

## JOHN WESLEY ON HEALTH: A WORD FOR SENSIBLE REGIMEN

by Philip W. Ott

John Wesley was a man of varied interests and abilities whose impact on eighteenth-century England cannot be gainsaid. His life and thought have been the focus of repeated examinations. Recently, several studies have referred to Wesley's involvement and concern in the area of health care. Robert S. Morison, physician and Cornell University emeritus scholar comments:

One of the formative influences on middle-class England was John Wesley and the society he founded. In many ways it provided an effective blend of social and public health practice with a sense of individual responsibility for oneself and others. Among other things, Wesley awakened an interest in sanitation (long absent from the Christian world) with the revival of an ancient Hebrew dictum that cleanliness is next to Godliness. More important, perhaps, were the weekly class meetings for increasing individual social virtues.<sup>1</sup>

Lester King, in a brief discussion of John Wesley and *Primitive Physick*, Wesley's 1747 publication dealing with simple remedies, underscores Wesley's contribution to eighteenth-century England. He cites Wesley as representing the best of the empiric tradition in medicine.<sup>2</sup> Kenneth Vaux, with particular reference to the preface of *Primitive Physick*, analyzes the theological themes which informed Wesley's perspective on disease and health.<sup>3</sup> While *Primitive Physick* represents a concrete expression of Wesley's attention to health care, his letters, sermons, and journal also contain references to this subject. It is my purpose in this paper to explore Wesley's concept of health as revealed in his writings and to examine his conviction that since the fall of Adam sensible regimen has been God's appointed pattern for a life of inward and outward health.

Wesley's concern for health and health care may have been influenced by his own experience as well as by the condition of those to whom he ministered. His *Journal* entries attest to the rigors of his schedule and the resultant demands placed on his less than robust body. Several times during his life Wesley battled with serious illness. A vivid

<sup>1</sup>Robert S. Morison, "Rights and Responsibilities: Redressing the Uneasy Balance," *The Hastings Center Report*, IV (April, 1974), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup>Lester S. King, *The Medical World of the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 39.

<sup>3</sup>Kenneth L. Vaux, *This Mortal Coil* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978), pp. 39-46.

description of his critical condition in Bristol follows:

Between ten and twelve the main shock began. I can give faint account of this, not for want of memory, but of words. I felt in my body nothing but storm and tempest, hail-stones and coals of fire. But I do not remember that I felt any fear (such was the mercy of God!) nor any murmuring. And yet I found but a dull, heavy patience of mind, which I knew was not what it ought to be. The fever came rushing upon me as a lion, ready to break all the bones in pieces. My body grew weaker every moment; but I did not feel my soul put on strength.<sup>4</sup>

Friends in London witnessing a bout he had with consumption feared his death.<sup>5</sup> Wesley himself, "not knowing how it might please God to dispose of me," and desiring "to prevent vile panegyric," wrote his own epitaph on the evening of November 26, 1753.<sup>6</sup>

Wesley's involvement in the needs of the poor and the sick can be traced throughout his ministry. He established a regular visitation program in London along the same lines as that which had been in operation among the Oxford Methodists. He explained the situation to his brother, Charles.

I am setting a regular method of visiting the sick here. Eight or ten have offered themselves for the work, who are likely to have full employment; for more and more are taken ill everyday. Our Lord will thoroughly purge his floor.<sup>7</sup>

Those persons assisting Wesley were expected to visit the sick on a regular basis, "every other day," and then report back. This thoughtfully designed lay ministry enabled Wesley to stay abreast with the needs of the sick. He became convinced that many were receiving inadequate care, "pining away... without remedy." Finally, as a "kind of desperate expedient," Wesley resolved to "prepare and give them physic myself." He explained further:

For six or seven of twenty years, I had made anatomy and physic the diversion of my leisure hours; though I never properly studied them, unless for a few months when I was going to America, where I imagined that I might be of some service to those who had no regular physician among them. I applied to it again. I took into my assistance an Apothecary, and an experienced Surgeon; resolving at the same time, not to go out of my depth, but to leave all difficult and complicated cases to such physicians as the patients should choose.<sup>8</sup>

The lack of professional training dictated caution, but was not a deterrent for Wesley. Indeed, he was under a stronger mandate. His attention to health care was motivated by the principle of "doing good to all men,...

