AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY
OF PUBLICATIONS ABOUT THE
LIFE AND WORK OF JOHN WESLEY

by J. Gordon Melton

This is an attempt at an exhaustive and annotated listing of books about the life and work of John Wesley. In compiling the list some materials have been excluded. Periodicals and pamphlets were omitted as they were by definition not books. In a few cases pamphlet material was mentioned when it was felt that it made a very significant contribution to Wesleyan studies. Also excluded were the many sermons (most of pamphlet length) that appeared upon the occasion of John Wesley’s death. As to books, the following were systematically excluded: those published before Wesley’s death (as these would be considered primary source material for a study of Wesley); books by Wesley (for the same reason); books about Wesleyan artifacts and archives; those primarily about Methodism as a movement; collections of centennial speeches; books on other subjects that bring Wesley into the issue (for example, discussions of enthusiasm in the eighteenth century) and foreign language publications. Also excluded are biographical prefaces to Wesley’s works. A few exceptions to these exclusions were made for several books that are highly significant in Wesleyan historiography.

In attempting to put this bibliography together, the following lists have been consulted, and this bibliography represents a compilation based on these lists:

1. The shelf list of Garrett Theological Seminary.

Approximately seventy-five percent of the works cited have been handled in the process of preparing this list and more than half were read.

It should be noted that a logical follow-up to this list would be a listing of periodical material outside the several Methodist historical publications. A beginning of such a list is found in Piette’s book cited above.

The method of presentation is chronological, with works in a single
year listed alphabetically. Major divisions, with the notes,* are by decade. Following the chronological list will be an analysis of specialized works about Wesley. Such topics as works by Roman Catholic authors, works on Wesley's theology, ethics or politics, and Wesley's affinities to other thinkers will be discussed. A listing of dates or reprints and later editions of each work is to show its influence. It is hoped that this work will be a helpful guide to the study of Wesley historiography.

1791-1799
During this brief period, from the death of John Wesley until the close of the 18th century, the Wesley biographies represent hastily prepared pieces of works which seem to be attempts to cash in upon the market. (See Maser's article, #6 above.)

A short delightful reaction to Wesley written by a nephew. Wesley is held up to ridicule under the guise of sincere praise. In 1801 Colet repudiated his work as false and unjust.

Begun before Wesley's death, Hampson's work met opposition from the Wesleyan Conference who had delegated three men to write an "official" biography. It does, however, contain some valuable source materials about Wesley's later life and an excellent pen portrait in Volume III.

This "official" biography was hurriedly done and rushed into print after a disagreement with John Whitehead over his text. It is plainly dull and inferior, lacking original insights that Coke could have most certainly supplied. Reprinted 1792, 1793, 1822, 1843, and twice without a date.

This work was to be the "official" biography until a dispute arose about editing rights of Coke and Moore. An account of the rather lengthy debate is found in William Myles' A Chronological History of the People Called Methodists. (London, 1813). Whitehead's work, while still lacking original insights, is far superior to that of Coke and Moore. Reprinted: 1805-06, 1825, 1844-46, 1845, 1852, 1853, 1854.

1800-1809
Following the publication of Whitehead's work in 1796, there was a seventy-year drought in Wesleyan scholarship, broken on only two occasions by Southey and Watson. Only one biography appeared in this first decade of the nineteenth century and is notable only because of its American authorship.

* The use of the word, "popular," to describe a work refers to the audience for which it was written and not its success in sales.


Without adequate source material, Bourne drew almost totally from the three primary 17th-century sources.

1810-1819

During this decade no original works on Wesley appeared and only *The Methodist Manual* by Jonathan Crowther comes close.

1820-1829

The drought in Wesleyan scholarship was momentarily broken in the appearance of Southey’s *Life of Wesley*, which is possibly the most popular biography of the founder of Methodism. It unleashed a debate that was immediately picked up and carried on through most of the later biographies of Wesley.


