TWO REMARKABLE STORIES:
LOST ENTRIES OF JOHN WESLEY'S JOURNAL
DANIEL F. FLORES AND THELMA HERRERA-FLORES

Our discovery came during a week-long reading marathon at the John Rylands Library of Manchester University, Manchester, England. We were researching documents relating to the early Methodist revival in Great Britain. My wife Thelma assisted me by requesting materials which she deemed important for my project. The card title, “Remarkable Stories in John Wesley's own hand,” caught her attention. The staff had difficulty locating the manuscript. However, on our last day they announced that they located it in box marked “Wesley Sermons IV.”

While reading the document file marked, “Remarkable Stories,” I immediately recognized that this was something very special. These were stories about the supernatural: the first is a ghost story; the second is a deliverance from demon possession followed by visions of holy rapture. On the surface they appeared to be mere illustrations properly stored in a box of sermons. However, their form indicated they were more than illustrations. These were journal entries. Certain things gave us clues: the use of occasional notehand; sewn leaves; and most obvious of all, the listing of days and dates.

Wesley’s Journal has been reprinted many times over the years. How could something like this be misfiled? That is the mystery. It is unclear why they escaped publication. One could postulate that it was because of bias concerning their supernatural content: heaven, hell, angels, demons, and spiritual ecstasy. The standard journals contain many other similar elements. Yet, none were as inclusive of these elements as the second entry below. Perhaps there was a fear that inclusion would have further agitated the schismatic spirit of the age. This is especially true regarding the move to distance Methodism from the emotional and charismatic nature of campmeeting religion. There is some certainty that Methodist leaders were endeavoring to restyle the movement into respectable Methodism in the early 19th century.

In 1831 Thomas Jackson edited and published the journal of John Wesley leaving out these two entries completely. John Emory followed Jackson in this exclusion when he issued the first American edition in 1832. Reprints continued to omit the journal entries throughout the 19th century. It was not until the 20th century that Nehemiah Curnock found these entries filed in a box marked “Wesley Letters.” This edition went through three British printings in 1913, 1948, and 1960. The celebrated Bicentennial
Edition of Wesley’s Works notes Curnock’s curious variant in the footnotes to volume 21. However, the editor, W. Reginald Ward, chose not to print the passages in question. To my knowledge, they have never been printed outside the United Kingdom.

Whatever the reason for the exclusion, the stories bear intrinsic value as bona fide works of John Wesley. The first story is an anecdote of a night visitation of a specter. The deceased visitor relates details of hellish doom. The image is somewhat reminiscent of the Dickens character Jacob Marley in his visit to Ebenezer Scrooge. Wesley’s credulous presentation is not without precedent. The poltergeist known as “Ol’ Jeffrey” was said to haunt the Wesley home at Epworth. Sermons on the subject of Hell also preceded this incident.

The second story has many troublesome elements for the modern reader. The main character is exhibiting bizarre behavior. This led Wesley’s lieutenants to conclude that she is demonized. Their prayers effected a deliverance or exorcism. She fell into a motionless trance. Wesley himself witnessed the young woman, still in a trance, begin to sing extemporaneous spiritual songs. When the trance was broken, she was subjected to a number of test questions by Wesley and Fletcher. She revealed her visions of hell and heaven, the Devil and God. Terrible portents of the coming events are suggested in her visions. The end of the matter is inconclusive. But it is clear that the experience was intense for all involved.

Perhaps significance of the second story is its place in the development of the doctrine of perfection. Here Wesley and Fletcher are granted a rare opportunity to test their theology of perfection against one who has been in heaven. There is a progression of questions regarding sin and desire. Six months after the incident a consensus on the subject of perfection crystalizes amongst the early Methodists. Their preoccupation with the apocalyptic is also worth noting.

The following pages contain the entries written in the language of John Wesley. Any variances from Curnock are strictly editorial. Others are possibly due to a difference in rendering Wesley’s note hand. Quotation marks and other punctuation have been supplied where missing or otherwise necessary for the sense of the notation.

I

“Admonitions from a Night Spectre”

Feb. 19, 1756. Thurs. 19. David Car, a young man which I never saw before but heard from others that he had been for sometime remarkably serious a prentice to one Mr. Rogers a Taylor, on Steppey Cause was gave me the account of the following “About the beginning of last month, there were strange noises in our house, which were heard by many, I sense! At about a quarter past ten at night, I went up into a two pair of stairs room, and sat
Two Remarkable Stories

