THE GIBBES FAMILY OF HILTON PARK

An unpublished correspondence of John Wesley

By John A. Vickers

During the fifty years in which he traveled the roads of England, John Wesley had three homes of his own, in London, Bristol and Newcastle. But scattered throughout the country were many other homes, some humble, some more exalted, where he found a welcome from year to year. Among these, toward the end of his life, was a country mansion, built of red brick about the year 1700, three or four miles north of Wolverhampton and the Black Country in Staffordshire. Although the heavy industry of the West Midlands is near at hand and a highway now runs through a corner of the estate, the house still looks out across pleasant countryside. The lawns slope steeply from the front of the house down to a small lake, near which a neglected conservatory stands among the trees. Behind the house an arched entrance still leads to the stableyard, but the stables where Wesley's horses were groomed are now used as garages. The building was enlarged in 1830 and is now run as a guest house for elderly people by Roman Catholic nuns. On a sunny afternoon it is still a quiet retreat such as Wesley found nearly two hundred years ago.

The arms of the Vernon family, who owned the estate in Wesley's day, are carved above the front door, but Wesley's host was Sir Philip Gibbes, who seems to have rented the house for several years, though no trace of his tenancy has otherwise survived. Sir Philip and his wife both came from Barbados, but little more is known about them, apart from a possible association with Bristol. Lady Gibbes was the daughter of Samuel Osborne of Barbados. She died in 1813, two years before her husband. In addition to the two daughters who feature in the following correspondence, there seem to have been two sons; but whether they had died young or were left behind in the West Indies is not clear.

In the early part of 1783 Wesley suffered considerably because of a cold which he contracted as a result of riding to St. Albans in an open chaise. A cough developed which persisted well into the spring, but it did not deter him from setting out as usual on his preaching tour at the beginning of March. He continued to preach, but by Sunday, March 16, a fever coupled with a "deep, tearing

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1 See footnote in Journal of John Wesley (Standard Edition, ed. N. Curnock), VI, 401. The family link with Barbados seems to have been maintained, as Thomas Coke records meeting "Sir Philip Gibbes" during his last visit to the island in 1793. (Extracts of the Journals of the Late Rev. Thomas Coke L.L.D., Dublin, 1816, 205).
2 Journal of John Wesley, VI, 380ff.
"cough" forced him to take to his bed. His friend, Brian Bury Collins, set out to fulfill his preaching appointments at Stroud and elsewhere, but the next morning the indomitable Wesley felt sufficiently recovered to set out after him, only to find himself laid low by a violent fever which kept him in bed the rest of that week. (The lack of a woman's firm hand is nowhere more evident than in this interlude in Wesley's Journal!)

By Saturday, Wesley had resumed his journey and reached Birmingham, where a course of electrical shock treatment, applied to both legs and breast, brought him such relief that he preached on the Sunday evening without ill effect. On Tuesday, March 25, he drove by chaise to Wednesbury, preached there at 9 a.m. and then went on to dine at Hilton Park. The visit had been arranged beforehand, through a mutual acquaintance, Miss Freeman, as a letter to Charles Wesley indicates: "On the day appointed, March 25, I went from Birmingham to Hilton Park. A little before we reached the Park gate Miss Freeman met us in Sir Philip Gibbes's chaise. After staring awhile, she came into my chaise, and she was convinced that I was alive." 4

The visit, which lasted two days, provided Wesley with a much needed respite from his labors, though it did not delay him long in his journey to Holyhead and Ireland. "That afternoon and the next day," his letter continues, "I gathered strength apace. The place was agreeable, and much more the company. Lady Gibbes puts me in mind of one of Queen Elizabeth's dames of honour. Her daughters are exceeding amiable, but sink under Miss Freeman's superior sense, and begin to feel that they are not Christians. She has been of great service to them, and hies at them day and night to show them what is real religion. On Wednesday night they were much struck; the younger sister could not contain herself, but burst out into a passion of tears." 5 Miss Freeman, obviously, was by twentieth century standards insufferably pious, and our sympathies for the two sisters under her zealous ministrations are deepened as we read on in the story. But there is no doubt that Wesley recalled the whole visit with great pleasure. The account in his Journal reads: "In the afternoon I reached Hilton Park, about six miles north of Wolverhampton. Here I found my old acquaintance, Miss Freeman (whom I had known almost from a child), with Sir Philip Gibbes's lady, and his two amiable daughters, in a lovely recess. With these I spent this evening and the next day both profitably and agreeably." 6

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3 Miss Freeman, a London friend of the Wesleys, is mentioned frequently in the correspondence of both John and Charles Wesley. Her unreliability as a correspondent was no new discovery for Wesley; see his letter to Ebenezer Blackwell, May 28, 1787 (Letters of John Wesley, Standard Edition, ed. J. Telford, III, 215f).
4 Letters of John Wesley, VII, 173 (letter dated April 4, 1783).
5 Ibid.
6 Journal of John Wesley, VI, 401.
Nor was he idle during even this brief holiday, for he found time to write an article entitled "Thoughts upon Dissipation" for the *Arminian Magazine* \(^7\) and seems also to have been busy preparing part of his *Journal* for the press.

