

The Early Biographers of John Wesley

By Frederick E. Maser

ROBERT SOUTHEY, posing as a Spanish traveller in England in the eighteenth century, says that after John Wesley died "a curious scene was exhibited at his different chapels, where the books of the society are always sold. One was crying 'The true and genuine life of Mr. Wesley!' another bawling against him, 'This is the real life!' and a third vociferating to the people to beware of spurious accounts, and buy the authentic one from him."¹ Many of the early biographers of Wesley were embroiled in a similar controversy. Each claimed that his biography was the most authentic, and most of them scorned the pretensions of other writers. In some instances, however, they boldly copied long passages or leaned heavily on the very work they professed to despise.

Seven major biographies of John Wesley were published in England between 1791 and 1871 besides innumerable shorter pieces or sketches. Luke Tyerman, the last of this group of biographers, has the advantage of the final word, and in his "preface" he smashes each of the British biographies in turn.²

"Hampson's," he writes, "ready for the press when Wesley died, is extremely meagre, and was the work of an angry writer. Coke and Moore's, issued in 1792, was a hasty publication, written *currente calamo*, to get possession of the market; and, like most things done in haste, was exceedingly imperfect. Whitehead's, dated 1793-96, was composed in the midst of disgraceful contentions, and was tinged with party feeling. Southey's, printed in 1820, has literary charms; but, unintentionally, is full of errors, and, for want of dates and chronological exactitude, is extremely confusing. Moore's, published in 1824, is the fullest and most reliable; but, to a great extent, is a mere reprint of Whitehead's, given to the public about thirty years previously. Watson's, issued in 1831, was not intended to supercede larger publications, but was 'contracted within moderate limits, and' avowedly 'prepared with special reference to the general

¹ *Letters from England* by Don Manuel Alvarez Espriella, translated from the Spanish. In two volumes, Second American Edition, New York, published by David Longworth at the Shakespeare Gallery, 1808. Vol II, page 71. The letters were in reality written by the poet, Robert Southey.

² About the time Luke Tyerman's biography appeared several other biographies also came on the market. One was a translation from the French. These will be briefly mentioned. In America two biographies appeared—one by George Bourne in 1807 and one by A. G. Meacham in 1835. These were written from British biographies and will merely be referred to in passing.

readers' ”³ The astute reader will easily infer that Tyerman's *Life* must be the only one worth reading.

Hampson's Work

John Hampson's biography of Wesley was published in 1791. Hampson began writing it while Wesley was living and finished it shortly after his death. It is in three small volumes, and before the last volume was completed, circumstances forced the author to include an "advertisement" authenticating his sources; since, he writes, "the Executors of Mr. Wesley, (have) taken such pains, by notices and advertisements, to prevent the circulation of these Memoirs, or any other account of Mr. Wesley, than that which they are now preparing, and which is to be signed by their names, —" ⁴

Hampson was the son of one of Wesley's itinerants whose name had been omitted from the one hundred Methodist preachers included in Wesley's Deed of Declaration, an important legal document which Wesley had drawn up to perpetuate Methodism after his death. Briefly stated, it placed the Methodist property held by Wesley at his death in the hand of the Methodist Conference in England—the Conference to consist of one hundred preachers named by Wesley and listed in the document. Some itinerants of long standing were arbitrarily excluded, among whom was John Hampson's father. According to Hampson's biography, five of these men strongly opposed the action, sending "circular letters, inviting all the preachers to canvass the business at the ensuing conference."⁵ Wesley made a speech at the conference in which he inveighed against the preachers opposed to the plan, and finally, with the support of the conference, insisted that they should either make concessions or be dismissed. The "concessions" included the admission that in their mode of proceeding they had sinned "for that was the word," Hampson says, "Mr. Wesley insisted upon." The brethren, having humbled themselves sufficiently, were restored to the fellowship of the conference. After a short time, however, one by one, they joined other Churches. John Hampson, the younger, joined the Church of England. "His life of Wesley," wrote Henry Moore, another biographer of Wesley, "was the

³ *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A. Founder of the Methodists*, by the Rev. L. Tyerman. In three volumes, New York, Harper and Brothers, 1872. Vol. I, page 111.