<sup>4</sup>*The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, ed. by Nehemiah Curnock, 8 Vols. (London: The Epworth Press, 1938) II, 514.

<sup>5</sup>*Journal*, IV, 90, footnote #1.

<sup>6</sup>*Journal*, IV, 90.

<sup>7</sup>*Journal*, II, 448.

<sup>8</sup>"A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists," *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, ed. by Thomas Jackson, 14 Vols., 3rd edition (London: Wesleyan-Methodist Book-Room, 1831), VIII, 263.

[according to] the ability that God giveth.”<sup>9</sup> It is of more than passing interest to note that Wesley analogously defended the use of lay preachers by referring to his practice of giving medicine to the poor.

Now, ought I to have let one of these poor wretches perish because I was not a regular physician? to have said, ‘I know what will cure you; but I am not of the College: you must send for Dr. Mead.’? Before Dr. Mead had come in his chariot, the man might have been in his coffin. And when the Dr. was come, where was his fee? What! he cannot live upon nothing! So, instead of an orderly cure, the patient dies, and God requires his blood at my hands.<sup>10</sup>

Wesley’s decision to establish a dispensary met with the approval of the London society. He promised to give the best advice and medicine he could give and encouraged the chronically ill to come. There was an immediate response. Thirty came on the following day, and in three months the number had swelled to three hundred. After six months of caring for the sick, Wesley attempted to evaluate the response. Of the six hundred persons who came over the six-month-span, three hundred came two or three times, and then, no more. Twenty persons “who had constantly attended did not seem to be either better or worse. Above two hundred,” Wesley judged, “were sensibly better, and fifty-one thoroughly cured.” The total cost was approximately thirty pounds.<sup>11</sup> Efforts to assist the sick in Bristol were frustrated by the difficulty in obtaining medicine. Nevertheless, at one point more than two hundred persons were coming to the dispensary for aid.<sup>12</sup>

It is clear, then, that Wesley sought to minister to the needs of the body as well as the soul. Throughout his writings are found repeated references to “health of body and soul.” Or, as Wesley explained in a letter to the young Alexander Knox, the Great Physician purposes “inward and outward health.”<sup>13</sup> Wesley did not suggest that health of body and health of soul are one and the same. However, he did acknowledge that there is a remarkable, but mysterious correlation between the two. In his *Journal* entry for May 11, 1759, he included the following comment:

Reflecting today on the case of a poor woman who had continual pain in her stomach, I could not but remark the inexcusable negligence of most physicians in cases of this nature. They prescribe drug upon drug, without knowing a jot of the matter concerning the root of the disorder. And without knowing this, they cannot

<sup>9</sup>“Letter to the Editor of the London Magazine,” *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.*, ed. by John Telford, 8 Vols. (London: The Epworth Press, 1931), IV, 121. The reference is specifically to the publication of the *Primitive Physick* and *Electricity Made Plain and Useful*. However, these are but concrete expressions of his broader concern for health care.

<sup>10</sup>“Letter to Mr. ‘John Smith,’ ” *Letters*, II, 95.

<sup>11</sup>*Journal*, III, 301.

<sup>12</sup>“Letter to Ebenezer Blackwell,” *Letters*, II, 85, 86.

