



# DISCOVERY

Edited by  
FREDERICK E. MASER

Many of us have been tremendously excited about the continuing rapid progress of the Wesley Works Project; and now on the horizon of Methodist historical research is another set of exciting projects—namely the publication of the letters and manuscripts of Susanna Wesley and an examination of all extant portraits of this signally important woman. Working on these two endeavors, which promise to reveal the Wesley family in a new light, are, respectively, Charles Wallace and Elizabeth Hart.

In this instance they collaborate in introducing a “new” letter of Susanna Wesley.

**Elizabeth Hart**, from the English Methodist tradition, has been Head Librarian at Vancouver School of Theology, British Columbia, Canada for the past six years. Her Master’s Degree in English Literature at the University of British Columbia explored the “Influence of Paradise Lost on the Hymns of Charles Wesley.” Her work on Susanna has included a popular biography, “Susanna Wesley—An Able Divine,” *Touchstone* 6(2) May 1988:4-12, and a paper, “Susanna Wesley and the Editors,” given at the Canadian Society of Church History Annual Meeting, Windsor, Ontario, June 1, 1988. She is currently working on a study of the various Susanna portraits.

**Charles Wallace, Jr.** is University Chaplain and Assistant Professor of Religion at Willamette University, Salem, OR., having previously taught at Wesley Theological Seminary and Western Maryland College. His degrees are from Bowdoin (B.A.), Yale (B.D.), and Duke (Ph.D.). He is currently working on an edition of Susanna Wesley’s letters and papers and would appreciate hearing from readers who know of any original material outside of the usual archival sources. His article on Susanna Wesley’s reading and writing appears in the September, 1989 issue of *Church History*.

In this issue of “Discovery” we feature a new letter of Susanna Wesley discovered by Elizabeth Hart and transcribed and introduced by Charles Wallace, Jr. This letter, never before published, gives us a better grasp

of Susanna Wesley's involvement with the evangelical revival just beginning under the leadership of her sons John and Charles. In it she not only helps her correspondent wrestle with some of the spiritual issues raised in the early days of the movement, but also defends Methodism against two "heresies" which threatened to derail its early successes: Moravian quietism and George Whitefield's Calvinism.

### FINDING THE SUSANNA LETTER

The rediscovery of this letter is a fascinating story in itself. In the fall of 1987 writes Elizabeth Hart, "I spent some time in England working with Susanna manuscripts at Bristol and Manchester. On my way back to the west coast of Canada, I found in the United Church archives in Toronto, a photocopy of what was described as Susanna's last letter to John (April 28, 1741). There were two problems about whom the "Dear Son" inscription referred to. The first was that the tone 'felt' as though it was to Charles, as it seemed to continue discussions I had just seen in her other letters to him. Second, it had not been included in Frank Baker's critical edition of John's letters, published in 1980. On writing to Dr. Baker, he agreed that it was probably not to John (John being with his mother at the time it was written) but Charles and Samuel were other contenders. However, we could not prove anything because page 4, where the addressee would have been named, was missing.

How could we find the missing (uncopied) page? Did it even exist any more? From Frank Baker we learned that he lost his bid for this manuscript—officially described in the sale catalogue as being from Susanna to John—when it came up for auction at Sotheby's "over forty years ago." The successful bidder was Rt. Hon. Isaac Foot, famous English Methodist orator, local preacher, politician and book lover. When Foot died in 1960, most of his 70,000 volume private library went to California, but inquiries revealed the manuscript was not there. It seemed that it had passed to Isaac Foot's son, Lord Caradon. He made a copy for Baker in 1978, but still without the missing 4th page.

Sometime in the next ten years, the manuscript passed from the Foot family to what Dr. Baker calls the "kindly and generous hands" of Mr. Peter Conlan, of Bromley, Kent, and it was here that the missing 4th page confirming that the letter was to Charles was finally copied and sent on to Dr. Baker who eventually sent it to us. Most of the mystery is solved, and we can finally correct the records of the Toronto Archives."

