Methodist Origins: John Wesley and Alcohol
by Ivan Burnett, Jr.

To understand American Methodism's ever-changing position on beverage alcohol, one has to understand John Wesley's position. Wesley was born on June 17, 1703, the son of an Anglican priest. The influence of his father and of a very devout mother led him to follow in his father's footsteps. Ordained to the priesthood in September, 1725, at the age of 23, he was named both Greek lecturer and Moderator of the Classes in Lincoln College. Later at Lincoln he received his master of arts degree. While there he and other students sought to live extremely disciplined lives. They were so disciplined, in fact, that someone, in derision, called them "Methodists." The name became their common title.

Even though Wesley received a formal education, he had not found salvation. His entrance into the ministry and his living the disciplined life were not signs of new life in Christ, but were, instead, signs of his seeking to find God's acceptance by performing good works. So anxious was he to save himself, that he even became a missionary to the American Indians. Finally, he learned that he did not have to save himself. That assurance, that he was already saved and so did not have to worry about his salvation, came on May 24, 1738. While hearing a reading of Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans, Wesley felt his heart strangely warmed and began to trust God for his salvation. This is commonly referred to as his "Aldersgate" experience.

After that he was instrumental in forming and acting as spiritual and political head of the Societies which were eventually to become The Methodist Church. In America he was thought of as the father in the faith.

Influence on Early American Methodists

To understand American Methodists, therefore, one has to understand Wesley. For not only did they see Wesley as spiritual head, they intended to follow his doctrines and disciplines. They seemed to think that they were doing so. Furthermore, one has to rely on Wesley's position regarding beverage alcohol if one is to understand American Methodism's position, simply because American Methodists in the first years wrote very little on the subject.

Unfortunately, however, Wesley's position is not that simple. It

1 Methodist Episcopal Church, Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, annually held in America from 1773 to 1794, inclusive (Philadelphia: Printed by Henry Tuckness and sold by John Dickins, 1795), p. 5.
is far more complex than later Methodists actually thought. His position appears even contradictory. On the one hand he drank beverage alcohol; on the other he stood for a form of legal prohibition. 2 While sometimes condemning the use of wine, 3 he also held it to be "one of the noblest cordials in nature." 4 He called spirituous liquors "liquid fire" and those that sold them "poisoners general"; yet he himself said that there was a place even for these stronger liquors. 5 He even wrote a book in which he went so far as to recommend their use. 6 Wesley's position on beverage alcohol, then, was anything but simplistic, and it is extremely unfortunate that since his time the breadth of his position so often has been overlooked.

One might have expected the prohibitionists of the twenties to overlook the wholeness of Wesley's position. In the ardor of their desire to get rid of what they saw to be the worst villany of the entire world, it is understandable that they might yield to the temptation to proof-text Wesley. What we know, however, is that Methodism in America departed from Wesley's position decades before the Eighteenth Amendment was passed; and, as the temperance movement grew in momentum it repeatedly chose to remember only that part of Wesley's writings with which it was comfortable. Indeed, in the last twenty years Methodists have so changed Wesley's true position that he is made to sound both like a total abstainer and like a legal prohibitionist who stood for complete control of all beverages containing alcohol. Everett Tilson, while Associate Professor of Biblical Theology at Vanderbilt University Divinity School, wrote about Wesley in this way in 1957, while pleading for total abstinence:

The keynote speaker of the 1952 General Conference of the Methodist Church once again sounded the alarm of Wesley's solution to the problem. As a part of his last great contribution of Methodist laborers in the Lord's vineyard, that little man who was in the vanguard of so many big movements, Bishop Paul B. Kern, in the Episcopal Ad-

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5 Wesley, The Works, 1872, VI, 128-129; Wesley, The Letters, VIII, 26. By "spirituous liquors" Wesley meant distilled liquors. The word liquor, itself, he also used for coffee, water, milk, etc. The spelling of some English words has changed since Wesley's time. In quoting him, we find such words as "spirituous," "showing," "phial," etc.
dress of 1952 issued this solemn reminder: “We call our people to the
high doctrine of total abstinence.”
That’s where John Wesley began in 1743. That’s where Paul B. Kern
left off in 1952.⁷