<sup>13</sup>“Letter to Alexander Knox,” *Letters*, VI, 327.

cure, though they can murder the patient. Whence came the woman's pain (which she would never have told had she never been questioned about it)? From fretting for the death of her son. And what availed medicines while the fretting continued? Why, then, do not all physicians consider how far bodily disorders are caused or influenced by the mind, and in those cases which are utterly out of their sphere, call in the assistance of a minister....<sup>14</sup>

Consistently Wesley underscored the interdependence of soul and body.<sup>15</sup> Analogously speaking, the soul is to the body as the artist is to the instrument. In both cases the reference is to two entirely different substances, but each needs the other. For, as Wesley explained, "an embodied spirit cannot form one thought but by the mediation of its bodily organs." Thinking is not "the act of pure spirit; but the act of a spirit connected with the body, and playing upon a set of material keys." The quality of music is directly related to the "nature and state of its instruments."<sup>16</sup> Consequently, Wesley observed, "if these instruments, by which the soul works, are disordered, the soul itself must be hindered in its operations. Let a musician be ever so skillful, he will make but poor music if his instrument be out of tune."<sup>17</sup>

This imagery provides insight into Wesley's concern for health of body and soul and leads to a consideration of his concept of health. There is an inviolable interdependence between body and soul so "ordained by the original law that during this vital union neither part of the compound should act at all but together with its companion...."<sup>18</sup> Consequently, Wesley observed in his sermon, "Heaviness Through Temptation," that heaviness of the soul "presses down the body, and weakens it more and more." Indeed, "deep and lasting sorrow of the heart may... sometimes weaken a strong constitution, and lay the foundations for bodily disorders as are not easily removed...." Conversely, Wesley continued, "When God appoints over us consumption,... if it is not speedily removed, it will... cause sorrow of the heart." This is a matter of the "soul sympathizing with the body."<sup>19</sup>

True to its literal meaning, Wesley viewed health as wholeness, or

<sup>14</sup>*Journal*, IV, 313.

<sup>15</sup>Wesley worked with a Cartesian dualism. The mind-body issue was considered under the rubric of the union of soul and body. Like others, Wesley was aware of the questions implicit in the Cartesian legacy (Cf. "The Imperfections of Human Knowledge," *Works*, II, 343). It was not that he was indifferent on the question of the soul's union with the body. Rather, for Wesley, the union was a mystery ("On the Trinity," *Works*, VI, 203).

<sup>16</sup>"The Fall of Man," *Works*, VI, 219.

<sup>17</sup>"The Heavenly Treasure in Earthen Vessels," *Works*, VII, 347.

<sup>18</sup>Unpublished sermon, "The Image of God," p. 3. This sermon will be included in The Oxford Edition of Wesley's Works. Wesley's *Sermons* will be Vols. 1-4, edited by Albert C. Outler.

<sup>19</sup>"Heaviness Through Temptation," *Works*, VI, 94-96.

the "well-working of the whole."<sup>20</sup> A brief reference to Wesley's unpublished sermon, "The Image of God," will serve to highlight his view of health as wholeness. In the sermon Wesley conjectured that the original state of man was one of life in a body "prepared for immortality [having] no seeds of corruption within itself, and adopt[ing] none from without. All its original particles were incorruptible,... none needed any reparation." Consequently, "the juices contained must have been still of the same existence, and the vessels containing them have kept the same spring, and remained ever clear and open."<sup>21</sup> The point seems to be that initially the body as a whole functioned without resistance. It was a free, well-working system. As for what followed, Wesley surmised:

...the fruit of that tree alone of whose deadly nature [Adam] was forewarned seems to have contained a juice, the particles of which were apt to cleave to whatever they touched. Some of these, being received into the human body, might adhere to the inner coats of the finer vessels; to which again other particles that before floated loose in the blood, continually joining, would naturally lay a foundation for numberless disorders in all parts of the machine. For death in particular; since, more foreign matter cleaving to the former every day, the solid parts of the body would every day lose something of their spring, and so be less able to contribute their necessary assistance to the circulation of the fluids. The smaller channels would gradually fill up, especially those that lie near the extremities, where the current, by reason of its distance from the fountain, was always more slow and languid. The whole tide, as the force that threw it forward abated, must also have abated its swiftness in proportion, till at length that force utterly failing, it ceased to move, and rested in death.<sup>22</sup>