Ms. Hart adds a further enlightening note about the letter and the Foots: "As the child of a Methodist minister in World War II in Callington, Cornwall—the home of the Foot family—I was deeply influenced by the lives and wisdom of Isaac Foot and his wife Eva. She had a tough, warm, near-saintliness which made many people think of her as a modern-day Susanna. My guess is that Isaac bought this letter for her, and so it remained in the possession of the family after her death in 1946."

**Introduction to the Letter by Elizabeth Hart and Charles Wallace, Jr.**

Susanna Wesley, a widow since 1735, had been living with her daughter Martha and son-in-law Westley Hall, having moved with them from Wooton, Wiltshire, to Salisbury, and finally to London sometime in the spring of 1739. Once her son John had acquired the Foundery in late 1739 and renovated it as his London headquarters, she took up lodgings with him. It was there she died on July 23, 1742.

The "Dear Son" whom she greets is not immediately identifiable, although patient detective work by Frank Baker shows that it was Charles.<sup>1</sup> Also problematic are the two dates in the letter. One, September 7, 1739 (between the letter's fifth and sixth paragraphs), seems to mark an earlier section, offering practical theological advice and affirming him in his evangelical calling; the other, April 28, 1741 (scrawled sideways on the left hand margin at the top of the third and final page), identifies a second section in which she bemoans the disruptive activities of the Moravians and the Calvinists and urges Charles to continue in the fight against them. Possibly she began the letter at the earlier date, then set it aside or misplaced it, and only took it up again at the later date, after which, as we can tell from the address sheet, it was finally posted and delivered.

In the first section Susanna plays her typical role of theological tutor, encouraging and advising Charles in response to a previous letter now lost. His reference to "the baptism which remains for us to be baptized with" and her interpretation, that "you think we are not yet fully convinced of sin," suggest that Charles may have been struggling both with the doctrine of sanctification and with his own mercurial temperament.<sup>2</sup> Her agreement that "we do feelingly know we are poor sinners" and her further counsel that "we clearly apprehend that [God] is almighty power . . . and yet almighty love" (the latter here illustrated in a lengthy exposition of Christ's passion) are in tune with the experiential approach of early Methodism.

The concluding section depicts her as a theological ally to her sons as they battled quietism and predestination, two competing approaches within the revival.

---

<sup>1</sup>Correspondence with the editors, July 5, 1989. The address "To The Revd. Mr. Wesley / in / Bristol" is in John's hand and the endorsement is in Charles'. Both content and the geographical placement of Charles in Bristol and Susanna in London with John fit. The only anomaly is the salutation: in no other letter does Susanna address Charles as "Dear Son." See hers to him, 27 December 1739, just following the death of her eldest son Samuel, in which she refers to John as "your brother (who henceforward I shall call Son Wesley, since my dear Sam is gone home) . . ."

<sup>2</sup>See, for example, her letter to him on October 19, 1738, in which she thanks God that "your mind is somewhat easier than formerly." It is possible that the reference is to the same spiritual crisis.

The Moravians had nurtured John Wesley in his evangelical awakening and provided him several models for institutionalizing the revival. In May 1738, he and his Moravian mentor Peter Boehler even jointly founded a religious fellowship, the Fetter Lane Society. Nevertheless, he reacted quickly to their increasing tendency toward quietism and antinomianism. Wesley, the good Anglican, could not “wait” for Christ and be “still,” but rather insisted on using all the means of grace: attending church, receiving the sacrament, fasting, praying, reading scripture, doing all possible temporal good. After much wrangling, Wesley and those who agreed with him left the Fetter Lane Society to the Moravians in July 1790 and put all their energies into the Methodist society meeting at the Foundery. Our letter shows Susanna Wesley taking her son’s part against the “little Moravian foxes” who nearly spoiled the vineyard.

