JOHN WESLEY AND ROMANTICISM

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INTRODUCTION

The roles of poets like James Thomson, the Wartons, Young, Gray, Collins, and MacPherson as forerunners of the Romantic Movement have been long known. The pre-Romantic importance of the Gothic novel and the sensibility novels and poetry has become generally recognized. The influence of political movements for "liberty, equality, and fraternity" in developing the interests of the great Romanticists has been adequately treated.

But thus far the full significance of the part played by the founder of the Methodist Church in the transition from the neo-classic period to the age of Romanticism has not been thoroughly studied. Most literary historians, as well as social and political historians, admit this influence but dismiss it with a few general statements. So far as I can ascertain, little or no effort has been made to select and analyze the pre-Romantic tendencies from such sources as facts about John Wesley's life and personality, the dominant elements of his theology, and his literary prejudices and practices.

To make a preliminary survey of these pre-Romantic tendencies in John Wesley is the aim of this study, to select from the biographical material concerning him, from his religious beliefs and practices, and from his writings and critical opinions, those elements which made early Methodism "one of the channels through which the Age of Reason merged

into the Age of Feeling."[1]

> There are words which connote so much, which take up into themselves so much of the human mind, that any compendious explanation of their meaning--any definition which is not, at the same time, a rather extended description--must serve little other end than to supply a convenient mark of identification.[2]

Romanticism has always been one of these difficult words. Since the beginning of the attempts a hundred years ago to classify Romantic tendencies and reduce them to a convenient formula, the resulting definitions have been varied, sometimes quite contradictory. The difficulty seems to be that the inherent qualities of Romanticism, especially subjectivity, are based upon individual interpretation and consequently liable to as many interpretations as there are commentators. For this reason we find the greatest of the Romanticists disagreeing with and often hostile toward one another. Byron ranks Coleridge and Wordsworth as third-rate poets. Shelley accuses Wordsworth of being a time-server. Wordsworth openly detests Don Juan.

Perhaps in all the Romantic poets at least one characteristic is common. This is what William Lyon Phelps has called "vague aspiration." Fairchild has expressed it this way:

> Beneath the entire movement one perceives the desire

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[1]M. Dorothy George, England in Johnson's Day (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1928), Introd., p. xiii.

[2]Henry A. Beers, A History of English Romanticism in the Eighteenth Century (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1896), p. 1.

> to bring God, man, and nature, finite and infinite, real and ideal, familiar and strange, into a thrilling unity of diverse elements through the 'shaping spirit of imagination.'[3]

This aim seems common to all the Romanticists; it is their various conceptions of just what this "thrilling unity" consists of and the methods by which it should be achieved that differentiate one from another.

It seems evident then that Romanticism can be best understood not by one exclusive definition but by the group of characteristics standing out most prominently during that "movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries which marked the reaction in literature, religion, philosophy, art, and politics from the neo-classicism and formal orthodoxy of the preceding period."[4]

The features which characterize this period in English literature and which have now become standard criteria for distinguishing Romantic literature from that of the preceding period are: exaltation of humble life, interest in external nature, return to the past, renascence of wonder, temper of reform, ~~and subjectivity~~.

A detailed discussion of these components of Romantic thought is not possible in a study of this kind. Nevertheless, a brief description showing the general manner in which these terms are applied to the literature of the Romantic

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[3]Hoxie Neale Fairchild, "The Romantic Movement in England," PMLA, LV (1940), 22.

[4]Quoted from a class lecture by Professor Matthew W. Rosa, source unknown.

Period will be necessary so that John Wesley's life and thought can be examined and tested by these standards. Such a discussion can by no means be comprehensive, nor can it always be stated dogmatically where one tendency merges with another. But at least the basic ideas themselves and the ways in which these differed from what went before them will be evident.

Exaltation of the humble man, the humble way of life, the humble animals, and the humble flowers is a typical Romantic sentiment. Generally speaking, the poetry of the neo-classic period, with its emphasis on respectability and city life, had little sympathy with the ordinary man and humble rural life and scenery. In their preoccupation with the drawing room, the theater, and the coffee-house, writers like Pope had little time or interest left for common people and common things. When satirical wit was directed at the evils of this aristocratic society, the wit was often an end in itself or was aimed at cleverness rather than at any idea of change.

At the beginning of the Romantic Movement, with the new stress on the individual and the natural, this previously disdained humble life began to be praised and often idealized. William Cowper sang of the consolations of friendship and family affections amid simple country surroundings in his poem, The Task. Sympathy for the lower animals was one of the themes of the poetry of William Collins. Robert Burns was introduced to the world as "this heaven-sent ploughman from his humble and unlettered station," and he, too, taught

his countrymen that "verse can build a princely throne on humble truth." Wordsworth was the major Romanticist in which this theme found its chief proponent. In his critical principles, he expounds the superiority of the common man and the language of the common man. He chooses for his subjects the humble leech-gatherer, the daisy, the shepherd, and the humble country-side.

There is no doubt that Wesley's religion emphasizes this humble man who became the ideal of some of the Romanticists, but in this study this emphasis will be treated primarily in its relationship to humanitarianism and subjectivity rather than as a separate Romantic feature.

In some ways related to this exaltation of humble life is that characteristic of Romantic thought commonly called a "return to nature." The term "nature" during the early eighteenth century had been used primarily as a philosophical term. To follow nature was to choose as one's guide the regular, the normal, the representative in art and morals. Gradually as the century wore on, this abstract concept of nature became fused in various ways with the external manifestations of the natural world.

In poets like Thomson, Young, Blair, and Gray, external nature was represented as having an effect, especially a solemn or melancholy effect on man's moods and feelings. Wesley's connections with this melancholy type of pre-Romantic poetry will be pointed out. Especially his liking for Young's Night Thoughts and the part that he played in popularizing that work will help to ally him with this so-called "Graveyard

School." In Wesley's own style, too, similar elements will be noticed. Here and there in the Journal will be found passages emphasizing this melancholy effect of nature on man's thoughts.

Interest in the external manifestations of nature soon became more specific, and the beauty of a particular scene, a particular mountain, or a particular flower became a theme for poetry. Still another change which is noticeable is the transition from interest in the landscaped garden, the smooth hills, and the peaceful waters to admiration for the rugged, the picturesque, and the grotesque. Scattered about through Wesley's Journal can be found expressions of this new preference for the rugged features of natural scenery.

The German critic, Heine, and several others have limited Romanticism to "the reproduction in modern art or literature of the life and thought of the Middle Ages." Although this definition is much too limited to apply to much work which cannot be referred to by any other adjective than "Romantic," it at least points out the importance of this element during the pre-Romantic and Romantic periods. The Romanticists were interested primarily not in a return to the classical past of Greek and Latin culture and literature but in a return to the Middle Ages with its emphasis on chivalry, the grotesque, the irregular, the sensational.

This gradual change of emphasis started early in the eighteenth century. Thus in 1749 appeared William Collins's poem, On the Superstitions of the Highlands, describing the

native folk-lore of Scotland. Thomas Gray in his letters extols the virtues of medieval architecture in the Gothic cathedrals, and in his later poems like The Descent of Odin showed a knowledge of, and admiration for, early Icelandic and Welsh languages and customs. Thus on through the Gothic novels like Walpole's The Castle of Otranto (1764), the publication of Bishop Percy's Reliques of English Poetry (1765), the Ossianic poems, Chatterton's forgeries, the interest increases and broadens until it later becomes a characteristic of the works of Coleridge, Scott, and Keats.

John Wesley's interest in the past is probably not a major factor in connecting him with the Romantic Movement. However, at least two phases of this interest should be examined in a study like this. The emphasis in Wesley's theological system on medieval otherworldliness and supernaturalism will be analyzed. And Wesley's ardent admiration for the Ossianic poems will help to link him definitely with the growing appreciation for literature dealing with the life of the Middle Ages. The enthusiastic reception which MacPherson's "translations" received illustrates this growing taste. Gray says in one of his letters, "I am gone mad about them." Goethe enthusiastically writes that Homer has been superseded in his heart by the "divine Ossian" and describes the world through which this "angelic bard" transports him. Scholars have been long aware of the influence of MacPherson in the works of Blake; Burns read his works early in his short poetical career; Ossianic traces can be found in some of Scott's songs; and there is a noticeable influence in some of

Byron's poems. As Cazamian concludes,

> The development of Ossianism in Europe was destined to become one of the channels through which English literature exercised a most important influence in the formation of the European Romantic Movement.[5]

Another definition of Romanticism which emphasizes an important aspect of Romantic thought is that of Watts-Dunton--"the renascence of wonder." The placing of man's individual imagination as the ultimate criterion of truth, together with the new emphasis upon common or ordinary things, causes the individual significance of a certain event or thing to take on added significance. The primrose becomes more than a primrose; the absence of the idea of death in the mind of a young child becomes an occasion for awe and wonder; and the meanest flower that blows can give thoughts that lie too deep for tears.

This sense of the sublimity of ordinary things is quite compatible with subjective religious feeling. The effect created by giving each individual a sense of the tremendous worth of his individual soul in the sight of God is a renascence of wonder at the power of God and the importance of each man's personal destiny. How Wesley produced this psychological effect on his hearers and then directed their emotions toward helping their fellowmen will be quite evident when one analyzes the subjective and humanitarian phases of early Methodism.

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[5]Emile Legouis and Louis Cazamian, A History of English Literature (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938), p. 945.

Interest in social and political reform is another element of Romanticism which has its roots far back in the eighteenth century. The gradual change from an age of social aristocracy, oblivious of the needs and woes of the common man, to an age of growing sympathy with him and experimental attempts to help him is evident along with other signs of Romanticism. The shibboleths of "equality and fraternity" give a new place to mute, inglorious men. Every individual becomes not only significant but worthy of sympathy and help. It is also important to note that early humanitarian interests cannot be separated from religious beliefs and especially a religion with its main emphasis on the supreme worth of each individual soul. John Wesley's pioneering efforts in promoting and spreading these humanitarian interests cannot be overemphasized. His early attempts to improve the physical and mental conditions of the lower classes will prove to be one of the most significant evidences of his part in laying the foundations of Romanticism in England.