Paul Kern may have left off there. We shall see, however, that
John Wesley did not begin there in 1743. His position was much
more complex.
Before we look at Wesley’s position, three things should be
noted. First, throughout history writers have been dealing pri­
marily with Wesley’s position as Wesley recorded it. We ourselves
have found it almost impossible to locate biographical statements
by Wesley’s contemporaries that deal with his views on alcohol.
We have found only one contemporary of Wesley who wrote about
Wesley’s attitude toward alcohol and that contemporary simply
wrote that a friend gave Wesley a drink of wine.⁸ Secondly, we
cannot predict what Wesley’s position regarding beverage alcohol
would be if he were living today. It may well be that on this spe­
cific matter he was wrong even for his day, or conditions may be
sufficiently different today that we should modify his position.
However, we will deal only with his position as it was then, and
will make no further claims. Thirdly, it should be noted that Wesley
never even used the term “beverage alcohol.” The word “alcohol”
was not customarily used in this way during his time. To get at
Wesley’s position, therefore, we have to explore terms other than
alcohol: drunkenness, spirituous liquors, brandy, drink, distillers,
fermented liquors, beer, ale, wine, etc. Examining how he used
these words will help us focus on his position on beverage alcohol.

Views on Drunkenness

Drunkenness was a tremendous problem for England, and Wes­
ley bitterly denounced it. He himself suggested the degree of the
problem by contrasting England with Ephraim. Whereas in Eph­
raim men would “rise up early that they might follow after strong
drink,” in England they reversed the process; they began “at
night” and drank until the next morning.⁹ Wesley reports that
conditions were so bad that there were even believable rumors of
drunk preachers.¹⁰

Others also report the seriousness of the problem which so con­

p. 61.
⁸ James Rogers, Some Account of the Last Sickness and Death of the Rev. John
Wesley . . . (Philadelphia: Printed by P. Hall and sold by John Dickens, 1791),
p. 53.
¹⁰ Wesley, The Letters, III, 203.
cerned Wesley. Allen credits W. E. H. Lecky, an English historian, as writing that the immoderate use of spirits affected all classes around 1724, and thereafter reached epidemic proportions. Allen used Lecky’s table showing the increase in the availability of distilled products and suggested this increase as the major reason for the problem.

Gallons of English Spirits Distilled

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Gallons</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1684</td>
<td>527,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1714</td>
<td>2,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1727</td>
<td>3,601,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1735</td>
<td>5,394,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1737</td>
<td>3,600,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1742</td>
<td>7,000,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>1750</td>
<td>11,000,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The increasing availability of liquors with a high alcohol content no doubt was a major cause of the rapidly increasing amount of drunkenness during Wesley’s time. But there were also other reasons. The conditions in which men lived and worked encouraged them to want to escape and drunkenness, itself, was a socially approved way of escaping. Signs in Wesley’s England reveal this acceptance. One such sign read: “Drunk for a Penny, Dead Drunk for Two-pence, Clean Straw [to ‘sleep it off’] for Nothing.”

The amount of drunkenness led Wesley to denounce it in treatises he wrote, in regulations he established for the Methodist Societies, and in a pamphlet he printed and distributed. In a treatise entitled, “A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion,” he wrote:

Friend! stop. You have the form of a man still; and perhaps some remains of understanding. O may the merciful God lay hold of that! Unto him all things are possible. Think a little for once. What is it you are doing? Why should you destroy yourself?

In regulations he established as ground rules for those entering Methodist Societies, in 1742-1743, Methodists were to avoid,

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12 Ibid.
14 In a paragraph titled, “Of the Band Societies,” the following explanation is given: “Two, three, or four true believers, who have confidence in each other, form a band. Only it is to be observed, that in one of these bands all must be men, or all women; and all married, or all unmarried.” *Discipline*, 1836, p. 82.
“Drunkenness, buying or selling spirituous liquors, or drinking them (unless in cases of extreme necessity).” 16 This rule, and the others that went with it, he termed the “General Rules of the United Societies.”