George Whitefield, was emerging from John Wesley’s shadow, and fast becoming the celebrated prototypical evangelist both in Britain and North America, not so much an organizer as a spellbinding preacher. Also in contradistinction to his old mentor and friend, he was becoming a Calvinist, largely as a result of conversations with such New England divines as Jonathan Edwards during his trips to North America. The matter came to a head when Wesley published his anti-predestination sermon *Free Grace*<sup>3</sup> in 1739. Whitefield responded with *A Letter to the Rev. Mr. John Wesley in Answer to his Sermon entitled Free Grace*, published after his return to England in 1741.<sup>4</sup> It is likely that this pamphlet was on her mind as Mrs. Wesley completed her letter to Charles. In fact, at about this same time she was composing her own defense of the Arminian position, published anonymously the same year as *Some Remarks on a Letter from the Reverend Mr. Whitefield to the Reverend Mr. Wesley, in a Letter from a Gentlewoman to her Friend*.<sup>5</sup>

In sum, this letter gives us additional evidence that Susanna Wesley, though within a year of her death, maintained a lively interest in the important issues facing her sons, and was both ready and able to counsel and support them in their evangelical ventures.

For readability we have expanded abbreviations, modernized punctuation and reduced captialization. Paragraphing remains as in the original and spelling has been corrected only when there is an obvious inadvertent mistake.

---

<sup>3</sup>Number 110 in Albert C. Outler, ed., *The Works of John Wesley*, Bicentennial Edition (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984) 3:542-63. Note that the polemic was accompanied by a 36 verse hymn, “Universal Redemption” by Charles Wesley.

<sup>4</sup>Reprinted in Iain Murray, ed., *George Whitefield’s Journal* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1960), 563-88.

<sup>5</sup>See Frank Baker, “Susanna Wesley, Apologist for Methodism,” *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, 35 (1965-6): 68-71.

Dear Son,

Your brother<sup>6</sup> hath more than once desired me to write to you, but as I knew there was a constant correspondence between ye, I thought he would inform of anything relating to me which was necessary for you to know.

I rejoiced in your being so much employed in the service of our Lord and that he is pleased to set his seal to your ministry. May you ever retain the same humble thoughts of yourself and continue to ascribe all the glory of your usefulness to him to whom it properly belongs.

I don't well understand what you mean by the baptism which remains for us to be baptized with,<sup>7</sup> but suppose by what follows you think we are not yet fully convinced of sin. I hope we are in good measure convinced already that we do feelingly<sup>8</sup> know we are poor sinners—but to be fully apprized of the evil of sin in its nature and consequences it is, I humbly conceive, necessary that we have a more full and perfect knowledge of God. The sight of our sins may humble us indeed, but when by the eye of a strong faith we behold him that is invisible to the eye of sense; when we clearly apprehend that he is almighty power, justice and purity and yet almighty love (demonstrated by sending his only son to die for us), then we may say as Job, "we have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now our eye seeth thee, wherefore we abhor ourselves and repent in dust and ashes."<sup>9</sup> Then we feelingly believe the exceeding sinfulness of sin, then true contrition springs up in the soul and the utmost self abhorrence—we stand amazed and confounded at the view of our own vileness and base ingratitude against God! That God which gave us being, that hath upheld us and fed and clothed us and by his blessed providence hath preserved us from innumerable evils all our life long, notwithstanding we have in no wise answered the end of our creation. But if reflection on our ingratitude for these temporal blessings (though exceeding valuable) renders us vile in our own eyes, how much viler do we appear when we consider we have all this while been sinning against redeeming love. If anyone would be deeply convinced of the evil of sin, if we would be more strongly affected with a sense of our own guilt, let us behold ourselves in the sufferings of the Son of God, for the sins of mankind, more particularly for our own. Let us, my son, attend our Lord from the Passover to the Garden in which his soul was made an offering for sin. That as in a Garden the first Adam by his disobedience lost himself and all his posterity (which were then virtually included in him) so a prin-

---

<sup>6</sup>I.e., John.

<sup>7</sup>See such passages as Matthew 20:22-23, Luke 3:16 and Acts 1:5.

<sup>8</sup>I.e., consciously.