During the summer months, as he continued his travels, Wesley kept up a correspondence with the two daughters of the Gibbes family. At the end of August, on a further journey north, he paid them a second brief visit; and he returned again in March, 1784 and March, 1785.\(^8\) The correspondence continued during the intervals, until August, 1785. There the story ends, except for one small fragment of evidence to show that Wesley did not forget "the amiable family" at Hilton Park. On March 11, 1789, he wrote to Richard Rodda, the preacher stationed at Birmingham: "I hope to be with you on Good Friday between one and two o'clock. Then you dispose of me as you see best till Easter Monday in the afternoon; but that day I am to dine with Sir Philip Gibbes at Hilton Park."\(^9\) But something caused Wesley to alter his arrangements, for though he was in Birmingham for Easter, on Monday, March 23, he preached at Dudley and then went straight on to Madeley.\(^10\)

The letters which Wesley wrote to the Gibbes daughters have been preserved at the Public Record Office, London (reference: P. R. O. 30/9/7-12) and this transcript has been made from photostat copies recently obtained by the Methodist Archives and Research Centre, for whose cooperation I am very grateful. The correspondence deals almost entirely with personal matters, but is interesting for the incidental light it throws on a number of things. Here is the 80-year-old evangelist, deeply moved by the friendly hospitality of a well-to-do family, discussing books and authors with the younger members and tactfully but firmly appointing himself their spiritual guide. Here are his views on the pitfalls of domestic service to a young man (or woman) of Christian conviction, and on the temptations presented to young ladies of fashionable circles by the vanity of high society; his views on physicians, the French, the Irish and the Cornish people, and the troubles in Ireland; his gratitude for the gift of seeds for his garden at City Road, London; his affection for his native town of Epworth, and his father's advice on the value of exercise. Wherever possible references and allusions have been identified; but even where this is no longer possible, the letters speak for themselves. For other helpful information I am indebted to Mr. Malcolm Pinhorn and Mr. A. G. L. Ives, C.V.O., M.A.

\(^7\)Subsequently published in the *Arminian Magazine*, 1785, 643.
\(^8\) *Journal of John Wesley*, VI, 442.
\(^9\) *Letters of John Wesley*, VIII, 124.
\(^10\) *Journal of John Wesley*, VII, 480.
1. To Miss Gibbes/At Sir Philip Gibbes Bart./In Hilton Park near/Wolverhampton

I cannot but return my sincere thanks to Lady Gibbes, & to my dear Miss Gibbes and Miss Agnes, for the friendly Entertainment I received at Hilton Park, which I shall not easily forget. I have frequently since then reflected with pleasure on those happy moments, & shall rejoice, should it ever be in my power to wait upon you again.

I must beg the favour of you to accept of the Concise History of England, wch fully clears the character of that much injured Woman. And I beg Miss Agnes to accept of Henry Earl of Moreland, which I think will speak to her Heart. I have ordered both of them to be put up in one parcel, & directed to you at Hilton Park.

How was I delighted to find both my dear Miss Agnes & you (I speak as if I had been long acquainted with you!) resolved in the Dawn of Life to be as wise & good as if you had lived three score years. May the God of Love confirm every resolution He has given you, & bring all your good desires to good effect! This is the earnest wish of

My Dear Miss Gibbes,
Your Affectionate Servant
John Wesley

Derby
7th April 1783

In a few days I expect to be in Dublin.

2. To/ Miss Gibbes/ At Lady Gibbes'/in/Aberystwith

My Dear Miss Gibbes

The very sight of your name gave me a sensible pleasure: Till I saw it, I was almost in doubt, Whether you wou’d think of me


12 The Fool of Quality, or the Adventures of Henry, Earl of Moreland (1766), by the Irish writer Henry Brooke (see also letter dated August 16, 1783 below), was reprinted by Wesley in abbreviated form in 1781, under the title The History of Henry, Earl of Moreland (Green, Wesley Bibliography, no. 351). It is variously described by Saintsbury as "a wholly unpractical book and a chaotic history, but admirably written, full of shrewdness and wit, and of a singularly chivalrous tone," (Short History of English Literature, 610) and by George Sampson as a "curious medley of stories, adventures and arguments" read in its shortened form by "generations of devout Wesleyans," whose author "deserves more serious study than he has yet received." (Concise Cambridge History of English Literature, 485, 511) The book shows the influence of such diverse writers as Rousseau, Sterne and William Law.
any more, considering on the one hand, the fatigue & hurry of Travelling, & on the other, the various Company & many amusements with which you was likely to be taken up. But it will not be easy for me to forget the few agreeable Hours I spent at the Park. I little expected to find so much Openness & Friendliness among Strangers. But what gave me still more satisfaction was, your Willingness to learn what is most worthy of Rational Creatures, & those that are designed for nobler Enjoyments, than any of those that perish in the using. You consider yourself, my Dear Miss Gibbes, not as a beautiful piece of Wax-work but as an intelligent, an immortal Spirit, a creature capable of GOD, intended to know the greatest & best of Beings, to Love & enjoy Him to all eternity! O never let your natural vivacity, company, or the flutter of the world, put this out of your sight! But Know yourself! that you may know GOD & know Christ, whom He hath sent.

