EMPIRICAL MEDICINE IN THE 18TH CENTURY:
THE REV. JOHN WESLEY’S SEARCH FOR
REMEDIES THAT WORK

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The Rev. John Wesley, M.A. (1703-1791) is commonly remembered as
the principal founder of Methodism. Largely forgotten is the fact that he
considered medical advice to be part of his pastoral responsibility. He read
widely among the medical works available to him from the 17th and 18th cen­
turies, and selectively followed contemporary trends in the field. He did not
do surgery and passed on complicated cases to physicians. His first medical
publication is titled, A Collection of Receits for the Use of the Poor, appear­
ing in three editions, in the years 1745-1746. In 1747 this Collection
was enlarged with a new format, under the title, Primitive Physick, Or, An Easy
and Natural Method of Curing Most Diseases. Wesley continually revised
this latter work, with the 23rd edition appearing in 1791. These editions con­
tain what Wesley thought to be the best available remedies, gathered from a
variety of sources, many of which he himself tried. This paper is mainly
about the contents of the latter of these two works. ¹

I

In medical matters Wesley considered himself an empiric. Empirical,
the adjectival form of the word empiric, is a modern continuation of the
Greek word empeirikos meaning skilled, and in the feminine form, emperia,

¹ Wesley’s medical interest, however, is not limited to a mere collecting of remedies. The
decades from the 1730s to 1750s are also the heyday of experimentation with the newly dis­
covered phenomena of electricity, especially its effects on human beings. By the 1750s this
effect is thought by some, usually non-faculty practitioners, to provide a possible panacea for
many medical disorders. Wesley is part of this latter movement, making electrical machine
treatments for the needy publicly available in London, with the results of the best information
available on the subject appearing in The Desideratum, 1760. He also publishes tracts in
response to contemporary controversies about the medical effects of tea drinking, A Letter to a
Friend, Concerning Tea, 1748; Onanism, Thoughts On The Sin of Onan: Chiefly Extracted from
a late Writer, 1767; gout, “An Extract from Dr. Cadogan’s Dissertation On The Gout, And All
Chronic Diseases,” 1774; and nervous disorders, ——“Thoughts on Nervous Disorders;
Particularly That Which is Usually Term’d Lowness of Spirits, 1784. His emphasis is on “non­
natural,” or preventative methods that encourage fresh air, exercise, diet, and early rising.
Further, his philosophy with respect to remedies is based on the principle that simple “receipts”
heal as well as “compound medicines”; that local botanical substances are cheaper and as effective
as exotic foreign imports; and, when possible, he identifies substances by their English ver­
nacular names instead of the traditional medical Latin, a habit that brings him into conflict with
some physicians and apothecaries.
meaning trial or experiment. Among the ancient physicians the Empirici based their practice of medicine on experience, as opposed to the Dogmatici and Methodici whose practice was dominated by philosophical hypotheses and doctrines. Remnants of this ancient controversy were still alive in an 18th-century context. Some medical practitioners viewed empirics with disdain, while others wore the label with pride. Wesley is among the latter.

Wesley’s reasons for declaring himself an empiric are revealed in the social history of medicine he composed for the 1747 Preface to Primitive Physick.

9. As Theories increased, Simple Medicines were more and more disregarded and disused; till in a Course of Years, the greater Part of them were forgotten, at least in the Politer Nations. In the room of these, abundance of New Ones were introduced, by reasoning, speculative Men; and those more and more difficult to be applied, as being more remote from Common Observation. Hence Rules for the Application of these, and Medical Books were immensely multiplied; till at length Physick became an abstruse Science, quite out of the reach of Ordinary Men.

10. Physicians now began to be had in Admiration, as Persons who were something more than Human. And Profit attended their Employ as well as Honour; so that they had now Two Weighty Reasons, for keeping the bulk of Mankind at a distance, that they might pry into the Mysteries of the Profession. To this end they increased those Difficulties by Design, which begun in a manner by Accident. They fill’d their Writings with abundance of Technical Terms, utterly unintelligible to plain Men. They affected to deliver their Rules, and to reason upon them, in an abstruse, and philosophical manner. They represented the Critical Knowledge of Anatomy, Natural Philosophy (and whatnot? Some of them insisting on that of Astronomy and Astrology too) as necessary previous to the understanding the Art of Healing. Those who understood only How to restore the Sick to Health, they branded with the ignominious Name of Empiricks. They introduced into Practice, abundance of Compound Medicines, consisting of so many Ingredients, that it was scarce possible for common People to know, which it was that wrought a Cure: Abundance of Exoticks, neither of Nature nor Names of which their own Countrymen understood: Of Chymicals, such as they neither had Skill, nor Fortune, nor Time to prepare; yea, and of Dangerous ones such as they cou’d not use, without hazarding life, but by the Advice of a Physician. And thus both their Honour and Gain were secured: A vast Majority of Mankind, being utterly cut off from helping either themselves or their Neighbours, or once daring to attempt it.