That Wesley understood health in terms of a well-working system is underscored by his reference in this same sermon to an antidote that was also present in the garden. This antidote was the fruit from the Tree of Life. According to Wesley, this fruit possessed a "thin, abstersive nature," which would have countered the strictures occasioned by eating the forbidden fruit. The body would have continued to function effortlessly, free of disorders, "notwithstanding he had eaten death."<sup>23</sup>

Health as wholeness is the underlying theme in Wesley's *Primitive Physick*. The preface of the book contains a brief theological statement outlining Wesley's view of health and disease. In the original creation man was without sin and pain. Heaven and earth "were mild, benign and friendly to human nature. The entire creation was at peace with man, so long as man was at peace with his Creator." But with man's disobedience the scene was changed. "The seeds of wickedness and pain, of sickness and death, are now lodged in our inmost substance; whence a thousand

<sup>20</sup>Cited by Leon Kass, "Regarding the End of Medicine and the Pursuit of Health," *The Public Interest*, XL (Summer, 1975), pp. 27 ff.

<sup>21</sup>"The Image of God," p. 3.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 3, 4.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 4.

disorders continually spring, even without the aid of external violence."<sup>24</sup> Again, Wesley's basic perspective is clear. Though plagued with disorders in the present, initially human nature was to have operated indefinitely. To pursue health, then, is to recover as nearly as possible the wholeness that characterized the original order. For Wesley, as stated in *Primitive Physick*, the life of sensible regimen has replaced the fruit of the Tree of Life as the appointed antidote for disorders. "The power of exercise, both to preserve and restore health, is greater than can well be conceived; especially in those who add temperance thereto...."<sup>25</sup>

Wesley understood health or wholeness to be at one and the same time a gift and a discipline. On the one hand, health is what was intended for creation, and in that sense, is a gift. God, "who has all power in heaven and earth,... gives life and breath and all things, and... cannot withhold from them that seek him any manner of thing that is good."<sup>26</sup> Or, as Wesley explained in a letter to a Mrs. Hall, "It is not wisdom to impute either our health or any other blessing we enjoy merely to natural causes. It is better to ascribe all to Him whose Kingdom ruleth over all."<sup>27</sup>

Along side the normal intended state of health, there is the discipline or responsible life style which is conducive to good health. The emphasis is explicit in the sermon, "The Good Steward." One of the gifts which we have received from God is a healthy body. "We are," Wesley exhorted, "not at liberty to use what he has lodged in our hands as we please, but as he pleases...."<sup>28</sup>

Wesley then proceeded to stress one's responsibility to care for that "exquisitely wrought machine," the body. The same theme is the focus of the sermon entitled, "The More Excellent Way." Taking some liberty in interpretation, Wesley used the Pauline phrase to underscore his conviction that there is a higher and lower order of Christian living. However, the contrast in this sermon is between the life of sensible discipline and the less-structured life. It is not that the individual who follows the latter is on a "highroad to hell," but he "will not have so high a place in heaven...."<sup>29</sup> Wesley concluded the preface to *Primitive Physick* with this admonition: "Observe all the time the greatest exactness in your regimen or manner of living. To persevere with steadiness in

<sup>24</sup>John Wesley, *Primitive Remedies*, ed. by Howard B. Weeks (Santa Barbara: Woodbridge Press, 1973), pp. 9, 10. *Primitive Remedies* was originally published as *Primitive Physick* in 1747.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>26</sup>Preface to "Advice With Respect to Health," *Works*, XIV, 258, 259.

<sup>27</sup>"Letter to Mrs. Hall," *Letters*, VI, 223.

<sup>28</sup>"The Good Steward," *Works*, VI, 138. It is significant to note that Wesley desired that this sermon be placed in every Methodist home. See *Works*, VIII, 328.