According to Miss Freeman’s Desire, I wrote to a Friend at Bath concerning her. And I wrote to her about the same time, but I have not had one line from her since. Probably you can inform me where she is? I am afraid she might be taken ill. Wishing you and my Dear Lady Gibbes every Blessing, which GOD has prepared for those that fear him, I remain,

My Dear Miss Gibbes,
Your very Affectionate Servant
John Wesley

Dublin
25th April 1783
I expect to be in Chester in a few days.

3. (On the same sheet as the above)
To Miss Agnes Gibbes
I am much obliged to you, my Dear Miss Agnes, for favouring me with a line, & shall be extremely glad, shou’d it ever be in my power to return you thanks in person. I shall not easily forget those happy moments in the Evening when we stood together by the fire in ye Dining Room: the emotion you then shewed gave me much pleasure, & I can hardly now think of it without tears. I believe it was then, & is now your Desire, to be not almost but altogether a Christian; to have that mind which was in Christ, & to walk as Christ also walked. O that the Lover of Souls may give you

38 Cf. letter to Charles Wesley written on the same date: “How odd is this affair of Miss Freeman! Since I left her at Sir Philip Gibbes’s preparing for her journey to Bath, I have not had so much as one line from her. Yesterday I had a letter from Miss Gibbes and another from her sister; but she is not even mentioned in either one or the other. Do you know what is become of her? Is she ill? Surely she is not slipped back to Paris!” (Letters of John Wesley, VII, 175).
your Desire! May make you all like Himself! What happiness wou’d this give to,

My Dear Miss Agnes,
Your ever Affectionate Servant
John Wesley

April 25, 1785 [Should be: 1783, as in previous letter]

4. To Miss Gibbes/At Lady Gibbes/in/Aberithwith
Manchester May 19th 1783

My Dear Miss Gibbes

Your last favour came exactly in time. It could not have found me at a better place. Three persons have already offered themselves, one of whom I have made choice of. He is about one & twenty, of no bad appearance, rather genteel, & of a pretty good understanding. His honesty and sobriety are unquestionable. Altho therefore he has not been in service before, yet I am in hopes he will make a good Servant, as he is very willing to learn. The greatest difficulty which I apprehend he will meet with, will be from his fellow-servants. For he will not be fit for their company. He is too serious. Of course they will dislike him. They will spare no pains (as the vulgar saying is) to pick holes in his coat. They will tell things of him wch he never did, & put a wrong construction upon his words: in order to prejudice you or Lady Gibbes against him. But if he stays a few months, I am persuaded he will not easily leave you.

The book you mention I read when I was in Scotland. It is a very ingenious but a very dangerous one. Lord Haim, the Author, was a confirm’d Deist, if not an Atheist: but he was a man of strong understanding. Therefore he was too subtle to speak openly against the Bible, tho he hated it with a perfect Hatred. But he strikes at it obliquely in an hundred places. He slips no opportunity of giving it a side blow. Such is that you mention, which is a home thrust not only at Revelation, but at all Moral Honesty. “Entire Submission to the Moral Sense (that is, to Conscience) wou’d be ill-suited to man in his present state, & wou’d prove more hurtful than beneficial.” Well put indeed! Then honesty is not the best Policy! What a doctrine for a Judge to maintain! His other supposition, That a constant Consciousness of the presence of GOD, wou’d make us incapable of transacting temporal Business, shows that he is utterly ignorant of the whole affair. I am obliged to Lady Gibbes for giving me a

14 Lord Haim: I have not been able to trace this Deist author, unless he is the Niclaus Franciscus Haym, whose Thesaurus Britannicus (2 volumes, 1763-5) is among the books from Wesley’s library now at Kingswood School, Bath.
little opportunity of serving her. It gives me pleasure whenever I think of the Family. I cannot easily express how sincerely I am,
My Dear Miss Gibbes,
Your most affectionate Servant
J. Wesley

5. Written on the same sheet as the above [to Miss Agnes Gibbes]
Manchester
May 19. 1783

You point, my Dear Miss Agnes, at the very thing which is likely to be your greatest hindrance; I mean Company, as you are of a friendly temper, & unwilling to displease anyone. But this is a cross which you must often take up, if you determine to be a Christian. For in many instances your ways will not be like those of other young persons: And you will then have need to summon all your Resolution, if you will prefer Reason before Custom. You have now an excellent opportunity of confirming yourself, during this season of Retirement, in every purpose which may be of service to you, when the hour of temptation returns. I do not clearly understand that Miss Freeman means by Human Attachments. I do not desire to be less attached to my Friends than I am: I do not desire to love them less. There are few persons in the world (perhaps not one) to whom I am more attached, particularly after so short an acquaintance, than I am to you. And I do not wish that Attachment shou'd be broken off. I trust it never will, either in this, or in a better world. I hope and want to remain both in time & in eternity, My Dear Miss Agnes

Yours most Affectionately
J. Wesley

6. To Miss Gibbes/At Lady Gibbes'/in/Aberistwith
London
June 10. 1783

My Dear Gibbes
When I received your last favour, I was a little concerned, lest the young man to whom I had spoken, shou'd have delayed his journey, and thereby put you to some inconvenience. But I found, upon reflection, I recollected he cou'd not well leave Manchester before the twenty third or twenty fourth of last Month. I hope he is now with you, & that tho he may be awkward at first, he will mend upon your hands. And I am glad you have not many Servants about you at present. He may the more easily learn what you wou'd have him to do.