Wesley’s empirical medicine, then, was motivated by his wish to serve the “vast Majority of Mankind” that had been cut off from healing by those practitioners focusing on “Honour and Gain.” If we take into consideration the fact that the three principal medical schools of United Kingdom in the 18th century, Oxford, Cambridge, and Edinburgh, all together, were graduating slightly more than two dozen physicians a year, plus a few more arriving from Leiden and other Continental medical schools, to service a growing population of five to nine million people,2 the scarcity of physicians can

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2 A. Wesley Hill, John Wesley Among the Physicians, 2-3.
be appreciated. If the bulk of this expanding population is poor, who is going
to address the medical needs of those people who cannot afford the attend­
dance of a university trained doctor? As one critic of *Primitive Physick*, then
in its 16th edition, put it, "...it is probable near twenty thousand have been
sold and dispersed among people of inferior rank."3

In Wesley’s mind, "He is the best physician...not who talks best, or who
writes best, but who performs the most cures."4 And the art of healing began
long before the arrival of contemporary medical schools. It reaches back
into primitive times, thus the title—*Primitive Physick*. Clearly, he was ide­
alizing the methodological simplicity of the pre-modern age.

> 7. Thus far Physick was wholly founded on Experiment. The *European*, as well as
the *American*, said to his Neighbour, Are you sick? Drink the Juice of this Herb,
your Sickness will be at an end. Are you in a burning Heat? Lap into that River,
and then sweat till you are well. Has the Snake bitten you? Chew and apply that
Root, and the Poison will not hurt you. Thus ancient Men, having a little
Experience, join’d with Common Sense, and Common Humanity, cured both them­
selves and their Neighbours, of most of the Distempers to which every Nation was
subject.5

But this admiration for the empirical simplicity of the past is not to say
that Wesley dismissed modern medicine. On the contrary, he depended upon
selected modern medical heroes. In his 1747 Preface he listed them: “the
great and good Dr. [Thomas] Sydenham [1624-1689]" and “his Pupil Dr.
[Thomas] Dover [1660-1742],6 who has pointed out Simple Medicines for
many Diseases”; Dr. [Hermann] Boerha[ave] [1668-1738] for his warning
“against mixing things without evident necessity”;7 and Dr. [George]
Cheyne [1673-1742]. Of these Dr. Cheyne, whom Wesley knew personally,
received the greatest attention, by way of concluding his Preface with a
three-page extraction from Cheyne’s *Rules of Health and Long Life* [1724].8

II

Wesley’s first medical tract, *A Collection of Receits*, is a pamphlet of 17
pages that addressed 92-93 disorders with 227-237 remedies. This modest
pamphlet was expanded into *Primitive Physick*, a small book of 119 pages.
Of the 23 editions, only 17 are extant.9 The extant editions viewed collec-

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3 Mr. *Antidote*, author of letter in *The Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* (December 25,1775).
4 May 9, 1767, *JWJD*, vol 22, 81.
5 1747 Preface.
8 *Ibid.*, #16, I-VI.
9 There are actually 24 edns, including a non-numbered version appearing in the first edn of his
*Works*, vol 25, pp 3-149. Of the numbered edns, 2-3, 6-7, 11, 18-19, are missing. Collations,
therefore, are taken from the 17 extant edns, including the *Works* version that contains a few
items that do not appear in the other edns, an indication of Wesley’s personal attention to the
text.
tively, contain one preface and three postscripts, a collection of remedies for a variety of disorders, plus a section on the medicinal benefits of cold bathing, water drinking, and electricity. The 17 extant editions together contain 333 disorders with 1,456 remedies (give or take a few that can be judged as asides). The 1st edition of 1747 contains 243 disorders and 725 remedies, while the 23rd edition of 1791 contains 288 disorders and 824 remedies. So what happened to the other 45 disorders and 632 remedies that disappear over the course of the 23 editions? The answer is that Wesley was actively involved in updating his book, continually revising the symptom based list of disorders, omitting those that were out of date, and adding new ones when necessary. Likewise he was continually on the lookout for simple, inexpensive remedies, and deleting those that are found to be ineffectual.

