The efforts of the last surviving members of the eighteenth-century Epworth Wesley family—John, Charles, and Martha Wesley Hall—to establish and solidify their positions within London society—assumed a variety of modes. For John Wesley, there arose the opportunity to re-unite with his brother, Charles, and increase the activities of Methodism in that city. For Charles Wesley, family responsibilities and concerns had assumed a higher priority than the eighteenth-century evangelical revival. For Martha Wesley Hall, a closer association with the literary circle of Samuel Johnson would, perhaps, ease the degree of her dependence upon her brothers. Through glimpses of the Wesleys within the context of “family,” one comes to understand that although generally Methodism aimed at the masses, it did function well within the upper echelon of London society, principally because, at an intellectual level, the Wesleys could claim full membership there.

The major portion of scholarly discussions relative to the Wesleys in London and the activities of Methodism in that city fails to develop clearly, within a single frame, the image of “family.” Instead, historians of 18th century Methodism tend to focus upon and emphasize John Wesley’s work among the members of his societies and bands—first at the old King’s Foundery in upper Moorfields, then at the chapels in West Street, Snowfields, Long Lane, Bermondsey, and City Road. Although, out of seasonal necessity, London served as a winter encampment for John Wesley, as well as a haven for respite from his travels, the town held no significant fascination for him. Indeed, his journal entries and correspondence resound with pleas and even commands for those of his followers who wished to abandon their homes and families in the provinces and move to the English capital. He urged them, particularly the women, to stay where they belonged. “That London is the worst place under heaven for preserving a Christian temper,” he wrote to Mary Pendarves (February 11, 1731), “anyone will immediately think who observes that there can be none where its professed, irreconcilable enemies, the lust of the eye and the pride of life [1 John 2:16], are more artfully and forcibly recommended.”1 John Wesley, for his part, spent as much of the year as he could manage on the homiletic hustings in Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and the remoter parts of England.

For the other surviving Wesley brother, Charles, the attitude toward the city differed, but in his situation, necessity more than goals or priorities decreed events. With the clear emergence of the Methodist organization in 1739–1740, Charles Wesley divided his time principally between London and Bristol, both cities serving as the base for his itinerancy. Following his marriage to the affluent Sarah Gwynne, of Garth, Brecknockshire, Wales, the couple settled in Bristol, but Charles continued his itinerancy—spending more time in London than his older brother. By late 1770, however, Charles Wesley’s health weakened (partially the result of his brief tenure in the Georgia and Carolina colonies) and his enthusiasm for travel and field preaching had declined. With that shift in pastoral priorities, his interest in the physical and spiritual welfares of his wife and three children increased considerably. The next year, he and his family settled at No. 1 Chesterfield Street, Marylebone, remaining there until Charles Wesley’s death on March 28, 1788.

The Wesleys had come to that house through an association with the widow of Colonel Samuel Gumley (?–1763)—her late husband a veteran of Marlborough’s dragoons—an acquaintance of Selina Shirley, Countess of Huntingdon, and a convert to Methodism by way of George Whitefield. Charles Wesley had known the Gumleys at least as early as May 1748, and some ten years later (July 25, 1758?) he dutifully tells his wife that “Mrs. Gumley . . . made me an offer of Drayton living, in Oxfordshire, the drunken incumbent being near death. I neither refused nor accepted it; for I had not consulted you.” Clearly, Charles Wesley had no intention of isolating himself behind the stone walls of a rural vicarage in extreme northern Oxfordshire and assuming the role of country parson. A more substantive offer from Mrs. Gumley came on May 26, 1771, when the affluent widow learned that the younger Wesley intended to settle his family in London. She offered him the lease of her town house in Chesterfield Street, her own rental rights on the property having twenty years remaining. After refusing a number of offers for it, she told Wesley that she would not announce its availability until she had heard from him. She intended to leave the rich furnishings, Wesley had only to maintain the house and to pay the property rent to the owner of the land, William Henry Cavendish, third Duke of Portland (1738–1809). “To-day,” wrote Wesley to his wife Sarah, “Mrs. Gumley told me . . . that all is ready for you, even small beer; that she will not put up the bill again, till next post brings your final resolution.”

