



DISCOVERY

Edited by
FREDERICK E. MASER

More About John Wesley

An unpublished Wesley letter! I found it while looking for something else. I had telephoned a dealer from whom I had purchased in the past some letters of Sara Teasdale. I wanted to fill out this collection before presenting it to my wife's Alma Mater — Mount Holyoke College. But the dealer said, "No, you've bought all the Teasdale I ever had." I was about to hang up the phone when I casually said, "I don't suppose you have any Wesley letters."

"As a matter of fact," she said, "I have! Something came in a few days ago. I've checked Telford, and it is not there. It is a letter to John Bredin. There are plenty of other letters to Bredin in Telford, but not this one."

My heart leaped with excitement. "Tell me more!"

The upshot was that I put a hold on the letter until I could reach Dr. Kenneth Rowe at Drew to see if together we could buy the letter for Drew, and it is in the collection at Drew today.

Who Was John Bredin?

There are numerous letters to John Bredin in the eight-volume edition of John Wesley's Letters edited by John Telford. On several occasions Wesley seemed particularly annoyed by this itinerant, but Telford writes favorably of the man:

Bredin was a Roman Catholic schoolmaster at Tullyvin, who died in 1819 after fifty years in the itinerancy. He was appointed to Yarm at this Conference [1772], and in 1773 to Aberdeen. Wesley calls him 'a weak brother'; but he proved a zealous and useful preacher. (Vol. 5, 328)

Crookshank in his *Methodism in Ireland* (Vol. 1, 337ff) speaks of him in the highest terms crediting him with reviving the work on the Cork Circuit and founding Methodism in Skibbereen, Ireland.

On September 18, 1773 Wesley had written to Bredin from Bristol, hinting at the cause of Wesley's displeasure. Bredin was in Scotland at the time. Wesley wrote:

Observe and enforce all our Rules exactly as if you were in England or Ireland. By foolish compliance our preachers in Scotland have often done harm. Be all a Methodist; and strongly insist on *full salvation* to be received *now* by *simple faith*. — I am
Yours affectionately.

Wesley used Bredin in some of his important circuits and stations, but as late as January 3, 1791 Wesley in writing to Adam Clarke says of Bredin:

. . . John Bredin is a weak brother; let him not complain. He behaved ill at both Jersey and Guernsey; but let him behave well now, and that will be forgotten.

Bredin suffered a great deal of illness during his life, and for a time, because of Bredin's ill health, Wesley laid him aside. In the letter some reference is made to Bredin's health problems. Other references in the letter are also full of interest for the Methodist student.

The "Magazines" referred to in the opening sentence of the letter are probably the *Arminian Magazine* which Wesley began publishing in 1778. According to Richard Green, Wesley, in his Preface to the Magazine,

makes heavy charges both of erroneous teaching and of unbecoming methods, on the part of many persons whose widely spread views it was his purpose to counteract by the publication of this Magazine. His aim was to maintain 'that God willeth all men to be saved, by arguments drawn partly from Scripture, partly from reason: proposed in as inoffensive manner as the nature of the thing will permit.' To this end he designs to publish 'some of the most remarkable tracts on the universal love of God, and on His willingness to *save all men from all sin*, which have been wrote in this and the last century.' (See Green's Wesley Bibliography, 1896, 197).

It would seem as though the Magazine was proving popular since Wesley says in the letter a set cannot be had in Ireland "for Love or Money."

Mr. Rutherford, to whom Wesley refers, was probably Thomas Rutherford, an itinerant in whom Wesley had great confidence. On October 19, 1782 Wesley had written to Rutherford, "I allow you to give any books you please to any preacher to the value of forty shillings."

Rutherford labored for a time in Scotland. On December 24, 1774 Wesley wrote to him commending him for the way he had handled a particular situation and then added an amusing comment on the character of the Scots, ". . . your Scots are such terrible critics that few of our preachers care to venture among them."

By 1782 Rutherford was married, and Wesley was sufficiently concerned for Rutherford's wife, who was pregnant, that he sought to station him near his wife's home where she could receive help and support during the time of her delivery. (Letter, March 1782).