⁴ *Memoirs of the Late Rev. John Wesley, A.M. (etc.)* by John Hampson, A.B., Sunderland, Printed for the author, 1791, Vol. III, "Advertisement" preceding the "Contents of Vol. III."

⁵ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, page 156 to 166 where the whole story is told from Hampson's viewpoint.

'amende honorable' made to the church into which, when he wrote it, he was about to enter as a minister." ⁶

Bishop Francis McConnell, himself a biographer of Wesley, did not agree with either Henry Moore or Luke Tyerman about the Hampson work. Writes McConnell, "(John Hampson) did not fall into that mood of extravagant and out-of-focus adulation of Wesley which injures nearly all friendly utterances about Methodism's founder. The author of that *Life*, without being harsh, gives us a temper of approach which introduces a realistic note into the treatment of Wesley, a note Methodists have always sadly needed. Hampson's book is out of print, but it is well worth being looked up and read by anyone who cares to see Wesley in the flesh, before the period of apotheosis dawned." ⁷

McConnell's comment restores Hampson's little work to its rightful place among the biographies of Wesley. Hampson's work is particularly noteworthy for the pen picture it sketches of Wesley, a picture drawn by a contemporary who knew Wesley, obviously respected him, and treated him with refreshing objectivity. From this point of view, Volume three, chapters six, seven, eight and nine, are among the best in the book. It is disappointing that more writers of the day did not undertake to do what Hampson has done here. Even as able a writer as John Whitehead, Wesley's personal physician and sufficiently close to him to be named as one of the Trustees of Wesley's manuscripts, did not leave us his own impression of Wesley's appearance. In his chapter on Wesley's character Whitehead quotes from Hampson without noting his source in any other way than by the liberal use of quotation marks. Thus the British Methodists were naïvely reading through Whitehead's account some of the best sections of Hampson's biography which, down to as late a date as Luke Tyerman in 1871, they were waving aside as the work of "an angry writer."

Writes Hampson about Wesley, "His face, for an old man, was one of the finest we have seen. A clear, smooth forehead, an aquiline nose, an eye the brightest and most piercing that can be conceived, and a freshness of complexion, scarcely ever to be found at his years, and impressive of the most perfect health, . . . few have seen him without being struck with his appearance: and many, who had been greatly prejudiced against him, have been known to change their opinions, the moment they were introduced into his presence."

The chapter continues by describing Wesley's dress, his mannerisms and appearance in the pulpit, his general characteristics and

⁶ *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley A. M. (etc.)* by the Rev. Henry Moore, in two volumes, London, 1824, Vol. I, page V of the Preface.

⁷ *John Wesley*, Francis J. McConnell, Abingdon Press, N. Y. Nashville, 1939, page 130.

personality traits, and then adds a statement that strongly contradicts those who reveal him only as a stiff-backed churchman, reticent and taciturn. "In social life, Mr. Wesley was lively and conversible; and of exquisite companionable talents. He had been much accustomed to society; was well acquainted with the rules of good breeding; and in general perfectly attentive and polite. The abstraction of a scholar did not appear in his behaviour. He spoke a good deal in company and, as he had seen much of the world, and, in the course of his travels, through every corner of the nation, had acquired an infinite fund of anecdote and observation, he was not sparing in his communications; and the manner in which he related them, was no inconsiderable addition to the entertainment they afforded. . . . It was impossible to be long in his company, without partaking his hilarity. Neither the infirmities of age, nor the approach of death, had any apparent influence on his manners. His cheerfulness continued to the last; and was as conspicuous at fourscore, as at one and twenty." ⁸

Hampson's biography is a valuable little work which, after judicious editing, might well be reprinted today.