Everyone appears to have approved of the arrangement except John Wesley, who, actually, had looked forward to Charles’ removal from Bristol to London, where the two brothers could see each other with greater fre-

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quency. Unfortunately, the house in Chesterfield Street lay a distance from the Methodist chapels at West Street and City Road. "Commonly," wrote John to Charles on May 3, 1786, "when I am in London, I am so taken up, that I cannot spare time to go three miles backward and forward. That was . . . [the first false step], the getting you an house so far from me as well as from both the chapels." Two weeks later, May 18, 1786, John Wesley again sounded the discords of frustration in the direction of his brother. "Certainly Providence permitted injudicious men to thrust you three miles from me, who would rather have been always at my elbow." At age eighty-three, John obviously had forgotten that men, injudicious or otherwise, had little to do with Charles and his family settling in Great Chesterfield Street.

One needs to understand John Wesley's "problem" with his brother's London settlement, as well as what appears to be a lack of sensitivity on his part, for the notion of family. His own father and mother, the Rev. Samuel Wesley the elder and Susanna Annesley Wesley, had brought nineteen children into the world—ten of whom managed to survive infancy. Susanna Wesley wanted her sons to be consecrated bishops of the Church of England and her daughters to become wives of Church of England bishops. Neither of those aspirations became realities. The three sons who survived past childhood—Samuel the younger, John, and Charles—received Holy Orders as deacons and priests of the Church, but Samuel's Tory politics and John's and Charles' evangelical theology prevented advancement beyond that. Of the surviving daughters—Emelia, Susanna, Mary, Anne, Martha, and Mehetabel married badly to ne'er-do-wells who contributed only to their wives' poverty, suffering, and—in all but one instance—premature deaths from childbirth and sickness. Another daughter, Kezia, never married. In his attempts to establish his own family, John Wesley failed miserably. He could not bring himself to propose marriage to Sarah Kirkham in 1725; eighteen-year-old Sophia Christiana Hopkey married William Williamson in Savannah, Georgia in 1737; and brother Charles—whose belief that the leader of Methodism ought to remain celibate contributed significantly to his spiritual and physical discomforts—openly prevented the marriage between John and Grace Murray in 1749. In the end, John Wesley, in 1751, wed Mary (Molly) Goldhawk Vazeille (1710–1781) a London widow with several grown children. The combination of her jealousy and his commitment to the Methodist itinerancy created nothing short of domestic disaster and marital breakdown. They endured each other for ten years and separated for twenty, the union coming to an end with Molly Wesley's death in 1781.

What remained, in terms of Wesley "family," focused solely but clearly upon Charles Wesley, his wife and three children. However, before consid-

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5 The Letters of John Wesley, 7:330.
ering directly the social and cultural milieu of the house in Great Chesterfield Street, we need to step both back and forward in time to demonstrate that the Wesley family's involvement in the London social and musical scenes did not limit itself only to the most obvious: the emergence of Charles' two musical prodigies. Thus, we need to look for a moment, at certain contacts established, first, by Charles Wesley prior to his marriage and, second, by his older sister, Martha Wesley Hall.

As early as 1746, some three years before his marriage to Sarah Gwynne, Charles Wesley had entered into the life of Priscilla Wilford Stevens Rich (1713-1783), formerly a waitress at Bret's Coffee House, then a housekeeper of John Rich (1692?-1761)—he the proprietor of Covent Garden Theatre—an actress, and eventually her employer's third wife. At some point in mid-1745 while still active on the stage, she ventured into West Street Chapel to hear Charles Wesley preach. According to one anecdotal account, "she was convinced of sin, renounced the theatre, sought salvation through Jesus, and became a new creature." His wife's religious conversion did little for John Rich's irascible temper; within a context that reminds one of Henry Fielding's Matthew Bramble (Joseph Andrews [1742]), he insisted upon her reappearance upon the stage, to which she replied that if she ever returned to the theatre "she would publicly bear her testimony against theatrical amusements." Beginning late October 1745, Charles Wesley could be found among the dinner and tea-time guests of Priscilla and John Rich at their house in Chelsea, although that first instance (Saturday, October 26) proved rather tense: "The family concealed their fright tolerably well," noted Wesley in his journal. "Mr. Rich behaved with great civility. I foresee the storm my visit will bring upon him." Indeed, in early 1746, Priscilla Rich sent to Charles Wesley "a copy of a song Mr. Rich has sung in a new scene, added to one of his old entertainments, in the character of harlequin-preacher, to convince the town he is not a Methodist. O pray for him that he may be a Christian ... and then he will be no more concerned about what he is called. . . ."