Wesley’s lengthiest statement on drunkenness was neither a rule nor part of a long treatise. It was, rather, a handbill, which he handed to members of his congregations. In this handbill Wesley wrote:

A WORD TO A DRUNKARD

1. Are you a man! God made you a man; but you make yourself a beast. Wherein does a man differ from a beast? Is it not chiefly in reason and understanding? But you throw away what reason you have. You strip yourself of your understanding. You do all you can to make yourself a mere beast; not a fool, not a madman only, but a swine, a poor filthy swine. Go and wallow with them in the mire! Go, drink on, till thy nakedness be uncovered, and shameful spewing be on thy glory!

7. Do you not rather drink for the sake of company? Do you not do it to oblige your friends? “For company,” do you say? How is this? Will you take a dose of ratsbane for company? If twenty men were to do so before you, would not you desire to be excused? How much more may you desire to be excused from going to hell for company? But, ‘to oblige your friends’: What manner of friends are they who would be obliged by your destroying yourself? Who would suffer, nay, entice you so to do? They are villains. They are your worst enemies. They are just such friends, as a man that would smile in your face, and stab you to the heart.

8. O do not aim at any excuse! Say not, as many do, “I am no one’s enemy but my own.” If it were so, what a poor saying is this, “I give none but my own soul to the devil.” Alas! is not that too much? Why shouldest thou give him thy own soul? Do it not. Rather give it to God.

But it is not so. You are an enemy to your King, whom you rob hereby of an useful subject. You are an enemy to your country, which you defraud of the service you might do, either as a man or as a Christian. You are an enemy to every man that sees you in your sin; for your example may move him to do the same. A drunkard is a public enemy. I should not wonder at all, if you was (like Cain of old) afraid that “every man who meeteth you should slay you.”

11. O repent! See and feel what a wretch you are. Pray to God, to convince you in your inmost soul. How often have you crucified the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame! Pray that you may know yourself, inwardly and outwardly, all sin, all guilt, all

helplessness. Then cry out, "Thou Son of David, have mercy upon me!" Thou lamb of God, take away my sins! Grant me thy peace. Justify the ungodly. O bring me to the blood of sprinkling, that I may go and sin no more, that I may love much, having had so much forgiven! 17

In this statement Wesley placed all the blame for drinking directly on the drunkard. The drunkard chose to make himself a "mere beast" by drinking either "for the pleasure of a few moments" or "for the sake of company." He generally did not place all the blame on the drunkard, however. Often Wesley blamed the distillers and the government. Furthermore, one should note that though Wesley did berate the drunkard at times, he also had compassion on the drunkard and bade others have compassion. In a sermon Wesley urged, "...by the mercies of God, do not despise poor drunkards! Have compassion on them!" 18

Such compassion seemed to come from two sources. First, Wesley was convinced of the love of God which causes one to express concern for another human being in need. Furthermore, this love was a redeeming love that made all things possible. 19 Another source of Wesley's compassion was his experience that the drunkard could change if given encouragement. Though Wesley realized that a drunkard's battle for sobriety rarely was won without an occasional relapse, he did not see the drunkard as being beyond hope. 20 He had seen too many of them escape their plight. He witnessed to this hope when he preached:

... Let not shame, or fear of men, prevent your pulling these brands out of the burning; many of them are self-condemned: "Nor do they not discern the evil plight That they are in"; but they despair; they have no hope of escaping out of it and they sink into it still deeper, because none else has any hope for them! "Sinners of every sort," said a venerable old Clergyman, "have I frequently known converted to God. But an habitual drunkard I have never known converted." But I have known five hundred, perhaps five thousand. 21

Wesley even thought it possible and likely that a drunkard would change while "under the influence." Experience had taught him this! He had seen many men while drunk make decisions for sobriety and stick to these decisions even after they sobered. 22

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18 Ibid., VI, 302-303.
19 Ibid.
20 Wesley, The Letters, VI, 154-155.
21 Wesley, The Works, 1872, VI, 303.
22 Ibid.
Wesley was willing to work with drunkards, but he was unwilling simply to bind up the wounds which had been caused by alcohol abuse. He wanted to get at what he saw to be the source of the problem: strong liquors. This he tried to do by establishing the General Rules, already referred to above, which forbade—in addition to drunkenness—the buying or selling of spirituous liquors unless in cases of extreme necessity.