<sup>29</sup>"The More Excellent Way," *Works*, VII, 29.

this course, is often more than half the cure. Above all, add to the rest,... that old-fashioned medicine — prayer....”<sup>30</sup>

It is a well-established fact that regimen was begun at a very early age for John Wesley. Susanna Wesley outlined the pattern for the daily routine at the Epworth rectory.

The children were always put in a regular method of living, in such things as they were capable of, from their birth....

As soon as they were grown pretty strong, they were confined to three meals a day.... Drinking or eating between meals was never allowed, unless in case of sickness, which seldom happened. Nor were they suffered to go into the kitchen to ask any thing of the servants, when they were at meat; if it was known they did, they were certainly beat, and the servants severely reprimanded.<sup>31</sup>

A rigorous pattern of living characterized Wesley's years at Oxford. In “The Character of a Methodist,” Wesley explained that the title “Methodist” was “not a name which they [took] to themselves,” but was given to the small group of three or four men by a student at Christ Church. Wesley was not certain as to whether the name was “an allusion to the ancient sect of Physicians so called, from their teaching, that almost all diseases might be cured by a specific method of diet and exercise,” or because they followed “a more regular method of study and behaviour....”<sup>32</sup> In either case, the title was believed to be related to their disciplined life style.

John Wesley expected like discipline from his lay preachers. Men who were sent by Wesley to minister to the growing number of Methodists were closely examined. Questions were arranged under the categories of instituted and prudential means of grace. Whereas the former focused on issues pertaining to the inner life, the latter centered on life styles, matters of “meat and drink.”<sup>33</sup> Wesley admonished all Methodists to follow common sense in their daily practice. Prudence must be used in the application of the standing rule of Scriptures. “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”<sup>34</sup> In a letter addressed to his colleague, Richard Steele of Armagh, Wesley enumerated “several (comparatively) little things which you should earnestly inculcate from time to time....” Of course, one is to be diligent, avoiding “sloth and indolence,... else you will never be more than half a Christian.” He should model his life after the Quakers. “Be cleanly... both in person, clothes, house and all about you.” To this, Wesley added, “Do not stink above ground.” Mr. Steele is urged to keep himself and his family free of lice and itch. Wesley concluded the list with prohibitions concerning

<sup>30</sup>*Primitive Remedies*, p. 18.

<sup>31</sup>“Letter From Susannah Wesley to John Wesley,” *Works*, I, 387, 388.

<sup>32</sup>“The Character of a Methodist,” *Works*, VIII, 323.

<sup>33</sup>“Minutes of Several Conversations,” *Works*, VIII, 323.

<sup>34</sup>I Cor. 10:31; “A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists,” *Works*, VIII, 255.

tobacco, snuff and drams.<sup>35</sup>

Equivalent standards were established for members of the societies. The society was described as a "company of men having the form and seeking the power of godliness, united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation."<sup>36</sup> The condition for membership was a desire "to flee from the wrath to come...."<sup>37</sup> However, such a concern, according to Wesley's thinking, would manifest itself in outward holiness. Diligent effort should be made to avoid "softness and needless indulgence."<sup>38</sup> Every individual was admonished to pursue decency and cleanliness for, as Wesley observed, "Cleanliness is next to Godliness."<sup>39</sup>

Clearly Wesley viewed disciplined living as a norm or standard for the Christian life. It is equally true that he saw a direct correlation between sensible regimen and health. Wesley's varied exhortations and instructions regarding a responsible life style can be collected under particular areas of concern. Sensible regimen included rising early, eating properly, and getting plenty of exercise. In addition, Wesley urged his readers to rely on simple remedies. Wesley addressed the issue of sleep with the zeal of an evangel. Expressing the belief that too much sleep may be the cause of many disorders, particularly what was termed nervous disorders, Wesley exhorted, "You have no other possible means of recovery, in any tolerable degree, your health both of body and mind. Do not murder yourself outright. Do not run on in the path that leads to the gates of death!"<sup>40</sup> As for the relationship between too much sleep and disorders, Wesley could only theorize. Nevertheless, it seemed to him that "while we sleep all the springs of nature are unbent." If we sleep longer than is necessary, "they [i.e., the springs] are relaxed more than is sufficient, and of course, grow weaker and weaker."<sup>41</sup> Each person must determine for himself what would be the proper amount of sleep. Wesley

<sup>35</sup>"Letter to Richard Steele," *Letters*, V, 132-34.