One place where these humanitarian elements began to appear during the eighteenth century was in the novel. The Novel of Doctrine became a means of setting forth the evils in the social and political system. Bage's novels present a sentimental picture of such evils but do not go far towards prescribing a constructive remedy. Henry Brooke's _The Fool of Quality_ goes still further with the sentimental technique and gives a picture of natural man unhampered by such evils. William Godwin's _Caleb Williams_ (1794) becomes

revolutionary in denouncing the British Constitution and the aristocratic form of government and shows the ruin of man's character by that system. The novels of Holcroft, Mrs. Inchbald, and others reflect the same interest in improving society and the individuals within that society.

In this phase of pre-Romantic humanitarianism, it will be demonstrated that Wesley was far from insignificant. Although he himself was not a novelist, his abridgment of Henry Brooke's sentimental novel made this work available in a readable form to thousands of people who otherwise would not have had access to it.

Though some of these first five characteristics may not be present in all Romantic poetry, there is at least one element which seems the very essence of Romantic subject matter and the treatment of that subject matter: subjectivity. In this respect, Romanticism truly clashes with the ideals of the neo-classic period. The subjective treatment is not an objective description of something or an interpretation of the universal truth illustrated in it. It is a treatment of that theme as it appeals to the spirit of the interpreter, his individual sentiments, his passions.

Nature as the source of man's knowledge placed a new emphasis on man's natural impulses as opposed to his intellect. So the Romantic poet wrote not of the universal meaning of a thing or of its external characteristics merely. He interpreted its effect upon his own sensations and emotions. This conception affected his style as well as his subject

matter. The conventional eighteenth century heroic couplet began to give way to blank verse, the Spenserian stanza, and the sonnet. Clear-cut, straightforward expression became charged with feeling, and the result was more personalized and individual. Sentimentalism in the novel, with its emphasis on the indulgence of emotions merely for their own sakes, became united with humanitarian interests, the love of nature, and idealistic yearning for the perfect.

If subjectivity can be called the essence of Romantic subject matter and style, early Methodism, which its founder termed "the religion of the heart,"[6] must obviously be based on the same fundamental principles. As Hutton concludes,

> The age of Wesley and Whitefield introduced what may be called a romanticism in religion, just as the Lake School, half a century later, may be said to have destroyed the classic tradition of the older poetry.[7]

The elements in John Wesley's religion which show it to be a religion of feeling rather than one of cold intellect will be readily discernible from the chapter which will be devoted to his religious beliefs and practices. The more one examines this religion, the more firmly he will be convinced that the emphasis on man's salvation through faith in Christ, his assurance of this salvation through his "inward feeling," his opportunity for direct communication with God, and his expression of his joy in extreme emotional outbursts

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[6]John Wesley, Journal (Everyman's ed.; London: J. M. Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1906), I, 248.

[7]W. H. Hutton, "Divines," The Cambridge History of English Literature, ed. by A. W. Ward and A. R. Waller (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1933), X, 410.

of action and song are all based on the poetic faith at the root of much Romantic poetry. Examples of subjectivity in Wesley's literary opinions and in his own style will justify this conclusion.

With these major elements of Romanticism and their various implications as a basis for judging, Wesley's life, religion, and literary influence will be analyzed. Naturally the results will not prove that Wesley was a true Romanticist. The obvious presence of several of these elements, however, and the part they played in the total pattern of John Wesley's far from insignificant contributions to the religious, social, and literary life of England make the founder of Methodism a noteworthy pre-Romanticist. If from this study it can be demonstrated that Wesley was ahead of his time in his appreciation of external nature and demonstrated this quality in his own writing, that he fell in enthusiastically with the group of writers who were extolling the praises of the literature of the Middle Ages, that his humanitarian efforts to improve the physical, mental, and social conditions of the oppressed common man were far beyond his times, and that the very basis of his religion was Romantic subjectivity, his positive connections with the Romantic Movement cannot be denied.

The first step in establishing this relationship is naturally an examination of the man himself and of the kind of background that produced this personality whom Southey considered the "most influential mind" of the eighteenth century.

CHAPTER I

"A BRAND PLUCKED FROM THE BURNING"

At midnight, February 9, 1709, a small boy was saved from a burning building a few moments before the roof collapsed. The burning building was the parsonage at Epworth in Lincolnshire, and the six-year-old boy was John Wesley, who much later in his life, when he realized the part he was playing in transforming the religious and social life of eighteenth century England, described himself as "a brand plucked from the burning."

John Wesley had been born in the rectory at Epworth on June 17, 1703. The large family of the Reverend Samuel Wesley and his wife Susannah was reared according to very rigid religious standards. The Wesley children were taught the Lord's Prayer as soon as they could talk, and every morning and evening the family would read together the Psalm for the day and another chapter from the Bible. According to Wesley's later reminiscences, Susannah taught all of her children to "fear the rod and cry softly." Misdeeds were never allowed to go unpunished, and such indulgences as eating between meals were never allowed.

Even in a pious household like this, John's precocious religious devotion and preoccupation with spiritual things was noteworthy. In his _Journal_ he admits that until he was ten years old he had not sinned against the "washing of the Holy Ghost" of his baptism.

At the age of ten and a half Wesley left the strict

tutelage of his mother and entered school at the Charterhouse, London. Here he made great progress in his studies, but, as he remarks in his Journal, he gradually lost his religious fervor.

During his studies at the Charterhouse Wesley's belief in apparitions seems to have had its beginning. "Mysterious and preternatural"[1] voices were heard at intervals in the Wesley household. Often at night various members of the family would hear a strange rapping in the building. "Old Jeffrey," as they nicknamed this unseen visitor, was soon treated as a common occurrence by even the younger children. Although he was not at home at the time, John was very careful to ascertain every detail about the circumstances, and his attitude toward the possibility of such events from that time on was one of avowed credulity.

Wesley's university career began in 1720 when he became a student at Christ Church College, Oxford. Concerning this period, he writes:

> I still said my prayers, both in public and private; and read, with the Scriptures, several other books of religion, especially comments on the New Testament. Yet I had not all this while so much as a notion of inward holiness; nay, went on habitually and (for the most part) very contentedly, in some or other known sin; indeed with some intermission and short struggles, especially before and after the Holy Communion, which I was obliged to receive thrice a year.[2]

It is interesting to note that during his early years

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[1]Luke Tyerman, The Life and Times of the Reverend John Wesley (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1872), I, 22.

[2]John Wesley, Journal, I, 97.

at Oxford, he not only maintained his former high scholarship but also spent some of his time writing verses. In some of his lighter moments he wrote one poem with a Latin setting in which the bliss of a young flea crawling over the body of its lovely young mistress, Chloe, is described at length.

When Wesley was twenty-two, he decided definitely to enter the ministry. He calls attention to the fact that at this time he was greatly influenced by Thomas à Kempis's _Christian Pattern_:

> At the same time the providence of God directing me to Kempis's "Christian," I began to see that true religion was seated in the heart, and that God's law extended to all our thoughts as well as words and actions. I was, however, angry at Kempis for being too strict; . . . I began to alter the whole form of my conversation, and to set in earnest upon a new life. I set apart an hour or two a day for religious retirement. I communicated every week. I watched against all sin, whether in word or deed. I began to aim at, and to pray for, inward holiness. So that now, doing so much and living so good a life, I doubted not that I was a good Christian.[3]

During this same period his correspondence with his family shows an intense interest in Jeremy Taylor's _Holy Living_ and _Holy Dying_. The influence of both these men seems to have been lasting, and some of the tenets of both received a permanent place in his system of thinking. Taylor was especially influential in Wesley's early emphasis on a strict daily schedule in which not any time would be lost or spent uselessly. In fact his _Journal_ was begun as an aid towards accounting accurately for all of the time which he had at his

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[3]Tyerman, _op_. _cit_., I, 34.

disposal. In a letter to his older brother, Samuel, in 1726 he makes this sweeping statement:

> Leisure and I have taken leave of one another. I propose to be busy as long as I live, if my health is so long indulged me.[4]

William Law's Christian Perfection and Serious Call were published in 1726. Wesley carefully studied these works, admired their style, and was vividly impressed with the call to absolute perfection:

> I was convinced more than ever of the impossibility of being half a Christian, and determined to be all devoted to God, to give Him all my soul, my body, and my substance.[5]

Wesley received his Master of Arts from Oxford, February 14, 1727. In July, 1728, he was ordained a priest in the English Church. In August of that year he went to Lincolnshire to serve as his father's curate at Epworth and Wroote. Here Wesley enjoyed the seclusion of a small country parish until November, 1729, when he was called back to Oxford as a fellow of Lincoln College.

Soon after John Wesley's return to Oxford the beginnings of the Methodist Movement began to take their first form. Wesley's younger brother, Charles (later to become famous as the author of over four thousand hymns), had been elected to Christ Church College in 1726. The regularity and strictness of the religious habits of John, Charles, and a small group of their friends soon caused the appellation

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[4] Ibid., p. 46.

[5] John Wesley, Works, XI, 352, quoted in Tyerman, op. cit., I, 51.

"Methodists" to be derisively applied to them. Other nicknames which the serious group of young men soon acquired were: "Holy Club," "Sacramentarians," "Godly Club," "Enthusiasts," and "Reforming Club." The term "Methodist," applied first in jest, later became the name by which the famous Wesleyan Movement has since been known. These Oxford Methodists evolved into a little group of Christians who worshipped and studied together, shared their possessions in common, and preached and gave food and clothing to the poor and those in prisons.