By March 1746, the storms had begun to pass, and the social-religious circle widened to include John Rich's musical daughters, Sarah, Charlotte, Henrietta, and Mary, joined by members of the London Methodist women's bands. At the home of Priscilla Rich, Charles Wesley met John Frederick Lampe (1703?–1751), the Saxony-born bassoonist in the Covent Garden orchestra who had converted to Methodism, edited one of the earliest and better Wesleyan tunebooks, *Hymns on the Great Festivals* (1746), and set to music several of Charles Wesley's hymns. On April 29, 1748, Mrs. Rich

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conveyed Charles Wesley in her coach to the Charter-house, where resided the widower Johann Christian Pepusch (1667–1752), who had been in London since 1704, playing violin and cembala in the Drury Lane orchestra, but who, by that time had become organist and composer to the Duke of Chandos, one of the founders of the Academy of Ancient Music, and composer of the overtures for John Gay’s operas. There they listened while Pepusch’s “music entertained us much, and his conversation more.”

Although no record exists in Wesley’s letters or journal entries, he may well have met—either at one of the Rich households (Chelsea or Cowley Grove, Uxbridge) or through Lampe—George Frederic Handel, who taught music to the Rich daughters. In 1826, Charles Wesley’s younger son, Samuel Wesley the youngest, found, in the library of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, three autograph tunes by Handel set, respectively, to three of Charles Wesley’s hymns: “Sinners, obey the Gospel-word!” “O love divine, how sweet thou art!” and “Rejoice, the Lord is King!”

Since the relatively brief tenure in the London social and intellectual scene of Martha Wesley Hall has been fairly well documented, her relationships with the likes of Johnson, Boswell, Frances Burney, and Hester Lynch Thrale Piozzi need not be examined too closely here. The seventeenth child and seventh daughter of Samuel and Susanna Wesley, Martha (or Patty) Wesley married the Rev. Westley Hall (1711–1776), to whom she bore ten children, nine of whom died in infancy, with the surviving child, Westley Hall the younger (1742–1757), living only to age fifteen before succumbing to smallpox. Her husband’s philandering and meandering brought her nothing but misery, and his death in 1776 left her free but virtually penniless. She occupied rooms in West Street Chapel, being dependent entirely upon contributions from her brothers. However, at some point even prior to Westley Hall’s demise, she had managed to gain entrance into the company of London literati and intellectuals. On February 6, 1776, Dr. Johnson, after having received from John Wesley copies of the latter’s *Explanatory Notes upon the Old Testament* (1765) and the fourth edition of his *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, sent a note of thanks to the Methodist leader: “When I received your Commentary on the Bible, I durst not at first flatter myself that I was to keep it, having so little claim to so valuable a present; and when Mrs. Hall informed me of your kindness, was hindered from time to time from returning you those thanks, which I now intreat you to accept.”

Martha Hall’s subsequent appearances in Boswell’s *Life* can be consulted at one’s leisure. However, the ultimate invitation from Johnson came

