THOMAS COKE (1747-1814)—
HIS PERSONAL BACKGROUND*

By John A. Vickers

No history of the Methodist movement in the years immediately before and after John Wesley's death can be written without reference to Thomas Coke, whose name has become something of a household word in World Methodist circles. Though remembered especially as a pioneer of overseas missions, he also occupies an important niche in the early history of Wesleyan Methodism in both Europe and America. Yet it cannot be denied that Coke has, on the whole, had a “bad press” and that the admiration for his energy and devotion has usually been muted and hedged with qualifications. Quite apart from the treatment he has received in a long line of lives of Wesley, he has been singularly ill-served by his own biographers. Even allowing for the concentration of Methodist scholarship on John Wesley, to the neglect of every other figure on the scene, it remains a curious fact that the only serious study of Coke to appear in the last hundred years is that by the American, Bishop W. A. Candler, in 1923. Before that, we have two early lives, by Jonathan Crowther, a friend and fellow-preacher (1815) and by Samuel Drew, his official biographer (1817), and the solid but undocumented volume of J. W. Etheridge (1860). The other, slighter studies that have appeared from time to time are largely derived from these. Yet a considerable, if not overwhelming, volume of material, especially letters, has survived on both sides of the Atlantic, and much of it remains unpublished. The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers have so far remained few.

Family Background

Although the available genealogical evidence is regrettably incomplete, it is sufficient to show that none of the published accounts is to be trusted. The parish registers at Brecon and Llanfrynach do not go far enough back to be of much help, but they are supplemented by details gleaned from family wills and administrations in the National Library of Wales. With certain qualifications indicated below, these sources enable us to construct the following family tree:

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1 This includes a biography in Welsh, Thomas Coke y Cymro a'r cenhadwr by W. O. Evans (Bangor, 1912).

2 For information on these, I am indebted to Mr. Idwal Lewis and Miss N. C. Jones of the N.L.W.
Henry Cooke

Edward Cooke (d. 1693)

Edward Cooke (d. 1730)  
Jeffrey Cooke (d. 1718)  
Lodwick Cooke  
Anne Cooke  
Mary Cooke

Bartholomew Coke (d. 1773)  
—m— Ann(e) Phillips (d. 1783)  
John Coke

Bartholomew Coke (1743/4-1747)  
John Coke (1745)  
Thomas Coke (1747-1814)

Henry Cooke is described by Theophilus Jones as of Gwern-y-Fuwch, Radnorshire, but the British Museum reference he gives is a meaningless one and I have been unable to find confirmation of this.

According to Etheridge, Bartholomew Coke was the son of Edward Cooke, rector of Llanfrynach. This is impossible, since this Edward Cooke died in 1693, nearly ten years before Bartholomew was born. (His administration was granted on 15 September 1693.)

There is, however, another member of the Coke family in the list of Llanfrynach rectors. This is Jeffrey (or 'Galfridus') Cooke, who held the living from 1696 to 1718, in succession to Morgan Prosser. Griffith T. Roberts has recently asserted that it was this member of the family who was the father of Bartholomew and grandfather of Thomas Coke. But the fact that, according to his will, Jeffrey Coke died a bachelor, is a formidable—though admittedly not insuperable—difficulty in the way of accepting this conclusion.

The solution seems to lie in the assumption that the earlier writers we have cited have confused two different Edward Cookes (father and son), and also the two members of the family, Edward and Jeffrey, who held the Llanfrynach living. This is borne out by the wills and administrations at N.L.W., though the evidence falls short of absolute proof. The administration of the Rev. Edward Cooke in 1693 was granted to 'Edward Coke of Llanvrenach, gent.' and to Jeffrey Cooke. Their relationship to the deceased is not given, but it is a fair assumption that they were his sons. Jeffrey Cooke's will in 1718 mentions his two brothers, Lodwick and Edward, and also

