THE WESLEYS AT HOME:
CHARLES WESLEY AND HIS CHILDREN

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The family life of Charles Wesley has perhaps not always received its due share of attention from his biographers, who have understandably concentrated their attentions on the more public aspects of his life. Yet the domestic sphere assumed for Charles an importance that it never had for his brother John, and any biographical study needs to take account of this important area of his life and his relationships with the members of his family circle: his wife Sarah (1726–1822), his daughter Sally (1759–1828), and his sons Charles (1757–1834) and Samuel (1766–1837). This paper focuses on Charles Wesley’s attitudes to family life and his relationships with his children, drawing on the evidence of his journals, letters and poetry, on unpublished family papers, and on contemporary testimony.


2 In this paper ‘Sarah’ will be used for Wesley’s wife, and ‘Sally’ for his daughter.


When confronted with information from such sources, one of the biographer’s first concerns is with context: the extent to which the picture of family life and parental attitudes that emerges is typical of its time and the position in society of those involved. Accordingly, this paper begins by considering prevalent attitudes to the education and upbringing of children in 18th century England, and in particular those attitudes prevalent within Methodism. It goes on to examine the childhood and early upbringing of the Wesley children. From the point of view both of parents and of children the evidence here is uneven, favoring Charles and his sons at the expense of his wife Sarah and his daughter Sally. In the absence of information about the specific attitudes and contribution of Sarah Wesley, but bearing in mind what we know about other aspects of the marriage, we can only assume that Charles’s views and attitudes were shared by her. As far as the children are concerned, the main sources of information relate mainly to Charles and Samuel, both of whom were musical child prodigies. Regrettably, there is comparatively little information on the upbringing of Sally, who, lacking her brothers’ outstanding musical abilities, was less in the public eye and attracted correspondingly less attention.

During his last decade, the most significant events in Charles’s family life were his dealings with Samuel, at the time going through a troubled adolescence and early adulthood. Of the three Wesley children, Samuel was the most musically gifted. He also comprehensively rejected the values of his family and of Methodism, to the sorrow of the family and the scandal of the entire Methodist community. Most of Samuel’s later life dates from after Charles’ death, and is thus not of direct relevance here. But his involvement with and conversion to Roman Catholicism and his long-standing love affair with Charlotte Louisa Martin both date from the 1780s and will be considered as important and highly stressful features of Charles’s final years.

Despite a large amount of concentrated and detailed attention over the last thirty years or so, the history of childhood still remains a controversial subject, to the extent that there is little agreement even on the broadest outlines of how relationships between parents and children changed over time.5

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5 Wesley, ed. Frank Baker (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), and Charles Wesley: A Reader, ed. John R. Tyson (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1989). The two most important collections of Wesley family papers, including large numbers of letters by Charles’s wife Sarah and the three children, are those at Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia (henceforth Emory), and at the Methodist Archives and Research Centre, John Rylands University Library of Manchester (henceforth Rylands).

Many historians, however, would identify a move in the late 17th century to a more liberal set of attitudes to children and their education from those that had been prevalent earlier. These new attitudes were articulated and encapsulated by John Locke in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), a work of immense influence on thinking on education for much of the 18th century. The dominant attitude of 17th century parents to children had been, in the words of J. H. Plumb, "autocratic, indeed ferocious." Unquestioning obedience was expected of children, and infringements of discipline were met by harsh punishments. The new, more liberal, attitude stressed the importance of gentler approaches: a series of rewards and punishments appealing to children's developing reason, by which they would be brought up as useful and accomplished members of society. Although both approaches can be seen in 18th century educational thought, the more modern approach became increasingly the dominant one.

The two approaches have separate religious and theological pedigrees. The earlier model is Calvinistic and stresses the essentially evil nature of the child, acquired through original sin: in the words of Richard Allestree in 1658, "the new-borne babe is full of the stains and pollutions of sin which it inherits from our first parents through our loins." By contrast, the latter model stresses the essential goodness and innocence of the child and the belief that with appropriate education and parental guidance he or she will prevail over the forces of evil. Theological underpinning for this view, which likens the child to Adam before the Fall, can be found as early as 1628 in John Earle's *Micro-cosmographie*: "A child is a man in a small letter, yet the best copy of Adam before he tasted of Eve or the apple. . . . He is purely happy, because he knows no evil." This stress on the innocence of the child was to become more prominent in the 18th century, and was in one guise or another to be central to many Romantic attitudes to children and childhood.