This most significant work of Wesleyan biography was immediately reprinted in America and went through at least 12 printings, one as late as 1920. The poet laureate, with his excellent command of words, attacks Wesley at every point and unfavorably compares him to Whitefield.


Defends Wesley’s conversion and orthodoxy.


This work by the dean of early 19th-century Methodist thinkers became the standard refutation of Southey and was included in several later editions of Southey’s Life as a set of footnotes.


1824 Moore, Henry. *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M., Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford*; in which are included the Life of his Brother, the Rev. Charles Wesley, A.M., Student at Christ Church; and Memoirs of their Family: Comprehending an Account of the great Revival of the Religion, in which they were the first and chief Instruments. Vols. I & II. London: Kershaw, 1824. pp. 571, 578.

After Coke’s death Moore undertook a second attempt to write a Wesley biography which was eminently more successful though he freely plagiarized from Hampson and Whitehead. He finally captured something of the Wesley that he knew on paper. Reprinted 1824 and 1826.


“A condensation and re-arrangement of Whitehead’s Life of Wesley; probably written by the printer, a local preacher.”


A popular work.

1830-1839

In this period appeared the second serious work on Wesley by Richard Watson. It is the only work that could be spoken of in the
same terms as Southey's work for popularity. For many years, it was the "official" biography and was included in the Course of Study for Methodist ministers. Within the church it was by far the most widely read.


1838 Jackson, Thomas. *A Speech: Addressed to the Wesleyan Conference, on the Principles and Conduct of Mr. Wesley, and of the Religious Connection founded by him, in regard to the Church of England.* London: John Mason, 1838. An early work on what was to be the major preoccupation of 19th century Wesleyan scholars after 1850.


1840-1849

No important contribution to Wesleyan studies appeared in this decade.


1842 *The Life of the Rev. John Wesley, compiled from Authentic Sources With an Appendix shewing the real character of the Methodist Priesthood, and proving John Wesley a true prophet.* Published by the Newcastle-upon-Tyne Tract Society, whose sole object is the overthrow of superstition and fraud. Newcastle; D. France & Co., 1842. pp. 20. "Holds Wesley up to Ridicule."


1847 There appeared a new edition of Southey with extensive notes by Daniel Curry.


1850-1859

The decade of the 1850's represents a period of growth in concern for Wesley as is shown by a relatively large number of publications. Unfortunately, they do not represent a creative burst of scholarship. Two highlights among the many rather dull works are those by O. T. Dobbin and Isaac Taylor. The latter was to become a major 19th-century antagonist of Wesley and the Methodists from his Anglican position. Stevens represents the best in American scholarship.


1851 *Sargent, George Etell. The Oxford Methodist; Or, the Early Life of John Wesley, A.M.* London: Benjamin L. Green, 1850.


AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF PUBLICATIONS


1853 Modern Methodism not in Accordance With the Principles and Plans of John Wesley During Any Period of His Life. London, 1853.


1858 This work by an Anglican priest is part of the early stages of the Anglican-Methodist discussion that reached its high mark in the 1870's.


1859 A picture book.


1860-1869 This decade is an exciting one in Wesleyan scholarship, particularly in pamphlets of a polemic nature. Toward the end two books appear as a result of the Anglican-Methodist discussion of John Wesley's relation to the Church of England. Other works attacked Wesley from different positions and there was one major treatment of Wesley's theology.


1860 Sis, Martin. The Life of John Wesley, Showing How he sowed some wild oats in his youth, and preached at the same time; but afterwards experienced a change and was nicknamed Methodist, etc., etc. Leeds: J. Johnson, n.d., pp. 31: This book does not live up to its title. Part of Johnson's Penny Library Series. Popular.


1870-1879

This period saw the full flowering of Wesley scholarship built around the issue of Wesley's relation to the Church of England. 1870 saw the appearance of the three outstanding works by Tyerman, Wedgewood and R. Denny Urlin. Rigg added two more works and Lecky's History of England in the 18th Century, which interpreted Wesley's significance on England for the next seventy-five years of scholars, appeared in 1878.