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3 History of Brecknock, Vol. IV, p. 49.  
4 Life of Thomas Coke, p. 425. Edwin Poole, History and Biography of Brecknockshire, p. 371, makes the same statement, but without naming the rector.  
5 Theophilus Jones, loc. cit., gives the dates of Edward Cooke's incumbency as 1664-1694, but according to N.L.W. MSS 1626c, his successor, Morgan Prossor, became rector on 1 February 1692/3.  
6 Theophilus Jones, loc. cit.  
7 Bathafarn, 1950, pp. 23 ff.
refers to Edward's sons, though unfortunately without naming them. (There were also sisters, one of whom, Mary, is named with her brother Lodwick as executor. Another sister, Anne, alleged that Jeffrey was suffering from a fever and therefore not of sound mind when the will was drawn up two days before his death. According to her, Lodwick, who was living with Jeffrey at the time, had poisoned his mind against their brother Edward, by accusing him of having 'rifled the rectory, wasted his Goods and drank his liquors in a profuse and Wastful manner.' In the course of this petty family squabble, Anne—conveniently for us—mentions among other things that Jeffrey had died a bachelor and childless.)

This second Edward Coke turns up again, described as 'of Llanhamlach, gent.', when his administration was granted to his widow, Jennett Coke, on 22 March 1730. Bartholomew Coke is also named in the administration, but his relationship to Edward is not specified. One further reference to Edward occurs a few years earlier, in 1722/3. *Alumni Oxonienses* has the following entry:

Coke, John, s. of Edward, of Llanvrynach, co. Brecon, pleb. Jesus Coll. matric. 5 March 1722-3, aged 19.

There seems little doubt that this refers to a younger brother of Bartholomew Coke. His subsequent career is a blank; but years later his nephew, Thomas, was to become a Gentleman-Commoner of the same College.

On his mother's side, little can be said of Thomas Coke's ancestry. Ann (e) Coke was the daughter of Thomas Phillips of Trostre, Cantref, a parish closely associated with Llanfrynach. The name Phillips occurs regularly in local parish records, but it is not easy to identify the family in most cases. However, two entries in the marriage register of St. Mary's, Brecon, are of some interest. On 22 July 1756, Bartholomew Coke witnessed the marriage of Thomas Phillips to Frances Vaughan; while on 29 August 1763, both Bartholomew and Thomas Coke were witnesses to the marriage of William Winston to Ann Phillips (both couples being of St. Mary's parish).

**Formative Years**

There is little doubt that, as their only surviving child, Thomas Coke was specially cherished by his parents. Two other sons had died in infancy before he was born. In return, Thomas was devoted to his parents. Of his schooldays we know virtually nothing. No records of Christ College in the eighteenth century have survived.

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8 Bartholomew, baptized at St. Mary's, Brecon, on 24th January 1743/4, was buried on 17th March 1747. John was baptized on 5th November 1745 and buried four days later.
We can say little more than that David Griffith had recently become headmaster, and that one of Coke's contemporaries was his lifelong friend, Walter Churchey. Presumably the strictures Coke uttered against the public schools in his *Sermon upon Education*, preached in Somerset in 1773, were based to some extent on his own experience as a pupil. His main objection was to the profanity and moral corruption of the classical texts which schoolboys were required to translate. He pleaded, too, that it was more effective to appeal to a child's affection and gratitude than to its fear.9

Brecon was at that time a busy town on the main coach route from London to West Wales. As the center of a prosperous agricultural region, it was both commercially and administratively important.10 There was no lack of social life, to which the young Thomas Coke found he had free access, not only through his own personal charm, but because of his father's standing in the community. Bartholomew had prospered in his practice as an apothecary and his medical skill and knowledge were in wide demand. But he found time to serve on the Common Council of Brecon, was for many years an alderman of the borough and was twice elected bailiff, in 1737 and 1758. It was no doubt as much a tribute to the father as to the son that Thomas was also made a Common Councillor on 24 September 1769 and a year later, at the age of 23, was elected bailiff. At the end of his term of office he became an alderman, but resigned in July 1772, on the grounds of his absence from Brecon. He was by now firmly installed as curate in South Petherton, Somerset, and henceforth his visits to his native town were to become increasingly rare. Nevertheless, he continued for many years to pay his contribution to the expenses of the Council dinners and other subscriptions.11

