greatly displeas'd in respect of your visit which I await."

³⁵*Ibid.*: "It may be that you will have seen me in London because people are talking much about my being expelled from Madeley for preaching in the open air. I am however calm. . . ."

"Last Sunday Mr. Ireland came here and accompanied me to my field-preaching: the French expression among our Protestant brothers in the Languedoc, is *to preach in the wilderness.*"

³⁶JF-CW August 8, 1765 (Of2: Fl. vol. 29) "My dear Friend, I wait in vain for your news from London or Bristol, as for a long time I have not been sure where you are. I have been told that you are in London at the moment and I will write to you there to remind you of your promise to include Madeley in one of your routes when you return to Bristol. It's the month of August, and that's enough for you if you haven't forgotten your promises."

*Mr. Stillingfleet of Westbromwich m'offrit son eglise et jy prechai le matin—je devois le faire le Soir, mais je fus empeché par un des Churchwardens, qui demandoit ma license.*³⁷

23 September 1765—

Mon tres cher Ami

*M'avez vous dont oublié! Je ne peux pas me resoudre à le croire: j'aime mieux n'imaginer que mes lettres sont perdues, ou que vous etes malade, ou si plongé dans d'importantes affaires que vous n'avez pas pu me repondre encore.*³⁸

The final letter in this series is dated October 8, 1765; Fletcher has received a letter from a Mr. Osgood about a school (run by a Mr. Croft?) for young Charles. *Mais je vous conseillerois de venir vous meme sur les lieux avant que de rien déterminer, pour votre fils.*³⁹

The Minutes of 1765 record that Alexander Mather was stationed in a “Salop” circuit, which Fletcher reports to Charles:

*Mr. Mather predicateur de Chester-round vient dans peu de jours prêcher à Wellington a 2 milles de l'Endroit où je preche les dimanches.*⁴⁰

This may have been a result of John Wesley's alarm at Maxfield's presence in Madeley; and this gives us the opportunity to look at Fletcher's relationship with Maxfield. The point must be made that Fletcher felt sufficiently free to be quite open with Charles about his continuing correspondence and friendship with Maxfield, which would undoubtedly have attracted brother John's disapproval.

In August 1762 John Wesley had hurried to return to London to deal with the Maxfield/Bell crisis:⁴¹ Fletcher had expected him to call to preach at Shrewsbury, and asks Charles Wesley about the true state of affairs.⁴² Fletcher makes his position on Maxfield clear a month later:

Je ne corresponds avec personne régulièrment qu'avec vous—Votre frere & M--d, Lady H--n et ma mere ont de moi une lettre en 6 mois. Si Max-d est la personne je

³⁷*Ibid.*: “The 1st in the church at Darlaston, the 2nd in 2 churches in Staffordshire, or rather in the churchyard of the latter: where I attempted to follow your custom, the Clerk having refused me entry to the Church, likewise around 1600 hearers. The 3rd Sunday I was invited to preach at Tipton near Wednesbury but the Rector sent order to his deputy not to allow me into the chaise. Mr. Stillingfleet at West Bromwich offered me his church and I preached there in the morning—I had intended to do so in the evening, but I was prevented by one of the Churchwardens, who demanded my license.”

³⁸JF–CW September 23, 1765 [Of2: Fl. vol. 30] “My very dear Friend Have you forgotten about me! I am not able to work out what to believe: I dearly love to imagine only that my letters are lost, or that you are ill, or so plunged into important business that you have not been able to reply to me again.”

³⁹JF–CW October 8, 1765 [Of2: Fl. vol. 31] “But I would have counseled you to come yourself to the places before determining anything for your son.”

⁴⁰JF–CW October 8, 1765 [*ibid.*] “Mr. Mather Preacher of Chester-round comes in a few days to preach at Wellington 2 miles from the place where I preach on Sundays.”

⁴¹John Wesley, *Journal*, August 20–21, 1762 (ed. Curnock 4:525–6).