The most striking feature of the new attitude to children is the emphasis laid on the rationality of the child, and indeed of the whole enterprise of child-rearing. As Locke says, expressing a point of view clearly novel at the time:

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It will perhaps be wondered that I mention Reasoning with Children: And yet I cannot but think that the true Way of dealing with them. They understand it as early as they do Language; and, if I mis-observe not, they love to be treated as Rational Creatures sooner than is imagined. ⑩

However, it is the earlier, harsher, approach which is to be seen in the methods employed by Susanna Wesley, the mother of Charles and John, and set down in a celebrated letter of July 24, 1732 to John Wesley. Foremost among the “principal rules” she observed was that of “conquering the will” of her children:

I insist upon conquering the will of children betimes, because this is the only strong and rational foundation of a religious education, without which both precept and example will be ineffectual. But when this is thoroughly done, then a child is capable of being governed by the reason and piety of its parents, till its own understanding comes to maturity, and the principles of religion have taken root in the mind. ⑪

The necessity of breaking the will of children was to attain the force of dogma in Methodist theories of the upbringing of children. The usual theological justification was the one given by Susanna: that children should learn to subjugate their own desires to those of their parents in preparation for the adult Christian life, in which they would subjugate their desires to the will of God:

As self-will is the root of all sin and misery, so whatever cherishes this in children ensures their after-wretchedness and irreligion; whatever checks and mortifies it promotes their future happiness and piety. This is still more evident if we farther consider that religion is nothing else than the doing the will of God, and not our own; that, the one grand impediment to our temporal and eternal happiness being this self-will, no indulgences of it can be trivial, no denial unprofitable. Heaven or hell depends on this alone. So that the parent who studies to subject it in his child works together with God in renewing and saving a soul. The parent who indulges it does the devil’s work, makes religion impracticable, salvation unattainable; and does all that in him lies to damn his child, soul and body, for ever. ⑫

The influence of Susanna’s views and the experience of his own childhood is apparent in the educational thought of John Wesley. ⑬ In the curriculum and rules for Kingswood School (1749), ⑭ he combines Susanna’s principles with elements of the Moravian educational practice that he had observed

⑩Some Thoughts Concerning Education, paragraph 81.
⑫Wesley, Journal, August 1, 1742.
⑬For an overall discussion of John Wesley’s educational thought, see Alfred H. Body, John Wesley and Education (London: Epworth Press, 1936).
at Herrnhut. The resulting regime was one of monastic severity: the only activities in the curriculum were lessons, prayer, walking, and working, either in the garden or indoors, and the children were under constant adult supervision. No provision was made for relaxation, and play was specifically excluded:

As we have no play-days (the School being taught every day in the year but Sunday) so neither do we allow any time for play on any day. He that plays when he is a child, will play when he is a man.\(^3\)

John Wesley’s views on education and the upbringing of children showed no signs of relaxation as he grew older, and essentially the same principles are reiterated in his sermons of the 1780s on the subject.\(^4\)

II

Such views were not shared by Charles Wesley, and in their attitudes to child-rearing and education, as in so much else, the attitudes of the two brothers were very different. The more extreme attitudes of John are characterized by a failure to understand the psychology of the child, and are of a harshness and austerity which would find few supporters today. Charles, on the other hand, is a figure whom modern readers can understand and with whom they can identify more easily. Hymns, poems, and letters all attest to his deep love for his children and his involvement with them: his anxiety when any of them were ill, his grief at the death of those who died in infancy, the care he took over their upbringing, his delight at their successes, and his disappointment when any of them failed to measure up to his high standards of behavior.