Lord Haim was the Author of that very ingenious & very dangerous Book. But I do not so much wonder that he shou'd imagine a continual sense of ye presence of GOD wou'd make us incapable
of attending to our worldly business, when I find the very same sentiment expressed by a much greater & better man than him, Dr. Blair! It is by this very consideration that this Writer endeavours to account for the present Ignorance of Man with regard to GOD & Eternity: "Because if those strong & [weird?] Impressions of GOD and the other world, which good men are sometimes favour'd with, were to remain always, they wd. be utterly unable to attend to the little affairs of this life. O no! The very Supposition clearly proves that both these Great men talk by rote: That they have no Experience of the things they talk of. Otherwise they wou'd know, that the stronger & livelier [lovelier?] sense any one has of GOD & Heaven, the fitter he is to do the will of GOD on Earth with the utmost Exactness.

Do me the justice, My Dear Miss Gibes, to believe your Letters are welcome in the highest degree to

Your most Affectionate Servant
J. Wesley

7. Written on the same sheet as the above
My Dear Miss Agnes

The very Friendship & good will of sensible & agreeable persons, who have no thought of GOD or their own souls, may prove a snare, by weakening your best desires, & damping you in your noblest pursuits. You are an Immortal Spirit, that are lately come forth from the God & Father of Spirits, & after you have done his will on earth for a few days or years, are to return to your native abode. What pity, that any person or thing, shd. ever put this out of your thoughts! I want you al[ways] to think, & speak & act, as one standing on [ye brink?] of Eternity! You & Miss Gibbes bring to my mind two Young Ladies in Ireland (Sisters of Lord Mahon) who were some years since about your age, & not unlike you, either in person or disposition. But they are both now in Abraham's bosom. The Younger, when very weak, desir'd but one thing on earth, to see me before she went hence. God gave her what she desired. She

The reference appears to be to Dr. Hugh Blair, minister of the High Church and Professor of Rhetorick and Belles Lettres in the University of Edinburgh. His Sermons, vol. I, 1777, contains a sermon "On our imperfect knowledge of a Future State" (pp. 84ff), on the text 1 Cor. 13:12. Though I have not been able to locate Wesley's actual quotation (which may be a paraphrase from memory), the sermon comes very close to it in several passages, notably p. 105: "The degree of knowledge [of God] desired, would prove incompatible with the design, and the proper business of human life. It would raise us to a sphere too exalted; would reveal objects too great and striking for our present faculties; would excite feelings too strong for us to bear; in a word, would unfit us for thinking or acting like human creatures." (Cf. also 92, 94f)
rejoiced with joy unspeakable & deliver'd up her Spirit to Him. Whenever He calls, I trust you will do the same! O that I might be enabled to help you a little forward in the way! What an unspeakable pleasure wou'd this be to

My Dear Miss Agnes, Yours most Affectionately
J. Wesley

London, June 10 1783

8. To/Miss Gibbes/At Sir Philip Gibbes, Bart./At Hilton Park, near Wolverhampton/Staffordshire

If I can hold a pen (wch indeed I can hardly do yet) I must write a few lines to my very Dear Friends at Hilton Park. But you really surprise me! I imagined you wou'd quite have forgotten me long ago. In ye late Century, Mr. Brooke, a Country Gentleman in Ireland was sent for by his dying Friend, who told him, “As my Wife is dead I bequeath this Infant to you: Train her up as your own.” He did so, & when she was about eighteen, married her. The next year she had Twins. The Elder, Counsellor Brooke (now just alive) wrote Henry Earl of Morland. One may observe two threads interwoven throughout, the Natural, & the Surprising. See Nature in Clement & Arabella, in the death of Matilda, &c. &c. These strokes I admire most of all! I feel them: So do you & my very dear Miss Agnes. The surprising I thought (as you likewise do) rose a little too high.

Now I must take breath.

I was in doubt before, Whether ye young man had a turn for Service. So I am not much disappointed: I believe it be little loss to him to return to his trade. If my strength returns, I shall take a Journey into Yorkshire shortly, & possibly wait upon you in a week or two at the Park. My best respects attend your dear Mamma. Living or dying, I shall always be,

My Dear Miss Gibbes
Your ever Affectionate
John Wesley

Bristol
August 16. 1783

9. Written on the same sheet as the above.
I cannot sufficiently thank my Dear Miss Agnes for still giving

38 These two sisters of Lord Mahon are nowhere referred to in Wesley’s Journal and pose a minor problem. Lord Mahon was a courtesy title used by Philip, Second Earl Stanhope between 1717 (or 1718) and 1721 when he became Earl Stanhope. The subsidiary title then passed to his eldest son, Philip, born that year, who used it until his death in 1763, and from him to his brother Charles, who succeeded to the Earldom in 1786. But these two brothers had no sisters; or at least, none that appear in the reference books. Their father, the second Earl, had two sisters, but the elder, Gertrude, was born as early as 1718 and died young.