1876 Tyerman, Luke. The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A., Founder of the Methodists. Vols. I, II, and III. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1870-71. pp. 564, 618, 675. This massive three-volume work is more a compilation of source material than a biography. Its strict year-by-year presentation is laborious reading, but it is still a standard reference to the student of Wesley. Tyerman has been the center of criticism through the years for his caustic comments on Wesley and those who knew him. The two most famous are, "he (Wesley) was up to the age of twenty-two, by his own confession, an habitual, if not profane and flagrant sinner;" (Vol. I, p. 31) and, "John Wesley was a dupe. Grace Murray was a flirt." (Vol. II, p. 55.) The fifth edition appeared in 1880.

1870 Urbin, R. Denny. John Wesley's Place in Church History, determined with aid of facts and documents unknown to, or unnoticed by, his biographers. London: Rivingtons, 1870. pp. 270. This excellent work, though over-emphasizing the Moravianism in Wesley, has gone largely unnoticed by Wesleyan scholars, possibly because of its Anglican author.


1871 The Story of our Founder. Being a Life of John Wesley, written for children. With an Introduction by Rev. Thomas Vasey. London: Elliot Stock, 1871. pp. 108. No one is quite sure who the author is, whether it is Thomas Vasey or a Miss Monkhouse (Vasey's sister)?; hence, it is listed as anonymous.

Kirton, John William. *John Wesley, Methodism and the Temperance Reforma-

Wise, Daniel. *The Story of a Wonderful Life*. Cincinnati: Curts & Jennings, 


1880-89

The 1880’s saw the continuance but slacking off of the great debate on Wesley’s Anglicanism and the appearance in point of several men who were to dominate Wesley studies for a generation: Richard Green and John Telford. The biography by Mathieu Lelievre, one of the first continental Wesleyan scholars, also appeared in an English translation and 1881 brought on a burst of scholarship relative to the First Ecumenical Methodist Conference in London.


Clark, James Osgood Andrew, ed. *The Wesley Memorial Volume*. New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1880. pp. 743. Reprinted 1874, 1909. Because of the use of some 150 authors to prepare this work, it stands as a good indication of the opinion of Methodists toward Wesley at this time.


The first biography of Wesley by a Continental, though Watson had been translated into French and Hampson into German. Lelievre's work had a tremendous effect as it was translated into Italian (1877), Senegalese (1896), and Spanish (1911).


As close to a standard life of Wesley as has been done. Reprinted 1887, 1898, 1902, 1929, and 1947.


Popular.


1890-1899

The century closed with little of lasting significance. The works of William McDonald taught Wesley to the holiness movement in America. The first of many specialized studies in Wesley appeared, (1896, Hatfield; 1898, Thompson) discussing his hymnology and social ethics.


In support of the "New Theology" of the 1890's.


Popular.


Popular. Reprinted 1900.


Popular.


Holiness.

AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF PUBLICATIONS


The Nineteenth Century: A Summary

Several overall things can be said about Wesleyan scholarship in the nineteenth century. First, it was almost totally British. This is as it should be. Wesley was an Englishman, and American Methodism was a new phenomenon. Also, those outside England were very limited by the lack of source material with which to work. Secondly, most all of the books in this period were attempts to treat Wesley’s entire life and work. There were very few specialized studies.

Thirdly, there were three main periods of scholarly activity on Wesley and two lesser ones. The two lesser ones were 1820 and after, due to reaction to Southey’s work, and the late 1850’s with no particular obvious reason. The three main periods of publication were around 1881 (in response to the First Ecumenical Methodist Conference), 1891 (the centennial of Wesley’s death) and 1899 (related to the American Holiness Movement.)

The Twentieth Century

The twentieth century opens with the start of a reversal of prevalent nineteenth-century patterns. While British scholarship still dominated, American scholarship was coming into its own. Also, while the general surveys of Wesley’s life still made up the bulk of the books published, a number of specialized studies in Wesley began to appear.