Charles had come to marriage and fatherhood late. He was 41 when he married and 44 at the time of the birth of his firstborn John, who lived for only eighteen months. At the time of the birth of Charles, the eldest child to survive to adulthood, he was 49; at the birth of Samuel, the youngest, he was 58. Nonetheless, he seems to have made every effort to understand his children, to enter into their world and to bring them up in the way most appropriate to their personalities and talents. Some aspects of his approach—notably his seriousness, his insistence on discipline, and his tendency to assume adult understanding on the part of his children, reflect orthodox Methodist thinking. But in other respects he is far more liberal. As his nursery verse shows, he was not unremittingly serious with his children and had a well-developed sense of fun. He also recognized the important role of play in children’s lives, and we know from family correspondence that Samuel, at least, was allowed to keep a small menagerie of pets and to indulge in kite-flying and other boyish activities.\(^5\) But friendships with other children were not encouraged. An

\(^3\)George and Rupp, 104–106.


\(^5\)Lightwood, Samuel Wesley, Musician, 45, citing Samuel’s letters of 1777.
undated letter from Charles to Sarah warns against the children having friends of their own age on the grounds that “children are corruptors of each other.” Significantly, too, and presumably for the same reasons, Charles and Samuel were not sent to Kingswood, but were educated at home.

It is largely because of the fame of Charles junior and Samuel as musical child prodigies that we know so much about their early lives. From an account by Charles given to the lawyer and antiquarian Daines Barrington we learn of the young Charles playing a tune on the harpsichord “readily, and in just time” at the age of two and three-quarters, after which he was able readily to reproduce what his mother sang or what he heard on the streets. Samuel’s musical gifts were apparent at almost the same age. According to his father he taught himself to read from Handel’s oratorio Samson, and at the age of five he “had all the airs, recitatives, and choruses of Samson and the Messiah: both words and notes by heart.” At around the same time he was said to have composed in his head the airs of his oratorio Ruth, which he was not however able to write down until he was eight.

From these and other anecdotes it is clear that as prodigies the two children were among the most precociously outstanding of all time, and inevitably their childhood and upbringing was very different from that of other children. As child prodigies they were the objects of widespread adult attention, and were frequently called on to display their accomplishments to visitors to the family home and in public. This early involvement with the adult world continued as they grew older and as their musical education developed.

The attitude of Charles to his sons’ musical talents was inevitably ambivalent. As a music-lover himself, he was delighted that his children were gifted musicians, and regarded their abilities as God-given talents, to be developed to their full potential. At the same time, he would have soon become aware of some less welcome consequences of their childhood celebrity. The boys received a degree of attention and adulation from adults that would not always have been welcome or desirable, and they inevitably missed out on many of the features of a more normal childhood.

Such problems are attendant on child prodigies and their parents in any age. In the case of the Wesleys, they were exacerbated by Charles’s prominent position within Methodism and by some deep-seated Methodist suspicions about music. John Wesley’s own views on music are set forth in his treatise On the Power of Music. While prepared to admit the value of certain narrowly defined types of music in the context of worship, he was deeply distrustful of its sensual appeal and its association with worldly pleasures, in

19Charles’s account was made available to Barrington and published together with Barrington’s own observations in his Miscellanies (London, 1781), 291–310. Barrington (1727–1800) had a particular interest in musical child prodigies, and had earlier written an account of the young Mozart, whom he had met and examined in London in 1765.
20Dated Inverness, June 9, 1779; printed in Arminian Magazine, 4 (1781), 104–107.
particular with dancing and the theater. For many Methodists, as for John, the profession of music would not have been consistent with a godly life, and the company of musicians would have been seen as highly inappropriate for the two sons of Charles Wesley. In addition, Charles would have been uncomfortably aware that there were many within the Methodist community who were already disposed to criticize him for what they saw as a worldly style of life. John Fletcher voiced what was presumably a widely felt concern when he wrote:

You have your enemies, as well as your brother, they complain of your love for musick, company, fine people, great folks, and of the want of your former zeal and frugality. I need not put you in mind to cut off sinful appearances.¹¹

