The Shaping of Wesley’s “Calm Address” by Frank Baker

In his Journal for March 19, 1776, Francis Asbury lamented the publication of John Wesley’s *A Calm Address to our American Colonies* the previous year, being “truly sorry that the venerable man ever dipped into the politics of America.” Undoubtedly American Methodists did suffer because of this venture, though not as much as has sometimes been thought, because Wesley’s original intention of spreading it in America was frustrated by the closure of the ports, and most of the few copies that did arrive were supposedly secured and destroyed by American Methodists. At home, however, it created a phenomenal reaction, so that within three weeks forty thousand copies were sold, and “within a few months fifty, or perhaps an hundred thousand copies, in newspapers and otherwise, were dispersed throughout Great Britain and Ireland.” The favourable response of many was matched by the vehement opposition of others, as is described in a companion article by Dr. Donald H. Kirkham. The pamphlet itself was reshaped on the anvil of controversy, and by comparing all known editions and tracing their background in the periodicals, pamphlet literature, and correspondence of the day it is possible to reconstruct something like a blow-by-blow account of its development.

The *Calm Address* sprang from a sudden and violent change in Wesley’s political views, a change which he was convinced must not be kept to himself. Ever since leaving Georgia nearly forty years earlier, he had retained a strong affection for America and the Americans. In 1770, apparently in reference to the duties imposed by the Grenville administration, he had written: “I do not defend the measures which have been taken with regard to America: I doubt whether any man can defend them either on the foot of law, equity, or prudence.” He welcomed the publication in 1774 of an anonymous work entitled *An Argument in Defence of the Exclusive Right Claimed by the Colonies to Tax Themselves*, apparently written by a young lawyer-in-training, Mr. Thomas

Parker of Lincoln's Inn, who became a Methodist and an eloquent local preacher, though his brilliant mind was somewhat marred by an over-impulsive nature. Wesley recommended the Argument to his brother Charles and others as a work that would convince them also “that the Americans were an oppressed, injured people, and that Great Britain had no right whatever to tax them.” He even gave a copy to his Bristol printer, William Pine, suggesting that he might publish excerpts in his weekly newspaper, the Bristol Gazette, which Pine thereupon did, in three successive issues. As late as June, 1775, Wesley wrote both to the Earl of Dartmouth, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, and Lord North, First Lord of the Treasury, stating that in spite of his High Church prejudices he could not avoid thinking that the Americans, as “an oppressed people, asked for nothing more than their legal rights, and that in the most modest and inoffensive manner that the nature of the thing would allow.”

Within a few weeks his mind was completely changed. Perhaps this was in part because of the increasingly militant tone of pro-American propaganda in Britain. His brother Charles distressed him by reports that Pine, a prominent Bristol Methodist, continued to “publish barefaced treason” even after a warning, and John responded favourably to a suggestion apparently put forward by Charles: “Such an Address to the Americans would be highly reasonable.” This came in a letter of August 4, and probably led to, rather than being caused by, the discovery of the lengthy pamphlet published earlier that year by Dr. Samuel Johnson, Taxation no Tyranny. Johnson argued that government by delegation was a normal feature of civilized society, that those who “had a right to English privileges... were accountable to English laws,” that voting was the privilege of a minority, and that the Americans were “descendants of men who either had no votes or resigned them by emigration.”

7. Wesley's printer, William Pine, referred to the anonymous author as “Mr. Parker” (Caleb Evans, A Reply to the Rev. Mr. Fletcher's Pindication of Mr. Wesley's Calm Address, Bristol, Pine, n.d., p. 10). Quotations from diverse sources all converge on this young man, trained in the north of England for mercantile employment, changing to a legal career, being admitted at Lincoln's Inn, London, May 29, 1775, publishing the Argument in 1774, The Laws of Shipping and Insurance in 1775, an exposé of the East Indies trade in 1782; and a Bible commentary in 1784, who, by his leadership and preaching doubled the size of the Methodists society in Durham within a few months from his arrival in 1780, welcomed Wesley to his home, was Thomas Coke’s right hand man in promoting his Plan for Missions in 1784, but in 1790 left the Methodists to become a Swedeborgian, and died in Edinburgh in 1829. (Watts, Bibliotheca Britannica; Allibone, Dictionary of Authors; Lincoln’s Inn, Admission Registers, I. 435; John Wesley, Journal, ed. N. Cumock, London, Epworth Press, 1958, VI. 281, VII. 170; Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society, XVIII. 185; Wesleyan Methodist Magazine, LIII. 577-80 (1850). I am indebted to Thomas R. Adams, Librarian of the John Carter Brown Library, Providence, R.I. for the query whether the Thomas Parker whom I proposed as the author of the Argument was linked with the man known to Wesley: this began a very fruitful line of inquiry.