<sup>36</sup>"Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies," *Works*, VIII, 269.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 270.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup>"Minutes of Several Conversations," *Works*, VIII, 320. See also sermons, "On Dress," *Works* VII, 16, and "On Visiting the Sick," *Works*, VII, 123. Dr. Outler has traced this reference to "cleanliness" back to Rabbi Phinehas ben Yair (cf. "The Song of Songs" in the Midrash Rabbah, I.1.9), who is said to have summarized "the doctrine of religion as carefulness,... abstemiousness next to cleanliness, and cleanliness into godliness." This information will appear in The Oxford Edition of Wesley's Works, as a footnote to Wesley's sermon, "On Dress."

<sup>40</sup>"On Redeeming the Time," *Works*, VII, 75. See also Charles Wallace, "Simple and Recollected: John Wesley's Life Style," *Religion in Life*, XLVI (July, 1977), pp. 198-212.

<sup>41</sup>"Thoughts on Nervous Disorders," *Works*, XI, 518.

judged, "from an observance of sixty years," that most men of good health required on the average six to seven hours of sleep. Women, he felt, needed a little more, seven to eight hours.<sup>42</sup> Wesley stressed that regimen, in all areas of living, must be sensible. While one should be diligent, he should never sacrifice his health.<sup>43</sup>

In 1742, Wesley read Dr. Cheyne's book, *Natural Method of Curing Disease*. It was, according to Wesley, a "most ingenious book." But, he mused, "What epicure will regard it? for 'the man talks about good eating and drinking'!"<sup>44</sup> As for John Wesley, careful attention to diet was the rule. At various periods in his life Wesley followed a "vegetable" diet, observing that he "found it of use both to body and soul...." However, a "violent flux" in Ireland convinced him to return to "animal food."<sup>45</sup> Even so, he avoided meat at the evening meal and encouraged others to do the same.<sup>46</sup>

Wesley limited his consumption of tea, and at one point, stopped drinking tea altogether. While a student at Oxford he noticed a "paralytic disorder," a shaking of his hand, which puzzled him. In time he observed that it seemed to be most severe after breakfast, but would disappear if he abstained from drinking tea for a period of two or three days. Others whom he questioned acknowledged the same phenomenon. Wesley decided to cut back on tea and only drink it with cream and sugar. For the next twenty-six years he continued to drink tea, but was "more or less subject to the same disorder." Finally he determined to quit drinking tea altogether. "My paralytic complaints are all gone," he reported, "my hand is as steady as it was at fifteen...."<sup>47</sup> Wesley resumed drinking tea as recommended by Dr. Fothergill.<sup>48</sup>

Wesley's practice, which he encouraged as a pattern for all, was temperance in food and drink. Following the orders of Dr. Cheyne, Wesley himself took a small quantity of wine each day. "And I am persuaded," he observed, "far from doing me any hurt, it contributed much to the recovery of my strength."<sup>49</sup> His primary concern was the abuse of eating and drinking. In agreement with such authorities as Dr. Cadogan of London and Dr. Cheyne, Wesley stressed that many

<sup>42</sup>"The More Excellent Way," *Works*, VII, 29; see also, "On Redeeming the Times," *Works*, VII, 69.

<sup>43</sup>"The Use of Money," *Works*, VI, 127.

<sup>44</sup>*Journal*, II, 545.