Coke and Moore

Tyerman gives a more discerning appraisal of the next biography to appear, *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley* by Dr. Thomas Coke and Mr. Henry Moore. As he indicates, the work is a hasty production written to provide, as soon as possible, some kind of authoritative work for Methodists to purchase and read.

Little need be said about Thomas Coke who is famous among Methodist historians and students. He was born at Brecon, South Wales, in 1747, son of Bartholomew Coke, a medical practitioner. He became a Rector and ordained Priest of the Anglican Church and later united himself to Wesley and the Methodist Movement. He was a scholar and preacher of no mean ability, and he became one of Wesley's most trusted lieutenants. He was ordained by Wesley as a Superintendent of the Methodist work in America, and in 1784 he brought to America Wesley's plan for governing the American Societies. For a time he served, together with Asbury, as Superintendent of the American work. In all, he made nine voyages to America. He was an impassioned missionary also, and eventually died while on the way to India in 1814. He had served as President of the British Conference in 1797 and again in 1805.

Mr. Henry Moore was a close friend of Wesley. He was born in the vicinity of Dublin in 1751. His father placed him under the care of a clergyman for a classical education with the hope of eventually

⁸ *Op. Cit.*, Hampson, Chapter nine, volume three.

entering him in Dublin University. On his father's untimely death Henry Moore was forced to give up this dream and go into business. He was eventually converted by the Methodists and became a preacher in the Methodist Movement. He became a trusted friend and confidant of Wesley. He died in 1844. He was sufficiently respected by his brethren to be elected President of the Conference in 1804 and in 1823.

In their preface the authors boast, "All his [Wesley's] private papers were open to our inspection for several years. He himself informed us of many important passages of his life, which he never inserted in his Journals, and are known to but few but ourselves. . . . Our materials are so abundant, that we might easily have swelled the work into two or ten volumes." Their reason for not doing so, they add, is so as not to "raise the price" of their book.⁹

The result is a disappointing volume that shows little evidence of the abundant material which the authors claim is at their command. In their summary of Wesley's appearance, character and personality, like Whitehead later, they lean heavily on Hampson, presenting a poor rehash of that author's excellent description of Wesley. They do add an illuminating incident, however, not found elsewhere. "The late Dr. Samuel Johnson, with whom Mrs. Hall, Mr. Wesley's sister, was intimate for some years, desired that she would procure him an interview with her brother. She made known his desire to Mr. Wesley, and a day was accordingly appointed for him to dine with the Doctor, at his house in Salisbury Court. The Doctor conformed to Mr. Wesley's hours, and appointed two o'clock: the dinner was not ready till three. They conversed till that time. Mr. Wesley had set apart two hours to spend with his learned host. In consequence of this, he rose up as soon as dinner was ended, and departed. The Doctor was extremely disappointed, and could not conceal his chagrin. Mrs. Hall said, "Why, Doctor, my Brother has been with you two hours!" He replied, "Two hours, Madam! I could talk all day, and all night too with your brother."¹⁰

It is especially disappointing, however, that men as close to Wesley as Thomas Coke and Henry Moore should have said practically nothing about the innermost thoughts and feelings of Wesley or set forth his views on the important steps he took in the interests of Methodism. Thomas Coke was intimately related to Wesley's plan for governing the American societies in 1784. He could have thrown a great deal of light on the whole matter, but one looks in vain for anything but the meagerest account of these important proceedings.

⁹ *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M. (etc.)* by Dr. Coke and Mr. Moore, London, 1792, pages VII and VIII of the Preface.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, page 526.