8. Evans, Reply, pp. 7-8.


11. Ibid., VI. 170.


13. Ibid., p. 41; cf. Wesley, Works, VIII. 179 (abridged and paraphrased by Wesley).
colonies had secured special privileges by royal charter, these privileges of protection and service implied the liability of paying for them by taxes. Johnson's pamphlet went on to indicate his own view that much of the furore was being artificially stimulated by those on both sides of the Atlantic who were in fact agitating for independence rather than direct representation in Parliament.14

Just when Wesley read Taxation no Tyranny is uncertain. In a letter to his "Assistant" in America, Thomas Rankin, written on August 13, 1775, he seemed to echo Johnson's point of view, maintaining that the Americans were not "at the bottom of all this outcry... They are only the tools of men on this side of the water, who use them for deadly purposes."15 Although neither Wesley's publications nor his private letters offer unequivocal evidence, he told Thomas Rankin: "I had written a little tract upon the subject before I knew the American ports were shut up."16 Following decisions made in the Continental Congress on July 4 and 6 it was announced, "N.B. All the ports in America will be shut up the 20th of July instant", news which appeared in the London Chronicle for August 15, though Wesley may not have heard it immediately. It seems unlikely that by this time he had written more than the first draft, nor that he did much more until the end of August, when he returned to Bristol from a tour in Wales, or even September 12, after another tour in Cornwall and Devon. On this latter journey the need for speaking out had been sharpened by a Methodist group at Plymouth Dock, "deeply prejudiced against the King and all his Ministers", to whom he "spoke freely and largely" at the Society meeting on September 7.17

It was probably early in September that Wesley put what he thought were the finishing touches to the manuscript of his Calm Address. The opening half was devoted to reproducing Johnson's arguments, drawn from about one-quarter of Taxation no Tyranny, partly in Johnson's own words, partly abridged and paraphrased, though with no indication of their source — a fairly normal practice with Wesley, as with other writers of the day. The following half developed the theme which had probably been reinforced by reading Johnson's pamphlet: "My opinion is this. We have a few men in England who are determined enemies to monarchy,... and have for some years been undermining it with all diligence, in hopes of erecting their grand idol, their dear Commonwealth, upon its ruins.... I make no doubt but these very men are the original cause of the present breach between England and her Colonies."18 Characteristically he divided the tract into twelve numbered sections.

15. Wesley, Letters, VI. 173.
16. Ibid., IV. 182.
17. Wesley, Journal, VI. 78.
18. Wesley, Calm Address, §9 [Bristol, Pine, pp. 13-15].
Wesley spent most of the second half of September in Bristol, punctuated by two visits to neighbouring counties. By Thursday, September 21, he was back to stay for ten days. It seems likely that on one of these earlier occasions he had handed the completed manuscript of the original *Calm Address* to William Pine, and that upon his return on September 21 Pine told Wesley that the manuscript occupied only nineteen duodecimo pages of type, so that to fill a sheet a further five pages were needed. Wesley was a great believer in the economical use of time and materials, and sometimes used such otherwise blank pages to reprint one of his tiny tracts in such a way that the two items could be cut apart and sold as distinct publications. In this instance four pages could have been used in this way. Wesley bethought himself of a better expedient, however. Pine had recently reprinted a pamphlet on the other side of the controversy, *A Sermon on the Present Situation of American Affairs*, preached in Christ Church, Philadelphia, on June 23, by Dr. William Smith (1727-1803), a native of Scotland, Provost of the College of Philadelphia, and an Episcopalian orator with a substantial following. He claimed that the Americans "contend only for the sanctity of charters and laws, together with the right of granting their own money." Wesley decided to use this in an appendix as a demonstration of the falsity of the arguments "confuted in the preceding tract", which thus he "would just touch upon...again". In this instance he named the author, and identified the handful of passages which he quoted from him, which form less than one-sixth of the additional five pages, but he did not continue the numbering of the sections carried out in the *Calm Address* proper.