37 This visit was paid on August 28.
me a place in her remembrance. I have lately seen Miss Freeman at Bath, who is now returned to London, but seems to be quite unhinged, & more than ever out of humour with every person & thing in the world. However I am exceedingly indebted to a kind Providence which by her means introduced me to the lovely Family at the Park. But an odd thought comes across me. Is it not strange to say, that I am half afraid to see Sir Philip? Because I am conscious of my not being able to make good the favourable account you will be apt to give of me.¹⁸ O may the God of Love repay sevenfold all the Kindness you have shown to

My Dear Miss Agnes
Your most Affectionate
John Wesley

Bristol
16 Aug. 1783

10. To/Miss Gibbes/At Sir Philip Gibbes, Bart./In Hilton Park/Near Wolverhampton/Staffordshire

My Dear Miss Gibbes

I return you many thanks for the Seeds, which I will order to be planted in my Garden at London. And probably we may save some seed by & by, which may be planted in the Garden at Kingswood. The Coldness of the Season makes it difficult to recover from any Disorder. Nevertheless, I hope Sir Philip is better already, & will quite conquer his indisposition without being obliged to have recourse to a Physician, who might keep him neither well nor ill till Midsummer.

I have not the Arminian Magazine here; And I do not know any one that has. I believe that account is in one of the last year's Magazines. The Ship was commanded by Capt. Kennedy. If I can procure the Magazine at Edinburgh I will send you a more particular account.

Every time I have the pleasure of being at Hilton Park I find more Attachment to it than I did before. Altho, to say the truth, it is not the place, but the Inhabitants, that

"In lasting Bonds my heart have laid."

I love Sir Philip; I love Lady Gibbes. But I confess I have a still greater regard, for those of the Family whom I know better. And methinks I know you as well as if I had been acquainted with you for many years. I know you fear GOD, & (at least) desire to love Him, more than all the gilded trifles of the world. You desire to be not almost but altogether a Christian: And not a fashionable

¹⁸ From this passage it is clear that Sir Philip Gibbes had been away from home at the time of Wesley's first visit to Hilton Park.
but a Scriptural Christian! That God may speedily give you the desire of your heart, is the sincere Prayer of,

My Dear Miss Gibbes
Your Affectionate Servant
John Wesley

Glasgow
April 28. 1784

11. To/Miss Agnes Gibbes/At Sir Philip Gibbes, Bart./In Hilton Park/Near Wolverhampton/Staffordshire

It is not easy to express, my Dear Miss Aggy, how much you oblige me by your free manner of writing. I beg (if you have a real regard for me) that you wou'd always write in this manner. Surely there does not need any Reserve (much less Disguise) between you and me. No Habitation can be melancholy to me, where I find so amiable, so Dear a Friend. Methinks when you either write or speak to me, you need not be afraid to think aloud. Need I tell you, that you never sent me a Letter before, which gave so much satisfaction? I shou'd be exceeding glad, if I cou'd find an opportunity of waiting upon the good Family this Summer. But I shou'd be almost afraid to come too often, lest I shd hardly know how to leave you. O that you may all have Health of Body & Health of Mind! Let this, my Dear Miss Aggy, be your constant Desire, to have the Spirit of Power, & Love and of a sound mind! Nay, may you have all ye mind that was in Xt Jesus!

My Dear Friend, Adieu!

Glasgow, April 28. 1784

12. To/Miss Gibbes/At Sir Philip Gibbes Bart./In Hilton Park/Near Wolverhampton/Staffordshire

Epworth
July 3. 1784

My Dear Miss Gibbes
I am now, & shall be for a day or two longer, in the little town where I first saw ye light, & wch (by a very odd, tho common, instinct) I think the pleasantest place in the world. What is it that so indears our native place to us? Is it this, that it contains the company wch we love best? Surely this is one reason. For this reason it is, that I think the House in Hilton Park so pleasant. Very possibly I shou'd not think so, if any other Family lived there.

I am afraid, it will not be in my power to wait upon you this year, in my return to London. I shall be obliged to spend the residue of this month in & near Leeds. And thence to go thro Nottingham, Birmingham & Worcester into Wales, which I have not seen these two years. I do not expect to reach Bristol till about the End of
August. From thence, after taking a large circuit, I am to return to London.

There is a great depth of sense in Lord Clarendon's History, as well as of piety. We have hardly any History in the English tongue that is to be compared to it. A little Partiality we may expect to find even in This (which is indeed scarce separable from Human Nature.) But I really think, as little as can be found in any Writer of that period, wherein men's passions were so exceedingly in­flamed on both sides, that few cou'd see any thing Good, but in their own party.

I cannot but commend Mr. Gibbes for chusing to be of some Profession. It will employ many hours, which might otherwise hang heavy on his hands. And he may pursue it, just as far as he pleases, & as agrees with his other employments. It is likewise proper for a person of some eminence to be well acquainted with the Laws of his Country. I was agreeably surprised, when Mr. Monckton, (whom I had heard mentioned at ye Park) took acquaintance with me. And when he told [me] he was canvassing for a seat in Parliament, it readily occurred, an honest man may fre­quently be of service to his country, tho he can only say, Yes or no.

Whether the weather be wet or dry, hot or cold, it is the same thing to me. I am fitted for the work I am called to: And indeed have full as much Strength and considerably better Health at Eighty One, than I had at Twenty One. We have had much rain & much cold in ye North of England, but no blights at all. Corn, Grass & all the other productions of the earth, smile in an un­common manner. Surely if we cou'd but trust ye Governor of the world, He wou'd give us nothing but Good!