The book, however, sold well. It had two important men of British Methodism as authors. Ten thousand copies were sold almost at once and a second edition was called for the same year of its publication. It was republished in America in 1793 by the American Methodists and sold by John Dickins in Philadelphia. My own copy is especially valuable from the viewpoint of a collector of Americana. It is bound in full calf by Robert Aitken, according to an authority on Aitken's bindings. Aitken was the publisher of the first English Bible ever printed on American soil, sometimes called the "Bible of the Revolution" since it was printed near the close of that conflict when there was a dearth of English Bibles in America.

Whitehead's Biography

The third biography published in order of time, was the one by John Whitehead. It is a much more ambitious book than that of Coke and Moore, and it is a creditable piece of work; although, as I have already noted, it is disappointing in its lack of intimate personal details about Wesley. It was written also in the heart of controversies among Whitehead, the special committee to supervise the publishing of a life of Wesley and the other two trustees of his papers, Coke and Moore. One controversy concerned the compensation due Whitehead for his work in writing Wesley's life, another in the question as to who should possess the copyright, a third centered in the possession of the original manuscripts which were placed by Wesley in his will in the care of Dr. Coke, Mr. Moore and Dr. Whitehead.

A Mr. Rogers who was originally in possession of the papers gave them to Whitehead with the consent of Coke and Moore. Whitehead was engaged to write the biography of Wesley, but when it appeared that he would not allow his work to be read and approved by Coke and Moore or the chosen committee of the conference to supervise the work, Coke and Moore demanded the return of the papers. Whitehead refused to return them till after he had finished his biography. His work was lagging, however, and it was known a life of Wesley by John Hampson was in preparation. The Committee, therefore, ordered Coke and Moore to write their above-mentioned biography, as Tyerman says, "to capture the market."

The whole controversy is set forth in some detail both in Wm. Myles' *A Chronological History of the People called Methodists*, London, 1813, and in the history of Wesleyan Methodism by George Smith, published in London about the middle of the nineteenth century. It can also be found in an "Introduction" by Rev. Thomas H. Stockton to a reprint of the first edition of Whitehead's Wesley published in Philadelphia by William S. Stockton in 1844.

That some of Wesley's manuscripts received woeful, almost weird treatment is attested by a note in Nehemiah Curnock's eight volume edition of the *Journal of John Wesley*, published between 1909 and 1916. On page 261 of Vol. I he states that the entire Colman Collection of Wesley's manuscripts and books are but a mere survival. The collection came into the hands of Russel J. Colman from his father J. J. Colman of Norwich who acquired them from Mr. Gandy who was executor to Henry Moore. Originally the manuscripts and books were "in the custody of the minister occupying Wesley's house in City Road. John Pawson, with a fiery zeal against what he regarded as dangerous literature, began to burn Wesley's notebooks and letters. How much he destroyed we do not know. Henry Moore, hearing of these exploits, hastened home, and was happily in time to save the books and letters of the Colman Collection." Some think that Wesley's personally annotated copy of Shakespeare's works was destroyed in this way.

Nevertheless, Whitehead had at his command an abundant amount of original source material.

That Whitehead was an able man cannot be denied. He had been an itinerant preacher in Methodism from 1764 to 1769 and then resigned to go into business in Bristol. Later he opened a school at Wandsworth in the vicinity of London. Here he became acquainted with a Dr. Lettsom, two of whose sons were in Whitehead's school. Under Dr. Lettsom he studied medicine. He later was appointed guardian of the son of a Mr. Barclay, an eminent Quaker, and went with him to Leyden, Holland. Here he continued his studies in medicine securing a diploma as a Doctor of Medicine. After some years he returned to England and again joined the Methodist Societies being received by Mr. Wesley with great kindness. He was Wesley's personal physician at Wesley's death and was requested to preach Wesley's Funeral Sermon. He died in 1804.

Whitehead's life of Wesley received favorable notices in the London "Analytical Review," in the London "Critical Review" and in the "British Critic." Adam Clarke in his *Memoirs of the Wesley Family* relied far more heavily on Whitehead than any other of the early biographers of Wesley including Robert Southey.