The first edition of the *Calm Address* was put on sale in Bristol (price twopence) about the end of September, 1775, bearing on its title page two lines from Virgil's *Aeneid*: "O my sons, make not a home within your hearts for such warfare, nor upon your country's very vitals turn her vigour and valour." On September 30 both *Calm Address* and appendix appeared in the columns of Sarah Farley's *Bristol Journal*. The minor variants in this newspaper version suggest that it was one of the prototypes of an edition published in Salisbury by J. Hodson, which similarly omitted the appendix, though the occurrence of other variants imply some missing intermediate edition or editions. Pine's pamphlet edition itself also furnished the basis for further editions, such as one printed by Mary Hay of Dublin, and one without any name of place or printer, which in its turn seems to have been reproduced in a broadsheet. Most of these were

21. Although this suggested origin for the appendix is speculative, it explains the delay in publication and the lack of continuity between the *Calm Address* and the criticism of Smith's sermon; the *Calm Address* was occasionally reprinted by itself without any noticeable incompleteness.
Unauthorized reprints, about which Wesley never seemed to complain, as long as the message was spread — no more than Dr. Johnson complained about Wesley's appropriation of parts of his own *Taxation no Tyranny*, but rather expressed gratitude for "the addition of your important suffrage to my argument on the American question".23

As was to be expected, opposition was speedy and noisy, and the spate of pamphlets and newspaper correspondence increased the demand for copies, whether authorized or pirated. The first to appear was in Bristol, which remained the focal point of the controversy. The Rev. Caleb Evans (1737-91), a Baptist minister of Bristol, was Wesley's key opponent, and his attacks led to successive changes in the contents of Wesley's *Calm Address*. Evans finished *A Letter to the Rev. Mr. John Wesley, occasioned by his "Calm Address to the American Colonies"* — the first of many misquotations of Wesley's title — on October 2; it was advertised in the *Bristol Gazette* on October 4 for publication on Saturday, October 7. Like Wesley's it was a twopenny pamphlet of twenty-four duodecimo pages, but was signed only "Americanus". The "Advertisement" on p.(ii) drew attention to the fact that the "principal arguments" of the *Calm Address* were "taken verbatim, without acknowledgment, from Dr. Samuel Johnson's pamphlet entitled *Taxation no Tyranny,*" and also pointed out that Wesley must radically have altered his political views. Maintaining firmly that "the origin of power is from the people" (p.11), and that to deprive Americans of the control of their own property made them slaves (pp. 12-15), he went on to quote Parker's *Argument* to the effect that "the representatives chosen by the people in the Colonies claim the same right as those in Ireland,"24 and that "our constitution... is utterly repugnant to every attempt to divide the right of taxation from the privilege of representation."25 He closed by stating that in his earlier espousal of the American cause Wesley himself had recommended Parker's work in Bristol.26

Wesley had left Bristol on Monday, October 2 (the day Evans completed his *Letter*) on a roundabout preaching journey to London, where he arrived October 6. He took with him a copy of Pine's printing of the *Calm Address*, in which he had made three minor alterations, including the addition of a footnote in the appendix, supplementing the clause, "Our Sovereign has a right to tax me," with the more democratic explanation, "that is, in connexion with the Lords and Commons".27 He

