



# DISCOVERY

Edited by  
FREDERICK E. MASER

In 1978 I purchased from a dealer in England a large folio volume containing the pictures, the important dates in their careers, and an original letter of every President of the British Methodist Conference from John Wesley to the Rev. John Allen, who served as President in 1900. It is truly an amazing collection. Many of the letters are full of human interest and others reflect incidents in the history of British Methodism. The following letter by Thomas Coke, who was President of the Conference in 1797 and again in 1805, reveals his missionary passion and also reflects the personal sorrow caused by the death of his second wife on December 5, 1812.

Leeds, Feb. 10, 1813.

Very dear Friend and Brother,

I thank you for your very kind letter. I fully purpose to visit Otley, before I leave these parts. But it cannot be for many weeks. Therefore you had better make the Public Collection for the missions immediately, lest the two Collections should be too near each other. When I come, I shall of course do what I can in private.

I beg [to give] my love to Mrs. Phillips and Mrs. Ratcliffe, and to my very obliging friends, Mr. and Mrs and Miss Ritchie. When I come, will it be convenient to them to receive me at their house. Favor me with a line on that point. And I will answer your letter as soon as I can fix upon the time of coming. God bless you. Pray for

Your afflicted but faithful Friend  
T. Coke

The letter is of interest for a variety of reasons. First, it draws attention to Otley near Leeds which, unfortunately, is not particularly well known among American Methodists. Otley is mentioned numerous times

in Wesley's *Journal*, and it is always mentioned favorably. On at least two, possibly three, occasions Wesley preached to an "immense congregation at the foot of a high mountain near Otley." (*Journal*, vol. 4, p. 331. See other references in the index.) On Saturday, February 16, 1760 he records the beginning of a stirring revival at Otley and writes about it at some length. Tyerman, one of Wesley's biographers, points out that a number of Methodists living at Otley claimed entire sanctification. He quotes Wesley as stating that "Here *began* that glorious work of sanctification, which had been nearly at a stand for twenty years. . . ." (Tyerman, vol. 2, p. 416.)

The persons mentioned in Coke's letter are not so easily identified. Any readers who wish to try their hand at tracking down their identities may send along their results to me in care of this magazine, and I will publish them in a future DISCOVERY.

Everything in the letter, except the date, suggests that the Mr. and Mrs and Miss Ritchie were the famous Ritchie family of Otley who were noted for their piety. Miss Ritchie was a favorite friend of John Wesley and she was at his bedside when he died. However, her father, John Ritchie, a surgeon in the navy, had died in 1780, according to Wesley, and thus, unless Coke was badly mistaken could hardly have been the Ritchie spoken of in this letter written in 1813. Miss Ritchie, later Mrs. Mortimer, is another person who should be better known by American Methodists. She was a deeply spiritual person, and she wrote a moving account of Wesley's death.

In turning back to Coke, himself, it should be noted that the letter he sent to Mr. Phillips is bordered in black and the pathetic closing line, where he refers to himself as "Your afflicted . . . Friend" is indicative of his sorrow at the death of his second wife. John Vickers in his excellent volume, *Thomas Coke, Apostle of Methodism*, has written a clear understanding statement concerning Coke's marriages and also has presented an enlightening view of the man's missionary zeal.