253

down to read my Bible, when I heard a knocking under my feet, as if it was in my room below. I took the candle in my left hand, and the book in my right, and went down immediately. As soon as I went into the room, the candle went out and I saw a man, standing in the middle of the chamber, in light-colored clothes, and a green velvet waistcoat, with a light torch in his hand. I said, "I the name of God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Who are you, and What do you want?" He said, "I am the Spirit of Richard Sutton, who died here, in the year 1702. I have a nephew in Kingston upon Thames, Thomas Roberts an Apothecary, and a niece. You must go and warn him and his sister from me that they immediately turn to God. For he will die on the 26 of next month, and she will die on the 30th." I said, "I can't go; for my time is not my own." He answered, "Can you write?" I said, "Yes." Then said he, "You must write to them. Go and fetch pen, ink, and paper. And I will tell you what to write." I went and fetched a pen and ink and the sheet of paper. When I came in again, the table which used to stand near the window, was removed to the feet of the bed. So I sat down and he stood before the table, and told me, word by word, what to write. I wrote a whole sheet of paper of all four sides describing the torments of Hell, in such words, as I had never heard in my life, enough, to make one's blood run cold. When I had done he said, "I will give you a mark that it comes from me." So he struck a burning end of his torch on my paper, and it turned that part of it into the color of half-burnt tinder. He then said, "What book is that?" I answered, "The Bible." He said, "Open it, and read where your eye falls." I did so, I read (John 5:28, 29) "The hour is coming in which all those in the graves will hear his voice, And so come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation." At that word he gave such a groan and shreik as I never heard and sank . . . 

II

"The Deliverance and Rapture of Miss West"

Thurs. Feb. 23, 1758. Elena West, a serious woman the wife of Joseph West, a weaver in Hurst Street Spittlefields (both of whom I had known for many years) come and told me a strange story concerning her child, desiring me to go and pray with her. Being full of business, I could not spare time myself, but I desired two of the preachers John Haime and Jo. Manners to go and inquire into the case, and these proceed as they should find occasion. They found her exceedingly troubled of the Devil, and in a manner very uncommon. Words came from her mouth without motion of her lips. She was convulsed to a strange degree, and appeared to be in the sharpest agonies, both of body and mind. Many other circumstances there were which could be no way accounted for, but by Diabolical agency. After sometime spent in prayer she was much relieved. But the next day she was worse
than ever. They again wrestled with God in prayer and she was entirely delivered

**Sat. 25.** I was importuned to go to her which I did about eleven o’clock. She lay without motion, and it seemed without sense. I desired we might all join in prayer. And soon after I began to pray, she began to sing. She sung five or six times, sometimes two or three, sometimes seven or eight stanzas at once. The lines were sung nearly in the voice of her own each of eight syllables: Only once, when she was triumphing over the Devil, she suddenly changed both the tune and the measure. The Master was good! It was partly prayer, but chiefly praise—exhortation: The verse not bad, often better than most men of learning could speak extempore. She intermixt Hallelujahs, sung in a pleasing tone, much like a general chorus of an anthem. While she sung she appeared to be wholly insensible of everything in the world. After half an hour she opened her eyes.

I then asked, “Do you know me?”

[West:] “Yes, Sir.”

[Wesley:] “Is it inconvenient for so many persons to be present?”

[West:] “No.”

[Wesley:] “Had the Devil possession of your body a day or 2 since?”

[West:] “Yes, and of my soul too.”

[Wesley:] “When did he depart from you?”

[West:] “Yesterday.”

[Wesley:] “Will he trouble you again?”

[West:] “No, never more.”

[Wesley:] “Do you think that you shall die soon?”

[West:] “I do not know.”

[Wesley:] “Do you desire it?”

[West:] “No. I desire nothing. I have no will but God’s.”

[Wesley:] “Do you feel nothing in you but the love of God?”

[West:] “No: nothing but love.”

[Wesley:] “Are you always happy?”

[West:] “O yes.”

[Wesley:] “Shall you never sin more?”

[West:] “Not if I watch and pray.”

[Wesley:] “Do you fear no thing?”

[West:] “No: no I can’t fear.”

[Wesley:] “Have you been in Heaven?”

[West:] “Yes and in Hell too. When I sing, I am in Heaven. I am with angels and archangels before the throne of God.”

[Wesley:] “Has he shown you things to come?”

[West:] “Yes, he has.”

[Wesley:] “Can you tell me the things that you saw in Heaven?”

[West:] “No; they are too great to be told.”

[Wesley:] “Can you tell us those things that are to come?”

[West:] “I must not. No one could bear to hear them.”
"Will the troubles that are coming be in part of the king, some or all of it?"

"They will be over all England."

"Will they come soon?"

"A part of them will."

"But will not the righteous escape?"

"If they put their trust in God."

"What will be End of all these things?"

"Praise to God."

A Bystander asked, "Are not you troubled when you thing of these things?"

She said, "No: I am not troubled; because I know whatever God doeth is good."

"Nay, but our Saviour wept over Jerusalem."

"Yes; he was grieved for the hardness of men's hearts. And so am I: But I am not for what troubles will come. For God would not let them come, if they were not good."

In the afternoon I talked with her again. "When did you know your sins were forgiven?"

"Yesterday, between three and 4 in the afternoon while Mr. Manners was at prayer."

"When was you so filled with the love of God?"

"About eight in the evening. I then taken away by the angels and carried where I saw a great lake of fire. And I saw abundance of people chained down in it, and I heard their groans. Then they took me into Heaven; and I saw all the holy angels round the throne of God. And I heard them all singing Praise to God; and I sung with them. And I saw God; I did not see him like a man, but as a glorious Brightness. I cannot tell you how it was; but it was Three in One. And Jesus Christ told me of the troubles to come; but the angels told me, not to reveal what he said. I stayed ther till between two and three in the morning; but I am as in Heaven still."