To another critic, a Methodist lady who objected to the eleven-year-old Charles junior playing in concerts, Charles replied with more than a hint of weary resignation as well as of defensiveness:

I always designed my son for a clergyman. Nature has marked him for a musician: which appeared from his earliest infancy. My friends advised me not to cross his inclination. Indeed I could not if I would. There is no way of hindering his being a musician but cutting off his fingers.²²

Such criticisms were also expressed by such later writers as Thomas Jackson and George Stevenson, who had their own reasons for voicing their retrospective concern. Writing long after the event, they were confronted with the fact that in their later lives both Samuel and Charles junior had departed far from Methodism. The behavior of Samuel, in particular, was of an extravagant rebelliousness which was a considerable embarrassment to the Methodist community, and was badly in need of interpretation and explanation. A convenient and plausible place to look was in the children’s childhood and upbringing. In the opinion of Jackson, for example, much of Samuel’s behavior stemmed from his father’s imprudent handling of his celebrity status as a child prodigy. Another factor was the supposedly malign influence of Samuel’s godfather the Rev. Martin Madan, himself a keen musician, with whom the young Samuel spent a good deal of time in his childhood:

When the boy displayed his early powers as a musician, this Clergyman carried him from place to place, among his friends, as a sort of prodigy. The child, though very young, was sensible and observant. He therefore felt that he was degraded, and conceived a prejudice against his father for suffering him to be thus exhibited as a boyish wonder. This to him was an essential injury, and the beginning of that downward course which he afterwards bitterly lamented. From this time he was indisposed to pay a just deference to his father’s judgment; and he lost that tender filial affection which, had it been cherished in all its power, would have operated as a restraint upon his passions, and have kept him in the way of receiving spiritual good.²³

¹¹John Fletcher to Charles Wesley, October 13, 1771, quoted in Gill, Charles Wesley: The First Methodist, 190.
²²Charles Wesley to Eleanor Laroche, February 3, 1769 (Rylands, DDWES 4/73), quoted in Baker, Charles Wesley as Revealed in his Letters, 110.
²³Jackson, Life, 357.
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It is impossible to adjudicate on the accuracy of Jackson's comments, but they are of value as being characteristic of explanations of Samuel's behavior offered at the time and for some time afterwards. In the case of his identification of Madan as a bad influence on Samuel, his judgment was no doubt affected by hindsight, for Madan was later to achieve notoriety following the publication of his controversial treatise *Thelyphthora* in 1780. The only piece of contemporary evidence of relevance to the issue is a letter from Charles to the seven-year-old Samuel, evidently written in response to some piece of childish misbehavior:

Come now, my good friend Samuel, and let us reason together. God made you for Himself, that is to be ever happy with Him. Ought you not, therefore, to serve and love Him? But you can do neither unless He gives you the power. Ask. (He says Himself) and it shall be given you. That is, pray Him to make you love Him: and pray for it every night and morning in your own words, as well as in those which have been taught you. You have been used to say your prayers in the sight of others. Henceforth, go into a corner by yourself, where no eye but God's may see you. There pray to your heavenly Father who seeth in secret: and be sure He hears every word you speak, and sees everything you do, at all times, and in all places.

You should now begin to live by reason and religion. There should be sense even in your play and diversions. Therefore I have furnished you with maps and books and harpsichord. Every day get something by heart: whatever your mother recommends. Every day read one or more chapters in the Bible. I suppose your mother will take you now in the place of your brother, to be her chaplain, to read the psalms and lessons, when your sister does not...

Foolish people are too apt to praise you. If they see anything good in you they should praise God, not you, for it. As for music, it is neither good nor bad in itself. You have a natural inclination to it: but God gave you that: therefore God only should be thanked and praised for it. Your brother has the same love of music much more than you, yet he is not proud or vain of it. Neither, I trust, will you be. You will send me a long letter of answer, and always look on me both as your loving father, and your friend,

C. Wesley

Irrespective of the circumstances which may have occasioned such a letter, it shines out as an example of the essential kindliness and rationality of Charles's approach to the upbringing of his children.

