Among the practices followed by John Wesley and the early Methodists at Oxford, one of the most useful to their religious pursuits was the keeping of a diary. The purpose and value of such an endeavor had been recognized earlier by Samuel Wesley, who was not hesitant to convey his attitude to his sons: "I can scarce recommend anything that would more conduce to the Advance of true Piety than your Christian Diary."¹ Such a diary was not intended to be a complete chronicling of events, but rather a means of promoting (in Jeremy Taylor's words) that "first general instrument of holy Living, Care of our Time."²

In keeping with the sentiments of his father and the advice of Taylor, John Wesley began keeping such a diary in April 1725, and persisted in this daily discipline to within a week of his death, nearly sixty-six years later. Not all of the carefully inscribed notebooks have survived, unfortunately. But those which have found their way into the twentieth century provide an incomparable resource for understanding the life of Wesley and the early Methodists. Particularly interesting are the diaries from the Oxford years, 1725-35, which provide the careful reader with a unique view of Wesley during the first decade of his ministry, the period just prior to the beginning of his narrative in the published Journal. Together with other manuscripts from this period--letters, sermons, financial accounts, and other notebooks--these documents also provide the historian with the materials for a clearer understanding of the "first rise of Methodism," as Wesley himself later referred to his activities at Oxford.³

The Diaries themselves are not items that can easily be glanced at and be found immediately revealing or informative. As the Wesleyan method of diary-keeping developed, it turned into a somewhat tedious, carefully

¹ Samuel Wesley, Jr., MS. Letterbook; Letters from Samuel and Susanna Wesley (Methodist Archives, London, MS. C77).
² The Rule and Exercises of Holy Living, 12th ed. (London: Printed by Miles Flesher, 1680), pp. 4-6.
worked out system of abbreviations, symbols, ciphers, shorthand, and cryptic notations, which became increasingly complex and obscure. Within just a few years the diary entries had become so complete as to indicate in careful detail, hour by hour, even minute by minute, not only the activities, but even the attitudes and disposition of the diarist. Some of the more intricate entries and subtle notations were not evident, however, to the early biographers, some of whom had access to many of the diaries but tended to use them in somewhat cursory fashion. Then for nearly a century these Wesleyan notebooks remained in private hands, inaccessible to the historians of the last century. Luke Tyerman for one lamented the disappearance of these crucial sources, crying, "Where are those manuscripts and why are they not given to the public?" In our own century, with the assistance of the Coleman family who had acquired many of the Wesley manuscripts, Nehemiah Curnock began the process of bringing to light the wealth of details that had lain in obscurity for generations by unlocking part of the Wesley cipher. His fascination with the first volume of the Oxford diaries, however, did not carry through to the subsequent volumes, and Curnock's general neglect of the diaries of the early 1730's has generally been imitated by his successors.

The same detailed complexity of abbreviations and symbols which has discouraged readers of the diaries for years is the very reason why these volumes are so very important. And the key which could unlock a great deal of that vast storehouse of details concerning the earliest years of Methodism lay in another small volume just recently brought to light. The diary of Benjamin Ingham for the year 1733-34 has in the front this note:

Charles Wesley, A.M., Student of Christ Church, Oxford, taught me the following Method of keeping a Diary. I became acquainted with him, and his Brother John Wesley, A.M. and Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxon., through Charles Burton:—....

Thereupon follows three pages, double-columned, of abbreviations used in this particular example of the

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5 Benjamin Ingham, MS. Diary, 1733-34 (Methodist Archives, London, MS. C203), p. [iii].
Wesleyan method of keeping a diary. Some of the abbreviations and symbols used in this (as in Wesley's) diary would probably have remained forever behind the cloak of secrecy without this key. And Ingham's diary, while following the precise style and format of the Wesleyan diaries, is much more explicit in that he provides headings for the columns in his daily entries, and records important conversations with extended longhand notes, something rarely found in John's diaries after 1727. In addition to this, Ingham's diary not only covers a period for which the Wesley diaries are incomplete, but it gives a perspective from within the Wesleyan movement which helps one to see in some detail the organizational pattern and activities of the Methodists.

The result of all this is that a new day has dawned in the study of John Wesley and the early Methodists. Information gleaned from the diaries destroys some of the shibboleths (both old and new) concerning Oxford Methodism. We are now able to correct some misinterpretations of these early years, whether they originated with inaccuracies in Wesley's own recollections of the period or in stereotypes perpetuated by later historians. The plethora of details which can be added to the picture of the Wesleyan movement during this period helps to shed new light on some of the questions that have arisen concerning this rather elusive period in Wesley's life, in some cases pointing the direction one must travel further in order to find answers. What we have then is a set of incredibly valuable resources to help us understand the nature and development of Oxford Methodism, as well as a window through which we can observe the growth and development of John Wesley's life and thought during this crucial period. In the remarks that follow, I shall show a few of the ways in which the diaries have already been useful.

Of all the terms which have been used to describe the group of Wesley's friends at Oxford, "the Holy Club" has perhaps gained the most widespread usage. The religious overtones and organizational implications of this particular title are perhaps given best expression in the painting by Marshall Claxton, entitled "The Rev. John Wesley and his Friends at Oxford," often accompanied by the note that "the room is the one in which the meetings were held."6 The somewhat erroneous impression

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6 This inscription was included on the copy engraved by Samuel Bellin. Reproductions of varying quality can be found in several illustrated volumes on Wesley and Methodism, with the usual caption, "The Holy Club."
given by this picture, which includes people who in real life never saw each other, we shall deal with later in discussing the nature of Oxford Methodism. Suffice it to say at this point that the simplistic picture of an organization with a title and a meeting place is difficult to alter in the mind of the public, especially when it has been given continued support by this rather fetching graphic portrayal.