Yet even this was not enough. Speaking to those who wanted to get into the Societies was necessary, but more action was needed. To deal with the flow of spirituous liquors Wesley sought to confront both society at large and the political arena in particular. To confront society he wrote a letter to the editor of Lloyd's Evening Post in which he argued for prohibiting the distillation of all liquors. His argument was two-sided. He argued that this prohibition would not only help prevent hurting people but also would help deal with the current shortage of food. His argument read:

3. But to descend from generals to particulars. Why is breadcorn so dear? Because such immense quantities of it are continually consumed by distilling. Indeed, an eminent distiller near London hearing this, warmly replied, "Nay, my partner and I generally distil but a thousand quarters of corn a week." Perhaps so. Suppose five-and-twenty distillers in and near the town consume each only the same quantity. Here are five-and-twenty thousand quarters a week—that is, above twelve hundred and fifty thousand quarters a year—consumed in and about London! Add the distillers throughout England, and have we not reason to believe that half of the wheat produced in the kingdom is every year consumed, not by so harmless a way as throwing it into the sea, but by converting it into deadly poison—poison that naturally destroys, not only the strength and life, but also the morals of our countrymen!

3. But how can the price of wheat be reduced? By prohibiting for ever that bane of health, that destroyer of strength, of life, and of virtue, distilling. Perhaps this alone will answer the whole design. If anything more be needful, may not all starch be made of rice, and the importation of this as well as wheat be encouraged?

Wesley confronted the political arena by writing a letter to the newly-elected Prime Minister, William Pitt. In that letter, dated 1784, Wesley dared to suggest that the distilling of liquor be con-

23 Distilled liquors have from 30-50% alcohol content. Such beverages include whiskey, brandy, rum, gin, and vodka as opposed to the fermented or brewed beverages: wine, beer, and ale. Howard W. Haggard and E. M. Jellinek, Alcohol Explored (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran, 1942), pp. 50-51.

24 Simon, op cit., pp. 100-103.

sidered a felony, or, at the very least, that distillers be required to pay more taxes.\textsuperscript{26}

Yet while Wesley called the distillers “poisoners general” and suggested that distilling itself be treated as a felony, he still admitted that there was a place for distilled liquors, he still used them himself, and he still recommended their use! But he only recommended them as medicines. In his book, the \textit{Primitive Physic}, he repeatedly suggested using a spirituous liquor such as brandy, as a medicine. He never suggested using spirituous liquors as his \textit{preferred} method of treatment, but he did include such use and in some cases remarked that he himself had seen it tried and found it beneficial.\textsuperscript{27}

For a wound that continued to bleed Wesley wrote that one should:

\ldots take of \textit{Brandy}, two ounces, \textit{Castile-Soap}, two drams, \textit{Pot-Ash}, one dram. Scrap (sic) the soap fine and dissolve it in the brandy; then add the pot-ash. Mix them well together and keep them close stop\ in a phial. Apply a little of this warmed to a bleeding vessel, and the blood immediately congeals.\textsuperscript{28}

One might observe that the brandy in this case was used outside the body. Wesley, however, was willing to recommend the use of this spirituous liquor for internal use as well. “To remove a fever” when afflicted with consumption, one should:

\ldots mix \textit{salt-petre} one dram, \textit{Cochineal} half a dram, the best \textit{Brandy} and \textit{Sugar}, an ounce of each, with a quarter of a pint of water. Of this mixture take two large spoonfuls, every third or fourth hour.\textsuperscript{29}

It is safe to say that the only use Wesley saw for spirituous, or distilled, liquors was as medicines. He really wished they did not exist at all. He thought that if the physician were sufficiently able he could find better medicines. Thus Wesley wrote:

\ldots Distilled liquors have their use, but are infinitely overbalanced by the abuse of them; therefore, were it in my power, I would banish them out of the world.\textsuperscript{30}

\ldots there would rarely be occasion for them, were it not for the unskilfulness of the practitioner.\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{26} \textit{Ibid.}, VII, 234-236.
\textsuperscript{27} The copy of the \textit{Primitive Physic} quoted from throughout the study is the 16th ed. published in 1788, only three years before Wesley’s death. It should be noted that only in the editions of the \textit{Primitive Physic} published after 1772, does Wesley place an asterisk by his preferred treatments.
\textsuperscript{28} Wesley, \textit{Primitive Physic}, p. 28.
\textsuperscript{29} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 42.
\textsuperscript{30} Wesley, \textit{The Letters}, VIII, 26.
\textsuperscript{31} Wesley, \textit{The Works}, 1872, VI, 129.
Even Wesley’s use of spirituous liquors as medicines was not without qualifications. He said it this way:

... Water is the whole meat of all drinks. ... Strong, and more especially spirituous liquors, are a certain though slow poison. Experience shews, there is very seldom any danger in leaving them off all at once. ... Malt liquors (except clear small beer, of a due age) are exceeding hurtful to tender persons.  