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*The Journal of Charles Wesley, 2:12.*


at some time during 1781–1784 (the extant transcript of his letter to Charles Wesley bears no date), when the London sage beckoned the entire Wesley clan—Charles and Sarah Wesley, and their daughter, Sarah Wesley the younger; John Wesley; and Martha Wesley Hall—to dinner. Unfortunately, there exists no record that the event ever took place—in the same way that there exists (outside of the cryptic journal entry) nothing of substance of the two-hour conversation between Johnson and John Wesley at Bolt Court on Thursday, December 18, 1783. At any rate, in December 1784, one week before his death, Johnson had entertained thoughts of asking the seventy-eight-year-old Martha Hall to reside in his house and to occupy the room of the departed Anna Williams. She qualified for such an honor because, as with Anna Williams, she had no money, and Johnson admired her virtue. However, the deplorable state of Johnson’s health, in combination with Mrs. Hall’s belief that the arrangement would compromise Johnson’s friendships with other of his female acquaintances, stood in the way of her joining the household “family” at Bolt Court. Martha Wesley Hall died on July 12, 1791, at age eighty-four, the last member of the Wesley family of Samuel and Susanna Wesley at Epworth, having survived brothers Charles by three years and John by slightly more than three months.

Returning, then, to Charles Wesley’s family life in and about Chesterfield Street, one may resume the argument that the hymnodist’s principal reason for leaving the itinerancy and settling in London concerned the rearing and development of his children. Between 1750 and 1766, nine children had been born at Bristol to Charles Wesley and Sarah Gwynne; only three lived beyond infancy—Charles, Sarah, and Samuel—and one does not have to read too carefully into their father’s letters to their mother to sense his concern about the health and welfare of the survivors. Further, Charles the younger and Samuel the youngest turned out to be musical prodigies, and Charles Wesley determined to supervise personally the selection of the best possible instruction for the boys (and at the least possible expense, one may add), as well as to curb their precociousness and control their ambitions. Simple coincidence of chronological parallel tempts one to dip into the wells of speculation here. Note this passage by the English music critic and biographer, Stanley Sadie: “Understandably, Leopold Mozart wanted to take his son to Paris and London, the largest, most prosperous music centres. The family set out on this ambitious trip in their own carriage, with a servant, on June 9, 1763; their intention was to visit every significant musical centre on the route, particularly those with courts where the children might be heard and generous gifts bestowed. Mozart usually played the

local church organ at towns where they made overnight stops. They also did a great deal of sightseeing." Add to Sadie’s account the observation that less than twelve months separated the births of Mozart (January 27, 1756) and the young Charles Wesley (December 11, 1757), which further tightens the strings of coincidence. The contrasts between fathers prove even more enticing. For Leopold Mozart, music, money, and reputation stood as reasonable goals—both for his young son and for his entire family. Thus, Erik Routley, for one, sees “Mozart [as] the true progenitor of the race of musicians who live and die for music. . . .”

As an ordained priest of the Church of England, albeit an evangelical one, Charles Wesley possessed an almost instinctive distrust of music and musicians. Although, unlike the elder Mozart, a professional musician, Charles Wesley could claim no significant knowledge of that discipline and art. Nonetheless, he realized what he had on his hands and in his house. Further, the elder Charles Wesley respected and trusted the authority and the reputations of others, and once he had obtained the positive reactions from the music masters to his sons’ potential as musicians, he found himself caught between his love for his children and his responsibilities, as an evangelical churchman, for their spiritual welfare.

To read both Charles Wesley’s own account of his search for the proper conduct of his sons’ musical education, as well as the narrative on that subject compiled by the lawyer and antiquarian Daines Barrington (1727–1804), translates into a compact survey of the London musical scene during the 1760s and 1770s. Before he had reached the age of three, Charles Wesley the younger could play on the harpsichord, and his father took him from Bristol to London. Wesley knew John Beard (1717–1791), the English tenor at Covent Garden and Drury Lane, through the singer’s marriage (his second), in 1759, to Charlotte Rich (1726–1818), the daughter of John Rich and step-daughter of Priscilla Rich. Beard offered to contact the composer-organist William Boyce and to get the boy admitted as a chorister of the Chapel Royal, but again, the elder Wesley had no intention of raising his son as a musician. In the end, Beard gave the boy an edition of the complete set of Domenico Scarlatti’s Forty-Two Suits of Lessons (London, 1730–1737). The boy auditioned before such composers and organists as the blind John Stanley (1712–1786) and Dr. John Worgan (1724–1790), and he later received lessons from Boyce and Joseph Kelway (?–1782), the latter appointed as harpsichord instructor to Queen Charlotte. Despite his father’s opposition, Charles Wesley devoted his life to music, performing on organ and harpsichord and composing for both instruments. However, he never rose to major rank.