Nehemiah Curnock did his best to dispel the notion that Wesley and his friends used any particular title to set their group apart, especially noting the Oxford don's distaste for the term "society." What the well-intended editor of the Journal did, however, was to replace one type of designation with another, which he then clutched with fervor: John Wesley and his Company. This is one case of certain clues in the diary being misread and given greater importance than they deserve. Curnock read the frequent entry, "-c," to mean "and company,"7 and the occasional note, "in Orco," to mean "in our Company."8 In fact, the former is a simple abbreviation for et cetera ("&c.") , the dash (a common usage for "and") being substituted for "&" quite generally in the diaries after March 1731. And the latter phrase is a specific reference to persons being in "Orcus," a Latin term (ablative, [in] Orco) which means "the infernal regions; the lower world," and is hardly to be taken as an indication of Holy Club affiliation.

The diaries make it clear that the terminology was not of great concern to John Wesley, as is evident in his use of several different terms to designate his group of associates at Oxford. He was not unalterably opposed to using the term "society" in relation to his group, as several references to "our little Society" indicate. His reluctance to cling to such titles, however, arose in part out of his high respect for the religious societies of his day,9 as well as an apparent avoidance of titles which might have indicated some sort of closed organization with membership requirements. In 1731 the term Holy Club might have been applicable, but

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8 Ibid., I, 184.
a study of the developments within the Wesleyan movement indicates that at least as early as the autumn of 1732 a plural designation such as Oxford Methodists may have been more appropriate. To understand why, let us look closer at both the rise of Methodism during this period and the nature of the group as it developed.

Wesley's diaries begin in the spring of 1725 at a critical juncture in the life of the Christ Church student. In January, John informed his parents that he was contemplating going into Holy Orders, a prospect which pleased his mother but which brought forth a more hesitant response from his father. Samuel seems to have recognized that his son's motivation for assuming the cloth was in part to increase his chances of a succession to a teaching fellowship, and sent him some appropriate words of advice.10 Two months later Samuel had overcome his hesitance, and favored John's going into orders later that year. The following six months are significant in the development of Wesley's "Methodist" spirit. No matter what the original motivation for this step, the imminent prospect of taking the ordination vows had a profound effect on the young Oxford don—a phenomenon not unusual in the history of Christianity, if you go back and read the biographies of such men as Luther or Hus. Within a week after his father encouraged him to take holy orders, John began making entries in an empty notebook inherited from two generations of Wesleys.

As the days wore on, the notes proliferated, soon taking the form of a daily diary, interspersed with lists of resolutions. At first the pages received a rather sterile record of what John had read or "writ," who he had seen, where he had gone, and what he had done. But by mid-August the diary entries started to reflect a deeper concern with religious matters as the notebook began to serve him as a private confessor, bearing the record of his self-examination. On August 16, John made his initial diary confession, partially hidden behind his cipher: "told a lie; Kyrie eleison." A week later it was "a lie in deed," and the day after that, "sins in thought." The night before his ordination, John entered in his diary the first results of what soon became weekly Saturday evening self-examinations: "boasting, greedy of praise, intemperate sleep,...lying...heat in arguing." The day following his ordination, Wesley

resolved to reflect on his progress twice a day, the first step in a process of development over the next decade by which Wesley's diary became more and more complicated. As John Wesley assumed the role of an ordained deacon, his life began to exhibit an increasingly intense application of one of the rules noted in the front of his diary—"Whenever you are to do an action, consider how Christ did or would do the like, and do you imitate his example." This is the beginning of a long life marked by the attempt to follow the path toward Christian perfection, "having 'the mind which was in Christ,' and of 'walking as Christ also walked.'"

For two years after his ordination Wesley pressed on, a solitary traveller along the road he had begun. In the meantime he earned his master's degree and won an appointment as Fellow of Lincoln College, but found very little satisfaction or encouragement at Oxford in his attempt to live by rule and method. So that in spite of the fact that his younger brother Charles came to Christ Church as an undergraduate in 1726, John felt little affinity with his high-spirited sibling and had no difficulty yielding to his parents' suggestion the following year that he take the curacy of the Wroot church in his father's parish.

Although the diary from this period is missing, we do know from other sources that Charles had a change of heart, inspired in part by his brother's example, and turned his mind toward more serious matters. As part of his reformation, he sought help from John in establishing a method by which to proceed on his search, and particularly was interested in learning how to keep a diary. Charles began following his brother's lead in working out his own salvation "by method"—searching for and adhering to that combination of religious activities which they felt were essential to one's spiritual progress and ultimate happiness. With limited success, Charles persuaded his friend Bob Kirkham to join him in this quest, and soon added a third person to the group,

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11 Ms. Oxford Diaries, (Methodist Archives, London, Colman Collection), I [viii]. These diaries are hereinafter referred to as O.D. and volume.  
a "modest, humble, well-disposed youth," who was willing to leave his former group of "vile" friends, and be "content to live without any Company" but that of Bob and himself.\(^\text{14}\) John's method was being put into practice at Oxford in a small but significant way. Charles had begun a diary, and was following his brother's suggestions for a reading program. The small group of friends was diligent in the pursuit of private and public prayer, as well as regular attendance at the Sacrament. This close-knit fellowship of persons, meeting frequently together to gain the support of like-minded company, had begun to exhibit at this point some of the characteristic marks of Oxford Methodism.

About the time John informed his brother in the spring of 1729 that he would soon be visiting Oxford, he started making diary entries in a new notebook, presumably his third since beginning the practice in 1725.\(^\text{15}\) The increased regularity of his life, incubated in a parish setting, is obvious from the very start of this neat little volume. Gone are the extended longhand reflections on interesting conversations. Gay notes on poetry and light reading are missing from these pages. From the very first page of diary entries, John has written cryptic, abbreviated notes within a carefully ruled format, with three or four lines allotted for each day's activities. This style of diary entry, perhaps inspired in part by his brother's inquisitions, served him almost without variation for the following three years.