But, my Dear Miss Gibbes, Consider! You [must?] not command me! For I can scarce help believing every thing you say. I almost wondered that I heard nothing either from you, or from my Dear Miss Aggy for so long a time! There are few persons in England whose Letters are so acceptable as yours to

My Dear Miss Gibbes
Your ever Affectionate Servant
J. Wesley

My best Wishes attend the good Family

13. [To Miss Agnes Gibbes; address missing]

Forgive me, my Dear Miss Agnes, my unjust apprehensions. I began to be apprehensive from your long silence, that you had almost forgotten me: but I am well pleased to find you have some regard for me still. I hope nothing will ever be able to deprive you of that amiable Openness of Spirit. But there will [be] great danger,

19 The latter part of this letter is badly mutilated.
if you live a few years longer [and] come to be more acquainted
with the world. For there is some truth in that melancholy assertion
of a very ingenious man, "There is in every one that is young,
a measure of Sincerity and of disinterested Benevolence. But when
they come to be hackneyed in the ways of men, they find nothing
but Guile & Selfishness in every man. Hence the little stock they
had of Truth and Love in a little time wastes away. And in a few
years they learn as much Disguised Selfishness as those that are
round about them."

Truly if this was a just representation of Mankind, I know not
who would wish to live thirty years! If we must needs outlive all
our Sincerity & all our Benevolence! Yet I cannot tell but there
is some truth in this, with regard to the men of the world. I know
not but it may be generally true, in respect of those who have no
Religion: I mean, Heart Religion: No such Religion as is [des]cribed
in Mr. Law's Serious Call. I ha[ve] seen in a thousand instances,
that all their professions of Truth & Friendship are mere grimace:
you cannot depend upon one word that they say. But here, as in
every other instance, Religion quite alters ye case. Altho that is
a sure Truth

"He that fears no GOD can love no Friend,"
yet on the other hand, he that truly fears GOD will continually in-
crease both in Sincerity & in Benevolence.

I scarce ever remember having so strong a regard for any person
on so short an acquaintance, as I feel [. . .] at the Park. [. . .]
for many years [. . .] of seeing you [. . .] visit South Wa[les . . .]
in the end of [. . .] at Bristol. [. . .] never forsake [. . .] be written
on [. . .] Whatever [. . .] altogether a [. . .] more & more [. . .]
wish of,

Your [. . .]
J. Wesley

Leeds
Aug. 1. 1784
My best wishes attend all the Family.

14. To/Miss Agnes Gibbes/at/Scarborough

Bristol
Oct. 2. 1784

See, my Dear Miss Aggy, how tastes differ! Why, Noise and Hurry
are the delight of the Gay world! It is their very Element: the
thing that saves them from Thinking. And they find by Experience,
that

"Pleasures on Levity's smooth surface flow:
Thought brings ye weight yt sinks ye soul to Woe."
Take care, my Dear Miss Aggy! You are in harm's way. You have a natural propensity to Thinking. Nay, you are apt to think deeply; not to be content with a cursory view of things. If you give way to this, if you go on to weigh every thing calmly and deliberately, are you aware what the consequences will be? You will infallibly be a Christian! Not a fashionable one: There is no great harm in that. But such a Christian as is described in the Bible, or in Mr. Law's Serious Call. You will have that Mind in you which was in Christ: and you will walk as Christ walked! And what a fall will this be! You will no longer be the admiration of the "Male Lillies of our land"; (as Dr. Young stiles them with great propriety.) Nay, some of them will, it is very probable, shake their heads & say, "Alas! She is quite out of her senses!" And what have you to counterbalance this loss? Let wise Mr. Pope, (no Enthusiast) tell you.

"The eternal sunshine of the spotless Mind,
Each Prayer accepted, & each Wish resigned;
Desires composed, Affections ever even;
Tears that delight, & sighs that waft to Heaven!"

And will you then be any considerable Loser upon the whole? Nay, will not your Gain be far greater than your Loss? Instead of the favour of a few poor, worthless men, you shall have the favour & the Peace of GOD! O may His Love flow in your heart as a River! May it be in you as "a fountain of water, springing up into everlasting Life." I am inclined to think your Ill Health is wisely & mercifully permitted for this very End, to make you altogether a Christian: To lessen your taste for things, which tho not evil in themselves, yet wou'd hinder your aspiring after better things, and attach you too much to those silly pleasures, which perish in the using.

Miss Freeman, I believe, is still in London, and seems to have no thought of leaving. I do not remember when it was, that I saw Mrs. Hambleton. One of the most sensible as well as the most pious women that I know in Scarborough is Miss Tindall. If you was to converse with her, it wou'd not be lost labour. She is as open as you are: Her Word is the Picture of her Thought. So let yours be always! As I am persuaded it is now, in all you say or write to,

My Dear Miss Aggy,
Yours in tender Affection
John Wesley

**Alexander Pope, *Eloisa to Abelard* (1717), lines 209ff. The passage begins:
How happy is the blameless Vestal's lot!
The world forgetting, by the world forgot.
Tomorrow I set out for London.
I did not know her name: But I imagine, that was the sensible & agreeable Lady whom I met with at Dunbar.