As leader of this group of Methodists at Oxford between 1730 and 1735, Wesley continued to strengthen his belief in personal purity, self-denial, and the powers of the Holy Spirit. But, at the same time, the state of his own religious convictions remained unsettled. He had not yet fulfilled that desire to _feel_ his direct relationship with God which was to become the basis of his mature philosophy. His decision in 1735 to go to America and become a missionary to the Georgia Indians is one indication of the unsettled state of his convictions at that time. (The significance of this trip to America is discussed fully in its relationship to the Noble Savage idea.)

In the year of his return to England (1738) Wesley's Aldersgate experience, commonly referred to as his "conversion," occurred. In spite of the rigid piety and purity of his personal life and of his relations with others, Wesley was still dissatisfied with his religious _feeling_--he had no

proof of his own salvation. On board the ship to Georgia he had had some contact with a small group of Moravians. These Moravians (ancestors of the modern United Brethren Church) were members of a German Pietistic religious group which had sent representatives to England in the 1730's. Wesley's admiration for them grew, and he accepted wholeheartedly their views on the depravity of human nature and the salvation and sanctification of man through faith in Christ. Wesley was closely associated with this group during his stay in America and became a member of the group. His discussions with the Moravian leader, Peter Bohler, soon after his return to England in 1738 convinced him more and more of the absolute sufficiency of faith in Christ and the significance of instantaneous conversion.

What happened to solidify these beliefs while Wesley was attending a meeting of the Moravian Society in Aldersgate Street, Wesley himself later describes. While he was listening to the reading of Martin Luther's preface to the Book of Romans on the significance of justification by faith, the crisis in Wesley's religious development occurred:

> I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me, that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death; and I then testified openly to all there, what I now first felt in my heart.[6]

It was not long after his conversion that Wesley became dissatisfied with the Moravian Society. He felt that

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[6]Wesley, Journal, I, 102.

the Moravians over-emphasized the tenet that a person should "wait for Christ and be still" until he received evidence of his full salvation. As a result of this "Quietism," they taught their followers that they should neglect good works and the sacraments of the Church while awaiting assurance that they were saved. Consequently, in 1739 Wesley decided to sever his connections with this sect and form a "Society" of his own. At the beginning this society was only a small group that met every Thursday for fellowship and prayer. But gradually the size of the group increased, new groups were organized, and Methodist Societies began to appear in various parts of the country. Although the name "Methodist" had already been applied to the small group of young men at Oxford, it was not until it was applied to these Societies that it began to have its full significance as the name of a religious movement.

From this period dates Wesley's career as the leader of one of the greatest revivals which the modern world has known. The remainder of his life is an almost incredible record of traveling, preaching, ministering to the poor, writing and editing, and organizing what developed into the Methodist Church.

Wesley insisted again and again that it was not his intention to separate from the Church of England and to form a Dissenting Church. It was his purpose, he often declared, merely to emphasize those doctrines which were at the heart of the Anglican Church but which were at that time suffering from

neglect and abuse. But the leaders of the Established Church were not prepared to accept Wesley's views. Almost immediately the regular churches began to close their doors to him, and he was forced to preach in other buildings improvised for that purpose. These soon became known as "meeting houses." In 1742 the Foundry, an old armament storehouse on Windmill Street which had been repaired for the purpose, became the scene of the first Methodist Conference. At this meeting another step was taken which tended toward separation. Because it was impossible to obtain enough ordained clergymen who were in sympathy with the movement, it was decided that "lay brethren" should be allowed to preach. This decision was not in accordance with Wesley's own desires, but he considered the spread of the Christian message as he interpreted it the most important phase of the problem and subordinated every other consideration to that end.

Itinerant preaching was another important phase of Wesley's program which was begun merely as a temporary measure to get the movement started. He records his early reactions:

> I could scarcely reconcile myself at first to this strange way of preaching in the fields, of which he [Whitefield] set me an example on Sunday; having been all my life (till very lately) so tenacious of every point relating to decency and order, that I should have thought the saving of souls almost a sin, if it had not been done in a church.[7]

A few days later he mentions his dislike of this unorthodox practice again:

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[7] *Ibid*., I, 184.

> At four in the afternoon, I submitted to be more vile, and proclaimed in the highways the glad tidings of salvation, speaking from a little eminence in a ground adjoining to the city to about three thousand people.[8]

Such opinions at least illustrate the adaptability of the man whose name soon became linked with that of George Whitefield as the greatest itinerant preachers of the eighteenth century.

This George Whitefield, whose name is often associated with that of Wesley, was at first completely in sympathy with Wesley's views, and he became a follower of Methodism. But he and Wesley soon disagreed on the question of predestination, and in 1741 he broke away from the Wesleyan group. From that time on his followers were known as the Calvinistic Methodists to distinguish them from the followers of Wesley.

The opposition that Wesley met from the Established Church and the public in general took many forms, ranging all the way from literary attacks to the leading of bulls into the midst of his congregation. One of the most interesting opposing opinions is that expressed in one of Horace Walpole's letters:

> This sect increases as fast as almost any religious nonsense ever did. Lady Frances Shirley has chosen this way of bestowing the dregs of her beauty; and Mr. Lyttelton is near making the same sacrifice of the dregs of all those various characters he has worn. The Methodists love your big sinners, as proper subjects to work upon; and, indeed, they have a plentiful harvest.[9]

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[8] Ibid.

[9] Horace Walpole, Letters, II, 155, quoted by Tyerman, op. cit., II, 32.

Again Walpole has this to say:

> Methodism in the metropolis is more fashionable than anything but brag; the women play very deep at both; as deep, it is much suspected, as the matrons of Rome did at the mysteries of the Bona Dea. If gracious Anne were alive, she would make an admirable defendress of the new faith, and would build fifty more churches for proselytes.[10]

Naturally Wesley's emphasis upon the equality of all in the sight of God met with opposition from the self-complacent members of the upper classes. A letter from the Duchess of Buckingham to Lady Huntington in 1741 shows an interesting opinion:

> I thank your ladyship for the information concerning the Methodist preachers; their doctrines are most repulsive and strongly tinctured with impertinence and disrespect towards their superiors, in perpetually endeavoring to level all ranks and do away with all distinctions. It is monstrous to be told that you have a heart as sinful as the common wretches that crawl on the earth. This is highly offensive and insulting; and I cannot but wonder that your ladyship should relish any sentiment so much at variance with high rank and good breeding.[11]

John Wesley did not marry until he was forty-eight years old. His unsuccessful love affairs before that time, however, are an interesting side light on his personality.

A correspondence with a young widow, beginning in 1730, has often been noted by Wesley's biographers, and there have been varying conclusions as to the actual feelings which existed between the two. The interests between young Wesley and Mary Granville Delany certainly seem to have been a

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[10] Ibid., p. 149.

[11] Life and Times of Selina, Countess of Huntington (1839), I, 27, quoted by George, op. cit., p. 36.

little beyond the purely religious, but nothing serious developed from their relationship.

During his stay in Georgia John Wesley fell in love with Sophia Hopkey, a young woman in the colony at Savannah. His belief at that time that he should live a life of celibacy, coupled with his reticence where women were concerned, resulted in his decision to pursue the matter no further, and Sophia soon afterwards married one of her other suitors.

In 1749 another chapter in John Wesley's unsuccessful love affairs occurred. This time again the woman involved was a young widow--Grace Murray, one of his most ardent converts. After she had nursed him very carefully through a "bilious attack," he decided that she would make an ideal wife and proposed to her. During what Wesley considered their engagement, he left her in the care of John Bennet, one of his helpers. It was the old story over again, and the ultimate result was that she married Bennet. Wesley was strongly affected by the sudden rejection, and Tyerman calls it "one of the greatest trials of his life."[12]

However, in 1751 Wesley did manage to have a short but successful engagement. The same can hardly be said of the resulting marriage. The woman he married was Mary Vazelle, a middle-aged widow with several living children. Southey, Wesley's earliest biographer, summarizes her character in this way:

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[12]Tyerman, _op_. _cit_., II, 53.

> She tormented him in such a way, by her outrageous jealousy and abominable temper, that she deserves to be classed in a triad with Xantippe and the wife of Job, as one of the three bad wives.[13]

Later scholars of Methodism have been more sympathetic with Mrs. Wesley. It is hardly possible that a man as busy as John Wesley could have found much time for domestic life. However, it is true that Wesley's wife was very jealous of his feminine helpers. She caused several embarrassing scenes in public and packed up and left her husband several times. Wesley describes one of these occasions in simple but emphatic Latin:

> Non eam reliqui; non dimisi; non revocabo.[14]

Although the separation referred to in this instance lasted only eighteen months, she did leave him permanently in 1776. Her death in 1781, Wesley mentions briefly in his Journal, but he seems to have been very little affected by it.

To get an adequate idea of the significant events of Wesley's fifty-year ministry, one must go to the pages of the voluminous Journal. Traveling with Wesley throughout England, Ireland, and Wales from 1738 until a little while before his death in 1791, one reviews with the author the birth and development of that religious movement whose whole significance can still not be estimated. As time passes, the size of his audiences gradually increases from mere handfuls at

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[13] Robert Southey, Life of Wesley, quoted by Tyerman, op. cit., II, 111.

[14] Tyerman, op. cit., III, 86.

first to hundreds, then thousands. (The largest audiences which Wesley himself records are those of nearly twenty thousand.) On one occasion he is hit on the forehead by a member of a rebellious mob; his only reaction is to wipe the blood from his face calmly and continue his message. His principal concern when he is in danger of being thrown into a river by another still more violent group of opponents is that some valuable papers which he has in his pockets may be ruined. One sees him dragging himself to his scheduled service when he is so sick that he can scarcely stand on his feet long enough to deliver a sermon. One hears him saying,

> My heart was so enlarged, that methought I could have cried out, (in another sense than poor vain Archimedes,) 'Give me where to stand, and I will shake the world.'[15]

But still the picture is incomplete. His writing and editing, his medical experiments and social ministry, his patient listening to the long accounts of the supernatural experiences of his hearers, his founding and supervision of the school for boys at Kingswood must all be worked into his busy schedule.