The seeds of an organizational pattern began to germinate during Wesley's visit to Oxford in the summer of 1729. The little band of friends, encouraged by the presence of John, occasionally meeting together for study, prayer, and religious conversation, attending the Sacrament regularly, keeping track of their lives by daily notations in a diary, represents the organized manifestations of Oxford Methodism. The gatherings are not regular, everyone does not always attend, the daily routine is not set, the light recreation is still evident now and then, but the marks of the Wesleyan movement are present in the group. The only difference between these summer experiences of 1729 and the developments later in the year (November being the traditional "rise"), is that John Wesley was only visiting and had

\(^{14}\text{Ibid., p. 68 (letter, Charles to John Wesley, May 5, 1729).}\)

\(^{15}\text{O.D., II.}\)
not yet resumed his residence at Oxford.

For the better part of a year after John's return late in 1729, the small circle of friends resembled an informal literary society more than anything else. There was no organizational structure, nor even regular meeting times at first, but the focus of their activity together was unmistakably tied to a "scheme of study," as Wesley would call it. By March of 1730 the first real pattern of meetings among the Oxford Methodists begin to take shape: Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday evenings at Charles', Bob's, and John's rooms respectively to read classical writings, and Sunday evenings at William Morgan's to read works of devotion.

Although only two persons were added to their number in the following two years (John Boyce and William Haworth), there was a rather significant development in the scope of the Methodists' activities beginning in August 1730. Largely at the suggestion of William Morgan, the group began visiting the prisons in Oxford--first the prison in the old fortifications of the Oxford Castle at the edge of town, and a few months later the gaol called Bocardo in the north gate to the city at St. Michael's. And exactly a week after John's first visit to the Castle, he began noting in his diary another type of visiting. On August 31, he went to see Mrs. Vesey, one of the many poor folk in town who relied on the sometime charity of their parish church for what support and spiritual sustenance they could receive. This activity was not a new experience for the Fellow of Lincoln, who had spent two years as a curate in a country parish. But the credit for seeing the possibility of this sort of service within the activities of an academic community (and in particular for the Methodists at Oxford) seems to go also to his friend, William Morgan. Before long, the Methodists were spending several hours a week with the poor and needy in the town, John's diary being dotted with records of visits to Goody Eagle, Mrs. Cox, Mrs. Aldrich, and several others in addition to Mrs. Vesey.

Morgan, who was the designer of a great portion of the Methodists' scheme of social action, also began

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brining together children of poor families in Oxford at least as early as the spring of 1731. When William went to Holt for a time to recover from an illness, Wesley and his friends attempted to fill in the void which their Irish friend had left. John realized quite soon that the situation called for more permanent arrangements and toward the end of June 1731 hired Mrs. Plat to take care of the children. The Methodists continued, however, to take an active interest in the progress of the children throughout the years ahead.

It is of crucial importance in trying to understand the dynamics of Oxford Methodism to note that the various activities which characterize their public image (visiting the prisons, helping the sick, teaching the poor, attending the sacrament) were in most cases not originated by Wesley himself, as we shall continue to notice. It must be remembered that Wesley was deeply engaged in the search for "a right state of soul." Consequently his method was not a static, settled scheme, but rather an approach to life that grew and developed and changed as he confronted different crises, had further insights, and met new friends. John's acknowledged leadership within the movement came from an ability to fit these various pursuits together with a sense of purpose, which gave direction and spiritual impulse to the Methodists' search for salvation. To catch the essence of Methodism at Oxford is to recognize this impulse as well as the developing life style which it elicited.

During the first half of 1732 the first drastic changes took place in the make-up of the small group of Methodists. Bob Kirkham and John Boyce left Oxford, William Morgan went back to Ireland due to his declining health, and William Haworth gradually disassociated himself from the group, leaving John and Charles as the only original participants still active in their pursuits at the University. But, as was frequently to happen in the following years, this discouraging trend was offset by a positive development. As William Morgan was preparing to leave Oxford, Wesley made the acquaintance of John Clayton, whose subsequent association with the Methodists made a lasting mark on the movement. Clayton had many of the same social concerns as Morgan, and in addition had high-church inclinations that focused on

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17 Letters, I, 85; see also John Wesley, MS. Financial Accounts (Methodist Archives, London, Colman XVIII), p. [xli].
the writings and methods of the ancient church. The two-week period during which both Morgan and Clayton were together with the Wesleys at Oxford was apparently an exciting time in the development of the Methodist scheme. One indication of the increased liveliness in the life of John Wesley is a change in his diary. Beginning on May 30, 1732, he began making fuller entries in his small notebook, expanding the usual four-line daily entry, which had indicated activities by the hour and quarter hour, into more extensive accounts, noting more precisely everything that was happening, and noting it right to the minute of the hour. This is but a small, almost symbolic, indication of the increased intensity which the Methodist life-style was to develop during the subsequent months.

Clayton was associated with the Methodists at Oxford for less than six months, but during that time his influence was felt in several areas. In particular the Methodist routine was altered to observe the Stationary Fasts every Wednesday and Friday, following the pattern of the early church. With the ardour of a new convert to this idea (he had sporadically tried to follow a monthly or weekly fast at times), Wesley held unerringly to this practice for months to come, the habit becoming so engrained by the end of the summer that when visiting his parents at Epworth he noted in his diaries on Wednesday and Friday mornings, perhaps with a little pride (if not disdain), "they breakfast."