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24 Martin Madan (1725–1790) was from 1758 until his death the Honorary Chaplain of the Lock Hospital, a charitable establishment for women suffering from venereal diseases. In *Thelyphthora* he attempted by the use of passages drawn from the Bible to prove the acceptability of polygamy in biblical times and advocated its reintroduction as a means of alleviating the plight of women who had been seduced and abandoned, and of their children. The resulting furor rapidly led to his disgrace and ostracism. Madan's arguments were trivialized and misunderstood in his own day, and the bald statement in most present-day reference books that he advocated polygamy does not do justice to the complexity of his thought or of his motivations in writing *Thelyphthora*. See Victor N. Paananen, “Martin Madan and the Limits of Evangelical Philanthropy,” *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, 40 (1975), 57–68.

25 Charles Wesley to Samuel Wesley, March 6, 1773 (Rylands, DDWES 4/70), quoted in Baker, *Charles Wesley as Revealed in his Letters*, 111.
It is likely that a large part of Charles’s decision to move the family from Bristol to London in 1771 stemmed from a desire to provide his children with the best possible educational and musical opportunities. In London, his sons would have all the musical opportunities they needed. At the same time, he would be able to keep their activities under supervision and control, and make sure they did not fall into bad company and bad habits. This was the rationale for the celebrated subscription concerts at the family home in Chesterfield Street, which ran for nine seasons from 1779 to 1787, attracting fashionable audiences and a good deal of publicity. Predictably, the concerts gave rise to some controversy and strong criticism from within the Methodist community, including the following from Thomas Coke:

I looked upon the Concerts which he allows his sons to have in his own house, to be highly dishonorable to God; and himself to be criminal, by reason of his situation in the Church of Christ; but on mature consideration of all the circumstances appertaining to them, I cannot now blame him.

In the face of such remarks, Charles Wesley felt obliged to give a justification of his actions. In a letter of January 14, 1779 to Lord Mornington he set out his “reasons for letting my sons have a concert at home”:

1. To keep them out of harm’s way: the way (I mean) of bad music and bad musicians who by a free communication with them might corrupt both their taste and their morals.

2. That my sons may have a safe and honourable opportunity of availing themselves of their musical abilities, which have cost me several hundred pounds.

3. That they may enjoy their full right of private judgment, and likewise their independency; both of which must be given up if they swim with the stream and follow the multitude.

4. To improve their play and their skill in composing: as they must themselves furnish the principal music of every concert, although they do not call their musical entertainment a concert. It is too great a word. They do not presume to rival the present great masters who excel in the variety of their accompaniments. All they aim at in their concert music is exactness.

He subsequently declared in a letter to his brother John his conviction that he was,

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26 Lightwood, *Samuel Wesley, Musician*, 50–55. Charles Wesley’s Concert Register, giving programmes, financial accounts, and the names of subscribers and participants, 1779–1785, is at London, Royal Academy of Music, MS-L WESLEY, C; a transcript in the hand of his granddaughter Eliza Wesley is at London, British Library, Add. MS 38071; further documents relating to the concerts are at Rylands, DDCW 4/4–6, 6/52, 6/55–58, 8/15, 8/21, and 9/15.

27 Thomas Coke to John Wesley, December 15, 1779, in *Arminian Magazine*, 13 (1790), 50–51.

28 Charles Wesley to Garrett Wellesley, 1st Lord Mornington, January 14, 1779 (Rylands, DDWES 14/65), quoted in Lightwood, *Samuel Wesley, Musician*, 51–52.
clear, without a doubt, that my sons' concert is after the will and order of Providence. It has established them as musicians, and in a safe and honourable way. 29

John disagreed, adding the footnote when he published the letter in the *Arminian Magazine* that he was "clear of another mind."

IV

It was during the period of the family concerts that the first signs of major problems in the Wesley family started to become apparent. By this time Charles and Sally were of adult years, although still living at home, as indeed they continued to do after their father's death. Jackson says nothing of Sally at this time, but he reports that Charles's worldliness and lack of spirituality were matters of concern both to his father and to his uncle, and quotes two letters from John Wesley to Charles on the subject. 30 In the light of the inoffensive dullness of Charles's later life it is difficult to see these letters as reflecting any serious or continuing problem.