⁴²See JF–CW August 22, 1762 [Of2: Fl. vol. 85].

ne peux pas me reconnoître coupable sans conviction, vu que ma conscience ne me convain y pas de lui avoir revellé aucun Secret. Cependant j'aurais soin de profiter de lavis fondé ou non il est toujours de saison, je vous ai dit que je ne suis pas un homme a parti, je ne suis ni pour ni contre les Temoins sans examens. . . . J'ai reçu 2 ou 3 lettres de lui depuis que je suis ici et je vous en promets la lecture quand vous viendrés à Madeley.⁴³

A year later Maxfield (now ejected from the West Street Society)

propose de me venir voir pour quelques jours . . . & dans son court sejour il ne pourroit pas semer la division parmi mon petit troupeau, qui n'est point du tout preparé pour la perfection, & à grand besoin d'etre encouragé à croire,⁴⁴

and a year further on

Mr. Maxfield m'a fait écrire . . . et je lui ai ecri que je serai bien aise de la recevoir . . . c'est un ancien ami qui a ses bonnes qualités, et dont on peut tirer du bien quand il n'y a pas de rivalité: et ses defauts se corrigeront plus aisément par l'amité que par l'eloignement. Au reste s'il vient j'aurai soin d'etre sur mes gardes de peur detre prevenu contre votre frere où contre lui, media tutissimus ibo.⁴⁵

The next year, Maxfield did make his promised visit to Madeley, by now having Fletcher's full confidence. He was there two months, and Fletcher was happy to leave the parish in his hands:

Vous Savez que Mr. M-d est ici depuis 6 semaines mais ce que vous ne savez pas c'est que sa prédication en accompagne de la bénédiction de Dieu. Il a un grand nombre d'auditeurs; plusieurs milliers (à ce que lon dit) quand il preche parmi les mines de Charbon. Personne ne semble faire attention aux defauts de sa maniere de s'exprimer: je n'entends point de plaintes di non des baptistes: tous s'accordent a le louer comme le predicateur le plus simple le plus evangelique, et la plus consolant qu'on ait encor vu dans notre Eglise. Quand vous viendrez vous pourris mieux juger des fruits de son ministere.

Je ne sais quand Mr. M-d nous quittera; comme son ministere est bien reçu & est beni c'est mon devoir de la retinir pour l'amour des auditeurs, et pour le miens, aussi longtems qu'il voudra rester. . . .

⁴³JF-CW September 20, 1762 [Of2: Fl. vol. 1] "I correspond with no-one regularly but you—Your brother & M[axfiel]d, Lady H[untingdo]n and my mother have from me a letter in 6 months. If Max-d is the person I am unable to acknowledge him guilty without conviction, seeing that my conscience does not convince me that he has revealed any Secret. Nevertheless I take care to benefit by opinion founded or not it is always in season, I have said to you that *I am not a party man*, I am *neither for nor against* the witnesses without examination. . . . I have received 2 or 3 letters from him [Maxfield] since I have been here, and I promise that you can read them when you come to Madeley."

⁴⁴JF-CW September 16, 1763 [Of2: Fl. vol. 23] "*proposes to come* to see me for some days . . . and during his short stay he will not be able to sow division among my little flock, who are not at all prepared for perfection & have great need to be encouraged in faith."

⁴⁵JF-CW August 22, 1764 [Of2: Fl. vol. 86] "Mr. Maxfield has written to me . . . and I have written to him that I will be very glad to receive him. . . . he is an old friend who has good qualities, and from whom one is able to draw good when there is no rivalry: and his faults will correct themselves more easily through friendship than by aloofness. Besides, if he comes I will have a care to be on my guard for fear of being biased against your brother or against him *media tutissimus ibo*." [Lat. "thou wilt go safest in the middle," Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, II, 137.]