<sup>45</sup>*Journal*, III, 274.

<sup>46</sup>Preface to "An Extract From Dr. Cadogan's Dissertation on the Gout and All Chronic Diseases," *Works*, XIV, 267.

<sup>47</sup>"Letter to a Friend Concerning Tea," *Works*, XI, 505-507.

<sup>48</sup>*Works*, X, 393.

<sup>49</sup>Preface to "An Extract From Dr. Cadogan's Dissertation on the Gout and All Chronic Diseases," *Works*, XIV, 266.

disorders can be traced to intemperance. It is intemperate for anyone "to use any kind of food, or such a quantity of any, either meat or drink, as in any degrees impairs his health...."<sup>50</sup> Wesley echoed Dr. Cheyne's belief that "it is not generally the quality, but the quantity, of what we eat which hurts."<sup>51</sup> As a rule of thumb, one should resist the temptation "to eat more than nature requires."<sup>52</sup> Wesley returned to this subject in his sermon, "The More Excellent Way." Good men eat with gratitude, but not to excess; at least, he observed, "not so far as to make themselves sick with meat, or to intoxicate themselves with drink."<sup>53</sup>

Wesley viewed exercise as an equally significant ingredient in the realization of health. His *Journal* entries frequently included reflections on his own health status. While demands of his schedule did take their toll, the fact remains that Wesley led a very active life for more than eighty-five years. Musing on his eighty-fifth birthday, he saw reason to praise God "for a thousand spiritual blessings,... [and] bodily blessings also." He admitted that he was "not so agile as I was in times past. I do not run or walk so fast as I did; my sight is a little decayed; my left eye... hardly serves me to read...." He experienced some loss of memory with "regard to names and things lately passed," but continued to write sermons "as readily, and, I believe, as correctly, as ever." Predictably, Wesley attributed such a long and productive life "to the power of God, fitting me for the work to which I am called...." But there were also "inferior means," the first of which was "constant exercise and change of air."<sup>54</sup>

Wesley urged his lay preachers and the people of the societies toward a life of physical activity. Agreeing with Dr. Cadogan, Wesley cited indolence, that is, the lack of exercise as detrimental to health.<sup>55</sup> Exercise, explained Wesley, quickens the release of "ethereal fire," commonly called, "animal spirits," throughout the body, enlivening every part.<sup>56</sup> Accordingly, one should walk everyday, "not less than an hour before dinner, or after supper." If one is too weak for this, he may compensate by riding in a carriage.<sup>57</sup> However, a sudden change from a reasonably active life to a more sedentary existence may be cause for concern. Wesley wrote out of deep concern to his friend, Mr. Blackwell.

I really am under apprehensions lest that chariot should cost you your life. If, after

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 267.

<sup>51</sup>"Thoughts on Nervous Disorders," *Works*, XI, 518.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup>"The More Excellent Way," *Works*, VII, 31.

<sup>54</sup>*Journal*, VII, 408.

<sup>55</sup>"Minutes of Several Conversations," *Works*, VIII, 313.

<sup>56</sup>"Thoughts on Nervous Disorders," *Works*, XI, 517.

<sup>57</sup>Preface to "An Extract From Dr. Cadogan's Dissertation on the Gout and All Chronic Diseases," *Works*, XIV, 268.

having been accustomed to ride on horseback for many years, you should now exchange an horse for a carriage, it cannot be that you should have good health. It is a vain thing to expect it. I judge your case by my own. I must be on horseback for life.... Now and then, indeed, if I could afford it, I should rest myself for fifty miles in a chaise; but without riding near as much as I do now, I must never look for health.<sup>58</sup>

John Wesley's attention to simple remedies led to the publication of *Primitive Physick*. The twenty-three editions during his lifetime reflect its widespread popular acceptance. *Primitive Physick* represented Wesley's attempt to place in the hands of the general populace "a plain and easy way of curing most diseases,"<sup>59</sup> and "to set down cheap, safe, and easy medicines, easy to be known, and easy to be procured, and easy to be applied by plain, unlettered men."<sup>60</sup>