Coke had passed from Christ College to Jesus College, Oxford, where he was entered as a Gentleman-Commoner on 6 April 1764. He had his taste of the debauchery that characterized the university of that day, and was for a time attracted by the prevailing Deism. But after taking his B.A., in 1768 and his M.A., in 1770, he proceeded to set a firm course towards ecclesiastical preferment. He was ordained deacon in Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford, on Trinity Sunday, 1770 and priest in the Episcopal Palace, Abergwili, Carmarthen, on 23 August 1772.12 In 1775, with the support of no less a

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9 *A Sermon upon Education: preached at the Anniversary of a Public School, at Crewkerne, in the County of Somerset, on Tuesday September 15, 1773* (Sherborne, 1774).

10 A detailed account of the importance of Brecon in the second half of the eighteenth century is given by Dr. R. T. Jenkins in his article on John Hughes in *Brycheiniog*, vol. viii, pp. 67 ff.

11 See letters to Thomas Williams quoted below.

12 The ordination certificates are in the M.M.S. Archives.
patron than the Prime Minister, Lord North, he obtained his Doctorate in Civil Law. 13

During his six years in South Petherton, Coke antagonized a growing number of his parishioners, partly by his outspokenness in the pulpit, partly by his eagerness to repair the church fabric at the expense of the rate-payers. Towards the end of his curacy, the influence of Methodism, chiefly through the writings of Wesley and Fletcher, 14 led him to ride over to Kingston St. Mary, near Taunton, to make the acquaintance of John Wesley on 13 August 1776. The older man sent him back to his parish to turn it into a Methodist circuit, 15 with the result that his flagrant “enthusiasm” quickly stirred up fresh hostility. On Easter Sunday, 1777, he was ignominiously dismissed from his post and driven from the parish. “Dr. Coke,” wrote Wesley, “being dismissed from his curacy, has bid adieu to his honorable name, and determined to cast in his lot with us.” 16

In the Service of Methodism

As a young man approaching his thirtieth birthday, Thomas Coke still had nearly forty years of active life before him, and these years were to be so filled with a multitude of undertakings that it is impossible to do them justice in any summary. For the first few years his name appears among the preachers stationed in the London Circuit, but he was, in fact, traveling ever further afield throughout the Connexion, visiting the societies and dealing with administrative problems on Wesley’s behalf. In the course of this he paid the first of many visits to Ireland, where he presided over the Conference of Irish preachers. The climax of this initial period came with his part in drawing up the Deed of Declaration in 1784, by means of which both the legal status of the Methodist Conference and its continuance after Wesley’s death were ensured.

The year 1784 also saw a sudden widening of Coke’s horizons and the sphere of his activities. When it opened he was busy circulating his first missionary appeal 17 and entering into a correspondence with Charles Grant on the possibilities of a mission in India, 18 a scheme that he was to cherish for thirty years before the opportunity...
of realizing it came. At the same time he was preparing to undertake his first voyage out to the newly-independent United States, to act on Wesley’s behalf in establishing the Methodist Episcopal Church there. On 3 August, in Bristol, he was ‘set apart’ by the imposition of Wesley’s hands, as Superintendent of the American Methodists, and he in turn, at the famous ‘Christmas Conference’ in Baltimore later that year, ordained Francis Asbury and ‘consecrated’ him as fellow-Superintendent. (The more scriptural term ‘bishop’ was not adopted until three years later, and against Wesley’s express wishes.) This was the first of nine visits to America in twenty years, in the course of which he also made four tours of the West Indies, where Methodism was expanding rapidly. When we add his involvement in the affairs of the Church at home in the troubled years that followed Wesley’s death, and a variety of other commitments, including the literary tasks to which he turned his hand, it is little wonder that Thomas Coke found few opportunities during these years for visiting his native town. But he did not forget the countryside of his boyhood, nor the spiritual needs of his fellow Welshmen. More than once, as he rode through the romantic landscape of the Caribbean islands or beneath the Blue Ridge mountains of Virginia, his mind went back to the Welsh mountains he had climbed as a schoolboy. And in 1800 it was Coke who, amid all the cares of the overseas missions he had created, persuaded the British Conference to initiate a Welsh-speaking mission. When he made his will, in preparation for his final voyage to the East, his chief desire was that he might be buried alongside his two wives, in the Priory Church of his native Brecon. But the wider world which he had served so unflaggingly in life was to claim him in death, and it is fitting that at the end of such a life of traveling he should lie in an unmarked grave beneath the waters of the Indian Ocean.