1901 McDonald, William. The Young People’s Wesley. New York: Eaton and
METHODIST HISTORY

Mains, 1901. pp. 204.
Popular.


Popular.


1903 Meredith, William Henry. The Real John Wesley. Cincinnati: Jennings and Pye, 1903. pp. 425. A book, forgotten soon after it was written, that needs a second look. Chapter IV is a discussion of Wesley's conversion; and Meredith, writing thirty years before Piette, after a lengthy consideration, reaches the conclusion of a 1725 conversion.


1908 Eltzoltz, Carl F. John Wesley's Conversion and Sanctification. Cincinnati: Jennings and Graham, 1908. pp. 41. Leitkevs Wesley's 1738 conversion is to be equated with his sanctification.


1910-1919

This decade witnessed a general slacking off in the number of books published. Only two outstanding books appeared: the English translation of Leger's John Wesley's Last Love and a second book by J. A. Faulkner.

A translation of a French work on Wesley's relation to Grace Murray and his wife based on a manuscript of Wesley's that turned up in Paris toward the turn of the century.


1913 Eayrs, George. *Wesley and Kingswood and its Free Churches*. Bristol: J. A. Arrowsmith, etc. 1911. pp. 326. Later editions of this popular book for youth were entitled *John Wesley on Horseback*.


1920-1929

The 1920's was not a great era of Wesleyan scholarship, but the beginnings of the neo-Wesleyan revival can be seen in the works of Rattenburg, Lee, Lipsky, and Lunn. Also during this era four volumes of John S. Simons' monumental five volume work was published.


1921 Simon, John Smith. *John Wesley and the Religious Societies*. London: Epworth Press, 1921. pp. 363. This is Volume I of the five volumes which have gone through three editions and are still in print.


1923 Egermeier, Elsie. *John Wesley, the Christian Hero*. Anderson, Indiana:


More of a reaction to Wesley. Collier, from a Boston personalism, wishes to catch Wesley's broad loving spirit, since Wesley had no interest in fighting for orthodoxy. Collier understands Lotze more than Wesley.


More of a reaction to Wesley. Collier, from a Boston personalism, wishes to catch Wesley's broad loving spirit, since Wesley had no interest in fighting for orthodoxy. Collier understands Lotze more than Wesley.


Popular. Anglican author sympathetic to Wesley.


A fictionalized version of Wesley's adventures in Georgia.


What could have been a good book has too much padding and redundancy, as well as the continual imposition of personalism on Wesley's thought.


A popular presentation of what might be termed the Wesley of Methodist myth. Reprinted 1954.


Based on Rattenbury's Quillian Lectures at Emory in 1928. Reprinted 1928, 1939.


Popular.


Compares Wesley to the rising charismatic Benito Mussolini.

1930-1939

This decade was the greatest era of Wesleyan studies. In 1938, in response to the bi-centennial of the Aldersgate experience the largest number of books on Wesley in a single year were published. The last volume of Simon's work was published in 1934. Major attacks on Wesley came in works by Bowen and Harrison. Significant inclusive works of Wesleyan Studies were by Cell, Piette, and McConnell. Specialized studies by Edwards, MacArthur, Clark, Rattenbury, Bready, and Pellowe were the beginning of outstanding special studies to follow.


Sees Wesley as tortured by sex and Grace Murray as a giddy, ignorant woman who was voluptuously beautiful.


1938 Harrison, Mrs. Grace Elizabeth (Simon). *Son to Susanna.* Nashville: Cokesbury, 1938. pp. 377. Mrs. Harrison sees Wesley as living out a sort of Oedipal complex. She organized his life around his relations to various women, predominantly his mother.


PRINTED BY THE TIMES AND NEWS PUBLISHING CO., 1938. PP. 178.

In this Ph.D. thesis, Miss Nottingham sees Wesley in a conflict of desire for rationality and emotional religious needs. This conflict is resolved at Aldersgate and finally settled at Bristol.