J'ai perdu l'Esperance de voir une reunion publique entre votre frere & M-d. Ils ne sont pas faits l'un pour l'autre.⁴⁶

In late September—

T. M-d m'a quitté apres une visite de deux mois, Sa predication, qui est plus douce que la mienne, a plu à beaucoup de gens, plusieurs ont été consolés et encouragés. Cependant je n'ai pas trouvé le fruit que j'esperois. J'ai escri à votre frere que je le croiois exempt d'Antinomianisme, si sa predication n'est pas detché & prise par pièces; car alors on pouroit l'accuser de faire la voie si large que les impies pau-sant y marcher [?] entrer, & les pourceaux predre les perles, mais il est clair qu'ils ne les peuvent & ne les veulent pas garder. J'ai souhaité qu'il y eut paix entre vous mais je ne sais comment elle pourra s'insinuer & remplir le grand Chasme: J'en desespérois, si je ne savois pas que tout est possible au Seigneur.⁴⁷

These excerpts speak for themselves: any suspicion Fletcher may have had of Maxfield, his doctrine and his motives are dispelled in the face of the love of God, and his hope and prayer are that the Wesley brothers will see things in the same way. The previous winter he had hoped for reconciliation—

Mr. Ley m'ecrit de Londres que T. M-d parle de reunion, il a assisté votre frere a Spittlefields, et ne plus que 50 membres dans sa societé: Qui l'auroit cru?⁴⁸

As Fletcher had made clear, *je ne suis pas un homme a parti*,⁴⁹ always he would see the love of God evident in the lives of others, and believe the best of them. John Wesley hastened to write his biography of Fletcher against the protests of Fletcher's other great friend James Ireland, who asserted “he was too

⁴⁶JF–CW August 8, 1765 [Of2: Fl. vol. 29] “You know that Mr. M[axfield] is here for 6 weeks but what you don't know is that his preaching is accompanied by God's blessing. He has a great number of hearers; many thousands (it is said) when he preached among the Coal mines. People do not seem to pay attention to the shortcomings in his manner of expression: I haven't heard any complaints, and none from the Baptists; all are agreed to hear him as a very simple very evangelical preacher, and the most comforting that has been seen moreover in our Church. When you come you will be able to judge best the fruits of his ministry. . . .

“I do not know when Mr. M[axfield] will leave us; as his ministry is well received and blessed it is my intention to keep him here for the love of his hearers, and of mine, for as long as he wants to stay. . . .

“I have lost hope of seeing a public reunion between your brother & M[axfield]. They are not made for each other.”

⁴⁷JF–CW September 23, 1765 (Of2: Fl. vol. 30) “T. M[axfield] has left me after a visit of two months. His preaching, which is more gentle than mine, has pleased many people, many are consoled and encouraged. Nevertheless I have not found the fruit I had hoped for. I have written to your brother that I believe him clear of Antinomianism, if his preaching is not removed and taken to pieces, because then one is able to accuse him of making a way so wide that the ungodly hesitate to enter it, and the pigs pick up the pearls, but it is clear that they are neither able nor willing to respect them. I had wished that there was peace between you but I do not know how it would be possible to penetrate and fill the *great Chasm*: I would despair of it, if I did not know that all things are possible to the Lord.”

⁴⁸JF–CW January 31, 1765 [Of2: Fl. vol. 24] “Mr. Ley has written me from London that T. M[axfield] speaks of reunion, *he has assisted your brother at Spitalfields, and has no more than 50 members in his society. Who would believe it?*”

⁴⁹JF–CW September 22, 1762 [43] “I am not a party man.”

great to bear the name of any sect."⁵⁰ Again, I have dealt (though briefly) with this elsewhere.⁵¹

Others got to visit Fletcher in Madeley; Charles Wesley never did make it. He had plenty to occupy him in Bristol, for apart from the oversight of the Bristol Methodists and his role in the national scene he had a young family to attend to. Moreover, as Frank Baker has pointed out, this was the very period when Charles's poetic muse was at its most prolific—"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!"⁵² It would be a bold claim to suggest that his new young protégé was an inspiration to him in his hymn-writing, but although it can hardly be substantiated it is inconceivable that there was no link between the development of this lively Christian relationship and Charles's creative life.