Correspondence with Thomas Williams

During these years of extensive traveling and multifarious duties, Thomas Coke’s chief link with Brecon was through his correspondence with Thomas Williams, the attorney-at-law who was related to him by marriage and who handled the business affairs arising out of the property Coke inherited from his father. Over fifty of his letters to Williams have survived, covering the years 1779 to 1802. By far the largest collection is at Wesley’s Chapel, London, but others have turned up in the Archives of the Methodist Missionary Society, in various American libraries and in the County Museum, Brecon. The fact that none of Williams’s replies can be traced is an indication of the homelessness to which Coke was committed by his

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19 Bartholomew Coke’s will cannot now be traced, but Crowther, Life of Thomas Coke, 1815, p. 489, gives the value of the estate which Coke inherited as £3,000.
roving existence in the service of Methodism. The conditions in which he lived and worked did not allow any filing of correspondence or accumulation of personal effects. Though he kept up an extensive correspondence over many years and a considerable number of his letters have survived, only a mere handful of the letters written to him can now be traced. (For the same reason, when the recent Coke exhibition was being arranged at the Brecknock Museum, not one personal "relic" of Coke could be located.) By comparison, even John Wesley's life seems almost a sedentary one.

The letters to Williams have a twofold value. Being concerned almost entirely with business matters, they furnish a different aspect of the man from the public figure revealed in most of his other correspondence, and, at the same time, they throw light—all the more illuminating for being incidental—on some aspects of his service to World Methodism and his beloved missions. Hardly any of these letters have appeared in print, and I am grateful to their present owners for allowing me to make use of them in this article.

The earliest surviving letter to Williams is worth quoting as a typical example, quite apart from its intrinsic interest.

**Foundery, London**

Feb. 23, 1779

Dear Sir,

As Mr. North is indebted to me 10£ being half a year's Rent for the house in which he lives, & which he by agreement is obliged to pay quarterly, but for mutual convenience (as I live at so great a distance from him) I have agreed to receive half-yearly; & as I shall have occasion to make up a Sum of Money next Month, & have accordingly written to him some time ago about the Interest, but have received no answer; I must beg of you either to speak or write to him, to let him know that I expect immediate payment, & you may give him a receipt & send up the Money to me by Draught at the Foundery, London. And if he want any further receipt, I will send it down to him on the receipt of the Money. My Mother is in tolerable Health. I have not seen her today, if she knew I was writing to you, she would gladly have joined me in Love to you and Cousin Williams, & Cousin Jones: my Love & Respects unfeignedly wait upon them.

I beg of you also to write a letter to Mr. Maybery to inform him that his Answer, which I have received, is not at all satisfactory; & that I insist on the payment of the Interest between the present time and the fifteenth of next March, & that he need not send me any answer unless he is resolved to pay the Interest within that time he may either pay it into yr. hands or send it up to me; I think it is twenty pounds.

I am

Dear Sir

Your very affectionate

Friend & Servant,

Thomas Coke

P.S. Mr. North upon recollection owed me something, more (I think) than ten pounds, as he rents some other ... [text broken] however, you may give him a receipt on some other account for what he pays, but it must not be less than ten pounds; [and] I will send him afterwards any reasonable receipt he can desire.29

29 Original at Drew University.
Here is Thomas Coke, the apostle of World Methodism, in down-to-earth mood, dealing hard-headedly with matters of personal finance. The names of both the tenants mentioned recur later in the correspondence. On 10 March of the same year, for instance, we find Coke asking Williams:

Will you be pleased to tell Mr. North, that his Bill for the Repairs of the Roof of the House & for the Pipe will be allowed to him on his paying you immediately the Remainder? Altho', I confess, I did not expect that the Roof would want so much repairing so soon.