While at Oxford Wesley had begun the strict life of scheduled regularity which continued until the last year of his life. An example of the type of schedule he followed is the one which he records for a part of 1739:

> My ordinary employment (in public) was now as follows: every morning I read prayers and preached at Newgate. Every evening I expounded a portion of Scripture at one or more of the societies. On Monday, in the after-

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[15]Wesley, Journal, I, 194.

> noon, I preached abroad, near Bristol; on Tuesday, at Bath and Two-Mile-Hill alternately; on Wednesday, at Baptist-Mills; every other Thursday, near Pensford; every other Friday, in another part of Kingswood; on Saturday in the afternoon, and Sunday morning, in the Bowling Green; . . . on Sunday, at eleven near Hannam-Mount; at two, at Clifton; and at five, on Rose-Green: And hitherto, 'as my day is, so my strength hath been.'[16]

Even physical sickness could not reduce his efforts. At one time when he was forced to go to bed, he went only with the provision that anyone who needed him might visit him and talk with him. He estimates that about fifty or sixty people visited him in his bedroom in one day. In the evening of that same day he sent for the Societies and had them meet in his room.[17]

In 1790, the year before his death, this energy and endurance had not been abated:

> I am now an old man, decayed from head to foot. My eyes are dim; my right hand shakes much; my mouth is hot and dry every morning. I have a lingering fever almost every day. My motion is weak and slow. However, blessed be God, I do not slack my labour. I can preach and write still.[18]

Until about a month before his death, Wesley continued these efforts to organize and to spread this new religion which he lived and taught. His calm death on March 2, 1791, was a perfect ending to his life. Gradually his physical strength became totally exhausted, and he was confined to his bed for a few weeks before his death. Surrounded by a group

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[16] *Ibid.*, I, 192.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 351.

[18] *Ibid.*, IV, 493.

of his followers and friends, he died with words of faith on his lips. A little while before he lost consciousness he was still singing one of Watts' hymns, "I'll praise my Maker while I've breath."

And so John Wesley, who had lived during all the changes of the eighteenth century, died just nine years before that century closed. During his fifty odd years of preaching, traveling, writing, and editing he had built a new religion from a small group of Oxford students to a following of thousands. Though such a motive was far from his own personal intentions, he had really founded a denomination which at the present time has the largest membership of the Protestant Churches. One cannot study his life without agreeing with Emerson that "An institution is but the lengthened shadow of one man" and that to understand early Methodism one should study the life of John Wesley.

But the purpose of recounting these major events in John Wesley's life is not to present a detailed history of Methodism. It is rather to show how out of this background grew religious and literary beliefs and practices which give Wesley an important position among those influences which gradually issued in the Romantic Movement in England.

CHAPTER II

"THE RELIGION OF THE HEART"

The "religion of the heart" which John Wesley taught among the common people of England was an effort to rescue and re-emphasize what he considered fundamental Anglican doctrines that were at that time being neglected.

During the latter part of the seventeenth century and the early part of the eighteenth century, the religious and moral habits of Englishmen had been gradually becoming more and more lax. The passing of the Act of Toleration by Parliament in 1689 gave new freedom to individual interpretation of religious principles. The progress of philosophers and scientists was giving added significance to the power of the human intellect; reason was rapidly dethroning those two dictators known as the Church and the Holy Scriptures.

Rationalists like John Tillotson (Archbishop of Canterbury) and John Locke sought to interpret the revealed Christianity of the New Testament in such a way that it would agree with the laws of the natural world and supplement them. But the later Deists took the doctrine of reason still further and argued away the necessity for and logical basis of any supernatural revelation. Many of the Deists were moral reformers and did much good by putting emphasis on man's moral behavior and constructive service. But one of the widespread effects of Deism was quite naturally a skepticism concerning Christianity or any religion at all. And one of the places where these results showed most and

did the most harm was among the clergymen of the Anglican Church. The best of the clergymen became noted for their tolerance and conviviality; a still larger group became notorious for immorality and drunkenness. One church historian makes this summary:

> In a word, though to this broad generalization there were many exceptions, the church system had become mechanical and dead. The valley was full of bones, and they were very dry.[1]

There were many thousands of people living in the vast industrial areas rapidly springing up, especially in the midlands, that were not reached by the churches at all. Even when churches were accessible to these poorly educated masses, there was little in the church services which they could understand or that had any personalized meaning for them. Sir Roger de Coverley presented his clergyman with a book containing a collection of good sermons and insisted that the poor automaton deliver one of these sermons every Sunday. Little emphasis was put on the varying needs and interests of the growing industrial class that was to play a considerable part in the future history of England.

Such were the conditions which the young Wesley observed during his years at Oxford. In spite of the progress that man was making in the fields of science and philosophy, man's intellect or reason was failing to bring him any nearer to God. If one judged by its fruits, the

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[1]John A. Overton and Frederic Relton, _The English Church from the Accession of George I to the End of the Eighteenth Century_ (London: MacMillan and Company, 1906), p. 64.

tree of Christianity in eighteenth century England was either barren or dead.

Wesley's solution for this problem was a religion of feeling. It was a religion laying stress on personal faith in Christ as the primary requisite for salvation and upon the possibility and necessity of man's direct communication with God. Man was not a rational, intellectual person who could work out his own salvation through logic and moral conduct; he was a depraved creature whose only redemption lay in his acceptance of salvation through the atoning blood of a personal Savior. As a result of accepting this salvation, man would renounce the pleasures of this earthly life, achieve a state of relative perfection, or "sanctification," through God's guidance and help, and be saved to an eternal life of celestial bliss. This was not a religion based on general universal truth as logically ascertained by the wisdom of the greatest scholars. It was founded on an infallible proof which might be experienced by any individual, regardless of education, social status, or possessions--"inward feeling"!

It can be seen that faith in man's direct communication with God was basic in the framework of early Methodist theology. This so-called "enthusiasm," a term which was used derogatorily of Wesley and his followers, Umphrey Lee has traced back to early Greek and Hebrew sources:

> Through the medium of the early church the notion of immediate inspiration passed into medieval Catholicism, and the Catholic Church continued to believe in its

possibility under certain conditions.[2]

This belief in "immediate communication with God" grew into disrepute after the Protestant Reformation, and during Wesley's times was generally discredited in the Church of England. But Wesley's "fundamental doctrines assumed man's immediate experience of God."[3] It was the very basis of personal salvation; when a man was "converted," this direct personal relationship took place; as a result of his regeneration this relationship became a daily and continuous privilege. Around this belief are centered the emotional experiences of his converts which John Wesley recounts in the Journal.

As McGiffert has pointed out, these somewhat mystical tendencies in Wesley's thought are indicative of a medieval otherworldliness in early Methodism.[4] Wesley did not advocate the complete asceticism of medieval Catholicism, but he did emphasize a complete renunciation of worldly amusements like card-playing, dancing, gambling, horse racing, the theater, and elaborate clothing. McGiffert also calls attention to Wesley's refusal to accept the modern Copernican conception of the universe because it seemed irreconcilable with scriptural authority:

In fact, in his supernaturalism and in his recognition

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[2]Umphrey Lee, The Historical Backgrounds of Early Methodist Enthusiasm (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), p. 31.

[3]Ibid., p. 138.

[4]Arthur Cushman McGiffert, Protestant Thought before Kant (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1911), p. 173.

> of an external authority to which all conclusions about the physical universe should be made to conform, he was a genuine medievalist, although his life fell wholly within the eighteenth century, the century of enlightenment.[5]

Too sweeping a conclusion should not be drawn, however. In spite of scientific progress, superstitions were much more common in the eighteenth century than the twentieth century layman realizes. Naturally the emotional basis of Wesley's religion made him more credulous than the average rationalist. One point at least can be concluded. Since interest in the Middle Ages is a decided characteristic of Romanticism, Wesley's embracing of these medieval elements of thought, along with his enthusiastic reception of the Ossianic poems, helps to ally him with the pre-Romanticists.

This belief in man's direct communication with God is only one aspect of Wesley's subjectivity. He makes all his decisions by "the most infallible of proofs, inward feeling."[6] His personal conversion during the Aldersgate meeting in 1738 was a mystical experience conveniently analogous to the occasion in Wordsworth's early life when he felt himself become a "dedicated Spirit" and to Carlyle's experiencing of his "New-birth" or "Fire-baptism." His principal dissatisfaction with his life during the period prior to his conversion had been that he could not _feel_ the utmost love for and faith in God. But after he once became convinced that he had found

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[5] _Ibid_.

[6] Wesley, _Journal_, I, 71.

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God, that his heart had been "strangely warmed" and his soul saved from sin, he never once wavered during the fifty years of his ministry. The following triumphant avowal is typical:

> And indeed, till all other considerations were set aside, I could never come to any clear determination; till my eye was single, my whole mind was full of darkness: whereas, so long as it is fixed on the glory of God, without any other consideration, I have no more doubt of the way wherein I should go, than of the shining of the mid-day sun.[7]

With this implicit faith in God's guidance, he had no trouble in believing in witchcraft, apparitions, and the seemingly miraculous conversions of his followers. Why should he doubt the possibility of communication with the spiritual world just because he does not understand it?

> It is true, there are several of them which I do not comprehend; but this is with me a very slender objection, for what is it which I do comprehend, even of the things I see daily? Truly not 'The smallest grain of sand or spire of grass.' I know not how the one grows, or how the particles of the other cohere together. What pretense have I then to deny well-attested facts, because I cannot comprehend them?[8]

Naturally that phase of Wesley's preaching which attracted most attention was the emotionalism connected with his conversions. A religion with its prime stress on an individual's feeling his personal redemption through Christ left room for extreme outbursts. And it is important to note that Wesley himself was sympathetic with some of the most sensational cases. He devotes pages of his Journal to recounting the progress of a sinner's groans and agony to his perfect peace and glorification of God through song and

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[7] Ibid., p. 176.