15. To/Miss Agnes Gibbes/At Sir Philip Gibbes Bart./At Hilton Park near/Wolverhampton
   London
   Jan. 14, 1785.

It is not for me, my Dear Miss Agnes, to expect any long continuance here.

“My race of Glory’s run, & race of shame,
And I shall shortly be with those that rest.” 21

But I cannot believe, that the going hence will make any change in the regard I feel for my Dear Friend. No! I rather think (as a good man observes) That “our Union hereafter will be more intimate & perfect, than it can be here,” where our Spirits are kept asunder by these Clogs of flesh & blood. And how grievously, in every respect, do these corruptible Bodies press down the Soul! Especially during the time of Sickness or Weakness: As you have largely experienced. There is no doubt but a dry, clean [clear?] Air wou’d be of great service to you: Especially if Exercise were added to Air, without which you can hardly have either Health or Strength. But what Exercise are you capable of using during your present Weakness? Especially in such a season as this, when you can hardly step out of doors but in a Carriage? There is one & only one Exercise (except walking gently, a quarter of an hour at a time, in the House) which you might use to what degree you pleased, & without the least fatigue. I mean, that wch was invented by the late Bishop Berkeley: and wch kept him alive many years: A Chamber-horse; I mean that sort of it (sold by ye [Upholsters?]) wch is in the form of an arm’d Chair, rising upon springs, whereon you might if you pleased, soon put yourself into a sweat.

It is a great Paradox, & yet an undoubted truth, that GOD is the Center of Spirits: And that no created Spirit is on earth happy, but in ye Knowledge & Love of Him. While we are persuing this, “He giveth us all things richly to enjoy”: Not that we may acquiesce in these instead of Him, but that they may lead us to Him. I believe He is jealous over you, lest you shou’d forget that kind Advice, “My child, give me thy heart!” That you & all the

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Dear Family may be thoroughly willing to do this, is the earnest
wish of,

My very Dear Miss Agnes
Yours most Affectionately
John Wesley

16. To/Miss Agnes Gibbes/At Sir Philip Gibbes, Bart./Near Wol-\nverhampton/Staffordshire

[May, 1785]22

My Dear Miss Aggy
Of all the Voyages which I have had to this Kingdom, I never had
such an one as the last. Indeed it was a dead Calm when we went
into the ship at Holyhead; but the Gentlemen on board desiring me
to give them a Sermon, while I was praying, "That GOD wou’d
give us an easy & a speedy passage," a Steddy wind sprung up,
which brought us from Holyhead Bay to Dublin Bay in just twelve
hours. The Sea in the meantime was all the way like a Looking
glass, so that no one was sick in the Ship.23 I have now gone thro’
about a third part of this Kingdom, and find most of my Friends
just such as I wish. And I do not envy

"The Brute Philosopher, that ne’er has proved
The Joy of loving or of being loved."

Many of them, it may be, shewed the more Affection now, because
they had not seen me for seven years, & hardly expected to see me
again, till we shd meet in a better world. I can never look upon you,
without a tender regard, tho I hope to see you again, probably in
a few months. But I know not how I shou’d look, or how I shou’d feel,
if I thought it the last time I shd see you till I saw you in that happy
abode, where Sorrow and Parting are no more.

If by Agitations that Author means Affections, I scorn the Art of
concealing them. I will cherish no Affections but such as are rational;
And these will bear the light. Let my Love & Joy, whenever I am
at the Park, be shown by my Eyes, my Tongue & my whole Be-
haviour. Nay, if I grieved or feared either with or for my Friend,
I shou’d not desire to hide it. Perhaps a French-man might: for they
generally love Dissembling: But we English love Openness.
Bare Philosophy cou’d never yet conquer, much less extirpate,
even irregular Passions. But true Religion can:

"Soft Peace she brings wherever she arrives.
She builds our Quiet, as she forms our Lives.

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22 The letter is undated, but postmarked during May in Cork; so it was presumably
written during Wesley’s stay in Cork, May 11-13, 1785.
23 See Journal of John Wesley, VII, 66.
Lays the rough paths of peevish Nature even,  
And opens in each breast a little Heaven.”

This, my Dear Friend (May I not say?) I wish you fully to experience. May you be filled with humble, gentle, patient Love, which is glory upon Earth begun.

When I went to the University, my Father told me, “I give you one Advice, with respect to your Health: Fail not, on any account whatever, to walk an hour every day.” I did so (whenever it was fair, in the open Air) for fourteen years together. I wish my Dear Miss Aggy had resolution to follow ye same Advice. I believe you wou’d in a few weeks or perhaps days find the advantage of it. That you may be easy and happy, in Soul & in Body, in Time & in Eternity, is the sincere desire of

My Dear Miss Aggy
Yours most Affectionately
John Wesley

The same I cannot wish for the whole Family.