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Samuel Wesley the youngest possessed more talent than his older brother—perhaps some may be tempted to say, because he entered the world on the same day (February 24) as had Handel, eighty-two years earlier. Again, Charles Wesley brought the boy to London from Bristol, where he had studied organ with David Williams at the Church of St. James Barton. By the time he had reached the age of eight, Samuel had composed an oratorio; at age eleven, in 1777, he published a collection of *Eight Lessons for the Harpsichord*; before he reached twenty-one, he had established a major reputation for performance on the organ, harpsichord, and piano. When, in 1774, Boyce came to hear him play, he informed Charles Wesley that he indeed maintained, under his roof, another Mozart.17

The musical blended with the social in No. 1 Chesterfield Street when, beginning in 1779 and continuing through 1785, the young Charles and Samuel Wesley organized a series of subscription concerts in their home, costing six guineas for the series and attended by the nobility, the affluent, and the *literati*. One large room in the house could seat eighty persons, and such among the affluent and the influential as Robert Lowth, Bishop of London; William Legge, second Earl of Dartmouth; Garrett Wellesley, first Viscount Wellesley of Dangan and first Earl of Mornington (who regularly breakfasted in Chesterfield Street and practiced the violin with the young Wesleys); and Lord and Lady George De Spencer numbered among the regular subscribers. On Thursday, January 25, 1781, Uncle John Wesley, himself, “spent an agreeable hour at a concert of my nephews. But I was a little out of my element among lords and ladies. I love plain music and plain company best.”18 According to one of the ladies who attended the same concert, “Mr. John Wesley went in full canonicals, and she in rich silk and ruffles.” Another member of the audience, the eighty-five-year-old General James Edward Oglethorpe, had come to hear the sons of his former secretary in Savannah (as well as the nephews of the former parish priest of that Georgia settlement). “Meeting with Mr. John Wesley, [Oglethorpe] kissed his hand, and showed him every mark of profound respect.”19

The occasions identified in this discussion represent only a small portion of the extent and variety of the Wesleys’ activities in London that brought both of the brothers and the one brother’s children into contact with the upper strata of London society. Their relations with Hanoverian government and church officials, particularly during such national traumas as the Jacobite rebellion of 1745, the war in America, and the Gordon no-popery riots, generally support the argument that 18th century Methodism held as

19Telford, 264–265.
firmly and as often as it could to the English Establishment. If the general discussion of 18th century Methodism yields to the tempting aromas of ignorance and enthusiasm emanating from the rank and the file of that religious organization, then the effects and influences of that religious movement upon the upper classes of 18th century urban and suburban society become submerged or lost altogether. In his study of John Wesley and the development of Methodism, most accurately titled *Reasonable Enthusiast*, the ecclesiastical historian Henry Rack underscores the point that John Wesley "described enthusiasts as 'those who think themselves inspired by God and are not.' That can be detracted by their contradictions of 'the law and the testimony,' i.e. the Bible. In practical terms [maintained Wesley] they are 'wanting the end without the means'—like the 'still brethren.'" [20] Thus, taking Wesley at his words, scholars and students must continue to look at the attempted reformation of 18th century life by the Wesleys and their followers as a complex social and religious phenomenon demanding scholarly considerations from all of its facets and dimensions—including the study of the family. If, by its very variety and complexity, life in the towns and cities of 18th century Britain cannot be easily reduced to concise summaries, then surely the same must be said of John Wesley's religious organization. In the end, the homemade family recital hall of the juvenile offspring of Charles Wesley holds as much importance for the social historian as the rantings and ravings of contemporary anti-Methodist pamphleteers, cartoonists and playwrights. In the end, certain of the Wesleys' attempts to court the London social scene constituted a kind of social conformity that made Methodism an attractive, if only temporary, oasis for the curious, the inquiring, and the spiritually deficient.

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