And again, on 7 July, in a letter which illustrates another recurring theme:

Will you be pleased to let Mr. North know, that he must pay the half Year's Rent due to me last Mid-summer into yr. hands some time in this Month, as I am going on a long journey in the beginning of August, & shall want money?

Such trivial references illuminate the man as no official records can do. In pursuit of his dues, Coke could at times be quite ruthless:

If Messrs. Maybery & Williams have not fulfilled their Promise,' he writes in 1783, 'I will swear to my Debt, & desire you to arrest Mr. Williams, . . . I shall chuse to swear only to the Principal, 108£, for fear of a mistake: I suppose that will not disqualify me at all from recovering the Interest."

Mr. Maybery was by now on the verge of bankruptcy, and early the following year Coke wrote to confirm his acceptance of a settlement of 10s. in the pound, if this met with general agreement among the creditors. Two properties which are mentioned frequently in the letters are an estate at Coity and the Shoulder of Mutton inn, very near Coke's birthplace in the High Street and noted for its associations with the Kemble family. In December 1789, the landlord was six or seven years in arrears with his rent and Williams was asked to bring him to account. A few months later, further pressure was brought to bear on the same tenant:

My dear Sir,
I find it expedient to make up the sum of one hundred pounds before I sail for the West Indies & America, which will be the beginning of October, if it please Divine Providence. I therefore beg the favour of you to transfer the inclosed Turnpike-Bonds in the best manner you can, and also the Turnpike writings which you have now in your hands. I'll also beg of you to send me the year's Interest of the mortgage. And I'll intreat you to oblige the Landlord of the Shoulder of Mouton, Howell (by kind means if these will do otherwise by other proper means) to pay me through you the Interest now due to me. Be pleased to send me the money in the course of next Month, & favour me with a line by the return of the Post. Deduct whatever will be due

[21] Letter dated 2 October 1783 (Original at Wesley's Chapel). Unless otherwise stated, the letters to Thomas Williams which are quoted in this section are to be found in the collection at Wesley's Chapel, London.
[22] Letter dated 31 May 1784 (Ibid.).
you for your trouble. If the Bonds cannot be transferred without some loss, I will consent to it.

My kind respects to Cousin Williams.

This letter illustrates the way in which Coke was at his most ruthless when—as was so often the case—he urgently needed money for the missions or one of his other undertakings. To his credit, as the same letter demonstrates, he was also prepared, when the work demanded it, to sell at a loss in order to realize his assets quickly. In this way he was able for years to pay his own expenses in crossing the Atlantic on Conference business and in traveling on both sides of the water. Despite all his efforts, during the years that followed Wesley’s death, the mission fund went steadily deeper into debt; there was as yet very limited support for the overseas work from the Connexion as a whole, and Coke’s begging for private subscriptions lagged behind the expenses which, by 1794, had mounted to £1,200 a year. Again and again, the gap was filled by recourse to Coke’s own pocket, with the result that by 1794 he had given over £900, besides advancing a total of £1,250 in the form of mortgages on a number of chapels in the West Indies. This is the background to the demands for the settlement of outstanding debts which recur in his letters to Williams. A letter of 8 April 1795, may be cited in illustration of this:

A particular circumstance renders it expedient for me to intreat the favour of you to pay me the year’s Interest of the Coity Mortgage, due last February, now. A Bill of £150 is just come from the West Indies on account of our Missions in those Islands. Those Missions have but £80 at present in the Bank; and therefore I must lend £70, to take up the Bill.

It was not the first, or the last, occasion on which “lend” proved to be the same as “give,” where Coke and the missions were concerned.

A letter of especial interest is one written in 1797 when, under pressure from the American General Conference, Coke had virtually made up his mind to settle in the United States and concentrate his energies upon fulfilling his episcopal duties there. The importunate pleadings of the British Connexion torn by the recent Kilhamite secession and ready to show its tardy appreciation of his services by electing Coke as President of the Conference, caused him to hesitate, think again, and eventually abandon his resolve. But the letter is no less revealing for that.