The biography appeared in sections between 1793 and 1796. The Life of Charles Wesley appeared first and later it was combined with the Life of John Wesley into a work two volumes in length. The work evidently sold well and a second edition was printed which was followed by a third edition in 1805, a year after the author's death. This was a mutilated edition of the original work which omitted many passages that were objectionable to Coke and the high church party.

This third edition was published by John Jones after he had

submitted his plan of publication to the Irish Methodist Conference and apparently secured their approval. He states in "To the Reader" in Volume II, "the additions to Dr. Whitehead's original work will be found very considerable." He does not add that he has omitted some very cutting comments of Whitehead; but gives the impression he is reprinting the work as it originally appeared. His editing is especially evident at two very important points in the book. He omits Whitehead's criticism of the Deed of Declaration and his equally forceful criticism of John Wesley's assumption of the right to ordain.

Whitehead speaks of the Deed of Declaration as being built on a misstatement of the facts. The very title, he says, is "incongruous"—"A Declaration and Establishment of the Conference of the People called Methodists." He points out that the *people*, the Local-preachers, Trustees of Chapels, Stewards, Leaders or any other Laymen have not the least voice in the Conference or a single representative there. He adds rather slyly, "It is difficult therefore to conceive, why this Assembly of a few preachers, was called *The Conference of the People called Methodists*; unless it was to give the people a hint, that they *ought* to have *some* representatives in an Assembly where laws are made, by which they, as Methodists, are to be governed."¹¹ He makes several other equally devastating comments which are omitted by Jones in his Dublin publication and which he smooths over with appropriate sentences.

Whitehead is equally sarcastic concerning Wesley's assumption of the right to ordain men to the ministry. He points out that Wesley's principle and practice in this affair directly oppose each other and adds a cutting statement directed at Coke. "In this business Dr. Coke has reasoned in a manner much more consistent with his general practice, than Mr. Wesley; . . . Coke had urged that it was expedient for him to receive ordination at Wesley's hands (1) 'I may want all the influence in America you can throw into my scale.' (2) 'An authority formally received from you will be fully admitted by the people.' (3) 'My exercising the office of ordination without that formal authority may be disputed.' Now all this," continues Whitehead, "is intelligible and clear; and I am confident these reasons would have satisfied any man in similar circumstances, *who had considered ordination as a mere stalking horse to gain influence and dominion.*" (Italics mine.)¹² Whitehead then continues his attack in a similar vein, hardly in a manner pleasing to either Coke or many other Methodists of that early day or since.

¹¹ *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley* (etc.) by John Whitehead, M.D., London: 1793-1796, Volume II, page 413.

¹² *Ibid.*, Whitehead, Vol. II, page 424.

All of these remarks the Dublin edition blithely omits without giving the least hint of the omission or suggesting a reason for it. The first edition of Whitehead's *Life*, therefore, is the one to read and well worth the time involved.

Southey's Famous Biography

Robert Southey's *The Life of Wesley and the Rise and Progress of Methodism* was published in London by Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, and Brown in 1820. It was published in the same year in New York by Wm. B. Gilley, no. 92 Broadway. It was immediately successful, coming from the able pen of The Poet Laureate of England. It has been reprinted more frequently than any other of the early biographies and it has been edited again and again with appropriate notes by a wide variety of editors.

That Southey's biography has a great deal of charm and is exceedingly well written is probably one reason why it is so often reprinted. That editors seem to enjoy adding footnotes and corrections to an otherwise excellent work is probably another. The chief charge made by many of the Methodists against it is Southey's insistence that Wesley sought and loved power. He probably did. But the statement irritated almost every biographer of Wesley down to Bishop McConnell. The Bishop is objective enough to admit the charge, but he leaps to Wesley's defense, even after saying that "The question was not worth quite so much ink." "There is no doubt," he wrote, "that, in dealing with men, Wesley was self-assertive beyond all description, but it is well that it was so. . . . Just think what a plight the Methodist Movement would have been in if Wesley had too often passed through seasons of doubt and self-distrust."¹³