25. Ibid., p. 21.
26. Ibid., pp. 22-3. Evans' citations from the *Calm Address* show that he used the edition printed by Pine.
27. This later alteration he probably made also in a copy which shortly afterwards served as the basis for the edition printed by Bonner and Middleton of Bristol, which is otherwise a replica of Pine's edition.
seems to have taken this copy to his chief London printer of the period, Robert Hawes, before leaving for another preaching tour on Monday, October 9, from which he returned on October 20, having delivered "a strong exhortation to 'fear God, and honour the King' " to the "many red-hot patriots" at Newbury, Berkshire.28 By this time Hawes' edition of the Calm Address was sold out and reprinted, apparently in part from standing type.29 On October 12 the General Evening Post had presented a reprint of the pamphlet in its columns, and other newspapers and printers hastened to market a saleable commodity. About the same time Wesley presumably authorized Hawes to publish a "New Edition", completely reset from Hawes' second printing, but with no alteration in the text. On October 20 Wesley wrote to Thomas Rankin in America: "I suppose above forty thousand of them have been printed in three weeks, and still the demand for them is as great as ever."30 On October 24 the Calm Address appeared in the columns of the Leeds Mercury, and four days later the Newcastle Courant advertised an edition printed by T. Saint, price one penny, which was probably authorized by Wesley, but of which no copy appears to have survived.

The attack also was growing. In the same letter to Rankin Wesley said: "Many are excessively angry, and would willingly burn me and it together." The Letter by "Americanus" had gone through two Bristol editions and many copies had undoubtedly reached London, where the Public Advertiser for October 20 announced that a London edition would be published "tomorrow at twelve". Wesley had received a copy on his travels, and on October 17 wrote to his brother Charles: "Some hours this morning I devote to Americanus. What is material I shall endeavour to answer. It is well if I can give as good an account of everything else as of my change of judgment."31 The morning's work, however, seems to have been insufficient for the completion of Wesley's task, and after a busy weekend in London he was on the road again. He did not return until the twenty-eighth, when again he wrote to Charles: "I am just putting into the press 'A New Edition of the Address, corrected', in which my change is accounted for, and two of the questions fully answered."32

Wesley's major alteration in the "New Edition, Corrected, and Enlarged", was to add a lengthy preface. In this he described the alteration in his opinions, at the same time accepting without any sense of guilt the charge of plagiarism: "I was of a different judgment on this head till I read

29. There is some resetting in the middle, double daggers are added to signatures 3, 4, and 5, and a different typographical rule is used on p. 19.
30. Wesley, Letters, VI. 182.
31. Ibid., VI. 179. There is some confusion in the dates. The original in the Methodist Archives, London, is in fact dated "Ramsbury Park, Oct. 19, 1778", but it is endorsed by Charles Wesley, "Oct. 18", though Wesley's Journal shows that he went to Ramsbury in Wiltshire on the seventeenth.
32. Ibid., VI. 183. The italicizing given by Telford should be disregarded here as often elsewhere. The underlining was carried out by Charles Wesley, not John; see the original in the Methodis Archives, London.
a tract entitled, *Taxation no Tyranny*. But as soon as I received more light myself I judged it my duty to impart it to others. I therefore extracted the chief arguments from that treatise, and added an application to those whom it most concerns.” He went on to sum up the argument of the *Letter* as being, “He that is taxed without his own consent is a slave.” To this he replied: “No: I have no representative in Parliament. But I am taxed; yet I am no slave. Yea, nine in ten throughout England have no representative, no vote. Yet they are no slaves: they enjoy both civil and religious liberty.” (This was, of course, true in England until long after Wesley's death.) In a poignant paragraph he then pointed to the real slave in America, the Negro: while the master “is screaming ‘Murder! Slavery!’ the other silently bleeds and dies.” Turning to the *Argument* which Americanus said that Wesley had earlier commended, he disclaimed ever seeing it or speaking about it, though he granted that Americanus was probably told so.

In this new edition the text of the *Address* also was altered. In section 7 the concession about colonial privileges was limited by the clause, “provided those privileges be consistent with the British constitution”. Three paragraphs about colonial charters were omitted from the same section, and were replaced by a new section 8 which stated that previous editions had “allowed too much”, and that even the King had no power to grant an exemption from taxes without an Act of Parliament. The following sections were renumbered, making thirteen instead of the original twelve. The general effect was to sharpen Wesley's criticism of his opponents. The enlargement of the text was made possible within the same number of pages by the elimination of leads between the lines of type, so that the amount of type on each page was increased by one quarter.