Downpatrick, Ireland,
Apr. 5, 1797


24 A statement of the receipts and disbursements for the support of the missions established by the Methodist Societies for the Instruction and Conversion of the Negroes in the West Indies, addressed to the Subscribers (London, 1794).
My Dear Sir,

I have found it indespensably necessary to bring my long voyages across the Atlantic to a conclusion, and for that purpose to determine on which side of the Ocean to spend the remainder of my days. I have therefore after most mature consideration resolved in favor of the States of America. It will therefore be necessary for me to settle my little affairs in Europe as soon as possible, as I am not sure but I may return to America from Ireland, in which case I shall sail, God willing, about the middle of next July. On this account I must beg of you to take up the Coyty Mortgage as soon as possible. I have left the writings in the hands of Mr. Collins atty. at law, Spital Square, London, and shall write to him by this post to settle all matters in this business, with you. Now I am going to take my leave of Europe, I will inform you of my temporal circumstances: by the considerable sums which I have myself given from time to time in my zeal for the preaching of the Gospel in the different parts of the world, I shall not have now more of my fortune remaining, after settling all my affairs, than the Coyty Mortgage, if you except my library, which may be worth two or three hundred pounds. You see therefore the necessity I am under of taking that small sum over with me, notwithstanding I am conscious of it that I shall have my traveling expenses borne in America. I might according to the judgment of the world have done better in more respects than one, but I have long consecrated all I am and have to God, and the many thousands of poor heathens I have been the instrument of bringing to Christ, infinitely more than compensate for all my losses and suffering, nor has the Lord left my ministry without success among professors of Christianity in different parts of the world.

I must therefore beg, my dear Cousin, that you will finally settle this business with Mr. Collins as soon as possible in the month of June next at farthest. Will you be so kind as to write to him on the subject? And favour me with an answer in White Friars Street, Dublin. You will be so kind as to Settle the interest up to the time of paying the principal. I'll also beg the favour of you to send me a statement of my accounts with Howell of the Shoulder of Mouton. I intend to resign those premises into the hands of Sir Charles Morgan before I sail, and at the same time to send a resignation of my place in the Common Council of Brecon, as my engagements to our American Connexion are irrevocable. I beg my respects to Cousin William, and all your family, and am, my dear Sir,

Your much obliged and affectionate kinsman and servant,

T. Coke

In the event, his American engagements proved less irrevocable than he had imagined and he did not resign from the Common Council. On 5 May 1798, he asked Williams to pay his share of the ‘Subscription which the Corporation of Brecon subscribed for the defence of our King and Country,’ and in 1801 and 1802 occur further references to the payment of his subscriptions to the Corporation dinners and other expenses.

There came a time when Coke was in such need of money that he was constrained to put pressure on Williams himself in order to obtain it. This time it was not the missions but another major undertaking which had to be financed. The Conference of 1792 had requested Coke to compile a commentary which was ‘neither so tedious as the expositions of Gill and Henry, nor so laconic as the annota-

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25 Original in M.M.S. Archives.
26 Letters of 10 March 1801 (original at Wesley's Chapel) and 1 May 1802 (original at Duke University, Durham, N. C.).
tions of Wesley.' He accordingly began to gather materials in the midst of his other activities, but as he progressed so the scope of the work grew larger, with the result that the first parts were not issued until 1799. On 19 July that year, as he returned from the Irish Conference, Coke wrote to Williams:

Dear Sir,

I have lately entered on a great undertaking, which has been the literary employment of the last seven years of my life—the printing of a Commentary on the Bible; a work, which on the onset will require a great deal of money in advance. I am therefore obliged to desire you to pay up the Coity mortgage. I must have two hundred pounds on that mortgage in a month's time. I would by no means wish to employ a third person in the business, if I could help it. If therefore, you can send up two hundred pounds with the interest, due to the present time in the course of a month to Andrew Strahan, Esq., M.P., Little New Street, London, you may take till next Spring to pay up the rest. I shall be in London, God willing, about the middle of next month, when I must some way or other have two hundred pounds out of the mortgage, towards making up a thousand pounds which I shall then owe for the single article of paper. It gives me no small pain, I assure you, Sir, to trouble you, but the circumstances I have described, require it. 27

This letter came as something of a shock to Thomas Williams, whose resources were so tied up that he was not in a position to find such a sum easily. Coke therefore modified his demands somewhat, and proposed that Williams should pay him £100 by the new year and the rest in subsequent instalments. But he continued to press for payment. He wrote in October:

Few things would give me greater pain than to put you to a great inconvenience; but I must have that £100 by the means of that Mortgage by about the 1st of January next & it is not reasonable that I should be put to a great expense in employing a Lawyer in the business; which would make the interest ten or fifteen per Cent, when the expenses of the writings were paid.