The most famous edition of Southey's work, aside from the first edition, is the third, edited by Southey's son, the Rev. Charles Cuthbert Southey. It contains notes by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the poet, and also a paper at the end of the book entitled, "Remarks on the Life and Character of John Wesley" by Alexander Knox. Rev. Southey, the editor, explains that Knox "drew up this paper at my father's request, and chiefly with the wish of convincing him that he had judged erroneously in ascribing for Mr. Wesley any motives of an ambitious character."¹⁴

I have several copies of Southey's *Life of Wesley* in my collection. One belonged to Bishop Gilbert Haven. It is the second American edition with notes by the Rev. Daniel Curry, A.M. Another edition in my collection is the Bohn Edition and belonged at one time to Cardinal Henry Newman. On a flyleaf the Cardinal wrote: "I have

¹³ *Op. Cit.*, McConnell, pages 130, 131.

¹⁴ *The Life of Wesley (etc.)* by Robert Southey, third edition, London, 1846, Page VIII of "Editor's Preface."

nearly finished Southey's "Wesley" which is a very superficial concern indeed; interesting of course. He does not treat it historically in its connection with the age, and he cannot treat it theologically if he would.

"I do not like Wesley—putting aside all his exceeding self-confidence, he seems to me to have a black self-will, a bitterness of religious passion which is very unamiable. Whitefield seems far better."

Southey's narrative is especially valuable for the excellent pen pictures it sketches of some of the itinerants who worked with Wesley. Southey used a fairly extensive bibliography which he lists in the front of the work but he evidently had no access to original manuscripts or letters. The book is eminently worth reading.

Richard Watson, in 1821, published his *Observations on Southey's Life of Wesley: Being a Defense of the Characters, Labours, and Opinions of Mr. Wesley against the misrepresentations of that Publication*. The work is not of much importance, and were it not for the fame of the writer who later wrote a short biography of Wesley which we shall briefly consider, it would hardly warrant the taking up of space on a bookshelf.

Moore's Two-Volume Work

Four years after Southey's *Life*, there appeared in 1824 Henry Moore's two volume *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley*. This biography was also reprinted almost immediately in America. As we have seen, it was summarily dismissed by Tyerman as being a reprint, for the most part, of Whitehead's work. This is unfair although large sections of the work are obviously plagiarized from the earlier book. Moore, however, adds much that he had evidently learned through his personal association with Wesley and possibly from the Wesley manuscripts and letters which he had seen and read before many of them were destroyed by the wanton hand of Pawson. Nehemiah Curnock points out this fact, and it is well worth considering. Moore also tells us something of Wesley's mental state at the time when John Bennet married Grace Murray, at the instigation of Charles Wesley. Since Grace Murray had promised to marry John Wesley, himself, her marriage to John Bennet, one of Wesley's itinerants, was a decided shock. Moore records a poem written by Wesley at this time and also mentions a later meeting between Wesley and Grace Murray when they both were advanced in years and Grace Murray a widow. Moore's account is a valuable insight into Wesley's heart and mind.

Moore, as did most of the early biographers of Wesley, boldly stole Hampson's description of Wesley, not noting, even by quotation marks, that it was taken from another writer. Moore's *Life*, however,

is worth studying. There is a personal quality about his portrait of Wesley that reveals a close association with the founder of Methodism. His work lacks the literary charm of Southey, the descriptive and analytical quality of Hampson, the order and arrangement of Whitehead, but it possesses a value of its own. Moore obviously knew Wesley and that knowledge is reflected throughout the book.

Watson's Short Biography

Richard Watson published a short *Life of Wesley* in 1831. This was republished the same year in America with notes and translations by John Emory who later became a Bishop in the American Methodist Church.