[8] Ibid., III, 329.

testimony. His entry for April 21, 1739, reads:

> At Weavers' Hall, a young man was suddenly seized with a violent trembling all over, and, in a few minutes, the sorrows of his heart being enlarged, sunk to the ground. But we ceased not calling upon God, till He raised him full of peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.[9]

This case represents the general emotional procedure resulting from the new evangelical type of preaching which John Wesley and George Whitefield were introducing. Another of Wesley's accounts illustrates the same type of emphasis:

> A young woman came to us at Islington, in such an agony as I have seldom seen. Her sorrow and fear were too big for utterance; so that after a few words, her strength as well as her heart failing, she sunk down to the ground. Only her sighs and her groans showed she was yet alive. We cried unto God in her behalf; we claimed the promises made to the weary and heavy-laden; and he did not cast out our prayer. She saw her Saviour, as it were, crucified before her eyes: she laid hold on him by faith, and her spirit revived.[10]

The similarity between subjective elements like this and the subjectivity of the Romantic poets is almost immediately evident. Just as Romantic poetry was a reaction against cold uniformity and regularity in the literature of the neo-classic age, so Wesley's religion was a reaction against the formalism and cold intellectualism of the eighteenth century Church. Umphrey Lee makes this comparison:

> The Romantic poet's impatience with those who would peep and botanize sprang from a conviction that there are other avenues to truth than analysis and another role for man to play than that of an admiring time-

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[9] Ibid., I, 187.

[10] Ibid., p. 226.

keeper to mechanical nature.[11]

In many places in Wordsworth, one finds allusions to the impotence of "our meddling intellect." John Keats yearns for "a life of sensations rather than of thoughts." The success of John Wesley's appeal to the colliers and factory-workers of England was successful because it went beyond their intellects and appealed to their imaginative powers. He drew their attentions away from the miseries of their own dreary existences to the beneficent love of a heavenly Father and a hope for an eternal life of happiness. He created within their individual hearts a devotion to something afar from the sphere of their sorrow.

One of the principal methods that Wesley used to bring about these emotional reactions in his hearers was hymn singing. Extreme joy and faith in one's own personal salvation was the result sought for in the groanings and faintings of the Methodist sinners. The sudden conversion to a state of salvation was always accompanied by praising God. Singing was the natural form for this expression to take.

The Wesleyan revival was accompanied by a great period of hymnwriting in the English Church. Wesley is sometimes referred to as the compiler of the first hymnbook in the vernacular for use in the English Church service. His

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[11] Umphrey Lee, John Wesley and Modern Religion (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1936), p. 9.

method was the substitution of simple tunes and simple religious verses for the formal psalm singing of the regular Anglican service. For this purpose the Wesleys wrote hymns, collected hymns, and prescribed the tunes to which they should be sung.

The psychological motives behind the early Methodist use of hymns are revealed in the theories of the instructions which Wesley gave to his helpers. He recommends simple tunes and the avoidance of anything which might result in "dead formality." He warns against anthem singing and singing "too slow." He concludes his instructions:

> Introduce no new tunes till they are perfect in the old. Let no organ be placed anywhere, till proposed in the Conference. . . and if you cannot sing yourself, choose a person or two in the place to pitch the tune for you. Exhort everyone in the congregation to sing, not one in ten only.[12]

Thus Wesley succeeded in making hymn singing both a part of the process of conversion and an expression of the resulting religious fervor of the saved souls. This singing definitely contributed to the emotional "atmosphere." Dimond compares the effect produced to that described by Samuel Taylor Coleridge as "the willing suspension of disbelief."[13]

The part that Charles Wesley played in English literature as the author of more than four thousand hymns will not be emphasized in this study. But there is another phase of

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[12]Tyerman, op. cit., I, 398.

[13]Lee, Wesley and Modern Religion, p. 287.

Wesley's efforts in the field of hymnology that must not be overlooked. As a writer of original hymns, John Wesley can lay claim to little recognition. However, his translation of at least twenty-nine German hymns into English was a definite contribution. J. T. Hatfield has made a study of these hymns, most of which Wesley had acquired from his associations with the Moravians and had translated into simple hexameter verse for use in his services.[14] Briefly, the principal characteristics of the hymns are these: Conventional evangelical use of the "blood of Christ" appears over and over again. Complete assurance that God will protect every Christian, that the Christian should be happy in this divine protection, is emphasized. The pleasures of the world are renounced as merely snares from which man must pray to be delivered. And there is a primary emphasis on the joys of eternal bliss in the future life.

The main literary importance of these translations seems to be Wesley's early recognition of this phase of German poetry. Wesley was then a pioneer in making the beauties of German poetry known to the English speaking world. Herbert says:

> English hymnody was left with a number of poems which are intrinsically at least as excellent as their distinguished German originals; he had opened a field which, by the end of the next century, had yielded a large and splendid sacred poetry to English-speaking congregations; and he had widened and deepened a

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[14]J. T. Hatfield, "John Wesley's Translation of German Hymns," PMLA, XI (1896), 171-199.

> channel which was to have a great, if not altogether measurable, effect upon the whole range of English poetry.[15]

Theoretically one might suppose that such a highly emotionalized religion as this would tend to cause its adherents to neglect what are commonly known as the social aspects of religion. But the way that Wesley worked out a balance between a man's personal religion and his attitude towards his fellowmen seems to be one of the most significant of his religious contributions. Briefly, Wesley created an emotional state in his followers through his personalized methods; then he directed the emotions thus created towards the uplifting and helping of others.

Like the other principal tenets of Wesley's religion, his proposed cure for social misery was individualistic. Not by a new social or political set-up but by the spiritual rebirth of individuals could social improvements be brought about. According to Wesley, the true causes of the sordid conditions of the poor lay not in inherent evils in the social and economic system; rather could they be traced to the ignorant, unsaved condition of individual souls. The conditions of society as a whole could be improved only by the salvation of the individuals in that society. From the beginning he insisted that "there can be no true love of man, unless it be built on the love of God."[16]

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[15]Thomas Walter Herbert, John Wesley as Editor and Author (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1940), p. 53.

[16]Wesley, Journal, I, 31.

And Wesley's methods definitely brought results. M. Dorothy George says:

> Methodism became the chief civilizing agency with the poorer classes, especially among the miners and in the growing industrial towns. Wesley himself claims that it was the cause of a great improvement in the manners and morals of the people. . . It was recognized that Methodism made for stability not disruption, its influence extended far beyond its own congregations.[17]

Some historians have gone so far as to give Wesley credit for averting a revolution in the working classes in England comparable to the French Revolution. Regardless of whether or not a statement like this is exaggerated, what Wesley actually did accomplish cannot be minimized. The abstract rationalism of eighteenth century theologians was not reaching the masses of factory workers created by the Industrial Revolution. The satire of university wits left the hungry, diseased, and destitute masses unaided and rebellious. Little good could it do one of this class to be assured that he was a definite link in an abstract chain of being in which "Whatever is, is right." Wesley's religion, with its stress on the importance and equality of each individual soul in the sight of God, put added emphasis on a sense of brotherhood and sympathy for one's fellowmen which had constructive and lasting influence.

One of Wesley's early plans to improve the general welfare, which was undoubtedly conceived in a weak moment, is interesting for several reasons. By this plan the condition

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[17]George, _op_. _cit_., Introd., p. xiii.

of all the people could be improved and the poor helped at the same time. The plan which he advocated was the abolition of tea drinking! In his own case and in the cases of others, he had noticed that tea drinking tended to cause nervousness and other slight disorders. Moreover, tea was among those products which had to be imported and was consequently expensive. Why should thoughtless people consume this harmful drug while thousands were starving for the lack of wholesome food? For these reasons, Wesley first set the example of total abstinence and then preached it to his followers. Luckily for such gentlemen as Dr. Johnson, the prohibition of tea drinking did not become universal! In fact Wesley's own personal habits seem to be the only ones greatly affected by this undoubtedly sincere but nevertheless naive impractical attempt.

But the above futile effort is by no means typical of Wesley's other humanitarian efforts. As early as the organization of the small group at Oxford in 1729, relief to the poor was started. Almsgiving was one of the primary motives of that society in its very beginning, and it continued to be a distinguishing characteristic of Wesley and his followers. Most of the proceeds of Wesley's writing and editing went for this purpose.

Wesley's efforts to help suffering mankind took still another form. The poor needed more than food and clothing; they were unable to procure adequate medical attention. In 1746 he decided to open his own dispensary and to

treat as many of their minor physical ailments as he could. He writes during that year:

> For six or seven and twenty years, I had made anatomy and physic the diversion of my leisure hours; though I never properly studied them, unless for a few months when I was going to America.[18]

In his own opinion at least, his treatments were highly successful, and he felt no qualms about practicing without specialized training. To those to whom he administered, it was a choice between his help and no medical attention at all. The earnestness of the man and his passion for suffering humanity are revealed in his own explanation:

> Now, ought I to have let one of these poor wretches perish, because I was not a regular physician?[19]

Again John Wesley showed that he was ahead of his times by his pioneering efforts to free the slaves. He preached and wrote against slavery and was the first Englishman to appoint a fast day to pray for its abolition.[20] In 1772 he writes:

> In returning, I read a very different book, published by an honest Quaker, on that execrable sum of all villainies, commonly called the Slave-trade. I read of nothing like it in the heathen world, whether ancient or modern. And it infinitely exceeds, in every instance of barbarity, whatever Christian slaves suffer in Mahometan countries.[21]

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[18] Tyerman, _op_. _cit_., I, 525.

[19] _Ibid_., p. 526.

[20] _Ibid_., III, 33.

[21] Wesley, _Journal_, III, 461.

Since Wesley was a conservative Tory at heart, this attitude is outstanding among his general political beliefs.

These humanitarian efforts of Wesley's continued throughout his long life of service. In Lloyd's Evening Post, December 21, 1772, one of his letters was published. In this letter he suggested an individualistic remedy for economic miseries of the time. The main cause of the tremendous scarcity of corn, he insisted, was "distilling." People were starving while corn was being made into liquor, the revenue from which went into the public treasury! Other things that needed to be remedied were the "monopolizing of farms," luxury, and waste--the boiling down of "three dozen of neat's tongue, to make two or three quarts of soup."[22]

In that same year (1772) he organized a society to visit London workhouses to pray with the inmates and instruct them in Christian living. This society developed into what was latter called "The Christian Community" and continued as an active home missionary group for many years after Wesley's death.