Wesley assumed that the human body varies in strength and susceptibility to disease. He addressed this notion of variability in the human constitution by offering multiple remedies for some disorders. But the number of remedies he suggested for any particular disorder varies widely. Of the 333 disorders, 114 offer only one remedy, and 58 offer two. In other words, slightly more than 50% of disorders are limited to one or two remedies, while a few disorders are favored with a much greater selection, up to 20 and 30 items each.  

What are Wesley’s sources for these remedies? Space forbids supplying the precise details of these receipts. Suffice to say that locating these remedies in the works of un-cited authors and compilers is made difficult by Wesley’s habit of abridging or re-writing whomever he pleases, often obliging me to settle for similar if not exact descriptions.

Wesley’s entire list of cited sources only amounts to 22 names without bibliographical citations. And one of these names, Dr. Tissot, is associated with, rather than derivative of, 19 receipts, in the form of a recommendation for further reading in Wesley’s own edition of Tissot’s Advice on Health, which he published in 1769 and is often bound together with Primitive Physick. Minus Tissot, these acknowledged sources only amount to 41 of the 1,456 remedies, of which four do not survive to the 23rd edition. All but six, or nearly 85%, of these items are 18th century in origin. And two of the six pre-18th-century items do not make it into the 23rd edition, namely the two contributed by Galen, or Wesley’s oldest source.

10 Under “Consumption”, for example, a disorder from which Wesley personally suffered in 1753, 30 remedies are listed; under “Dropsy” there are 30; “Rheumatism” and “Scurvy” show 20 items each. Moreover, “Agues” were listed in 4 forms with 51 remedies; “Cholicks” in 10 forms with 46; “Teeth” in 6 forms with 41; “Fevres” in 13 forms with 39; “Coughs” in 8 forms with 36; “Headaches” in 6 forms with 34; “Stone” in 7 forms with; “Cancer” in 3 forms with 30. It is probably safe to assume that the disorders listing multiple remedies mirror what Wesley perceives to be the most common complaints among the Methodist people of his time. But for the complaints medical historians generally associate with the “better classes,” the number of remedies offered are comparatively modest: “Gout in the Limbs”—9; “Nervous Disorders”—3; “Hypochondriac and Hysterical Disorders”—2; “Lues Venerea”—1.
In addition to the 41 receipts acknowledged above, I have located another 382 from sources he did not name. All together they only account for 423 of the 1,456 extant remedies. And of the 382 items, 264 come from 18th-century sources, or 70%, while 116 belong to 17th-century sources, and one item to Galen. It would appear, then, that Wesley’s idea of “primitive physick,” although sentimentally belonging to the simpler societies of pre-modern times, in practice only goes back to the 17th century.

III

As it is not possible to prove the “primitive” antiquity of the remedies found in Primitive Physick, Wesley applied another method of highlighting the traditional effectiveness of certain receipts. In the 1747 Preface #15, Wesley stated, “I have subjoin’d the Letter I to those Medicines, which are said to be Infallible.” The implication of this statement is that “Infallible” is an opinion borrowed from other people. Primitive Physick contains 40 receipts that bear this “I” mark at one time or another in their editorial history. Although the designation is applied to less than 1% of the items, if the reader of any edition of Primitive Physick encounters one of these, he takes notice. This medicine is guaranteed to work. In short, it is “infallible.”

Of these 40 “infallible...medicines” only eight survive, so stated, to the 23rd edition. In 18 instances the receipts are deleted without explanation, implying that they did not live up to expectations. For the remaining 14 receipts, the “infallible” designation is removed for other reasons: in 5 instances the “I” is changed to the word “tried”; in 3 instances the “I” is replaced with the term “tried,” that is in turn replaced with some other expression of verbal affirmation; in two instances, the “I” is changed directly to this other form of verbal affirmation without passing through the “tried” stage; and in one instance the “I” is dropped completely without deleting the receipt.