Clayton also renewed an interest in "collecting" prayers among the Methodists, an encouragement which eventually resulted in John Wesley's first entrance into the publishing world in 1733. And just as William Morgan had done before him, John Clayton opened up some new areas of activity for the Methodists. In August of 1732, Clayton obtained leave to go to St. Thomas' Workhouse twice a week, providing yet another venture in which Wesley and his friends could help the poor. And with Clayton at Oxford, Wesley had an associate whom he could with confidence entrust the leadership of his group while he was out of town--no small consideration in the

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18 O.D., III, 17-19 (italics mine).
19 Ibid., pp. 1-3; see also p. 12 in the back portion of Wesley's MS. Prayers (Methodist Archives, London, Colman VIII), where the prayers for Saturday morning are noted as being "from Mr. Clayton."
light of the rather noticeable impact that Wesley's absence occasionally had upon the movement.\textsuperscript{20}

John Clayton was a significant addition to the Methodists in 1732 not only for what he himself contributed, in terms of encouragement, ideas, and leadership, but also for the new friendships and associations he opened up for John Wesley. Clayton, the son of a Manchester bookseller, not only helped John develop closer relationships with publishers and booksellers in London and Oxford, but also seems to have introduced John into a new circle of friends in the London area. These included influential supporters of the religious society movement such as Sir John Phillips, a prime mover in the S.P.C.K. The importance of this relationship can be seen not only in Sir John's substantial contributions to the Oxford Methodists' resources, or in the simple fact of Wesley's becoming a corresponding member of the S.P.C.K., but also in the fact that the Society became an important source for the suggestion and supply of books for the Methodists as well as being a major factor in promoting John Wesley's interest in the Georgia colony from the fall of 1732 onward.

Clayton also seems to have begun a new level of development within the Methodist movement by gathering around himself other students from Brasenose College into a small society after the Wesleyan fashion. When Clayton left Oxford in November, several of these Brasenose students began to relate themselves directly to Wesley's group. But the pattern of separate groups meeting throughout the University had been set, and became one of the characteristic features of the later stages of Oxford Methodism.

The departure of Clayton came in the midst of a period of trial for the Methodists. Word had reached Oxford that William Morgan had died, and the rumor spread that the ascetic rigors of the Methodist lifestyle had killed him. As Wesley was defending himself, his friends, and his method against these insinuations, Clayton left to take a living at Salford, near Manchester. Although no one ever quite filled the void at Wesley's side caused by Clayton's absence, new names again began appearing regularly among the Methodists. At the same time, the occasional note of ridicule or passing smirk of the detractors throughout the University

\textsuperscript{20}See Letters, I, 84, 136.
became more frequent and more intense as the work of the Methodists took on an increasingly social (and thereby noticeable) dimension. Others began noticing with some alarm the seemingly fanatical practices of fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays, the annoying practice of getting up at four and five o'clock in the morning, and the more or less radical extent to which Wesley and his friends carried their frugality and their various methods of self-denial. The Methodists were about as inconspicuous on the Oxford campus as several cells of Jesus freaks would be on any campus of about 2,000 students. As Bob Simon noted on the CBS news recently in a special report on the Jesus movement in England today, the British have a long tradition of appreciating eccentrics, as long as they smile, and especially if they sing. Well, at this point, the Methodists were not smiling by any means (they didn't have time), and they had not yet begun to spread the gospel on the wings of Charles Wesley's hymns.

In this situation, Wesley assumed the responsibility for defending the Methodists against slanderous attacks primarily through two channels: a letter to Morgan's father, explaining the rise and design of the movement, and a sermon preached at St. Mary's, outlining their theological rationale, later referred to as the doctrine of Christian perfection. At the same time, John's diary is filled with references to his visiting influential persons throughout the University, attempting to gain support, or at the very least, to make an apology for the Methodists. The first diary use of the term "Methodist" comes in the context of these visits; with William Holmes, the Vice Chancellor, with Joseph Smith, the Provost of Queen's, with Jonathan Colley, the chaplain at Christ Church, with Euseby Isham, the rector of Lincoln College. Wesley was doing his best to counter the slanderous remarks that had been spread abroad, among other places in the now infamous letter to the editor of Fog's Weekly Journal.

The latter months of 1732, leading up to the sermon at St. Mary's on "The Circumcision of the Heart," had witnessed the further development of what can be called, without any hesitation, Methodism. The opponents of John Wesley had denominated it as such, he himself had

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23 O.D., III, 25.
recognized the term, and a historical and theological rationale had been formulated. The Methodists had received public notice not only throughout Oxford but across the realm. Vicious pockets of vocal opposition had been offset to a certain degree by important centers of support. The movement seemed to be gaining momentum and strength, building upon a small, but strong and active, group of followers. Oxford Methodism had matured, and the developments of the next few years would be more or less variations on a theme that was fairly well set by January 1733.

The ensuing months brought many refinements in the Methodist program. Continuing controversy, both within and without the group, resulted not only in a fluctuation of membership, but in a great deal of soul-searching on Wesley's part. The ability of the Methodist leader to be both innovative and flexible in the face of problems and challenges is not only a characteristic which came to the foreground during this period, but one which remained a hallmark both of John Wesley in his lifetime and of the Methodist tradition which is his heritage.

Throughout the fluctuating successes and failures of the next two years, the Oxford Methodists continued to maintain the program of serving the poor in Oxford. In addition, several writings flowed from Wesley's pen to assist his pupils and friends (and indeed himself) formulate positions on particular theological issues. The organizational form of Methodism filled out through the efforts of some new and active friends, such as Benjamin Ingham, James Hervey, Thomas Broughton, John Gambold, and Westley Hall. And behind all of the other activities and ideas through this period loom two areas of concern that began building toward a climax—the question of John succeeding to Samuel Wesley's living at Epworth, and a fascination with the new missionary enterprise in the colony of Georgia.

In the years 1733-34, Wesley's scheme began to take effect in several corners of the University so that one could point to at least two dozen persons who were following Wesley's design for Christian living. At the same time, the tone of singularity in Wesley's own life (as continually emphasized by his new friend William Law) were increasingly put into practice. Certain noticeable changes in the style and format of his diary indicated some of these more substantial refinements he was making in his total approach to life among the Oxford Methodists. As the number of friends increased, Wesley tried new methods of meeting the demands of an increasingly more
complex set of relationships.