Watson was born at Barton-on-Humber in 1781 of parents who became members of a Methodist Society. At first Watson joined a rowdy group who molested the Methodists but he later was converted, and in 1796 was the youngest itinerant ever to be received on trial by the Wesleyan Methodists. Later he became a supernumerary, becoming an editor of a newspaper. He again became an itinerant in the Wesleyan Methodist Conference in 1812. He developed a passion for missions and became Secretary of the Missionary Society Institutes. He turned also to writing, his best works being his *Theological Institutes* and his *Biblical and Theological Dictionary*. He died in 1833.

Watson's *Life of Wesley* has the advantage of brevity, but little else. He adds nothing new. He relied on Wesley's *Journal*, Whitehead's *Life*, Moore's *Life* and Southey's *Life*. He quotes from the latter for the purpose of contradicting its conclusions and statements. He took from Hampson the famed description of Wesley and also gathered whole sections from other authors to complete his picture of Wesley. He usually credits his sources. The American edition is the most entertaining to read in the light of Emory's notes since they reveal basic differences between American and British Methodisms. Watson, for example, opposes the itinerant system, especially the necessity of frequent moves. Emory, in his notes, defends the system as stirring men to greater activity and zeal. The activism of American Methodism can be seen quite clearly as far back as this little biography.

Luke Tyerman's Monumental Work

Luke Tyerman's work *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley* is a mammoth production which is more a chronological gathering of events in Wesley's life than a biography. His method is simplicity itself. He divides the life of Wesley into years, and then reports in the appropriate year every event in the life of Wesley which he could find.

Tyerman, himself, was born at Osmotherley, Thirk Circuit, February 26, 1820, of Methodist parents. He was converted at 15 years of age, and on becoming a Methodist minister he was appointed to his first circuit in 1845. In 1864, due to failing health, he became a supernumerary and devoted himself to writing. He died March 20, 1889. Besides his *Life of John Wesley*, he wrote a biography of Samuel Wesley, John's father; of George Whitefield; of John Fletcher; and a book on *The Oxford Methodists*.

In his introduction to *Wesley's Life*, Tyerman states that he had collected through the years a mass of original manuscripts which he used in his biography. Besides this he had access to other original materials then in the Wesleyan Mission House. He also explored the magazines, broadsides, tracts, songs and pamphlets published during Wesley's lifetime as well as the many manuscripts and letters that had come to light since the publication of Moore's and Whitehead's lives of Wesley.

The three volume biography was the longest written about Wesley to that day. It is a mine of information which must be consulted by every subsequent biographer. It is replete with anecdote, stories, and factual information about Wesley's doings. It lists at the end of each chapter his writings for that year. It carries in the top of the margin of each page a date for quick reference. It is chuck full of letters to and from Wesley, but it is not as thoroughly annotated as to its sources as it might be. In its more amusing anecdotes it substantiates Hampson's statement concerning Wesley's cheerfulness and humour. "On one occasion, when about to dine with a rich Methodist, one of his preachers, who was present, with more piety than politeness, cried out: 'O Sir, what a sumptuous dinner! Things are very different to what they were formerly! There is now but little self denial among the Methodists!' Wesley pointed to the abundantly furnished table, and then silenced the preacher's untimely eloquence by saying, 'My brother, there is fine opportunity for self denial now.'" ¹⁵

I learned as this paper was going to press that the original manuscript of this work is at the Rose Memorial Library, Drew Theological Seminary, Madison, N.J. Tyerman in his introduction suggests that he had at his command far more material than he ever used in his three bulky volumes. It would be an interesting exercise to compare the manuscript with the printed work to see if this extra material can be found.