Wesley’s attachment of the word “tried” to a receipt suggests that he has some empirical experience with it. In other words, he has either “tried” it on himself or others in the course of his practice. This designation begins in the 8th edition of 1759 and is eventually applied to 158 items. Of these 158 receipts, 143 survive the 23rd edition, with the word “tried” deleted in 13 of these items, of which in 10 instances the word “tried” is replaced by some other expression of verbal affirmation. In addition to these 158 receipts, Wesley’s other writings, especially his Journals, connect his personal practice to another 15 receipts, all of which appear in the 23rd edition. As a way of further refining his opinion of certain remedies, Wesley attaches a *** mark to 52 items indicating that these are his personal preferences, 42 of which also bear the “tried” mark. But by the 23rd edition the preferred *** mark is reduced from 52 to 27, leaving most of the receipts standing with a “tried” status.

If 90% of the remedies that Wesley has “tried” make it to the 23rd edi-
ion, compared to 45% of those that he received on good authority as being "infallible," Wesley was clearly not timid about deleting items once he determined they are not in fact "infallible." Likewise, this skepticism extends to the remedies he himself "tried," allowing him to change his mind about their effectiveness.

IV

So far, Wesley appears to be open minded about the simple and cheap remedies he has included, "tried," or deleted. Yet there are certain substances, even if they are simple and cheap, that he is closed minded about from the beginning. He spoke about them in his 1755 Postscript, "It is because they are not safe, but extremely dangerous, that I have omitted (together with Antimony) the four Herculean medicines, Opium, the Bark, Steel, and most of the preparations of Quicksilver."

Well, "closed minded" is fitting to his 1755 Postscript, but not categorically true to his practice. Wesley prescribed derivatives of "Antimony" for two complaints.\(^{11}\) He himself took "a grain and a half of opium" for a severe cramp he experienced on August 5, 1783.\(^{12}\) He prescribed "Laudanum," a derivative of "Opium," in seven instances.\(^{13}\) He recommended some form of "Peruvian Bark" for six disorders.\(^{14}\) He advised derivatives of "Steel" in two situations.\(^{15}\) He prescribed "Quicksilver" 11 times,\(^{16}\) and Quicksilver in a Mercury form twice.\(^{17}\) Last, but not least, Wesley provided two remedies "To one Poisoned," by "Opium" or "Mercury Sublimate" [15-23; 12-23].

Wesley's moral principle in prescribing remedies was the Biblical adage, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, the same do unto them."\(^{18}\) But for diseases that are beyond his ability to help, or where life is in immediate danger, he advised "every man without delay to apply to a Physician that fears God." The underlying assumption about the "God-fearing" physician is that he will treat his patients in the manner of this biblical ethic, as he himself would like to be treated, without abuse or neglect.

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\(^{11}\) For "Menses Obstructed" [1-23] and "Whites" [1-16].
\(^{12}\) *JWJD*, vol 23, pp 438-40.
\(^{13}\) For 2 "Ague" remedies [14-23; 20-23], and 1 each for "Cholera Morbus" [12-17], "Hysteric Cholick" [5-23], "Falling Sickness" [8-23], "Bloody Flux" [12-23], and "Quinsy of the Breast" [15-23].
\(^{14}\) For "Ague" [20-23], "Cough" [8-23], "Falling down of the Womb" [20-23], "Quinsy" [2-23], "Scorbutic Gums" [20-23], and "To prevent [Profuse Sweating] [12-23].
\(^{15}\) For "Consumption" [14-16], "Green Sickness" [9-23], and "Whites" [2].
\(^{16}\) For "Asthma" [1-23], "A Dry, or Convulsive Asthma" [20-23], "Nervous Cholick" [1-23], "Green Sickness" [2-23], "Hypochondriac and Hysterical Disorders" [1-23], "Iliac Passion" [1-23], "Lues Venerea" [5-23], "Twisting of the Guts" [5-23], "Whites" [5-23], 2 for "Worms" [14-23; 5-16].
\(^{17}\) For "Fistula" [1-23] and "A Malignant Ulcer" [1-2].
\(^{18}\) Matthew 7.12. "...whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the Law and the Prophets." [King James Version 1611.] The first portion of Wesley's quotation is taken directly from the KJV.
Wesley was also cognizant of the fact that even a "God fearing" physician's prescription passed through the hands of an apothecary, who may or may not put the interest of the patient ahead of his own. He described this kind of apothecary in his 1760 Postscript:

Perhaps he has not the drug prescribed by the Physician, and so puts in its place 'what will do as well'. Perhaps he has it; but it is stale and perished: yet 'you would not have him throw it away. Indeed he cannot afford it.' Perhaps he cannot afford to make up the medicine as the Dispensatory directs, and sell it at a common price. So he puts in cheaper ingredients: and you take neither you nor the Physician knows what! How many inconveniences must this occasion! How many valuable lives are lost! Whereas all these inconveniences may be prevented, by a little care and common sense, in the use of those plain, simple Remedies, which are here collected.