Again, other Methodists began extending the general design and/or adapting it to their own uses, as Benjamin Ingham's diary discloses. In March 1734, Ingham, John Robson, and Thomas Grieves decided to begin reading the prayer service at St. Thomas' Workhouse, a plan which Wesley endorsed with enthusiasm. Toward the end of April, the design was extended to reach out to the Bartlema men, a small group of poor and infirm men who lived in the remains of St. Bartholomew's Hospital, just to the east of Oxford. Four days later, with Wesley having gone north to Epworth, James Hervey came to Ingham and suggested the idea of going to another workhouse, by Gloucester Green, a plan which they began implementing regularly on Saturday mornings. The following month, the personal devotional life of Ingham and some of his friends also took on a new dimension. Following the suggestion of Anthony Horneck's The Happy Ascetic; or the Best Exercise, and applying one of Jesus' "positive commands"—"Watch and Pray"—to their weekly method of living, Ingham, Atkinson, and Washington "agreed to Watch every Saturday night" from 9:00 to 11:00 in preparation for Sunday. This particular practice, which Ingham continued for months, was accepted somewhat hesitantly by Wesley upon his return from Epworth. Ingham noted John's reaction in his diary: "Fasting is always necessary; Standing on Sundays only decency; religious talk of Watching, acceptable, but not necessary for all." 24

The process of adaptation worked both ways, with individual Methodists adding to or detracting from Wesley's general scheme to fit their own needs. For instance, Wesley's diary is filled with indications of his consternation at being unable to convince one or another of his friends to rise early. And even some who did resolve to begin the day early had some difficulty putting their aspirations into practice. Smith, Robson, and Ingham all had problems in this regard, and the latter's diary contains many notations of his reluctance to get out of bed early in the morning. Ingham tried many different methods to bolster his weary body at that early hour, from lying on the bed-stocks (without sheets) to fining himself. At one point, he reflected upon his having lain in bed for an hour in the morning telling himself he needed to warm his shirt, and consequently resolved to have "no more such trivial Excuses." Three

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24 Ingham, MS. Diary, pp. [116-17].
days later he resolved not even to meditate while sitting on the bed in the morning because of the temptation which this presented. He tried Thomas Broughton’s suggestion, "to leap out of bed at first sound of the Larum, fall to [his] knees, and pray for purity." At one point he even had a friend sit up all night beside his bed to help him get up in the morning. 25

Wesley himself had begun a new experiment with his diary. For nearly two years he had been "keeping score" of broken resolutions by means of monthly charts in the back of his diary. Beginning in December 1733 his daily diary had become so full of notations regarding his hourly recollections, prayers, and other regular disciplines that his daily entries took half a page apiece. By the end of January even this amount of space was apparently felt to be inadequate, and Wesley changed from the paragraph-style entry which had served him for many years to a columnar style, with each day's entry taking up a whole page and including everything he had shown on the charts and more. The new style diary was "more exact," to use the Methodist description. It promoted the keeping of an hourly record of one's adherence to the Wesleyan design, in prayers, activities, resolutions, moods, and nearly every aspect of daily life. The separate columns were designed to indicate 1) the hour, 2) the use of ejaculatory prayers at the beginning of the hour, 3) the activities of that hour, 4) the number of minutes spent in devotion, 5) the record of his recollection, 6) the attitudes and feelings which characterized the activities of that hour, 7) the resolutions broken, 8) the resolutions kept, and 9) special blessings. A whole new series of symbols develops to record such finer points of recollection as the "degrees of attention" in certain endeavors such as his prayers, indication whether he was zealous, fervent, or at least attentive when praying, or perhaps indifferent, cold, or even dead in prayer. 26 At the same time he continued drawing up a summary of the important events of his life at the end of each day, each month, and each year.

All of this indicates a rather unique method of keeping one's spiritual pulse, and represents to some degree the extent to which Wesley's method had developed

25 Ibid., pp. [30, 63, 74, 96, 123].
26 These "degrees" were noted by means of symbols, the key to which is given by Ingham in the front of his diary, p. [iv].
at Oxford. As 1734 passed, however, John's concerns were torn between Oxford and Epworth, between his attempts to establish and refine a scheme of holy living within the academic setting and the increasing pressure to seek an appointment as rector of his father's parish. John Wesley's world at this point revolved about Oxford as it had for the past decade, and it was only after he had convinced nearly everyone of this (including himself) that his path took the strange twist which led him away from the seat of learning that had been his mission field for ten years.

The problems involved in making rather crucial decisions during this period can be seen in the last of his Oxford diaries. With respect to pressures both from within and without his movement concerning the practices of fasting and early rising, John began at the outset of 1735 to use the casting of lots to help him make up his mind. On January 3 he cast lots to determine whether his tired body should have more rest: the result was forty minutes more of sleep. About a month later he applied this method to the question of fasting. On Friday, February 7, a Stationary day, he cast lots at 5:45 a.m. as to sleep, and received a negative answer. At nine that morning he "thought of eating," but his resort to casting lots supported his wavering will more than his empty stomach, as the answer then also was negative.

Throughout this period, John had been in correspondence with his father and his brother Samuel concerning the question of the Epworth living. At one point, just as he was coming to the end of his diary for February 1735, he noted in the daily summary, "Almost convinced of Duty to go to Epworth." In the end, of course, Wesley did not take the living, by a rather strange combination of intent and default. And in the disruption and confusion that followed his father's death, his interests in promoting "scriptural holiness" received a new focus of attention. Dr. John Burton suggested to Wesley that he and some of his Oxford compatriots might be interested.

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in going to the colony of Georgia to assist in the pro-
pagation of the gospel. From among the Methodists at
Oxford, however, Wesley could persuade only his brother
Charles and his friend Benjamin Ingham to accompany him.

As Wesley sailed for the New World, he left behind
him over three dozen persons who were or had been asso-
ciated with the Methodist movement at Oxford. Many of
them had left the University and were spread throughout
the countryside. Some of them were still at Oxford,
carrying on the scheme of living by rule and method
which John had promoted. There were at that time a half
dozens or so persons who were personally associated with
in Wesley's own study group, and two of these besides
the Wesleys seriously considered accompanying their
leader across the sea, only to back out at the eleventh
hour. There were many other Methodists at Oxford who
did not belong to John Wesley's own personal group, and
from among these, Ingham was the only one who decided
to brave the trials of the New World.