The reviewer who appraised the work for American Methodist readers in the *Methodist Quarterly Review* (October 1871), while

¹⁵ *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley (etc.)* by the Rev. L. Tyerman, with an appendix by Abel Stevens, in three volumes, New York, 1872, page 659, Vol. III.

admitting the importance of the biography was exceedingly caustic in his comments. "(Tyerman) possesses little grace of style, little historical tact, no power of portraiture or pictorial imagination, makes no pretense of philosophy, and displays no remarkable power of pronouncing a satisfactory judgment upon his facts and characters." A little later in the review it becomes clear why the reviewer is almost bitter. "Mr. Tyerman denies that Wesley really intended his authentication of Coke to be an ordination of him as American Bishop." Obviously the writer wanted to maintain at any cost that a bishop is of a higher order of the ministry, and thereby establish a Methodist hierarchy. The entire review centers in a discussion of this one point.

The reviewers, however, generally admitted that the very mass of material Tyerman had accumulated would make it necessary for every future biographer of Wesley to resort to his work.

Less Important Biographies

The Life of the Rev. John Wesley (etc.) by George Bourne, Baltimore, 1807, and *A Compendium of the Rise and Progress of the Methodist Church both in Europe and America* by A. G. Meacham, V.D.M., New York, 1835, are both interesting chiefly because they are fairly full lives of Wesley that were published in America by American writers at a comparatively early date. Neither, however, relied upon any original source material but used the British authors. Meacham and Bourne both plagiarized liberally from the British writers, although Bourne lists his sources in his introduction.

About the time Tyerman's *Life* was published three other books about Wesley came from the press beside a judiciously chosen volume of selections from his *Journal* entitled *Wesley His Own Biographer*. The first was a life of Wesley written for children. It was one hundred twenty pages in length and admirably suited for its time and purpose. It is entitled *The Story of Our Founder: Being a Life of John Wesley Written for Children*, London: E. Stock, 1870.

In the same year appeared Julia Wedgewood's *John Wesley and the Evangelical Reaction of the 18th Century*, London: MacMillan and Co., 1870. It is an exceedingly thoughtful and charming book. It is sympathetic to Wesley and his work, and written, as the author states in her "Preface," not as a biography, but as an "attempt to delineate the influence of a particular man upon his age."

The author ably fulfilled her purpose. She is especially understanding of Wesley in his problem of what to do about his American Societies following the Revolutionary War. She adequately supports the position that Wesley's decision and course of action were due to circumstances beyond his control, and she staunchly defends his conduct in ordaining men for the American work. The volume should

rank high among the biographies of Wesley. It deserves a more complete analysis than there is time to give it in this paper.

In the same year (1870) the Rev. A. J. French translated *John Wesley His Life and His Work* by Matthieu Lelievre which appeared in France in 1868. It had been a prize essay in a competition sponsored by the French Conference. Five thousand copies were printed in a total of three French editions. In another edition, which was an English translation by Rev. J. W. Lelievre, published in London in 1900, the author states that it is almost a new work. It was enlarged and modified by the help he had secured from Tyerman's monumental work. It is well written but contains nothing new. Its chief interest is its French origin.

With Tyerman's biography the first wave of Wesley biographies had spent itself. Tyerman marks the end of this initial effort to picture the Methodist leader. All that is known about Wesley to that date has been gathered and recorded. Other important facts remain to be discovered from Charles Wesley's secret *Journal* in Georgia, John's *Diaries* and the innumerable letters and manuscripts still to be found. But these will afford grist for the mills of later writers. Still later will come the analysts, whom we shall now always have with us, seeking to explain Wesley on the basis of a particular psychological theory. The flow of biographies about Wesley will not diminish, it will increase. In my collection I have five shelves of biographies about Wesley and quite recently I acquired one written in Japanese. The man is being written about more today than in the first fifty years immediately following his death. In spite of all the available material about Wesley, however, like most great men, he is still an enigma, a mystery. Sometimes I think the vast amount of material we have conceals rather than reveals Wesley. Whatever the reason, Wesley's life still awaits the delineating pen of a biographer great enough to match the challenge of Wesley's life and soul.