<sup>9</sup>Job 42:5-6, substituting the second person plural. Susanna Wesley's quotation marks.

cial part of the sufferings of the second Adam for sin were undergone in a Garden. It seems as if there was a gradual withdrawing of the light of God's countenance from the time of eating the Passover — he "began to be sorrowful and very heavy," saith St. Matthew, "sore amazed and very heavy," saith St. Mark.<sup>10</sup> Again that strange request to his three disciples. "Tarry ye here and watch with me,"<sup>11</sup> argued an astonishing weight of horror and grief in his soul! But how can we behold him in the Garden, prostrate on the earth agonizing to that strange height as far surpassed the power of human nature to sustain, insomuch that an angel was sent from heaven to strengthen him, after which we find that he prayed more earnestly till his sweat was in great drops of blood falling to the ground!<sup>12</sup> I do humbly conceive that our dear Lord at that time did sustain the whole weight of the grief, anguish and sorrow which is due to divine justice for the sins of all mankind;<sup>13</sup> and then was his spotless soul made an offering for sin indeed! He knew God, the infinite purity of the divine nature! He perfectly knew the nature and felt the full weight and guilt of sin, as far as was possibly consistent with his unity with the Godhead!

'Tis certain our blessed Lord had a perfect foreknowledge of every article of his suffering long before and at that time had them all in view. But what does the Apostle mean by these words: "In the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death; and *was heard* in that he feared."<sup>14</sup> If this is a right translation, what was it our Lord feared? It was not contempt and shame or pain or death; all this he patiently suffered — and therefore if it had been these things he deprecated, how was he heard? I humbly conceive then that what our Saviour deprecated was the terrible insupportable hiding of the Father's face: at the zenith of his passion, having probably some diffidence of his own human ability to finish the great work of man's redemption if the Godhead remained quiescent.<sup>15</sup> Set me right in this.

To your prayer that we may never rest till we rest in God, I say a hearty Amen.

The present state of the Christian Church affords but a melancholy prospect. Great numbers of the clergy as well as laity have either never known the gospel of Jesus Christ or else hath forgot it. There hath of late been such a strange awakening throughout the Kingdom as has not

---

<sup>10</sup>Matthew 26:37 and Mark 14:33; our quotation marks. Note the same citations in her long letter to her daughter Susanna, January 13, 1709/10, expounding the Apostles Creed, in the section explicating "under Pontius Pilate."

<sup>11</sup>Matthew 26:38; our quotation marks.

<sup>12</sup>See Luke 22:43-44.

<sup>13</sup>Phrasing close to another sentence in the same 1709/10 letter.

<sup>14</sup>Hebrews 5:7; our quotation marks. Underlined in MS.

been in my time before, as if our Saviour now made his last effort to bring people out of their carnal security before he comes to judgment; for in my apprehension that awful time draws very near. Satan has taken the alarm too, and perceiving that many are become obedient to the faith by which means he feels his kingdom strongly shaken, he hath exerted all his power in making opposition to the success of the gospel; he soon found the wicked too weak to serve his interest and therefore hath transformed himself into an angel of light (under which disguise he is ever most formidable) and has prevailed with many that had been led into the way of truth to turn out of it. And now again our dearest Lord is wounded in the house of his friends. First the little Moravian foxes attempted to spoil our vines and destroy the tender grapes.<sup>16</sup> These endeavoured to lead people into practical atheism by teaching them (out of a pretence of greater purity) that when they were regenerated and born again, they were at liberty to lay the ordinances aside as useless: not considering that thereby they denied their Lord in setting aside his authority which appointed [them and refusing]<sup>17</sup> to do him that public honour which he requires and has told us beforehand that such as will not confess him before men, the same will he deny before his father at the last judgment.<sup>18</sup> Further, they have taught that we are not to obey God's commands because he hath commanded us so to do, but because the doing, or forbearing such or such a thing, is agreeable and pleasing to spiritual self (a shameful contempt to divine authority again) whereas in truth, if when after we have been enlightened, have tasted the heavenly gift and been made partakers of the Holy Ghost, we decline from a pure intention of glorifying God by an entire sacrifice of self, and make either peace of conscience or the pleasure we find in any religious actions, the principal end of those actions; we exalt self into the place of God and are guilty of idolatry (more refined and spiritual, indeed) but as [?]flat idolatry as<sup>19</sup> if we fell down and worshiped a graven image. This practical atheism their principles naturally lead men into.<sup>20</sup>