Wesley's humanitarianism, like that of William Collins, extended also to the lower animals. Even as late as 1781 he preached a sermon on what he called "The Brute Creation." In this sermon he very confidently asserts that the animals will all live again. Furthermore, they will live again in a higher form of being; they will be as they were when they were first

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[22]Tyerman, op. cit., III, 130-132.

created. Interest in the lower animals is definitely a distinguishing characteristic in the poetry of poets like Collins and Burns. The extremes to which Wesley took such an interest helps to ally him with the increasing Romantic tendencies of his times.

Much of modern social reform is admittedly a result of the humanitarian interests aroused by the Romantic writers. Interest in the feelings of the common man led to protestations against the sufferings of the poor, and consequently many movements to improve the economic and social conditions of the masses began. It must be recognized, however, that these movements originated before the time of the major Romanticists. Back in the first half of the eighteenth century there were men who had already accomplished much in this direction. And it is very significant, in showing Wesley's influence on the Romantic Movement, to note that he was far from unimportant in these early breakings away from complacency to positive efforts to improve the physical and mental well-being of the large group at the bottom of the social ladder.

CHAPTER III

LITERARY PREJUDICES AND PRACTICES

Wesley's literary influence is often neglected because it has been overshadowed by his fame as an evangelist. People tend to regard only the emotional phases of early Methodism. It is easy to overlook the fact that the founder of this religion of feeling was a university graduate whose scholarship would be considered superior during any age and whose writings and literary influence entitle him to a place in the history of English literature. These literary prejudices and practices are naturally an inseparable part of the man's theology and philosophy, but his editing, his personal criticism of works which during his time were changing the course of English literature and life, and qualities in his own style make a separate analysis of these phases necessary for an adequate understanding of his relationship to Romanticism.

Besides Wesley's voluminous Journal, his letters, his grammars, textbooks, and political treatises, he edited more than three hundred and seventy-one publications.[1] Regarding the size of his literary production, Wesley's biographer Tyerman says:

> Looking at his traveling, the marvel is how he found time to write; and looking at his books, the marvel is how he found time to preach.[2]

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[1]Herbert, op. cit., p. 2

[2]Tyerman, op. cit., III, 658.

Perhaps Tyerman was momentarily overlooking the fact that Wesley did much of his writing and editing while astride his horse traveling slowly to and from the places where he preached so regularly and continuously.

As soon as the Methodist Societies were organized, Wesley began to set up libraries for the use of the members. His reason was a simple one:

> If we read nothing but the Bible, we should hear nothing but the Bible; and then what becomes of preaching?[3]

Again he expresses his conception of learning in this way:

> It is certain that the Author of our nature designed that we should not destroy but regulate our desire for knowledge.[4]

So this man, whose own scholarship extended to the knowledge of Greek, Latin, French, German, and Italian, set out both to provide instructional material for those of meagre education and to make the great literary masterpieces of their own language available to them:

> Methodists were poor and unaccustomed to reading. He must provide cheap volumes to fit their financial capacities; he must provide simplified and explained writings to suit their educational limitations; and he must provide the inducement of his own name so that people who knew nothing of, say, Milton, would be impelled to buy and read Mr. Wesley's book.[5]

A full discussion of these abridged works which Wesley put into a shape to be enlightening and instructive

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[3]Quoted by Herbert, _op_. _cit_., p. 4.

[4]Wesley, _Letters_, III, 81, quoted by Herbert, _op_. _cit_., p. 4.

[5]Herbert, _op_. _cit_., p. 6.

to the uneducated cannot be attempted here. But the procedure followed in the publication in 1744 of A Collection of Moral and Sacred Poems From the Most Celebrated English Authors in three duodecimo volumes is typical. Among the poets included were Milton, Dryden, Pope, Cowley, Congreve, Prior, Parnell, Dyer, George Herbert, Watts, and Young.

Wesley's method in handling Milton illustrates the purpose of his abridgments. Milton was Wesley's favorite poet, and he adjudged Paradise Lost the best poem of all times and nations. "But," he insisted, "this inimitable work, amidst all its beauties, is unintelligible to an abundance of readers: the immense learning which he has everywhere crowded together, making it quite obscure to persons of common education."[6] On the whole about two thousand lines were struck out, and "short and easy notes" were appended to this work of the man who sought "fit audience though few"! Beautiful but obscure similes were omitted, single words or phrases were deleted in such a way that the rhythm of the lines was not seriously impaired, and a few religious sentiments with which Wesley disagreed were left out. Thomas Walter Herbert summarizes Wesley's pruning in this way:

> If the Extract from Milton's Paradise Lost were the only extant record of the poem, its high rank among the epics of world literature would remain unchanged. He who knows the original would regret the loss of what Wesley cut away and find the excision of a few

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[6]Wesley, Works, VII, 601, quoted by Herbert, ibid., p. 76.

passages, such as the simile of the bees, utterly indefensible. But for the unlearned people whom the editor expected to reach, the edition was epochal.[7]

Wesley's relationship with pre-Romantic literature is further illustrated by his abridgment of Edward Young's Night Thoughts. In 1779 he published what he called An Extract from Dr. Young's Night Thoughts on Life, Death, and Immortality. In the preface to Wesley's edition of the work is reprinted a contemporary opinion which indicates that his interest in this poem was closely related to its melancholy qualities and their effects on the emotions. A very typically pre-Romantic portion of the preface which Wesley reprinted in his edition is this:

> Yet this work contains many strokes of nature and passion, which touch the heart in the most tender and affecting manner. Besides, there are afflictions too deep to bear either reasoning or amusement. They may be soothed, but cannot be diverted. The gloom of the "Night Thoughts" perfectly corresponds with this state of mind. It indulges and flatters the present passion, and at the same time presents those motives of consolation which alone can render certain griefs supportable. We may here observe that secret and wonderful endearment which nature has annext to all our sympathetic feelings, whereby we enter into the deepest scenes of distress and sorrow, with a melting softness of heart, far more delightful than all the joys which dissipating and unthinking mirth can inspire.[8]

Just how much influence all of this editing and abridging had on the poorer and less educated classes of his time, it is impossible to ascertain. But if one realizes the virtual dictatorship which Wesley held over the reading

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[7] Herbert, ibid., p. 79.

[8] Quoted by Herbert, ibid., p. 80.

of thousands of people and the force of his personality, the influence must be admitted. And judging from the fact that it was a common occurrence for these abridgments to run through a dozen editions, one can at least estimate how much indirect influence Wesley must have had in spreading the habit of reading in eighteenth century England.

Wesley's literary tastes can be determined partly from these abridgments that he made. In addition, however, there are the critical opinions that he gives here and there in the Journal.

His connection with Henry Brooke's novel, The Fool of Quality, is another example of his editing, but it is particularly important in showing his sentimental tastes. Wesley insists that he abhors even the term "sentimentalism," especially as it is used by Sterne in his Sentimental Journey:

> Sentimental! What is that? It is not English; he might as well say Continental. It is not sense. It conveys no determinate idea; yet one fool makes many. And this nonsensical word (who would believe it?) is become a fashionable one! However, the book agrees full well with the title; for one is as queer as the other. For oddity, uncouthness, and unlikeness to all the world beside, I suppose the writer is without a rival![9]

But evidence of another kind makes one suspect that it was not the sentimental elements that he objected to. Wesley always denounced any kind of indecency, so in this instance his opinion seems to be based largely on moral and religious grounds.

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[9] Wesley, Journal, III, 461.

Certainly his connection with Henry Brooke's sentimental novel, The Fool of Quality, associates him very closely with this pre-Romantic literature and style. This five-volume partly Rousseauistic, partly sentimental, and predominantly moralistic novel appeared in 1766. The seventy-seven year old Wesley was so well pleased with the book that in 1780 he published a two-volume abridgment of the work under its original sub-title, The History of Henry, Earl of Moreland.

Wesley gives this enthusiastic recommendation of the book:

> I recommend it as the most excellent in its kind, that I have seen, either in the English or any other language. The lowest excellence therein is the style, which is not only pure in the highest degree, not only clear and proper, every word being used in its true genuine meaning, but frequently beautiful and elegant, and, where there is room for it, truly sublime. But what is of far greater value is the admirable sense, which is conveyed herein; as it sets forth in full view most of the important truths, which are revealed in the oracles of God. And these are not only well illustrated, but also proved in an easy natural manner; so that the thinking reader is taught, without any trouble, the most essential doctrines of religion.[10]

But to Wesley the style in which the book is written is a minor consideration when compared with the content. He continues his praises:

> But the greatest excellence of all in this treatise is, that it continually strikes at the heart. It perpetually aims at inspiring and increasing every right affection. And it does this, not by dry, dull, tedious precepts, but by the liveliest examples that can be conceived: by setting before your eyes one of the most beautiful pictures, that was ever drawn in the world. The strokes of this are so delicately fine, the touches so easy, natural, and affecting, that I know not who can survey it with tearless eyes, unless

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[10]Quoted by Tyerman, op. cit., III, 343.

> he has a heart of stone. I recommend it, therefore, to all those who are already, or desire to be, lovers of God and man.[11]

The above passage is quoted at length because it undoubtedly represents one of Wesley's most sentimental moods and, taken with all its internal evidence and logical implications, proves most conclusively Wesley's close alliance with the style and substance of this book which has long been admitted to be a step in the development of Romantic sentiments. This critical passage illustrates one of those occasions when Wesley's simple prose reaches beyond the clear-cut classical style and borders on the subjective and sentimental. The lavish words of praise themselves seem like the gushing of the hero or heroine of a sentimental novel. He describes what was later looked upon as an exaggerated and excessively emotional style as "pure in the highest degree." It is "one of the most beautiful pictures that was ever drawn," and no one can "survey it with tearless eyes, unless he has a heart of stone."