The case of Samuel, however, was another matter. As early as September 1778, as we know from a letter from Charles to Sarah, some aspects of his behavior seem to have been giving grounds for concern, and he was becoming interested in Roman Catholicism:

Sam will have many more escapes. Great will be his trials; but the Lord will deliver him out of all... Sam wants more pains to be taken with him. If I should not live to help him, it will lie all upon you. Make him a living Christian, and he will never wish to be a dead Papist. 31

Exactly what form Samuel's interest took is not clear from Charles's comment, but it probably indicates Samuel's attendance at Roman Catholic services at one of the London embassy chapels, which were the only places where Catholic rites could legally be celebrated at this time. It is doubtless true, as Samuel was many years later to assert in his manuscript *Reminiscences*, 32 that what drew him to Roman Catholicism in the first place was its music rather than its doctrines. Nonetheless, the mere fact of his attendance would have been a severe test for the most liberal father, and it is hard to imagine that the reaction of Charles could have been anything other than dismay.

Most of the details of the beginnings of Samuel's interest in Roman Catholicism remain unclear. His first dated Roman Catholic church music compositions were written in November 1780, but Charles' letter suggests an

29 Charles Wesley to John Wesley, April 23, 1779, printed in *Arminian Magazine* 12 (1789), 386–88; quoted in Lightwood, *Samuel Wesley, Musician*, 52.


interest and involvement dating back to at least two years earlier. Whenever it occurred, it was an inopportune time, given the strong anti-Catholic feeling which followed the passing of the First Catholic Relief Act of 1779 and which was later to erupt in the Gordon Riots of June 1780. Although Charles's comment quoted above is our only record of his reaction to Samuel's initial interest, we can readily imagine his displeasure and his anxieties, not only for Samuel's spiritual wellbeing, but also for his physical safety. Samuel’s involvement with Roman Catholicism in 1780 gives a personal significance to Charles's poems on the Gordon Riots, one of which was written on June 8, when the disturbances were at their height and when Samuel and his mother had had to be evacuated from the family home for their own safety.\(^3^3\)

Although Samuel's attendance at Roman Catholic worship may have been tolerated by Charles, it can hardly have been welcomed by him. But Samuel's next step was more extreme. In early 1784 he underwent a form of conversion. It is not known whether he received instruction, conditional baptism and formal reception into the Roman Catholic church, but one tangible outcome of his conversion was that he composed an elaborate Missa de Spiritu Sancto for chorus, soloists, and orchestra which he dedicated to Pope Pius VI and dispatched to Rome.\(^3^4\) The whole episode of the conversion was chronicled in considerable detail first by Jackson and later by Stevenson, for both of whom it evidently had a dreadful fascination.\(^3^5\) Both authors describe what must have been an occasion of acute embarrassment when the Duchess of Norfolk, in her capacity as the wife of the leading Roman Catholic layman in England, paid a formal visit on Charles to break to him the news of his son's conversion, a situation made the more poignant by the fact that the Duchess' own son had recently abandoned Roman Catholicism for the Church of England.\(^3^6\) Samuel’s conversion also occasioned on August 19, 1784 a long letter from John Wesley which in its tolerance and eirenic approach contrasts strongly with the intemperate anti-Catholic remarks which he had made in the aftermath of the passing of the First Catholic Relief Act. After voicing his disquiet at Samuel's behavior in general terms, he expresses himself unconcerned about the precise form, "Protestant or Romish," of Samuel's religious observance, and expresses his greater concern for Samuel's spiritual health:

> Whether of this church or that, I care not: you may be saved in either, or damned in either, but I fear you are not born again; and except you be born again you cannot see the kingdom

\(^3^3\)See also Charles's eye-witness account of the Gordon riots in his letter to John Wesley on June 8, 1780, quoted in Jackson, Life, 320–321. For the Gordon Riots, see Christopher Hibbert, King Mob: The Story of Lord George Gordon and the Riots of 1780 (London: Longmans, Green, 1958).