It is perhaps a strange observation that Benjamin
Ingham was not closely related to John Wesley's group
while they were at Oxford, even though one can say with
certainty that Ingham was a Methodist from at least the
autumn of 1733 onward. To understand this, it is
necessary to look more closely at the organizational
structure of Methodism at Oxford as it developed after
1732. The stereotyped picture of the Wesleyan movement
in terms of the "Holy Club" is in part due to the de-
scription of the origin and design of Methodism given in
Wesley's letter to Richard Morgan during the contro-
versies of late 1732, a picture which has been kept in
the public eye through its inclusion in the prefatory
material in Wesley's published Journal. And this has
been reinforced, as we have noted, by the Claxton
painting of "the Holy Club." At the same time there has
been a dearth of material which describes the nature of
Oxford Methodism at its height, from mid-1732 onward.

As we have noted, John Clayton had gathered a "little
flock" around himself at Brasenose during the summer of
1732. Benjamin Ingham's diary reveals an even more com-
plicated set of relationships. He appears to have been
the moving force within three or four different groups
or combinations of individuals, some of whom have become
known as Oxford Methodists, even though they are never
mentioned by John Wesley in his diaries, letters, or
journals. Ingham's direct advisor appears to be Charles
Wesley, rather than John, although he confers at times
with the latter on important matters. It is Charles who
is his immediate spiritual mentor, teaching him the method of keeping a diary (Ingham learned the "more exact" method of keeping a diary from Charles five weeks after John began using it), giving him the rules to copy, and leading a Methodist study group which Ingham attended regularly. Among the friends in Ingham's groups, some were also close associates (even students) of John Wesley. A few, however, were not only unrelated to Wesley, but would not even meet together with the other groups under Ingham.

There appear, therefore, to have been several levels of groups meeting together with various degrees of proximity to the leadership of John Wesley. There were the persons meeting directly and regularly with John for study and prayer (although the membership of these groups differed between weekday and weekend meetings). These persons, then, appear to have gone their separate ways and met with other friends at other times, to form a second level of study groups (such as the one led by Charles). Members of these groups (such as Ingham) then appear to have formed under their guidance yet another level of groups. In addition, there was at least one group in town, under the care of Miss Potter, who looked to Wesley for guidance. Even though John Wesley was the acknowledged leader of the movement, there was no strict organizational hierarchy, for some persons at all of the "levels" were in direct contact with John Wesley, even at times attending one of his groups or activities. And while many persons in the peripheral groups joined with Wesley and the others in their charitable designs, some appear to have never entered into any sort of direct participation with Wesley himself. With this intricate arrangement of groups and varying degrees of direct relationship to John Wesley, complicated by the normal changeover of students in the University setting, it is rather difficult to portray a simple view of the "Holy Club" meeting with its "director," John Wesley.

While some Methodists may have been overlooked by the historians, others had the opposite problem: disassociating themselves from Wesley's movement. Richard Morgan, Jr., protested to his father that simply by becoming Wesley's pupil he had been "stigmatized with the name of a Methodist," even though the group itself felt that he had not yet a good enough "stock of religion" to actually be taken in as an "assistant." But as Richard argues, and the diaries show, simply being called a Methodist did not necessarily make a person one. In fact, regular attendance at John Wesley's own reading circle was not even a positive indication. The diaries
confirm the impression given in one of the younger Morgan's letters to his father that in early 1734 Wesley's group met for a regular session before Morgan would come to join with them in the reading group at seven o'clock. It also seems that Wesley and Morgan had different concepts of who belonged to the "Society," as John challenged Richard's claim that there were seven members by saying that he himself knew of "no more than four." All who attended the Sacrament at Christ Church were not necessarily Methodists, although Wesley actively promoted this practice and it appears that his friends often formed the bulk of the communicants. Preaching or visiting at the Castle prison was not a sure sign of a Methodist any more than a number of other specific activities already mentioned. Likewise not every Methodist actively participated in, or agreed with, all that John Wesley promoted.

If the criteria for determining who was indeed a Methodist are to take into account the complex circumstances surrounding the growth of the movement and yet catch the essence of what it meant to be so called, they must go beyond a statistical record of academic meetings or charitable activities and try to indicate who those persons were who had willingly associated themselves with others who were also seeking, in Wesley's own words, "a right state of soul, a mind and spirit renewed after the image of him that created it." Having reached this goal is not the criterion. The means used in striving for this goal are not in themselves the measure. Rather, the Methodists were those who were striving for "the one thing needful," and to that end had a "single intention" in life—"to please God" by improving "in Holiness, in the Love of God and...Neighbor." 29

As we have indicated, the diaries fill in many of the interesting details of this scheme of living by method and rule. One can watch the development of the various lists of resolutions and rules which provided the plumb-line for Wesley's self-examinations. They cover almost every aspect of life, as a brief sampling will show:

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28 Letters, I, 147ff, 151.
Before private or public prayer, cry mightily for help.
To observe and use occasions of self-denial, the hinge of mortification.
To rise at dawn.
During the fast, no secular Business.
In the common room, help yourself last; [take] but one slice of pudding, one glass of wine or ale; never taste of above three dishes at a meal.30

And the penetrating nature of the Wesleyan method of introspection can be seen in any one of a number of lists of questions John developed to examine the most remote corners of the individual's self-consciousness:

Have I done or said anything without a present or previous perception of its direct or remote tendency to the glory of God?
Have I been zealous in undertaking and active in doing what good I could?
Have I said or thought unkind things of or to any one?
Have I felt, or entertained, or seemed to approve any proud, vain or unchaste thought?
Have I contrived pretences to avoid self-denial?
Have I assumed any Praise for what God did by me?
Have I allotted some time for thanking God for the Blessings of the week?31