He was even more explicit in his recommendation concerning medicines for children:

No child should touch any spirituous or fermented liquor, nor animal food, before two years old. Their drink should be water. Tea they should never taste till ten or twelve years old.  

Thus, we can say that Wesley used and recommended the use of spirituous liquors at the same time that he tried to outlaw them. But his use was extremely qualified. His use is perhaps best summed up in the advice he gave to the Band Societies: “To taste no spirituous liquor, no dram of any kind, unless prescribed by a physician.”

Views on Fermented or Brewed Liquors  
Wesley drew a rather sharp line between a fermented liquor such as beer, ale, or wine and a distilled liquor such as rum or brandy. Wesley knew that a distilled liquor was stronger than a fermented liquor, even though he did not know the precise alcohol content. He knew that ale, beer, or wine could lead to drunkenness, though it was much less likely to do so. Wesley, therefore, was less harsh in his limits on fermented liquors. Whereas he never recommended the use of spirituous liquors except as medicine, he did not hesitate to recommend ale or beer. He suggested that a preacher, when through with his sermon,
should "... take a little lemonade, mild ale, or candied orange-peel." Furthermore, he himself drank ale. He thought water should be one's common beverage, but recommended beer or ale if water disagreed with one's stomach. He even seemed to appreciate the taste of good ale. Indignant that the use of hops was ruining the taste and healthfulness of ale, Wesley brewed his own—in his own house. In a letter describing his action, Wesley complained that the use of hops should be outlawed because it destroyed the "soft and sweetish taste" of good ale.

Yet even beer or ale could be misused, and apparently they both were. Thus Wesley warned his ministers against addiction by asking them:

Do you drink water? Why not? Did you ever? Why did you leave it off? If not for health, when will you begin again? to-day?

How often do you drink wine or ale? every day? Do you want it?

So much for Wesley's position on ale and beer. What did he believe about the use of wine? He certainly must have believed that it was a good medicine. His Primitive Physic is filled with suggested uses. In addition we have a record of Wesley himself drinking some hot mulled wine only weeks before he died. We can also presume that Wesley drank some wine almost every week at the sacrament of Holy Communion since he recommended constant communion as a duty of Methodists. Furthermore, one might wonder if it were not the custom then, as it is now in the Church of England, for the celebrant, after the laity have communed, to drink the remaining wine. If this were the case, Wesley could have had a few ounces of wine on these occasions, too.

But Wesley's use of wine was not limited to medicinal and sacramental purposes. He approved of taking a little bit every day. And in a letter to his mother he referred approvingly to Dr. Cheyne's Book of Health and Long Life, in spite of suggesting that the book seemed more suited to persons with a sedentary temperament. Dr. Cheyne, according to Wesley, entirely condemned:

... eating anything salt or high-seasoned, as also pork, fish, and stall-fed cattle; and recommends for drink two pints of water and one
of wine in twenty-four hours, with eight ounces of animal and twelve of vegetable food in the same time.\textsuperscript{45}

It is certainly clear from Wesley's writings that he saw neither the Bible nor the Christian faith as demanding abstinence from wine. In his commentary on Romans 14:17, he wrote that "... true religion does not consist in external observances." Regarding verse twenty, in particular, he said that eating meat or drinking wine are evil "... to that man who eateth with offense ...," that is, only to the man who sees it as evil for him.\textsuperscript{46} Understanding Paul in this way, Wesley was unwilling to demand that Christians abstain. Wesley seemed to resent even more an insinuation that he suggested such. In fact, when some persons claimed that Wesley required abstinence, he deliberately drank some wine to prove that a Christian does not have to abstain! The incident is recorded for us in a letter Wesley wrote to the Bishop of London. It appears in the letter that the Bishop may have also made similar charges. Whatever the case, Wesley replied:

By "extraordinary strictness and severities," I presume your Lordship means, the abstaining from wine and animal food; which it is sure, Christianity does not require. But if you do, I fear your Lordship is not thoroughly informed of the matter of fact. I began to do this about twelve years ago, when I had no thought of "annoying parochial Ministers," or of "captivating" any "people" thereby, unless it were the Chicasaw or Choctaw Indians. But I resumed the use of them both, about two years after, for the sake of some who thought I made it a point of conscience; telling them, "I will eat flesh while the world standeth," rather than "make my brother to offend." Dr. Cheyne advised me to leave them off again, assuring me, "Till you do, you will never be free from fevers." And since I have taken his advice, I have been free (blessed be God!) from all bodily disorders.\textsuperscript{47}

Wesley continued to abstain from wine and animal food on the advice of his physician for about two years. He then resumed his previous habits.\textsuperscript{48}

Wesley's position on wine should be seen in the context of his general attitude of temperance toward all things. He himself lived a temperate life and encouraged others to do so. In one of his letters dated 1786, he wrote: "Our preachers have as great need of temperance in preaching as in eating or drinking ...." \textsuperscript{49} It was in this

\textsuperscript{45} Wesley, The \textit{Letters}, I, 11.
\textsuperscript{47} Wesley, \textit{The Works}, 1872, VIII, 489-490.
\textsuperscript{48} Wesley, \textit{The Works}, 1872, VIII, 490.
\textsuperscript{49} Wesley, \textit{The Letters}, VII, 351.
light that Wesley saw wine. Taken temperately it was good and wholesome. Therefore, Wesley disagreed with one of the physicians of his day who suggested that wine was harmful. In regard to this physician’s views Wesley complained:

... I cannot subscribe to his opinion; neither to his condemning of wine in general, several sorts of which, as Dr. Hoffman shows at large, are so far from being unwholesome, that they are some of the most powerful medicines yet known, in some very dangerous diseases. I myself was ordered by Dr. Cheyne, (not the warmest advocate for liquors), after drinking only water for some years, to take a small quantity of wine every day. And I am persuaded, far from doing me any hurt, it contributed much to the recovery of my strength. But it seems, we are to make a pretty large allowance for what the Doctor says on this head; seeing he grants, it will do you little or no harm to take “a plentiful cup now and then.” Enough, enough! Then it will certainly do you no harm, if instead of drinking that cup in one day, (suppose once a week,) you divide it into seven, and drink one of them every day.

I cannot but think, if your wine is good in kind, suited to your constitution, and taken in small quantities, it is full as wholesome as any liquor in the world, except water. Yet the grievous abuse of it, which almost universally prevails, might easily prejudice a benevolent man against it; and make him endeavour to prevent the abuse, by forbidding the use of it.  

Used temperately, then, it was good. In fact, it was one of God’s best gifts. “Why,” Wesley asks concerning this physician’s views, “should he condemn wine toto genere, which is one of the noblest cordials in nature?”

Wesley: Consistent or Changing?

We have examined John Wesley’s attitude toward beverage alcohol and have seen a view more complex than it has often been thought to be, not simply total abstinence and not simply moderation. His view varied according to the strength of the alcohol content and the way the beverage was being used. Toward some beverages he almost held a “moderation” stance. For others, he could use them only as medicines and could do without them even for that purpose. Toward drunkenness and distillers, however, Wesley was scornful.

This was Wesley’s position on beverage alcohol. Did he vary from that position? Did Wesley’s position change as he grew older and wiser? Did he finally move to the position of total abstinence from all alcohol beverages? Probably, he did not. Wesley never changed the General Rule covering drunkenness and that rule

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60 Wesley, The Works, 1872, XIV, 266.
61 Ibid., III, 443.
always allowed for the use of distilled liquors as medicines. The same could be said concerning the rule for the Band Societies.

The Minutes of Several Conversations revised by Wesley only two years before he died and reprinted from a copy bearing the year of his death, also show continued use of alcoholic beverages rather than total abstinence. Wesley also did take the hot mulled wine before he died.