\(^3^4\)Autograph dated May 22, 1784 at Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, MS 730; revised version at London, British Library, Add. MS 35000.

\(^3^5\)Jackson, Life, 359–60; Stevenson, Memorials of the Wesley Family, 505.

\(^3^6\)Stevenson mistakenly describes this incident as having taken place in 1785.
of God. You believe the Church of Rome is right. What then: If you are not born of God, you are of no church. Whether Bellarmine or Luther be right, you are certainly wrong, if you are not born of the Spirit; if you are not renewed in the spirit of your mind in the likeness of Him that created you. . . .

O Sammy, you are out of your way! You are out of God’s way! You have not given him your heart. You have not found, nay, it is well if you have so much as sought, happiness in God! And poor zealots, while you are in this state of mind, would puzzle you about this or the other church! O fools, and blind! Such guides as these lead men by shoals to the bottomless pit. My dear Sammy, your first point is to repent and believe the Gospel. Know yourself a poor guilty helpless sinner! Then know Jesus Christ and him crucified! Let the Spirit of God bear witness with your spirit, that you are a child of God and let the love of God be shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto you; and then, if you have no better work, I will talk with you of transubstantiation or purgatory.27

The intense pain caused to Charles by the Roman Catholic incident is amply documented in the collection of poems in MS Samuel Wesley RC, the front cover of which is endorsed by Sally as being “verses on his Son Samuel on being made acquainted he had embraced the Roman Catholic religion.”28 In the best known poem of this collection Charles expresses his grief at what he inevitably saw as an act of betrayal, and likens his “sacrifice” to that of Abraham:

Farewell, my all of earthly hope,
    My nature’s stay, my age’s prop,
        Irrevocably gone!
Submissive to the will divine
    I acquiesce, and make it mine;
        I offer up my Son!

But give I God a sacrifice
    That costs me nought? My gushing eyes
        The answer sad express,
My gushing eyes and troubled heart
    Which bleeds with its belov’d to part,
        Which breaks thro’ fond excess.29

Samuel’s conversion to Roman Catholicism was not the only aspect of his behavior to cause concern to the family. What now confronted Charles was a general unruliness and rebelliousness which seems to have informed Samuel’s behavior from his early adolescence, and may, as we have seen, have originated in his childhood. There are, unfortunately, few relevant contemporary

29The Unpublished Poetry of Charles Wesley, vol. 1, 304. The poem of which these stanzas form part is also printed in Jackson, Life, 361–64, and Stevenson, Memorials of the Wesley Family, 505–6.
family documents and letters to fill out a fairly sketchy picture of life in the Wesley family in the 1780s.\textsuperscript{40} Retrospective references in later letters, chiefly from Sally to Samuel, supply many of the details. Samuel’s behavior at this time seems to have included drunkenness, staying out until the early hours of the morning, and striking and otherwise abusing servants. It is clear that Samuel was in open revolt from his father and his family and all that they stood for, and it is possible to interpret his behavior as a particularly extreme form of adolescent rebellion. But it seems more likely that it was to some extent an early manifestation of a hypomanic phase of the bipolar or manic-depressive illness that was to affect him for the remainder of his life.\textsuperscript{41}

Our knowledge of Samuel’s wild behavior gives precise context to passages like the following in the poems of MS Samuel Wesley RC, which might otherwise be dismissed as overwrought and hysterical in tone:

\begin{quote}
From drunken, riotous excess
From vice, and open wickedness
His giddy youth restrain,
While flattery soothes, and pleasure smiles,
And harlots spread their slighted toils,
And glory courts in vain.\textsuperscript{42}
\end{quote}

Perhaps the greatest cause of family tension in the 1780s was Samuel’s relationship with Charlotte Louisa Martin, whom he was eventually to marry. They had first met as early as October 1782, when Samuel was 16 and Charlotte was 21 or 22. The relationship was violently opposed by the family, largely on the grounds of what was perceived, with what degree of justification it is impossible to tell, as Charlotte’s unsuitability of character.\textsuperscript{43} We can also assume that Samuel’s youth and the difference of five years in age between him and Charlotte would also have come into the matter. Samuel, predictably, refused to accede to his parents’ demand that he should break off the relationship, and it continued up to the time of Charles’s death as a potent source of family conflict.