(And an indication of the compulsion behind Wesley's whole approach)
Have I considered HOW each [Blessing] obliges [me] to stricter Holiness?32

Besides these more explicit entries, the diaries can be gleaned for information regarding such things as the Methodists' schedule for visiting the prisons, the poor, and the children. A fairly complete listing of John Wesley's correspondence can be developed which includes nearly twelve hundred references to letters written by and to the Oxford don during this decade. Two lists of sermon topics in Wesley's first diary can be extended into a preaching schedule by comparing them with the subsequent diaries and the extant manuscripts. The

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30 Selected from extensive lists in the front of O.D., II, IV, V.
31 O.D., IV, [4d].
32 Ibid., pp. [ii, iii].
inquiring mind can discover even further how much time Wesley spent preparing particular sermons. It is interesting, for instance, to note the extreme care put into the writing of "The Circumcision of the Heart," and the significance which Wesley seemed to attach to it even at that time. By watching Wesley's schedule carefully, one can see that when he began visiting the poor in Oxford and preaching at the prisons late in 1730, he practically discontinued preaching in the countryside around Oxford, a practice that he had been following for over five years. Also, the diaries indicate that almost without exception Wesley attended the Sacrament every Sunday morning that he was at Oxford. One can also take note of other practices, such as fasting and early rising, to see with what success these disciplines were being followed. A careful study of the diaries also indicates that these small volumes were used not only by the diarist for his own recollection, but were occasionally passed around during meetings of the Methodists, for the purpose of "comparing diaries." This was just one method by which the company of friends attempted to help each other persist in their pursuit of perfection.

The diaries also contain some further information concerning the writings of the Methodists, and particularly John Wesley. Notices of his "collecting" or abridging works of various authors are found throughout, as well as accounts of composing original essays and sermons. Some of his sermons can be dated with some certainty through other types of references in the diary, such as the great fire and the horserace at Epworth on September 1 and 2, 1732, which are almost certainly the occasions referred to in his sermon "On Public Diversions," a sermon he appears to have written and delivered that same weekend in his father's church. The manner in which the sermons and other writings of the Methodists were copied and circulated among their friends can also be seen in the diaries. Benjamin Ingham and Charles Wesley began reading a copy of John Wesley's sermon "On the Love of God" the afternoon after he first preached it at St. Mary's. Ingham also copied some of Clayton's sermons. This habit of sharing sermons also led Charles to copy several of John's sermons, which have survived only through the copies the younger brother made (which were published in the early nineteenth century as Charles

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33 Ingham, MS. Diary, p. [35].
34 Ibid., p. [17].
Wesley's sermons). John himself seems to have copied several of his own works for the use of his friends: essays, letters, and sermons, on such topics as the Stations, baptism, the sacrament, acquaintances, and company. This desire to circulate writings among the Methodists and among the poor with whom they were working, eventually led Wesley to enter the world of publishing, one of the steps taken during this period which had lasting consequences upon the movement, as Methodism entered the age of mass communication. The diary again helps with many of the details, not only indicating those times and places where Wesley is editing his work, or correcting proof, but in one particular instance recording when the copies of his first book, the Collection of Forms of Prayer, arrived from London.

The desire to copy and circulate important writings also led to certain problems for Wesley, an understanding of which may help the modern historian see the complexities of dealing with materials from this period. John made a transcription of his important letter to William Morgan's father in the fall of 1732, and used this writing as an historical apology for Methodism in his conversations and contacts with important people. He did not, however, intend the letter to be mass-produced, as can be seen in his reaction to the publication of the little pamphlet entitled The Oxford Methodists (February 1733), which in effect reproduced the substance of the letter to Morgan. John's first reaction was to write Morgan again and ask if he had showed the letter to anyone. A negative response from that quarter sent John scurrying around to question those persons to whom he had read or showed the letter. Apparently he never discovered who the author of the pamphlet was, a situation which still exists today (even though some ascribe it to William Law, more for lack of a better candidate than on any solid grounds). The complicated nature of John's (and likewise our) attempt to solve the problem is indicated by the fact that there is a manuscript of that letter in Charles Wesley's hand, apparently made from his brother's

36 These arrived on January 17, 1734. O.D., IV, p. 46.
37 See the continuing controversy in the W.H.S. Proceedings, XIX (Dec. 1934), 181-83; XX (June 1935), 30-32; and passing notices in the biographies by John S. Simon, V. H. H. Green, and Martin Schmidt.]
copy, and more than likely shown to a host of persons, any one of whom might have also made a copy without John ever having known.

In addition to information which contributes to a better understanding of the rise and design of Oxford Methodism, or the developing life-style of the diarists, the diaries from this period also include a great deal of material that could be categorized at the very least as interesting, if not significant within the larger concerns of the historian. In Wesley's notebooks one finds such disparate items as laundry lists, humorous poetry, lists of colloquialisms ("You muckspout...I'll tan your bone-cart...rough robins...to threpe...as rough as a Hackle"), local gossip from the Isle of Axholme, rather interesting relationships with various young ladies, and financial accounts which include everything from preaching income and book expenditures to winnings at cardgames and penny fares to cross the Trent.