By November 6 this new London edition had reached Bristol, and on that day Wesley’s old friend Rev. James Rouquet wrote to him from Bristol refuting Wesley's statement that he had never seen Parker’s *Argument*. He was echoed on the following day by William Pine. Wesley replied that he certainly had no memory of the occasion which they described, but would immediately buy a copy to test his memory. A week later he agreed that he had indeed read it, and “then thought the argument conclusive”, so that he may well have recommended it, though he still could not remember doing so.35 On November 7 Caleb Evans in Bristol prepared his own answer to Wesley's preface, a new edition of his *Letter* preceded by “Some Observations on the Rev. Mr. Wesley's Late Reply”, in which he offered testimony that Wesley had in fact seen and recommended Parker's *Argument* a year earlier. This time he displayed his own name on the title page. A few weeks later he followed this up by an open letter to Wesley in the newspapers, dated December 4.

Wesley also had been busy with the public press, for at the end of October and throughout November there was a spate of attacks on the *Calm Address*, including Augustus Toplady's *An Old Fox Tarred and Feathered*. To these he felt that he should respond once for all in a letter printed in newspapers in London, Bristol, Leeds, and Newcastle, and almost certainly other cities. It was dated “Nov.1775” only, but its first appearance was probably in the *London Chronicle* for November 28. In this he claimed that the only way to reduce public tension was “to show that the Americans are not used either cruelly or unjustly”, and to that end only he had published his pamphlet.

At the same time he had been busy sharpening the arguments in the *Calm Address* itself. On November 3 he wrote to his brother Charles about one of the hitherto unanswered questions raised in Evans' *Letter*: “Why did [Parliament] uniformly through a course of perhaps one hundred and fifty years permit the Colonists to tax themselves?” Triumphant he exclaimed: “How shockingly ignorant of the law are our lawyers! Yea, and the whole body of the Lords and Commons into the bargain! To let Lord Chatham, Mr. Burke, etc., etc., so long triumph in this *argumentum palmarium*! Why, it is a blunder from top to bottom. They have been taxed over and over, ever since the Restoration: by King Charles, King William, Queen Ann[e], and George the Second. I can now point out chapter and verse.”54 This led to the addition of a new section 9 in the next edition of the *Calm Address*, which cited five specific Acts of Parliament from 25th Chas.II. chap.7 to 6th Geo.II.chap.13, all supporting the proposition “that from the Restoration the Colonies were considered as part of the Realm of England in point of taxation as well as everything else.” This in turn necessitated the renumbering of the subsequent sections to their final total of fourteen. At the same time two minor additions were made in the appendix. Because of his preaching travels (and because he was writing a charity sermon for the innocent victims of the war) Wesley was not able to prepare this new edition until Saturday, November 11.55

No more than another two or three weeks passed before Wesley handed to Robert Hawes what was to be the last edition of the *Calm Address* which he published, and which found its way to Bristol by December 16.56 Apart from two more minor revisions in the appendix the

54. Evans, *Letter*, pp. 18-19; Wesley, *Letters*, VI. 183, 187. The original of the Nov. 3 letter, in the Methodist Archives, London, shows that the phrase “have been taxed” was underlined by John Wesley himself, the remaining italics in the published version being either additions by Charles or the result of modernizing the styling of foreign quotations.
55. Wesley, *Journal*, VI. 82. (On this day also he may have penned the open letter referred to above, of which the journal entry is almost a summary.) The sermon “for the benefit of the widows and orphans of the soldiers who late fell near Boston, in New England” was written Nov. 7, preached Nov. 12, and published Nov. 24: See *Works*, VIII. 400-8. This edition of the *Calm Address* is that reproduced in Jackson's edition of Wesley's *Works*, XI. 80-90.
56. Letter of Caleb Evans to Wesley, Bristol, Dec. 16, which appeared simultaneously in Bristol and London newspapers on Dec. 23. In the *London Gazetteer* and *Bonner and Middleton's Bristol Journal* it was dated Dec. 18, in *Freke Fasley's Bristol Journal* and in Evans' own *Reply* (p. 22), it was dated Dec. 16.
end of the work on the American edition and added a letter, and its first appearance on the new page, and only alteration — a major one — was the addition of yet another appendix: "A Calm Address to Americanus. By a Native of America." This occupied eight pages gained by using smaller type, and was also published separately, though whether earlier or later remains uncertain. Its link with Wesley's previous edition is demonstrated by its statement that the Colonists "were taxed over and over, ever since the Restoration", and there is a brief reference to Wesley himself on the closing page. In addition to a close examination of several specific points made by Evans, the author also stresses in detail the way in which the Americans had received assistance from their mother country. Like the Calm Address itself, this second appendix also was reprinted separately in the newspapers.