Apparently, when the letter to Bredin was written, Rutherford, and possibly some other itinerants, were aiding in the sale of some of Wesley's books. The *History of England* mentioned in the letter was probably Wesley's *A Concise History of England*, from the earliest times to the death of George II. Written in four volumes, it possibly appeared in 1776, although the Preface is dated 1775.

Henry Earl of Moreland was issued under the title *The History of Henry, Earl of Moreland* in two volumes, 1781. It was Wesley's abridgement of *The Fool of Quality; or The History of Henry, Earl of Moreland* written by Mr. Henry Brooke, an Irish Barrister. Wesley, in his abridgement, did not credit the author, for which he has been criticized, but his publication seems to have had the full support of the author, himself, whose nephew was an ardent Methodist. (See Tyerman, Vol. 3, 172.)

Wesley speaks of the book in the highest terms, although novel reading was not generally encouraged among the Methodists. Tyerman says that some of Wesley's admirers felt puzzled by the publication, and others pained.

In the second paragraph of the Bredin letter, Wesley gave his itinerant advice about his health. Apparently the man suffered from headaches or possibly sores on his scalp, referred to later in the letter, and Wesley was seeking to draw away that "Humour" from Bredin's head. Samuel Johnson, in his Dictionary [1755] defines *Humour* as "1. Moisture 2. The different kinds of moisture in man's body, reckoned by the old physicians to be phlegm, blood, choler, and melancholy, which, as they predominated, were supposed to determine the temper of mind." He adds seven other meanings for the word, but Wesley was using the term as set forth in the first two definitions suggested by Johnson.

Evidently, Wesley wished to apply an "issue" which is defined by Johnson, among other definitions, as "a vent made in a muscle for the discharge of humours." In this case Wesley was suggesting a small cut, "under the ham" (that is at the top of the calf, since "ham" is the hollow area behind the knee) to drain off body fluids, or "humorus," in order to relieve pressure in or on the head. In addition Wesley was suggesting a diet-drink that might help. The diet drink was described in Wesley's little volume of home remedies entitled *Primitive Physick*. It is a cure for Scorbutic Sores:

A diet drink: Put half a pound of fresh-shaven lignum guaiacum [called by blockmakers, lignum vitae], and half an ounce of senna, into an earthen pot that holds six quarts. Add five quarts of soft water and lute the pot close. Set this as a kettle of cold water, and put it over a fire till it has boiled three hours. Let it stand in the kettle until cold. When it has stood one night, drink daily half a pint in new milk warm, in the morning, fasting, and at four in the afternoon, unless it purges too much, if so, take less. Wash with a little of it. In three months all the sores will be dried up.

Wesley adds to this recipe, "Tried." There is no record as to whether these heroic measures proved successful.

In his closing paragraph, Wesley was "glad to hear so good an account of Mr. Thompson." This could be Jonathan Thompson who was received on trial at the Conference of 1789. He had been very useful as a local preacher at Ayr, and laboured with great zeal in the Iverness Circuit. (Telford, Vol. 8, 150, also Atmore's *Memorial*, 424.)

The letter follows:

near London
Feb. 6, 1784.

My Dear Brother

I suppose there is not a set of the Magazines, to be had in Ireland for Love or Money. But I believe Mr. Rutherford has both the History of England, and that of Henry Earl of Moreland: And he may send you a set of each of them by the first opportunity.

It is not improbable that an issue may be of some service, in drawing away that Humour from your Head. But it is worth considering, Whether it would not be better, to make it under the Ham than in the Arm! Perhaps with this help, the Diet-drink for Scorbutic Sores, might have a good effect.

I am glad to hear so good an account of Mr. Thompson: & am

Your Affectionate Brother
J. Wesley.

The address leaf states:

To

Mr. John Bredin
In Athlone
Ireland.

In closing this *Discovery* I wish to thank Dr. Richard P. Heitzenrater for invaluable help in deciphering Wesley's handwriting and in explaining to me the treatment Wesley is advising. Dr. Heitzenrater is the greatest living authority on Wesley's handwriting and one of today's leading authorities on Wesley himself.