Yet there is a suggestion by at least one scholar that Wesley's position did in fact change. Douglas Jackson, author of *Stumbling Block*, suggests that Wesley changed his position out of concern for his weaker brother. In a book encouraging total abstinence, Jackson wrote:

> Wesley did not at first see the necessity of total abstinence. He and others of the reformers required abstinence from the use of distilled beverages and moderation in the use of beer, ale and wine. He became convinced, however, that the reformed drinker could not use these fermented drinks without lapsing back into his old intemperate patterns. Moderate drinkers were urged to stop drinking for the sake of the weaker brother.

Jackson quotes in defense of his position part of a sermon printed on page 487 of the London edition of the *Arminian Magazine*, Vol. XX, published in 1797:

> You see the wine when it sparkles in the cup, and are going to drink it; I tell you there is poison in it, and therefore beg you to throw it away! You answer, the wine is harmless in itself. I reply, perhaps it is so; but still, if it be mixed with what is not harmless, no one in his senses, if he knows it, at least unless he could separate the good from the evil, will once think of drinking it. If you add, it is not poison to me, though it may be to others; then I say, throw it away for thy brother's sake, lest thou embolden him to drink also. Why should thy strength occasion thy weak brother to perish, for whom Christ died. Now, let anyone judge which is the charitable person, he who pleads against the wine for his brother's sake, or he who pleads against the life of his brother for the sake of wine?

Apparently because of this sermon Jackson believes that Wesley late in his life came to the total abstinence position. The editor of the magazine from which Jackson quoted, however, included this comment immediately after the quoted sermon:

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52 Ibid., VIII, 319, 324.
53 Rogers, op. cit., p. 53.
55 Ibid.
Every experienced Christian will readily observe, that Mr. WESLEY wrote the preceding SERMON before he was fully acquainted with the Power of Divine Grace.  

It is impossible to know precisely what the editor meant by his phrase "before he was fully acquainted with the Power of Divine Grace." This could mean "prior to Wesley's Aldersgate experience," that is, very early in Wesley's life and not necessarily a conviction of later life.

But regardless of how one interprets this particular editorial comment, there is another editorial comment which appeared when the same sermon was printed in the authorized Wesleyan edition, published by the Wesleyan Conference Office in London, England. (The editor is referring to the same sermon, plus some others.)

Most of these Discourses, it will be observed, were written before Mr. Wesley obtained correct views of the way of salvation; and as they were not published either with his knowledge or by his appointment, he should not be made responsible for the sentiments which they contain. That on the resurrection of the body was only revised and abridged by him; and it is probable that some others of them were not his composition.

In the light of both these editorial comments and since Jackson apparently bases his entire argument of Wesley's change in position on this particular passage, one might question Jackson's conclusion. Even if one assumed the authenticity of the sermon, could it not simply illustrate a homiletical overemphasis on what was an important point—our social responsibility for the influence of our example? It would appear that even if one accepts this sermon as Wesley's and as a conclusion Wesley came to late in life, one might assume that Wesley's position was still not that of total abstinence. It was more likely a position which included a willingness either to use wine or to abstain according to the social impact of one's use.

Therefore, we conclude that John Wesley's positions in regard to the beverage alcohol were these:

1) A strong opposition to 'drunkenness,' but compassion for the 'drunkard.'

2) The use of distilled liquors only as medicines.

3) Moderation in the use of wine, beer, and ale.

4) The use of beverage alcohol according to the social impact of one's use.

5) A strong opposition to distilleries.

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56 The Arminian Magazine, for the year 1797 (London: Printed for G. Whitfield, 1797), XX, 490.
58 This author wrote Douglas Jackson but never received an answer to his letter.
6) An emphasis on being temperate in all things, including beverage alcohol. **

(The opinions and assertions contained in Dr. Burnett's article are his alone and are not to be construed in any way as official U.S. Navy policy or as in any way reflecting the views of the Department of the Navy. This article is part of his doctoral dissertation which was completed prior to his entering the Navy Chaplaincy.)

** For a detailed study of American Methodism's use of its Wesleyan heritage in regard to beverage alcohol, one is encouraged to refer to Ivan Blockwell Burnett, Jr.'s doctoral dissertation, Methodism and Alcohol: Recommendations for a Beverage Alcohol Policy Based on the Ever-Changing Historic Disciplinary Positions of American Methodism.