Furthermore, his lavish praise of this novel is typical of the basis of his religion, and the basis of much of the most famous Romantic poetry: "it continually strikes at the heart. It perpetually aims at inspiring and increasing every right affection."

The Fool of Quality is significant for its position as the first of the pedagogic novels in the English language and for its part in popularizing such ideas of education as

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[11] *Ibid.*

those set forth in Rousseau's Emile. Brooke agrees with Rousseau that it is the purpose of education to develop the natural instincts of man and to develop the potentialities of his nature.[12] It is evident then that both the various Rousseauistic ideas and the sentimental style of this novel had pre-Romantic significance. That Wesley abridged this cumbersome five-volume novel to the size of two readable volumes and recommended it to the large audience over which he was literary dictator is highly noteworthy.

That Rousseauistic belief in the superiority of the natural man over the falsely civilized one links Wesley's enthusiastic praise of this novel with another phase of his thought--his connection with the Noble Savage Cult. Henry Brooke's novel has as its theme the contrast between a character allowed to develop unhampered by the artificial restrictions of modern society and a personality warped and ruined by those same restrictions.

As usual, Wesley's relationship to the Noble Savage is very closely associated with his religious sentiments; but since this subject is very closely connected with pre-Romantic literature, it will be discussed here along with Wesley's style and tastes.

Hoxie Neale Fairchild has traced the Noble Savage theme in English literature from the early Renaissance to its

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[12]Ernest A. Baker, The History of the English Novel, Vol. V, The Novel of Sentiment and the Gothic Romance (London: H. F. and G. Witherby, 1934), p. 115.

full fruition during the Romantic Revival. According to Fairchild,

> The Noble Savage idea results from the fusion of three elements: the observation of explorers; various classical and medieval conventions; the deductions of philosophers and men of letters.[13]

Starting with Columbus, a long list of explorers began their praise of the American Indian, the inhabitants of the South Sea Islands, and savages in other remote parts of the world. The carefree inhabitant of such lands began to remind the Englishmen both of the happy state of humanity in the pre-sin period in the Garden of Eden and of the classical Golden Age. In Montaigne's essays, especially, Fairchild points out the gradual growth of the idea.

The Noble Savage of Romantic literature was a result of these Renaissance ideas plus the influence of writers during the neo-classic period. Mrs. Aphra Behn's Oroonoko (1688) added no little to the fad. But the main development during the early eighteenth century was in the field of satire. Swift's imaginary land of the Houyhnhnms was contrasted bitterly and effectively with the corruptions of contemporary civilization. John Gay used the theme in the Beggar's Opera. Defoe, in Robinson Crusoe, represents a middle step between the satirical and the Romantic approach to the subject.

In such works as James Thomson's The Seasons (1726-1730), Joseph Warton's The Enthusiast (c. 1740), Gray's Elegy

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[13]Hoxie Neale Fairchild, The Noble Savage (New York: Columbia University Press, 1928), p. 2.

Written in a Country Churchyard (1751), this idea began to be fused with other pre-Romantic elements. Gradually the Noble Savage idea influences, and is influenced by, the love of nature, the humanitarianism, and the primitivism of the Age of Feeling.

From the days of the Renaissance, as has been mentioned before, the American Indian became the primary embodiment of the Noble Savage ideal. Added to all the other Romantic inducements of this land of opportunity, was the appeal of the Indian "civilization," a society which was glamorous in its simplicity and lack of the corruptions of an urban society.

John Wesley, too, began to admire the American Indian. Naturally Wesley looked at the situation from the religious angle. In 1735, he was in the midst of a very unsettled state of mind as to the certainty of his own personal salvation. At this strategic time he had the opportunity to become a member of Governor George Oglethorpe's expedition to Georgia. His brother, Charles, was hired as Oglethorpe's secretary, and Wesley decided to accompany the group as a missionary to the Indians.

Wesley gives a very definite and specific reason for the American trip:

> Our end in leaving our native country was not to avoid want, (God having given us plenty of temporal blessing,) nor to gain the dung or dross of riches or honour; but singly this: to save our souls; to live wholly to the glory of God.[14]

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[14]Wesley, Journal, I, 15.

Nor was Wesley blind to the physical beauty of the Indian. In describing the inhabitants of Georgia, he remarks:

> . . . they were all tall, well-proportioned men, and had a remarkable softness in their speech and gentleness in their whole behaviour.[15]

The fact that he definitely associates their merits with their simple, unadorned state of society is shown when he calls the Choctaws "the least polished, i. e., the least corrupted of all the Indian nations."[16]

Even when for practical reasons it became necessary for Wesley to return to England in 1738, he did not abandon his idealistic enterprise. He writes in his Journal:

> I took my leave of America, (though, it please God, not forever).[17]

The principal thing to be noted about the Georgia trip is that Wesley thought that he could attain a higher form of Christianity among these savages (of whom he had a quite idealized conception) in a society stripped of the artificiality of his own times and country. Many things happened to make the results of his efforts in America far different from anything he had anticipated. He had few practical opportunities to preach to the Indians, and his success with the white inhabitants of Savannah and the adjoining towns was retarded by his insistence upon very strict observance of the ceremonies of the Church. Events came to a climax when he

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[15] Ibid., p. 23.

[16] Ibid., p. 34.

[17] Ibid., p. 70.

refused to allow Sophia Williamson (see Chapter I) to receive communion because of her frequent absences from services and her laxness in observing other religious practices. As a result of this, he became involved in a lawsuit, and his return to England became a matter of expediency.

But even though Wesley's youthful scheme, like the idealistic fancies of such young Romanticists as Southey, Coleridge, and Chateaubriand, met with subsequent disappointment, his motives are none the less like theirs. He was convinced that he could achieve perfection among the simple Indians of America rather than within the walls of Oxford or in a country parish of England.

Nor did he lose entirely his early idealized conceptions. In January, 1753, he writes in his Journal:

> In the afternoon I visited many of the sick, but such scenes who could see unmoved? There are none such to be found in any pagan country. If any of the Indians in Georgia were sick (which indeed rarely happened, till they learned gluttony and drunkenness from the Christians), those who were near gave him whatever he wanted. Oh, who will convert the English into honest Heathens?[18]

At least one other point about the visit to America should be mentioned. As Umphrey Lee points out, the Georgia trip added to the psychological appeal of Wesley's personality and message. The fact that he had traveled in this strange fascinating country gave an exotic atmosphere to his sermons.

Wesley was also quick to recognize and appreciate

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[18] Ibid., p. 235.

those qualities in MacPherson's Ossianic poems which were a key to the changing literary tastes of the times. He became very enthusiastic in his praise of the so-called "translations":

> But what a poet was Ossian! Little inferior to either Homer or Virgil; in some respects superior to both. And what a hero was Fingal! Far more humane than Hector himself, whom we cannot excuse for murdering one that lay upon the ground; and with whom Achilles, or even pious Aeneas, is not worthy to be named.[19]

Several times he mentions his admiration for these works, calling Fingal "that wonderful poem" and speaking of it as "one of the finest Epic Poems in the English language." And he especially likes it because "many of the incidents were deeply pathetic"![20]

One cannot be dogmatic about just how much of this enthusiasm for the Ossianic poems is based on Romantic love for the literature of the Middle Ages. But the subjective qualities which Wesley emphasizes reveal a literary taste closely allied to the pre-Romantic tendencies of his time. His liking for these works is significant also because of the influence that MacPherson's productions had on his contemporary writers like Gray and Blair, on French and German writers, and on the later Romanticists.

Wesley's own literary creations present his critics with a set of puzzling paradoxes. Again and again he sets

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[19] Ibid., IV, 283.

[20] Ibid., p. 345.

forth the popular neo-classic standards of his time--brevity, clarity, and purity. In much of his informational and didactic writings, these qualities are undoubtedly the predominant characteristics. But often, both in his own writing and in his ardent appreciation of some highly subjective work of his times, are evident traces of the individual and the subjective.

The neo-classic qualities referred to above are evident and need not be emphasized, especially in a study of this type. One is tempted, however, to point out a few passages tinged with a satirical sort of wit which help to give the Journal a place alongside of the writings of men like Samuel Johnson and Horace Walpole.

In recounting some reports derogatory to himself and Methodism, Wesley observes:

> . . . they had found out several of our customs to which we were ourselves utter strangers.[21]

He summarizes the lukewarm reception given to his vigorous efforts on a certain occasion:

> The people indeed were exceeding quiet and the cold kept them from falling asleep; till (before two) I left them very well satisfied with the preacher, and with themselves.[22]

Another unfruitful effort is calmly dismissed with this observation:

> After having beaten the air in this unhappy place for twenty days, on January 26 I took my final

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[21]Ibid., I, 6.

[22]Ibid., p. 405

leave of Frederica.[23]

And, after violently denouncing the sins of gluttony and drunkenness, he dismisses dancing and card-playing as "equally conducive to the glory of God"!

Hutton has called attention to one element of Wesley's style which shows an effective device of evangelistic technique.[24] Wesley asks a question, supplies a hypothetical answer, then tears down this answer with the force of the argument which he is trying to validate. For example, he describes a case in which one of his hearers has a strange experience of being "tempted of the Devil" and falls down as though dead for a few hours. Is this dissimulation? He answers:

> A strange sort of dissimulation this! I would wish those who think it so, only to stop their own breath and pulse one hour; and I will subscribe to their opinion.[25]

Another characteristic which is quite noticeable in Wesley's style in the Journal is the use of frequent apostrophes to God, to Satan, or to the reader. These he employs as effective insertions in his narrative accounts. When calmly describing how some Oxford Christians have found it prudent to leave off Psalm singing, he suddenly utters his deepest feelings:

God deliver me and all that seek him in sincerity, from

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[23] Ibid., p. 43.

[24] Hutton, op. cit., p. 416.