In the midst of the minutia and tedium of these diaries, however, stand those occasional entries which summarize and give substantial meaning to what is being described day by day, hour by hour. One must look hard and long, for instance, for explicit statements in Wesley's diaries which give any indication of particular theological reflections on given issues. Most of what one can say about Wesley's mindset at this point is derived from his other writings, combined then with an overall view of how he was living out his theology in the life-style described in the daily diary entries. A close evaluation of his reading program gives some indication of his intellectual concerns, and the lists of questions and resolutions indicate how these are being worked out in the practicality of his method. His sermon on "The Circumcision of the Heart," of course, presents the major outlines of the framework he was developing, with a rather disarming emphasis upon the inner aspects of the seal of one's calling: "Circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter." Strange words for a person who seems to be using every external means possible in an attempt to develop a method or manner of living which exhibits scriptural holiness. And yet, although Wesley seems to have had a somewhat legalistic approach to the Christian life, he can never actually be accused at any point during his Oxford years of developing a firm set of rules or regulations for the movement, and after 1733 one can notice an increasing
flexibility in Wesley's method. In spite of all the lists of resolutions and questions, regardless of all the methods and means used, the essence of his approach was a dynamic process of seeking scriptural holiness as the desired end of his designs. The means, the methods, the rules were never to be relied upon as being the source of one's hope for eternal life or happiness—"Use them regularly," he told George Whitefield, "but do not depend on them in the least."39

What began increasingly to bother the Oxford scholar after 1733 were the theological and practical tensions that his pattern of life had forced upon him: the tension between the implications of Christian liberty and the demands of his living by rule and method; the tension between the counsels of perfection and his own awareness of sin; the tension between his obsession with his failings and his frantic desire to improve himself in the sight of God.

One particular entry in the Wesley diaries both speaks to his attempt to resolve these tensions and gives a hint at the theological impulse behind his activities at Oxford. In the front of his diary for 1734-35, Wesley listed both his predicament and what he felt was his only recourse as a sinful man:

Q? How steer between Scrupulosity as to particular instances of Self Denial, and Self Indulgence?
A. Fac quod in te est, et Deus aderit bonae tuae Voluntati.

"Do what you can, and God acknowledges your good intentions." It is interesting to note that at this point in his life Wesley is echoing the position expressed by some late medieval nominalists such as Gabriel Biel and their pre-Reformation view of grace: "Do what is in you, and God will not withhold his grace."40 Wesley himself

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39 George Whitefield, A Short Account of God's Dealings with the Reverend Mr. Whitefield (London: Printed by W. Strahan, 1740), p. 44.
40 Reinhold Seeberg, Textbook of the History of
had spoken further to this issue in an extended comment added to his abridgment of Robert Nelson's work on the Sacrament. What he saw as the absolute demands of the Old Covenant, "Do this and Live," are tempered in his own mind by what he saw as the conditions of the New Covenant—"Try to do this, and live." In a sense, Wesley was beginning to rest his hope upon his sincerity. But as the years passed, this attempt to resolve his spiritual tensions and theological difficulties was brought down by his inability to have confidence that he was indeed doing the best he could. This rationale could never provide an effective assurance for the Oxford Methodist, whose affinity for self-examination at times bordered on spiritual paranoia and simply served to make him increasingly uneasy as to his religious condition.

It was this rather uneasy state of tension between a constantly evident sinfulness and a continually desired holiness, combined with a sense of urgency and orderliness, that provided both the impetus for, and to some degree the form of, the Methodist movement at Oxford. The rules and methods, the acts of devotion, the program of social concern, the practices of fasting, constant communion, keeping diaries, and self-examination—all were used to nurture that hoped-for inward disposition of the soul, scriptural holiness. The quest for this "one thing needful," marked by a spirit of self-denial and world-renunciation, eventually led Wesley to the New World. He had exhausted the possibilities of the thought patterns and structures of many persons who had preceded him on the road he was traveling, and was yet unsatisfied. In fact, the very intensity of his attempt to combine the perfection of the Pietists, the devotion of the mystics, the moralism of the Puritans, within the doctrinal framework of the Church of England and the organizational

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Doctrine (Grand Rapids: Baker House, 1966), II, 201; for the background and development of this concept in its patristic and medieval setting, see Albert Outler, "Methodism's Theological Heritage; A Study in Perspective," in Paul M. Minus, Jr., ed., Methodism's Destiny in an Ecumenical Age (Nashville: Abingdon, 1969).

41 John Wesley, MS. The Duty of Receiving the Lord's Supper (Methodist Archives, London, Colman XX), f.v. 18.

42 What kept him pressing on was, as he put it, "the Hope of our Calling; to know that our Hope is Sincerity, not Perfection; Not to do Well, but to do our Best." John Wesley, MS. Selima Letters (Methodist Archives, London, Colman II), p. 27.
structure of the religious societies, made his lack of satisfaction even more desperate. One can say that in 1735 he had indeed reached the point of despairing in his ability to work out his own salvation. As he left for America, he summarized his own perspective and condition better than perhaps even he himself realized at that point, as he wrote in a letter on the eve of his departure: "Nor indeed, till he does all he can for God, will any man feel that he can himself do nothing."43

Although the sense of insecurity and hesitancy which had marked his Oxford views began to disappear as he went through his Aldersgate experience, some of the basic tensions between holiness as a gift of God and yet a work of man still remained. And it is the fact that this tension continued beyond Aldersgate that in some sense accounts for the continuing vitality of the Methodist emphasis upon pursuing the Christian life. This is not to say that Wesley himself had completely overcome the sense of frustration which had accompanied much of his work at Oxford. Nearly four decades later the frantic uneasiness of the Oxford days looked comforting compared with the problems he was then facing, as he wrote to his brother, "I often cry out, Vitae me redde priori! Let me be again an Oxford Methodist! I am often in doubt whether it would not be best for me to resume all my Oxford rules, great and small."44

Although history has the annoying habit of never disclosing its lost alternatives, we can say that if Wesley had not gone through the years of searching and frustration at Oxford and in Georgia, he might never have reached the point where he could say, "I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."45 And certainly the subsequent shape of the Methodist doctrine and discipline, not to mention the methods and mindset of Wesley, would have been quite different had he not been strongly convinced at Oxford of the necessary tie between the process of salvation and the manner of the Christian life. Wesley's attempt to hold faith and works in dynamic tension within the Christian experience is not a total reversal of the perspective of Oxford Methodism, but rather is a continuing development of his life and thought which eventually included the evangelical understanding of grace within his longtime search for "the one thing needful."

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43 Letters, I, 189.  
44 Ibid., VI, 6.  
45 Journal, I, 475f.