I hope I have presented sufficient evidence of how Charles Wesley was closely involved with Fletcher's personal and ministerial development in those initial years in Madeley which shaped the whole of that apostolic ministry in the "cradle of the Industrial Revolution" for which he is famed. Certainly the Fletcher of 1765 has now a poise and confidence altogether different from the uncertain, hesitant man who could write:

*Je sens de plus en plus que je ne demeure pas en Xt. ni Christ en moi; et cependant je ne le sens pas assez pour le chercher sans interruption, O miserable que je suis qui me délivrera de ce cœur d'incrédulité? Beni soit Dieu qui m'a promis cette délivrance par notre Seigneur. J.C.*⁵³

In 1760 he had defied John Wesley by going to Madeley (but with support from Charles and Lady Huntingdon); by 1765 he was able to challenge a major issue in Methodism by letting Maxfield loose in the parish. My perception is that when Fletcher went to Madeley he at last found himself, or rather he found the divine destiny for which *le Seigneur* had marked him out.

Our question must be: to what extent was Charles Wesley's advice and encouragement responsible for this transformation? Without knowledge of Charles Wesley's side of the correspondence, this will always be somewhat conjectural. However, I think we have enough clues to make some judgments.

The first is that Fletcher's correspondence with Charles Wesley was probably the most significant influence on him during those years: of his correspondents Charles was the only one with whom he enjoyed that level of equality and trust. Moreover, Charles was evidently concerned about the whole of Fletcher's well-

⁵⁰Quoted in Tyerman, *Wesley's Designated Successor*, 1882.

⁵¹Article P. Forsaith "Wesley's Designated Successor," *PWHS* 42(1979), 69ff.

⁵²Article F. Baker, "Charles Wesley's Productivity as a Religious Poet," *PWHS* 47(1989).

⁵³JF–CW March 10, 1761 [Of2: Fl. vol. 10] "I sense more and more that I do not dwell in Christ, nor Christ in me; and yet I do not sense this enough to search without interruption. O wretched man that I am who will deliver me from this heart of unbelief? Blessed be God who has promised this deliverance through our Lord J. C."

being—not some detached spiritual existence, but his eating and drinking, paying his bills, as well as the more significant matters—thoughts of marriage and of the whole measure of his ministry; and Fletcher received that concern very positively.

But then the question raises itself in my mind: what was Charles’s model for parish ministry, for this was not a part of his own experience? Undoubtedly he had seen many clergy in differing situations, and he had accepted Fletcher’s move to Madeley. My suggestion—and it is no more than that—is that Charles may have based his notions of ministry on the Rector of Epworth. There are indeed parallels between the two, which may deserve further exploration—the rural parish based on a market town, the use of societies and cottage meetings, effectively resisting opposition. Perhaps Charles was conscious of some of his father’s shortcomings and mistakes, and endeavored to steer Fletcher in the light of that experience.

Consideration of Charles’s influence on Fletcher leads us to look in the other direction. One specific area is the *ménage à trois* among Fletcher, John and Charles Wesley. With Charles he was familiar, with John formal. One wonders to what extent Fletcher’s assessment of John, evident in these letters—always detached, sometimes almost cynical—affected Charles and, at a time when family concerns and perhaps the “middle years” of the Revival were distancing the brothers, exacerbated the tensions between them.

These are all fields ripe for development, and as my work on Fletcher’s letters develops and broadens, I hope it will be possible to advance them further. My intention in this article has been to outline areas of significance, give something of a taste of the correspondence, and draw some tentative conclusions.

As a tailpiece, I shall quote one final letter which falls outside this series and from which I take my title. After his visit to Europe in the summer of 1770, Fletcher picked up his pen:

To
The Revd. Mr. Charles Wesley
in Charles Street
Bristol

Madeley 10th Aoust 70

Mon tres cher Ami

*Les eaux de l’Ocean et de la méditerranée n’ont pas éteint mon éteincelle d’amour fraternal pour vous, J’ai grande envie de vous voir pour mentretenir avec vous sur les mysteres du Roiaume des Cieux et apprendre de vous ce que le Seigneur fait pour vous et pour les votres.*⁵⁴

Here we have the key to it all: *mon éteincelle d’amour fraternal pour vous*—but it was more than a spark, it was a beacon that blazes across two centuries.

⁵⁴JF–CW August 10, 1770 (OF2: Fl. vol. 33) “The waters of the Ocean and the mediterranean have not extinguished my spark of brotherly love for you, I have a great longing to see you to share/converse with you on the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven and learn from you what the Lord is doing for you and yours.”

—