



## **DISCOVERY**

by  
FREDERICK E. MASER

I cannot refrain from beginning my final contribution to DISCOVERY by writing a short but significant tribute to Dr. Charles Yrigoyen, Jr., General Secretary of the General Commission on Archives and History. "Chuck" Yrigoyen, as he is known to his friends, is an author, lecturer, and administrator of the highest caliber. His writings are widely read, and he is in constant demand as a speaker. The work of the Commission has been greatly expanded under his direction, and under his leadership, the meaning of history has made a tremendous impact on the church. The denomination is fortunate to have a person of his caliber in this important post.

I also wish to pay tribute to Dr. John A. Vickers whose contribution to this issue follows. Dr. Vickers is well known to Methodists on both sides of the Atlantic. He is an authority on Thomas Coke, having written the definitive biography on this historic Methodist character. He is at present working on Coke's letters and Journal. His contribution to this issue centers in:

### **A Letter from a Female Friend to John Wesley**

by  
Dr. John A. Vickers

Compared with the many letters written by Wesley, the number of those written *to* him that have survived is very small. His itinerant ministry and incessant activity probably combined to make any systematic filing of his correspondence impossible. At any rate, a surviving letter from one of his feminine friends is rare enough to be of interest.

Mary Stokes was for a time in the 1770s one of Wesley's favourite correspondents. The daughter of Joseph and Mary Stokes of Bristol, she and her parents were members of the Methodist society there. What seems to have been his first letter to her, written from Chester on March 17, 1771, is printed in Telford's "Standard Edition" (Vol. V, 230–231) and was followed by others in which the affection he felt for her became more and more explicit. As he wrote in his next letter, on April 4, "There is a sweetness and friendliness in your spirit which is exceeding agreeable to me. And you have an openness withal which makes it the more pleasing." As with his other feminine correspondents, the exchange was both idyllic and platonic, and he saw her as "another Jenny Cooper," whose letters he had published in 1764. Their correspondence provided a welcome respite from the responsibilities and problems that beset so prominent a figure in the Methodist movement.

Sadly, the correspondence was not destined to continue much more than a year. To Wesley's dismay, in 1772 she was drawn to the Quakers, towards whom his attitude had always been somewhat equivocal. On August 10, shortly after the Conference of that year had ended, he wrote to her from Sheffield, warning her to "Beware of striking into new paths! of being wise above that is written!" (Telford, *Letters*, V, 334–5) and this seems to be his last surviving letter—perhaps the last he wrote—to her. But her reply to it is extant, thanks to its being embodied in her biography (*The Life of Mary Dudley*, edited by Hannah Dudley, London: 1825, 15–17). It is the letter of a spirited young woman, quite prepared to stand her ground despite the deep respect she felt for her spiritual mentor who was also many years her senior. Though the date presents a problem and, from internal evidence, we must assume that it was written on August (not July) 29th, the letter is full of interest. The letter follows:

LETTER TO JOHN WESLEY.

*August [?] 29th, 1772.*

My very dear and worthy friend,

For once I can say, the receipt of a letter from you has given me inexpressible pain; I am therefore constrained to address you in this manner, before we personally meet, as I fear my spirits would not enable me so freely to speak as to write the undisguised feelings of my heart. I believe the apprehension of my valuable friend and father arises from a tender affection for an unworthy worm; of the sincerity of which he has only added a fresh and convincing proof. Whether I may give weight to or dissipate your fears, the most unreserved declaration of my sentiments will determine. Your reviving in my remembrance the many favours I have received from the liberal hand of mercy, since my connexion with our dear friends, is kindly proper; I think I have some sensibility of the love of GOD towards me in this respect, and esteem that memorable hour when I heard the gospel trumpet among them the happiest of my life. Yes, my dearest sir, my heart burns while I recollect the attraction of heavenly grace! the many, the innumerable mercies since then received, I desire with thankfulness to acknowledge; and which, unless the spirit is separated

from the gracious Author, cannot be forgotten. 'Beware of striking into new paths,' says my revered friend. Much, very much, should I fear exploring any of myself, or taking one step in so important a point, without the direction of Him, who is emphatically called, '*Wonderful! Counsellor!*' To His praise be it spoken, He has given me the desire to be guided by Him; and I humbly hope, in obedience to this Holy Teacher, I have at some seasons lately attended the Quakers' Meeting, but not at the time of our own worship, except Sunday evenings, when, with truth I say, the excessive warmth of the room was too much for me to bear. I am obliged to testify, the LORD has clothed His word delivered there with divine power, for which the heart of my dear father will rejoice, since

'Names, and sects, and parties fall,  
And thou, O Christ, art all in all!'

With regard to *silent* meetings, I apprehend their authority may be known by the power they are attended with. I have not been at such, yet in my own experience find the *unutterable* prayer to be the most profitable, and am led much into what is so beautifully expressed in one of our hymns.

'The speechless awe that dares not move,  
And all the silent heaven of love.'

I long to be more internally devoted to that GOD, who alone is worshipped in spirit and in truth; and find, in order to keep up a spiritual intercourse, there must be a deep, inward, silent attention, to the secret intimations of divine love, for which my inmost soul aspires to Him, who has promised to fulfil the desire of them that seek him; and is this, my dear Sir, "stepping out of the way?" Surely it cannot, while I find a peace that passeth all understanding. Can this lead me to think slightly of my old teachers? Oh! could my heart be opened to my friend, he would see far other characters imprest. Will this teach me to neglect my meetings? I esteem them great privileges where, not custom, but a sincere desire for GOD's glory is our principle of action. What further can I say to my honoured friend, after disclosing so much of that heart which holds him in most affectionate and respectful love. I can only add the request, that he would join me in that emphatic prayer to the GOD of all grace, "Thy will be done;" to which an attention and obedience will, I trust, divinely influence his very unworthy, but gratefully affectionate,

M. Stokes.

Her biographer records that by the middle of 1773 Mary Stokes had openly associated herself with the Society of Friends and ceased to attend worship at the New Room. But this is not quite the end of the story. In 1777 she married Robert Dudley of Clonmel in Ireland and there, on April 22, 1778, the two correspondents renewed their acquaintance in very agreeable circumstances. The Methodists had obtained the use of the "Quakers' work-house" because their own room was too small to accommodate those who crowded to hear Wesley preach. Wesley recorded in his Journal: "I had scarce sat down when a young man came and said, 'My father and mother send their kind respects, and would be glad of thy company this evening.' His [step-]mother (now Mrs. Dudley), was my old acquaintance, Molly Stokes. I went at four and spent an hour very agreeably." Wesley had been informed

that his old friend and correspondent had spoken disrespectfully of him, but before he left her husband assured him that this was not so. "It was an utter mistake; . . . she had never spoke a disrespectful word concerning me."

It is good to know both that two old friends were thus reconciled at last and that some of Wesley's followers were prepared to stand up to him when convictions differed.