Thus these little foxes have endeavoured to destroy our Lord's vineyard and throw it open to common; but now, "the wild boar out of the wood" is labouring "to root it up: and the wild beasts of the field to devour it."<sup>21</sup> 'Tis an old maxim of Satan's, "Divide that you may destroy."<sup>22</sup>

<sup>15</sup>In the letter to young Susanna on the Creed, cited above, see a similar reference under the words "crucified": ". . . there was, but after what manner we cannot conceive . . . a sensible withdrawing of the comfortable presence of the Deity, which caused that loud and passionate exclamation, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me.' "

<sup>16</sup>Song of Solomon 2:15.

<sup>17</sup>Bracketed words are reasonable guesses. Only the tops of several words are visible at the bottom of the MS page.

<sup>18</sup> See Mathew 10:32-33.

<sup>19</sup>Preceding phrase difficult to make out.

<sup>20</sup>Running top to bottom in the left-hand margin near the end of this paragraph is the date April 28, 1741.

In order to practice his own rule, he hath thrown a bone of contention among the brethren about a point which hath been formerly much controverted in the Christian world, but of late years hath been very wisely laid aside.<sup>23</sup> The bait has taken among the weaker sort of people and numbers are greatly shaken, and no doubt but the Grand Adversary triumphs in his success and exults to see that he hath prevailed so far over our men as to engage them in a pernicious controversy which will effectually divert them for working out their own salvation with fear and trembling.<sup>24</sup> I am fully persuaded that if Whit[efield] could live more years than he will live, he will never do so much good as he has done harm since his return to England.<sup>25</sup> God forgive him.

Your brother hath made a noble defence against the enemies; has given them no quarter indeed! But continues daily to serve the Predestinarians as Samuel did Agag—he hews them in pieces before the Lord.<sup>26</sup> I admire his zeal and so much more as it is tempered with great meekness and patience and longsuffering—and though he strenuously opposes their doctrines, he does it always in the true spirit of Christian charity! Before they beset and [?]assaulted him so furiously on every side, he was very weak, and having no assistant, was often ready to faint under his labours. But our Lord hath had compassion on him and hath renewed his strength to such a degree as is truly astonishing! Asher's blessing is fallen on him: as is his day, so is his strength.<sup>27</sup> Glory be to God!

I have had many thoughts about you, because I knew the weakness of your body, I was under some apprehension of its being cast down by incessant labours;<sup>28</sup> but now I see the power of our Lord so plainly manifested in your brother and consider that his God and Saviour is yours also, my fears are at an end, and I need not desire you to join hand and heart with your brother in vindicating the glory and honour of our ever blessed Redeemer! Proclaim his universal love and free grace to all men. And that ye may go on in [the power of the Lord and in]<sup>29</sup> the strength of his might and be preserved from yielding place to those bold blasphemers so much as for an hour is the hearty prayer of your loving mother. I send thee my love and blessing.

<sup>21</sup>Near exact quotation from Psalm 80:13, Book of Common Prayers; our quotation marks.

<sup>22</sup>Susanna Wesley's quotation marks.

<sup>23</sup>I.e., predestination, the source of the Wesley's dispute with Whitefield.

<sup>24</sup>See Philippians 2:12.

<sup>25</sup>George Whitefield departed for his second trip to North America in August 1739 and returned March 1741, at which point he joined the controversy by publishing *Some Remarks . . .*, the reply to Wesley's sermon, *Free Grace*. Murray, ed., 564-68. See introduction, above.

<sup>26</sup>See 1 Samuel 15:33.

<sup>27</sup>Paraphrase of Deuteronomy 33:25.

<sup>28</sup>Or "labour."

<sup>29</sup>Bracketed words added in left margin; probable reading.