[25] Wesley, Journal, I, 259.

> what the world calls Christian prudence![26]

And to Wesley's imagination, Satan is a real personality to be fought against constantly:

> Satan, thy kingdom hath suffered loss: thou Fool! how long wilt thou contend with Him that is mightier than thou?[27]

On another occasion, when cataloguing a long list of successful conversions, Wesley openly defies him:

> Now, Satan, count thy gains![28]

These personal insertions give an air of spontaneous sincerity to the sentiments which he is expressing. They also help to represent the emotional elements of John Wesley's style.

But there are many other examples of the frequent times when in his writing the evangelistic leader breaks out of the narrow bounds of eighteenth century prose and uses a subjective style more like that of the later Romantic writers. On one occasion he expresses his determination and endurance in these words:

> When I have once launched out into the unknown sea, there is no recovering my harbour; I must go on, through whatever whirlpools, or rocks, or sands, though all the waves and storms go over me.[29]

He expresses his enthusiasm again:

> The prince of the air made another attempt in defence of his tottering kingdom. . . . But immediately after, the hammer of the word brake the rocks in pieces.[30]

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[26] *Ibid.*, p. 162.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 290.

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 366.

[29] *Ibid.*, p. 179.

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 288.

Someone tells him that failing to observe the ordinances of the church will not cause one's faith to be shaken. Wesley violently disagrees:

> If it does not shake us, we are asleep in the Devil's arms.[31]

The following three quotations illustrate further the subjectivity of Wesley's religion and the subjective way in which he describes his own feelings:

> I adore the wisdom of God.[32]

> I felt their words as it were thrilling through my veins. So soft! so pleasing to Nature![33]

> I groaned to love God with all my heart, and to serve Him with all my strength.[34]

At times Wesley has a very effective way of working up to a climax in his sentences and paragraphs. One example of this is one of his earnest exhortations to those who have made mistakes and sinned:

> Strive more humbly, more calmly, more cautiously. Do not strive as you did before,--but strive while the breath of God is in your nostrils![35]

But perhaps the following description of a drowning woman best illustrates this feature of his style:

> Mrs. S. was seen standing on the deck as the ship gradually sunk; and afterwards hanging by hands on the ropes till the masts likewise disappeared. Even then for some moments they could observe her floating upon the waves, till her clothes, which buoyed her up, being thoroughly wet, she sunk,--I trust, into the ocean of God's mercy.[36]

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[31] Ibid., p. 398. [32] Ibid., p. 343.

[33] Ibid., p. 365. [34] Ibid., p. 394.

[35] Ibid., p. 33. [36] Ibid., p. 446.

In the writings of Wesley, too, the pleasure derived from the contemplation of death and other subjects usually associated with gloom comes to the surface every now and then. In speaking of a dead body, he writes in the Journal:

> I never saw so beautiful a corpse in my life. Poor comfort to its late inhabitant.[37]

When he recounts the funeral of one of his members, he makes this comment:

> We had a night of solemn joy, occasioned by the funeral of one of our brethren, who died with a hope of immortality.[38]

He gives many detailed accounts of dying people. And the emphasis of his specific descriptions cannot all be explained by his interest in the future welfare of the person's soul. He seems to get a very definite pleasure from the contemplation of the various aspects of the situation. Quite often he describes the passing from life to death with words like these:

> The silver cord appeared to be just then loosing, and the wheel breaking at the cistern.[39]

And of course a discussion of tendencies like these should not be left without calling attention to the impressive figure of John Wesley standing on the tombstone of his father in the Epworth churchyard preaching to thousands of listeners!

One could hardly call John Wesley a nature poet.

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[37] Ibid., p. 35.

[38] Ibid., p. 349.

[39] Ibid., p. 346.

Nevertheless, scattered throughout his Journal are occasional references to some natural phenomena which show an awareness of, and sometimes a feeling for, external nature. In describing one of his evening services, he makes this observation:

> The service begins at half an hour past eight, and continues till a little after midnight. We have often found a peculiar blessing at these sessions. There is generally a deep awe upon the congregation, perhaps in some measure, owing to the silence of the night.[40]

At first glance this passage does not seem significant. upon analysis, however, one sees that early pre-Romantic association of the changes of nature with the feelings of man--the awing effect of the "silence of the night" upon man's own soul which Wesley probably admired in works like Young's Night Thoughts.

His description of Land's End shows an awareness of the difference between the smooth and calm in nature and the rough and rugged:

> I know no natural curiosity like this. The vast rugged stones rise on every side when you are near the point of land, with green turf between as level and smooth as if it were the effect of art. And the rocks which terminate the land are so torn by the sea that they appear like great heaps of ruins.[41]

Perhaps Wesley's early fear of the sea caused it to have a fascination for him, for quite often he notes it in his observations and uses it in his religious figures of speech:

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[40] Ibid., p. 132.

[41] Ibid., p. 263.

> Here the jagged rocks, with the waves dashing and foaming at the foot of them, and the white side of the island rising to such a height, perpendicular from the beach, gave a strong idea of "Him that spanneth the heavens, and holdeth the waters in the hollow of his hand."[42]

On another occasion he makes this observation:

> I can conceive no difference, comparable to that between a smooth and a rough sea, except that which is between a mind calmed by the love of God, and one torn up by the storms of earthly passion.[43]

But it seems still more noteworthy that this nature awareness carries along with it a preference for country life rather than that of the city. In style and content the following words from Wesley's <u>Journal</u> sound like the outburst of a full-fledged Romanticist:

> O who should drag me into a great city if I did not know there is another world! How gladly could I spend the remainder of a busy life in solitude and retirement.[44]

If the whole picture of Wesley's editing, literary tastes, and style is taken into consideration, there is not so much inconsistency as at first may seem apparent. The religious frame of reference was naturally his main consideration. Thus although it is evident that many of his own beliefs were similar to those of Rousseau which had so much contemporary influence, Rousseau's attitude toward revealed Christianity caused him to distrust all of his sentiments and writings. But when he found a work like the Ossianic poems,

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[42]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 18.

[43]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 20.

[44]<u>Ibid</u>., p. 218.

or Young's Night Thoughts, or Henry Brooke's The Fool of Quality, in which moral and religious sentiments not contrary to his own were written in a style which "struck at the heart," praise could not be too high.

In his own writings the same frame of reference is evident. As he often said, he wrote what God told him to write. Style was not an end in itself but a means towards the glorification of God and the uplifting of his fellowmen. So he set for himself the standards of briefness, clarity, and purity. But the very religion of feeling which he was working to establish caused him to lose himself in the enthusiasm and ardor of his own emotions, and he lapsed into those frequent outbursts tinged with subjectivity and warmth.

Furthermore, these seemingly paradoxical opinions and practices help to illustrate Wesley's position as a transitional figure between the neo-classic and the Romantic. He was another of those pre-Romantic figures, who, steeped with the literary standards of their times, nevertheless gradually rose above these standards and, consciously or unconsciously, helped issue in the great Age of Romanticism which they themselves often did not live to see.

CONCLUSION

Exactly how much influence John Wesley had as a forerunner of the Romantic Revival cannot be dogmatically asserted. One can merely emphasize the fact that several of the major characteristics of the English Romantic Movement were definitely the motivating forces of his life, his religion, his literary tastes, and his style.

From the early time when Wesley heard the "preternatural voices" in his father's home to the time of his death we have seen that he was one who put emphasis on faith rather than on external evidence, on feeling rather than on intellectual proof. When twenty-two years old, he had decided that true religion was seated in the heart, and he then began his long struggle to find for himself that true religion. We see him experimenting with the teachings of the mystical William Law and of the Moravians. We follow him to America with his idealistic plans to save his own soul in the land of the Noble Savage. And finally we watch him as he feels his "heart strangely warmed" at the Aldersgate meeting, and, after this Romantic experience, launches forth, with the world as his parish, to make universal the true religion which he has discovered.

We watch him as he preaches this religion of faith with its emphasis on man's direct communication with God, a religion, based on feeling rather than reason, which often finds expression in excessive emotional outbursts. Over and

over again we find him subjectively extolling the holiness of the heart's affections and denouncing people who "hear much, know everything, and feel nothing." In order that this inward feeling may be produced in his hearers, he translates, collects, and writes hymns which have as one of their psychological motives the willing suspension of disbelief.

All these subjective elements of Wesley's religion help to give him a place among the pre-Romanticists. In fact these beliefs and practices have at bottom a fundamental conception of the importance of man's emotions which is the basis of Romantic expression.

Added to these subjective features are Wesley's humanitarian efforts to help the downcast, the sick, and the poor. We have watched this man acting as a pioneer in his denunciation of slavery. We journey with him as he founds homes for indigent children, simplifies and condenses knowledge for the poor and uneducated, and diligently peruses medical books so that he can administer simple remedies to the sick. Since humanitarianism has been long recognized as a phase of the Romantic Movement, the pre-Romantic significance of these far from unimportant constructive efforts of the father of Methodism cannot be denied.

In Wesley the man of letters, these fundamental concepts of early Methodism find still another form of expression. In his condensation and republication of cheap

books for the masses is evidenced not only the desire to improve the moral and religious conditions of his readers but also the motive of raising their mental and esthetic standards. The selections that he makes and his own critical ideas which he gives in his prefaces and in his Journal reveal a literary consciousness that went beyond the neo-classic tastes of the eighteenth century. A liking for the poetry of Milton, a pre-Romantic appreciation of the melancholy power of external nature along with a love for its rugged aspects, a preference for the sentimental novel, a belief in the Noble Savage, and an enthusiastic appreciation of the Ossianic poems, all these tastes combine to produce a recognizable portrait of the early eighteenth century Romanticist. And, last but not least, there are the frequent expressions of subjective emotionalism in the personal style of this man who "groaned to love God with all his heart" and felt religion "thrilling through his veins."

All in all, if the entire portrait of the founder of Methodism is examined, there appears not a complete Romanticist but an influential transitional figure between the old and the new.

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