Wesley's medical criticism, however, was not limited to compound prescriptions. On some occasions he was in disagreement with basic medical ideas. For example, on the subject of pleurisy, he questioned:

O why will physicians play with the lives of their patients! Do not others (as well as old Dr. Cockburn) know that 'no end is answered by bleeding in a pleurisy which may not be much better answered without it'? ... Calling on a friend, I found him just seized with all the symptoms of pleurisy. I advised him to apply a brickstone plaster, and in a few hours he was perfectly well. Now, to what end should this patient have taken a heap of drugs and lost twenty ounces of blood? 'To what end? Why, to oblige the doctor and apothecary.' Enough! Reason good!

The "Itch" was thought by some doctors to be an internal disorder that is cured by the ingestion of internal medicines. Wesley disagreed. A note attached to his remedies for the "Itch" says, "This distemper is nothing but a Kind of very small Lice which burrow under the Skin. Therefore inward Medicines are absolutely needless. Is it possible that any Physician should be ignorant of this?"
Yet Wesley himself was not free from errors in medical judgement. In 1753, while being treated for an "Ague" that turned into a "Consumption," an illness that his brother Charles feared would be fatal, he took a "decoction of the Bark." It made him sicker. With this vivid memory in mind, he berated Dr. Tissot's (1728-1797) claim that "Peruvian bark" is:

..."the only infallible remedy either for mortifications or intermitting fevers." He really seems transported with the theme, as do very many physicians beside. I object to this, 1. It is not 'infallible remedy,' either for one or the other... I myself took pounds of it when I was young, for a common Tertian ague. Yet it did not, would not effect a cure. And I should have probably died of it, had I not been cured unawares, by drinking largely of lemonade. ... But this I affirm in the face of the sun; it frequently turns an intermitting fever into a consumption. ... I could multiply the instances; but I need go no farther than my own case. ... What but a ball could have made a quicker dispatch than this *infallible* medicine?

While medical history does not side with Dr. Tissot on the matter of treating mortifications with the "Bark," quinine, or the alkaloid derived from the cinchona bark, continues to be the specific for treating "Intermitting Fever" or malaria.

V

In the 1747 Preface, Wesley painted a bleak picture of a medical world that is unintelligible to most patients and neglectful of the poor. The 1755 Postscript attacks the "Herculean" drugs doctors prescribe. The 1760 Postscript attacks dishonest apothecaries. However, in the 1780 Postscript the tone is different:

Since the last Correction of this Tract, near twenty years ago, abundance of objections have been made to several parts of it. These I have considered with all the attention which I was master of: and in consequence hereof, have now omitted several Articles, and altered many others. I have likewise added a considerable number of Medicines, several of which have been but lately discovered: and several (although they had been long in use) I had never tried before.

What is different is that Wesley was now on the defensive. At 77 years of age, he was a famous religious figure with a large following, and, consequently, the object of public scrutiny. With respect to *Primitive Physick*, he was now double-checking his remedies, deleting a large number of them,
and adding others, some from contemporary discoveries. The primitive healer was now attempting to be an up-to-date medical man. What accounts for this change in attitude?

What goes around has indeed come around. Critics from within the medical profession had finally taken notice of him and were challenging certain remedies found in his book. The assault began on Christmas Day 1775 with a front-page letter to the Rev. John Wesley in the *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* by an author using the pseudonym Mr. *Antidote*, who had been reading the 16th edition of *Primitive Physick*. He was responding to Wesley’s antidote “To one Poison’d”: “Give one or two Drams of distill’d Verdigrase: It vomits in an instant [2-16].” The letter writer said:

> Every one who has the least acquaintance with the powers of medicine, will, I believe, be equally startled with myself at reading such a prescription. I could scarce believe my eyes for some time, nor can at present by any means account for the ignorance and presumption of a man who deals out as an antidote, one of the most active poison’s in nature, in such an enormous dose, and this in such an undetermined quantity, as if the exact dose were immaterial. ... I leave it to your own judgement, to find out by what method you can recall these firebrands and death, that you have scattered so plentifully through the land; but I hope you will be speedy and not wait for the interposition of the Censors of the College of Physicians, who, as Guardians of the public health, have a right to and I doubt will, if necessary, interfere in a case which calls so loudly for immediate redress.