This veiled threat was effective, and Coke had his £100 by the stipulated date. But Williams was not yet out of the red. Before the year's end Coke had returned from America and was pressing even more insistently for the balance still outstanding. The printing of his Commentary, now in full swing, was making serious demands on Coke's resources. He wrote on 17 December 1800:

I have £400 to pay in about fourteen days & have no other way of raising the sum but by calling in the £300 due from you. I really feel myself much pained in putting you to inconvenience; but I can't help it. . . . If this is not done, I shall be obliged, tho' with great pain, to desire Mr. Collins to get it in as soon as possible. I am sorry, but I really cannot help it.

To Thomas Coke, wealth was always expendable, and he had accustomed himself to realizing his assets at short notice. Williams had tied up his resources to a degree which Coke felt to be quite unjustified. Accordingly, he wrote again on 27 December, to suggest a further compromise, but adding:

27 Letter of 19 July 1799 (Original in M.M.S. Archives).
If you do not comply with this proposal, I shall have the whole to be settled by Mr. Collins from the time I might have read your answer. No person keeps much money in his hands longer than he can help it; your laying out therefore your money to the best advantage, is no reason why you should not pay me, when I want my money very much.

“No person keeps much money in his hands longer than he can help it”: such words were doubly true in the case of Thomas Coke. From somewhere or other, Thomas Williams found the rest of the money that was owing, the Coity mortgage was foreclosed, and the printing of the Commentary continued, though not until 1807 were the final pages of Volume VI completed. Even then there still lay hidden in the future all the trouble which Coke was to become involved in through the publication of an abbreviated translation of his Commentary into Welsh. Only after several changes of both translator and printer were the three volumes of this work to see the light of day. Apart from his sermon on the Godhead of Christ, this was his only publication to be translated into Welsh, and it serves as a further reminder of Coke’s attachment to his native land. Though he himself spoke no more than a sentence or two of Welsh, he was fully aware of its importance as a medium of the Gospel, especially in North Wales.

The achievements of a man like Thomas Coke are easier to catalog than to assess. As a young man, he became Wesley’s trusted delegate on both sides of the Atlantic. As the first Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, he presided at many of the early Conferences in America, and during his last visit he preached before the Congress itself in Washington. He was twice elected to the presidential chair by his brethren in the British Conference, and in other years frequently served as its secretary. The name of no other Breconian is so widely remembered and honored as that of this man who traveled so continuously and extensively throughout the world he served. Thomas Coke was indeed a son of whom Brecon may be proud, and one it should be ashamed to forget.

28 Letters of 30 January 1801 and 18 March 1802 (originals at Wesley’s Chapel).
29 The three volumes are dated 1808, 1809 and 1813. For an account of the vicissitudes through which the translations passed, see Coke’s letter to Thomas Roberts, dated 1 September 1809 (original in possession of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania); also A. H. Williams, Welsh Wesleyan Methodism, 1935, pp. 121 f.; Wesleyan Methodist Magazine, 1932, pp. 542 f.; John Hughes’ Journal, in Bathafarn, 1956-7.
30 Pregeth ar Dduwdod Crist, by H. Carter (London, 1811; second edition, 1815). The N.L.W. possesses one further publication in Welsh connected with Coke and probably issued by him, a collection of letters from Wesleyan missionaries in America and elsewhere, entitled: Llythyrau a anfonwyd at Dr. Coke ac eraill; yn dywedyd am lwyddiant yr Efengyl yn nhlith y Wesleaid yn America a llefydd eraill yn y hwylwyn ddwiwedd, 1806 ... Caerlleon: argo gan J. Hemingway. This does not appear to have been published in English.