17. To Miss Gibbes/At Hilton Park/Near Wolverhampton/Staffordshire

London
July 63 17th. 1785

It wou’d have grieved me, if I had thought my Dear Miss Gibbes had quite forgotten me. For I do not place you in the rank of Acquaintance only: I rejoice to call you my Friend. While I am in Ireland, a Letter directed to Dublin finds me in whatever part of the Kingdom I am. I set sail from Dublin Bay on Monday morning, and came into Holyhead Bay in the Afternoon. We reached Chester on Wednesday, took coach the same Evening, & came hither on Friday. I thought of you when we passed thro Stafford, & shou’d not have failed to call at the Park, had I been in my own carriage. But the approach of our yearly Conference laid me under a necessity, of being in town as soon as possible. It gives me pleasure to hear, that my Dear Miss Agnes has the courage to rise early and to use Exercise. If she persists herein, it will do her more good, than all the Medicines in ye Dispensary.

I was agreeably surprised, as I travelled thro all the Provinces of Ireland, the Northern in particular, at finding out what was the principal Cause of the Alarm wch has spread thro both ye Kingdoms. For three or four years, a few bold, lively persons, but of no note [rank? rate?] (some of them very low Mechanics) & therefore wisely concealing their names, have filled ye public papers with inflammatory Letters & Paragraphs, (personating men of great importance) which our English News-writers have eagerly retailed. But in reality Ireland is full as quiet as England, & ye Irish Volunteers as harmless
as ye English Lifeguards. In the Irish Parliament a few Mock Patriots still snarl at every thing, till they gain their point, Places or pensions.

The other day, a Gentlewoman came into the Stage-coach, near Stafford, who hearing Hilton Park mentioned, after speaking very respectfully of you, said, "I hear the Affair of Miss Gibbes & Sir — — is over." Altho no more was said upon the subject, this led me into a train of Reflections. I cou'd not but wish, that a person whom I valued so much, might never fall into the hands of one, that did not abound either in Sense or Religion, merely because he had a large estate. Will Money bring Happiness? Is Content to be purchased, even by thousands of Gold or Silver? Prior's words sound prettily.

"The Joys of Wedlock with ye Cares we mix: Tis best Repenting in a coach & six."

But I cannot wish that either you or your Dear Sister shou'd ever make the experiment. I am persuaded you will act, in this and in all things, in such a manner as you will never repent of. I feel myself nearly concerned in ye happiness of all the amiable Family: And shou'd rejoice in any opportunity of showing my deep regard for every branch of it. I am,

My Dear Miss Gibbes, Your ever Affectionate Servant JW

18. To/Miss Agnes Gibbes/At Hilton Park/Near Wolverhampton/Staffordshire

Camelford Aug. 30. 1785

It was with great satisfaction that I received my dear Miss Agnes' Letter yesterday, at my return from the Land's End. The people of this County much resemble those of Ireland, being earnestly affectionate to their Friends. Those of them in particular, whose minds are at once softened & strengthened by Religion. I never saw so much of this among the Irish, as in my late Journey through the Kingdom. Surely People of so fine a temper are scarce to be found in any other part of Europe! But they have not, in general, the English Steddiness[?]: They easily receive, & as easily lose an impression. And yet I have found many who are unvariable in their Friendship, & have been so, even from their Childhood. And if I mistake not, this is the temper of my Dear Miss Agnes. I believe all your Affections are naturally strong: But yet not very variable, not apt to change, without some particular reason. This is a great
Blessing, Stediness of Temper: for which, and for a thousand other Blessings, you have reason to be thankful to Him, who is daily helping you, & pouring his benefits upon you.

I am glad you have the resolution to use that domestic Exercise, when you cannot so well go abroad. But it should be used constantly, once if not twice a day: otherwise it will have little effect. And I am still in doubt, whether your Health will be confirmed, unless another thing also be added: Unless you thoroughly follow that kind Direction, "My Child, give me thy heart!" You have frequently a Desire to do this; but "something or other" comes between. Then your thoughts are dissipated, & that good Desire insensibly dies away. Dissipation therefore, whether at London, at Bath or elsewhere, I take to be your grand Hindrancer. Any thing which you knew to be evil you could not admit of: But this which seems to be so harmless (tho it is really nothing better than Practical Atheism) steals upon you unawares! If you can avoid this, in the hurry & bustle of the Gay World, you must have more than Human Power. Especially in places of Public resort. But the GOD whom you serve is able to deliver you.

On Saturday next, Sept. 2. I expect to be at Bristol; but I am afraid you will not be at Bath, before I set out for London, which will be on Monday, October 3d. As soon as you are there, you will be so good as to let me know.

I thought you had had the "Moral & Sacred Poems," which were publish'd many years ago. But I conjecture you have not, from your not knowing where to find those lines. They are part of Mr. Prior's Paraphrase of the thirteenth Chapter of the first of Corinthians. They you may enjoy every Part of that Holiness, which is there so beautifully described, is the earnest wish of,

My Dear Miss Agnes,
Yours in tender Affection
John Wesley

My mind was so full of you, that I had quite forgot Mr. Gibbons: He is the more dangerous because he is Decent.

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*A Collection of Moral and Sacred Poems, From the most celebrated English Authors* (3 volumes, 1744); see Green, *Wesley Bibliography*, no. 58. The paraphrase of I Corinthians 13 is in volume I, pp. 87ff, but no authorship is given there. Wesley considered Matthew Prior "the equal of Pope and Dryden" (Essay on Prior in *Works of John Wesley*, 3rd Edition, Vol. XIII, pp. 380ff).