The pamphlet controversy over the Calm Address continued well into the spring of 1776, though it seems unlikely that any new editions of it were published during that year — certainly none edited by Wesley or his colleagues. It is not possible for us at this time to uncover either all the printing ramifications or the practical results of this, Wesley's major venture into American politics. It seems clear, however, that Wesley's own estimate of the circulation of a hundred thousand copies was by no means exaggerated. The seventeen known pamphlet or broadsheet editions (with two more likely) probably had printings of from 2000 to 3000 copies each, which would represent almost 50,000 copies, while newspapers needed a similar circulation to survive, and some had considerably more. We may express a little more hesitation, however, about his statement of the results: "The eyes of many people were opened... They perceived... how they had been hoodwinked before. They found they had been led unawares into all the wilds of political enthusiasm, as far distant from truth and common sense as from the real love of their country." And yet... "Many people" — though upon this phrase we may place a different interpretation from Wesley's — were undoubtedly educated by means of the Calm Address to political realities, whether or not they were convinced by his arguments to the point of changing their mind as he had done. The Morning Chronicle was a Whig newspaper, strongly opposed to Wesley himself as well as to his Tory politics. Therefore the grain of truth in one of its news comments was surrounded by a mass of prejudice: "It is said that a certain Calm Address has been so far from producing the pretended serene effect that on the contrary nothing but storms and
tempestuous disputations have been the consequence since the publication of that piece of plagiarism.\textsuperscript{45} Certain it is, however, that John Wesley, even with the aid of the colleagues who came to his defence, his preacher Thomas Olivers with \textit{A Full Defence},\textsuperscript{44} his clerical collaborator the Rev. John Fletcher of Madeley with his \textit{Vindication},\textsuperscript{45} and less publicly by the Rev. Josiah Tucker, Dean of Gloucester,\textsuperscript{46} still seemed largely a voice crying in the wilderness, vastly outnumbered by his vociferous critics. By the end of the year 1775 he had reached a similar position to Tucker's, that the wisest thing might be to grant independence to the Americans: "Let them have their desire, and support themselves.\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{43} \textit{Morning Chronicle}, Dec. 2, 1775, p. 2, column 3.

\textsuperscript{44} \textit{A Full Defence of the Rev. John Wesley, in answer to the several personal reflections cast on that gentleman by the Rev. Caleb Evans in his Observations on Mr. Wesley's late reply prefixed to his Calm Address}, London, 1776 (in fact published late December, 1775), 12mo., pp. 24.

\textsuperscript{45} \textit{A Vindication of the Rev. Mr. Wesley's "Calm Address to our American Colonies": in some letters to Mr. Caleb Evans}, Dublin, Whitestone, 1776, pp. 70. (The first letter is dated Nov. 15, 1775; the other two are without date.)

\textsuperscript{46} An anonymous newspaper correspondent wrote to Tucker on Oct. 9 that he was "well assured that you have been greatly pleased with John Wesley's late two-penny piece, ...and that you speak highly of its merit" (\textit{Felix Farley's Bristol Journal}, Oct. 28). Certainly Tucker attacked the \textit{Letter of Americans}, and it was in a long letter to Tucker dated Oct. 27 that Evans revealed his real name (\textit{Bristol Journal}, Nov. 11; cf. \textit{Felix Farley's Bristol Journal}, Nov. 4, \textit{Bristol Journal}, Feb. 10, 1776, etc.)

\textsuperscript{47} Letter to Christopher Hopper, Dec. 26, 1775 (\textit{Wesley, Letters}, VI. 199).