1940-1949

The war only slightly interrupted Wesleyan scholarship. More and more, however, the specialized studies took over the major advancement in the field with the work of Green, Cannon, Lindstrom, Rattenbury, Baker, and Edwards.


As the title implies, this is a commentary on Wesley's standard sermons.


1950-1959

The productions of Wesley literature in the 1950's is generally not of the caliber of the 1930's and 1940's. Among the few outstanding books are those by Knox, Turner, Todd, Schmidt, and Edwards.

1960-1966

The 1960's have seen the production of several very excellent studies of Wesley both of a general and of a specialized nature. Of the former category are Schmidt and Green. Of the latter are Williams, Deschner, Green, Parris, and Cox.

1960 Marston, Leslie Ray. *From Age to Age A Living Witness*. Winona Lake, Ind.: Light & Life Press, 1960. pp. 608. This history of the Free Methodist Church is included because of the rather unique view of Wesley's conversion held by Marston. He believes Wesley's conversion is after Aldersgate and shortly before Bristol, at some unknown point.


As mentioned elsewhere, the major movement of Wesleyan studies as the twentieth century moves on is the trend toward more and more specialized studies. The number of biographies attempting to survey Wesley’s life and career dropped drastically in the 1930’s and since then only a few have been produced. Of these the best and most important are by Piette (1937), McConnell (1939), and Schmidt (1963). A second volume of the latter work is yet to be translated into English. The best single one-volume biography is Green (1964).

Studies in Wesley’s relationship to his family have received excellent treatment in this century. Those by M. L. Edwards (1949 and 1961) are the best. Harrison (1937) presents Wesley’s whole life as a “Freudian” reaction to his mother. Brailsford (1954) discusses John’s relation with his brother Charles.

Wesley’s early life has come under a considerable amount of scrutiny. The best are Green (1961) and Schmidt (1963). Others are Oemler (1927) and Edwards (1959).

The conversion of John Wesley is the major part of the early life to be dealt with. Two distinct schools of thought have arisen on this point. The “accepted” view is that Wesley was converted in 1738 at Aldersgate. This view is ably spelled out in Clark (1938), Eltzholtz (1908), Green (1908), Rattenbury (1938) and Joy (1937). The Roman Catholic view centers Wesley’s conversion on 1725, and was presented with its strongest case by Meredith (1804), probably the most forgotten book in Wesley bibliography. Later presentations are by Todd (1958) and Knox (1950). A third and unique idea is that by Marston (1960), who feels Wesley’s conversion was some time shortly before the preaching began at Bristol.

Wesley’s love life, an interesting side topic for everyone, has found two major treatments, Leger (1910) and Harrison (1937).

Turning to Wesley’s theology, one finds that most of the work has grown out of G. E. Cell’s monumental *Rediscovery of John Wesley* (1935). No significant work appeared prior to it. In origins of Wesley’s thought, Monk (1966), Baker (1948) and Green (1945) are all important. Surveys are best exemplified by Lindstrom (1946), Cannon (1946), Dale (1952), and Williams (1960). Specialized studies by Deschner (1960) and Parris (1963) are very important, and Lawson’s work on the sermons (1946) is still a very popular presentation.

Perfection is another area of much interest in Wesley, and four
studies have appeared dealing with it, of which Turner (1952) is the best. Others are Findlater (1914), Sangster (1943) and Cox (1964).

Wesley’s social and political thought is a topic of great contemporary interest. By far its most able presentation is by Edwards (1933). Others are Thompson (1898), Faulkner (1918), MacArthur (1936), Watkins (1936), Doidsie (1938), Bready (1939) and Harding (1947). Prince (1926) and Gross (1954) present Wesley on education.

Two works on Wesley’s hymnology are Rattenbury (1961) and Manning (1942). Wesley’s scientific work is treated by Collier (1928), Hill (1958) and Turrell (1938).

It should be pointed out in closing that many excellent specialized studies of Wesley have appeared in recent years as doctoral dissertations and some of these will find their way into publication in the very near future.