The subsequent history of the relationship, while not of direct relevance here, is worth sketching as an indication of Samuel’s later actions and the extent to which he departed from the values and conventions of the family, and

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\textsuperscript{40} Not surprisingly, Charles’s letters to John Langshaw senior in \textit{Wesley-Langshaw Correspondence} contain no hint of any family problems.
\textsuperscript{41} Samuel’s extended periods of depression throughout his life have long been acknowledged by his biographers, but the diagnosis of manic-depressive illness is more recent. It is, however, strongly borne out by the events of his life, his pattern of creativity, and his letters. On manic-depressive illness, see Frederick K. Goodwin and Kay Redfield Jamison, \textit{Manic-Depressive Illness} (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990); Kay Redfield Jamison, \textit{Touched with Fire: Manic-Depressive Illness and the Artistic Temperament} (New York: Free Press, 1993).
\textsuperscript{42} The Unpublished Poetry of Charles Wesley, vol. 1, 305.
\textsuperscript{43} See Samuel’s letter to his mother of November 7, 1792 (Rylands, DDWF/15/5) in which he defends Charlotte against accusations of extravagance and the possession of a “fickle and wanton nature.”
\end{quote}
indeed of respectable society of the day. After more than ten years of opposition from the family, Samuel and Charlotte married in April 1793. For some time before the marriage they had lived together and considered themselves as man and wife, while refusing to go through any marriage ceremony and claiming some theological justification for their stance. After the marriage their relationship almost immediately started to deteriorate, and their subsequent life together was unhappy and stormy, with frequent quarrels, infidelity on Samuel’s part and incidents of violence on both parts. They finally separated in early 1810. Samuel subsequently took up with his housekeeper Sarah Suter, 15 or 16 years old to his 43, and lived with her until his death in 1837, fathering no fewer than seven children to add to the three by Charlotte. As divorce was not readily available at the time to those in the Wesleys’ position, Samuel and Charlotte remained married, and all the children by Sarah Sutter were illegitimate.

In the 1780s these later episodes in Samuel’s life lay far in the future. But it is apparent from the events described earlier that these years must have been ones of almost incessant domestic stress and turmoil for Charles. We should not, first of all, underestimate the continuing disruption to domestic routine caused by the family concerts over a period of eight years, or the continuing strain they must have imposed on Charles at a time when he doubtless would have preferred to lead a quieter life. The major problem, however, beside which any shortcomings in the behavior of Charles Junior or Sally must have seemed insignificant indeed, was the behavior of Samuel. Few today would share the confidence of 19th century writers such as Jackson or Stevenson in explaining root causes and in apportioning blame for Samuel’s behavior, and modern explanations are far more likely to take into account the part possibly played by his manic-depressive illness. Nonetheless, it is clear that, for whatever reason, every significant action in Samuel’s life at this period was taken in direct or indirect defiance of his father. An important part of the story of Charles Wesley’s final years must be the story of this badly failed relationship, and the pain and suffering that it undoubtedly caused him.

“This stance in part derived from one of the arguments of Madan’s Thelyphthora. Following Madan, Samuel claimed that there was no evidence for the existence of any sort of religious marriage ceremony in biblical times, and that marriage was constituted solely by the physical union of a man and a woman. By this criterion, as he declared in his defiant letter to his mother of November 7, 1792, he and Charlotte were by this time incontestably man and wife: “she is truly and properly my wife by all the laws of God and Nature. She never can be made more so, by the mercenary tricks of divine jugglers . . . .”

“Theyir first-born child was Charles, who according to Stevenson (Memorials of the Wesley Family, 539) was born on September 25, 1793. He was baptized on October 20.

“In addition, one child by Charlotte and two children by Sarah Suter died in infancy or early childhood.