As Wesley assessed the matter, the trend of eighteenth-century medical care was away from the experimental or empiric approach to a rational or theoretical discipline. Consequently, "simple medicines were more and more disregarded and disused, till in a course of years, the greater part of them were forgotten." In place of simple remedies, physicians introduced an "abundance of compound medicines consisting of so many ingredients, that it was scarce possible for common people to know which it was that wrought the cure...." Such a practice of compounding medicines, Wesley argued, "can never be reconciled to common sense. Experience shows that one thing will cure most disorders, at least as well as twenty put together." As for the tendency to compound medicines, it can be "only to swell the apothecary's bill. Nay," Wesley added, "possibly, on purpose to prolong the distemper, that the doctor and [the apothecary] may divide the spoil."<sup>61</sup>

A survey of the remedies in *Primitive Physick* is beyond the scope of this study. It is commonly acknowledged that many of them were quaint, if not questionable. Wesley instructed the individual suffering from ague (i.e., intermittent fever) to "take a handful of groundsel, shred it small, put it into a paper bag four inches square, pricking that side which is to be next the skin full of holes; cover this with thin linen, and wear it on the pit of the stomach, renewing it two hours before the fit."<sup>62</sup> Yet, in some instances, twentieth century medicine can do no better than Wesley. For the common cold he recommended "a pint of cold water [and] lying •own in bed; or, a spoonful of molasses in a half-pint of water."<sup>63</sup>

<sup>58</sup>"Letter to Ebenezer Blackwell," *Letters*, IV, 255.

<sup>59</sup>*Primitive Remedies*, p. 15.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 5. Howard B. Weeks, in his editorial comments, takes this reference from an added postscript to the 1755 edition of *Primitive Physick*.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 12-16.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>63</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 43.

Wesley advised persons as to the "manner of using the medicines" collected in *Primitive Physick*. Under the various categories of illnesses Wesley usually included at least three or four remedies. Persons were instructed to use only one remedy at a time. If, after a reasonable period, there seemed to be no cure, one should "use the second, and the third, and so on" through the list.<sup>64</sup>

Frequently Wesley's letters provided an occasion for medical counsel. Again, reliance on the sensible and simple was the rule. Wesley urged Philothea Briggs "to use all probable means of recovering and confirming [her] health." But, he added, "taking many medicines, indeed, is not a probable means. I would in no wise advise this."<sup>65</sup> As he expressed to Ann Bolton, a change of air is better than "a hundred medicines."<sup>66</sup> Similarly, Wesley wrote to Martha Chapman, "You have done right in leaving off the taking of medicines. But withal you should use all the exercise you can, particularly in the open air."<sup>67</sup>

In this paper I have explored John Wesley's concept of health. Throughout his writings Wesley developed the theme of health as wholeness, i.e., a well-working of the whole. Well-working was the hallmark of the original created order. Though tarnished by Adam's disobedience, mankind is still endowed with an "exquisitely wrought machine," designed to function properly within the limits of mortality. Wesley's frequent exhortation was that the individual should be a good steward of that which God has placed in his keeping. Health, for Wesley, was at one and the same time a gift and a discipline. Sensible regimen is the divinely ordained pattern for the preservation of wholeness. Accordingly, it is not to be taken lightly. "Who then is a wise man, and endued with knowledge among you? Let him," Wesley admonished, "resolve this day, this hour, this moment, the Lord assisting him, to choose... the 'more excellent way.'"<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>65</sup>"Letter to Philothea Briggs," *Letters*, V, 277.

<sup>66</sup>"Letter to Ann Bolton," *Letters*, V, 340.

<sup>67</sup>"Letter to Martha Chapman," *Letters*, VI, 147.

<sup>68</sup>"The More Excellent Way," *Works*, VII, 37.