"Do not these things make you proud?"

"No: I can't be proud; for it is God, not I that does all. And the Angels are better than me; yet they are not proud. I am only afraid, the people should think too much of me."

"Do you feel no Pride at all?"

"No. I am in Heaven."

"What keeps you humble?"

"The Grace of God."

Sund. 26. About two I went again. When I came in, she was quite senseless; nor could I discern any motion of her throat or breath or even pulse in the temporal arteries. After a while she broke out into singing Hallelujahs, and then stanzas, two or more at a time. They were as the day before, chiefly Praise, but mixt with strong Invitation to sinners. Some who stood by, were deeply affected. In about three quarters of an hour she came to herself. I then said, "We have been returning thanks on your account."
[West:] "I know you have."
[Wesley:] "Who told you so?"
[West:] "God."
[Wesley:] "Have you then been in Heaven again?"
[West:] "I have."
[Wesley:] "What did you see then?"
[West:] "Jesus Christ and God surrounded with angels."
[Wesley:] "Do you see him always?"
[West:] "Yes."
[Wesley:] "Is there never any cloud between God and your soul?"
[West:] "No. Never."

One saying, "What a wonderful child is the sister?"
She said short, "Don't praise me: Praise God. If you would praise God man, he would bless you more. All Being, all Power, all Life, all Light is from God."

[Wesley:] "You said a while ago, it would be a sin to reveal the troubles that are to come to some persons. May you not reveal them to some others?"
[West:] "God will reveal them to whom it pleases him."
[Wesley:] "Are you in pain now?"
[West:] "I was, but Love takes away pain, Death is Swallowed up in Victory."
[Wesley:] "Do you chose Life or Death?"
[West:] "I chose nothing. Let God do as seemeth him good."
[Wesley:] "But do you not ask God to show you whether you shall live or die?"
[West:] "No, I can't. Perhaps it is not good that I should know."

Abundance of people came to see her the following week, who were much divided in their judgment concerning her. Many acknowledge, "It must be the work of God!" Others were sure it was all a cheat. On Saturday March 4 being convinced it was not expedient for her to be gazed at by such multitudes of people, I removed her to the house of a serious woman. And that where she might have a little privacy.

On Sunday morning I asked, "Do you see God still?"
[West:] "Yes, as clear as ever."
[Wesley:] "Do you never find any cloud between Him and you?"
[West:] "No, not for a moment."
[Wesley:] "Do you pray all the time you are awake?"
[West:] "Yes. I pray without ceasing."
[Wesley:] "What do you commonly dream of?"
[West:] "Till very lately, I did not dream at all. But I have lately dreamed several times of going in a chariot; and it went heavily; for it was without wheels. But last night I dreamed, I saw a great chariot, that had wheels. And I was taken up into it. And God was there."

In the afternoon she was removed to the Foundery. In the evening I come in while Mr. Fletcher was talking to her. The sum of his questions, and her answers (in here own words) were as follows.
"Two Remarkable Stories"

[Fletcher:] "Whom did you see, when you was in heaven?"
[West:] "God, and his angels, and glorified saints."
[Fletcher:] "Did you know any of them?"
[West:] "Yes, several: in particular I knew Moses and Elias."
[Fletcher:] "How did you know them?"
[West:] "God shewed me. But I can’t tell you how."
[Fletcher:] "Did they take notice of you?"
[West:] "No: they did not mind that Creature: they were wholly taken up with the Creator."
[Fletcher:] "How were they employed? What were they doing?"
[West:] "They were singing praise to God."
[Fletcher:] "Did they sing low or loud?"
[West:] "They sang louder than ever I heard anything in my life."
[Fletcher:] "Had they any instruments of music?"
[West:] "They had trumpets. But not like our trumpets in the world."
[Fletcher:] "Were they glorious?"
[West:] "Yes, they were like flaming fire: there were a deal brighter than the sun: And they could see thru another."
[Fletcher:] "Did any of them carry themselves down upon the ground before God?"
[West:] "Yes, the four and twenty elders."
[Fletcher:] "Were there many of the saints and angels?"
[West:] "O yes. But they were all like one Family. All of us that were there were at home."
[Fletcher:] "Was you willing to stay there?"
[West:] "I should have been very unwilling to come back, but that it was God’s will."
[Fletcher:] "Do you think you shall sin any more?"
[West:] "I believe not: I believe God will keep me."
[Fletcher:] "Have you one particular guardian angel?"
[West:] "Yes: I saw him by my bedside, when I was at home."
[Fletcher:] "Do you ever see the Devil?"
[West:] "Yes, I saw him last night, as I lay in bed. But I didn’t care. I did not fear him. I knew he could not hurt me."
[Fletcher:] "Do you find any temptations?"
[West:] "Yes: he tempted me this afternoon, not to pray, and not to sing. But I did not give way. And I believe, I shall find that temptation no more."
[Fletcher:] "Are you as happy when you are singing our hymns as when you sing in your trance?"
[West:] "No: while I sing these hymns, I am upon Earth; but while I sing those, I am in Heaven."