The issue is that prescription read “drams” instead of “grains,” a dram in the apothecary’s weight at the time being the equivalent of 60 grains. On the following January 1, 1776, Wesley answered Mr. *Antidote*:

> I thank the gentleman who takes notice of this, though he might have done it in a more obliging manner. Could he possibly have been ignorant (had he not been willingly so) that this is a mere blunder of the printer? that I wrote grains, not drachms? However, it is highly proper to advertise the public of this; and I beg every one that has the book would take the trouble of altering that word with his pen.

Printer’s blunder indeed! The blunder appeared in all 16 editions of *Primitive Physick*, without anyone else taking public notice of it. But Wesley’s unapologetic and arrogant response attracted attention and set the ball rolling against him. Later in 1776, following a controversial exchange of correspondence in the press between Wesley and apothecary William Hawes (1736-1808), a full scale attack was launched in the form of Hawes’ publication, *An Examination of the Rev. Mr. John Wesley’s Primitive Physick*. In its preface Hawes defends the medical professions maligned in the preface to *Primitive Physick*, and in its main text he made a critical commentary on 107 of the remedies appearing in the 16th edition.

Among the 107 criticisms, in addition to highlighting the Verdigrase scandal, Hawes found two other “deadly errors.” The first is among
Wesley's remedies for "Apoplexy," namely to "fill the mouth with Salt." To this Hawes warned, "...but the most likely consequence of this would be, killing the patient, by stopping all respiration." The second is among the receipts for "Cholera Morbus," "Or, take six Grains of Laudanum and apply a slit of Onion to the Stomach." With respect to the latter, Hawes said:

As Mr. W. uses the word grains, he must undoubtedly mean solid opium. Now, opium is one of those Herculean medicines, which he so pathetically dissuades his readers the use of, in his preface; and yet he here prescribes a dose of this powerful narcotic, which would, in all probability, cause ninety-nine persons out of a hundred to sleep for ever. In disorders in common, the Faculty seldom administers above one grain, and scarcely ever exceed two grains.

Laudanum was clearly a liquid that cannot be measured in "grains." In the 17th edition, Wesley changed the measurement to "drops."

VI

The 16th edition of Primitive Physick contains 289 disorders and 1,012 receipts. In the wake of the controversy with Hawes, the 17th edition of 1776 was trimmed down to 275 disorders with 828 remedies. Of the 107 items Hawes complained about, 49 were deleted (34 after the 16th edition and 15 more after the 17th); 12 were altered to compensate for the shortcomings pointed out, and two new items were added as supplements; 44 remain unchanged. The controversial "Verdigrease" antidote was changed from two "drams" to two "grains"; the receipt calling for "salt" in the mouth of the "Apoplexy" victim was omitted after the 16th edition; the Laudanum prescription for "Cholera Morbus" is changed from six "grains" to six "drops" in the 17th edition, and thereafter deleted. A critic from the orthodox medical establishment had made his point and Wesley reluctantly listened. No matter how noble his intentions about serving the medical needs of the neglected "inferior ranks," he was still capable of making alarming and embarrassing mistakes.

By 1781 the controversy calmed down. Wesley had not been sued for wrongful death or malpractice. Hawes produced, in 1780, a 2nd edition (actually a 2nd printing) of the "Examination," which like the 1st edition, is based on the 16th edition of Primitive Physick. But Wesley had already addressed Hawes' chief complaints back in 1776 with the appearance of the 17th edition. Consequently Hawes' out of date reprint made him look like a man beating a dead horse. His effort, however, did not go unnoticed. A Doctor of Medicine degree was conferred upon him and he no longer referred to himself as an "apothecary."

Apparently the controversy energized Wesley's interest in the Primitive Physick project, for the new 20th Edition contains 12 new disorders and 144 new remedies. In the next 10 years of the venerable old man's life, he published three more editions, all the while still advising readers from his 1780
Postscript, "...for complicated cases, or where life is in immediate danger, let every one apply without delay, to a Physician that fears God."

Although *Primitive Physick* only amounts to a small fraction of Wesley's published writings, its influence is not limited by its size. He estimated that he traveled 5,000 miles a year on behalf of the Methodist movement, on horseback or in carriages when he was older. Traveling with him was *Primitive Physick* and a bag of medicaments. It is a model imitated by countless "circuit riding" preachers in Great Britain, Ireland, and North America, or wherever Methodist people could be found. To those readers Wesley's medical empiricism was still alive.


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25 *Primitive Physic*, 1960, with an Introduction by A. Wesley Hill.