

BOOK REVIEW

W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater, editors, *The Works of John Wesley, Volume 24, JOURNAL and DIARIES VII* (1787-91). Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003. 719+ pp. \$55.00.

Just in time to celebrate the 300th anniversary of John Wesley's birth, a major publishing project dealing with his life has reached completion: all seven volumes of his Journal and Diaries in Abingdon Press's *The Works of John Wesley* series are now in print. Wesley students have been waiting since the first volume appeared in 1988 for volume seven to appear.

The first section (195 pp.) of *Journal and Diaries VII* contains Wesley's Journal for January 1, 1787, through October 24, 1790, the date when he stopped keeping a Journal. In this narrative, Wesley presents himself as a man who, even in his mid and late eighties, is tireless for the Lord. A day off? His entry for March 21, 1789, confesses: "I had a day of rest, only preaching morning and evening" (p. 124).

Wesley shines through his Journal as a man determined to wear out, not rust away. He travels around England, across Wales, over to Ireland, and into Scotland. All the while, he is preaching, reading the Church of England's services of morning and evening prayer, administering communion, visiting societies and classes, holding conferences of his preachers, talking with individuals on religious matters, writing letters, sermons, and magazine articles, and reading in a wide variety of subjects.

Always there are estimates of how many people were in his congregations, accompanied by comments, sometimes wry, on their responsiveness. Once he admits the likelihood that people gathered to hear him because they were amazed that anyone so old was still preaching: "Probably many of these flock together because I have lived so many years!" (p. 53). More ego satisfying is the welcome he received in Falmouth on August 18, 1789: "high and low. . . lined the street from one end of the town to the other out of stark love and kindness, gaping and staring as if the King were going by" (p. 151).

Each year on his birthday, Wesley took stock. On June 28, 1789, he wrote: "This day, I enter on my eighty-sixth year. I now find I grow old: (1) my sight is decayed so I cannot read a small print, unless in a strong light; (2) my strength is decayed so that I walk much slower than I did some years since; (3) my memory of names, whether of persons or places, is decayed till I stop a little to recollect them" (p. 145). The note that Reginald Ward attaches to Wesley's self-assessment is an example of our indebtedness to Ward for his meticulous annotations. Ward quotes the way Alexander Knox saw Wesley two days after Wesley peered into his own mirror. Knox comments: "In [Wesley's] conversation one might be at a loss whether to admire most

his fine classical taste, his extensive knowledge of men and things, or his overflowing goodness of heart—while the grave and the serious were charmed with his wisdom, his sportive sallies of innocent mirth delighted even the young and thoughtless, and both saw in his uninterrupted cheerfulness the excellency of true religion" (p. 145, n. 71).

The next section of this volume contains Richard Heitzenrater's transcription of Wesley's diaries for January 1, 1787, through Wednesday, February 23, 1791—he died the following Wednesday, March 2. Here is an example:

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 4. 4 Prayed; slept; read. 6 Conference. 8 Tea, religious talk; necessary talk (religious) to some. 9 Conference. 12 Visited. 1 Dinner, religious talk, prayer. 2.30 Slept. 3 Letters; prayed; necessary business. 5 Necessary business; writ notes; prayed. 6.30 Revelation 21:5! necessary business; at Mr Castleman's, supper, prayer. 9.30 (p. 325).

How is one to handle 152 pages of similar eye-wearying and mind-numbing material? By understanding it as the ground bass over which the melody of Wesley's Journal narrative flows. More than that, when his Diary is examined carefully, it adds shading to the self-portrait Wesley paints in his Journal. Finally, Wesley continued to make diary entries for roughly fifteen months after he left off writing his Journal. For instance, the entry quoted above shows us Wesley about seven months before his death. He was still getting up at 4 a.m. and going to bed at 9:30 p.m.; still holding conferences of his preachers, writing letters, and conversing on religious matters. But he admits to going back to sleep after getting up and praying, and he takes an afternoon nap. Does this mean that tireless Wesley was tiring?

Once my attention was caught by Wesley's "slept" entries, I decided to do some counting, to see if his naps might reveal a steady decline in his energy. Throughout the period covered by volume seven, Wesley disclosed that he treasured his Sunday afternoon naps, only giving them up when there was something very important to do: he missed 19 in 1787, 12 in 1789, 10 in 1790, and one in 1791—on February 6, less than a month before he died. This slight decrease in the number of missed Sunday naps points to a man whose energy is not quite what it used to be, yet still amazing for someone in the second half of his eighties.

The more interesting story is his new habit of taking weekday naps: the first in this volume occurs on June 15, 1787; he took only seven more the remainder of that year. In 1789, he took 42 weekday naps; in 1790, 151; and during the 54 days in 1791 for which he made notes, he napped on 33 days. Clear signals of flagging energy. Nevertheless, after taking a Sunday nap on February 20, 1791, he skipped naps, because he was too busy traveling around London to take them, on the last three days for which he jotted notes—seven days later, he died. Wesley, in Dylan Thomas's words, did "not go gentle into that good night": he was ready to go napless for God right up to the end.

In addition to the Journal and Diary material, this volume includes a section on Wesley's text, the editions, variant readings, etc. There is an excellent bibliographical index (108 pp.) covering all seven volumes, which Richard Heitzenrater prepared; it contains full citations for every book mentioned by Wesley in his Journal and Diaries, and by Ward in his notes. An index of Scriptural References deals with the seven-volume series, as does John Vickers' magisterial general index (166 pp.). Finally, there is a list of errata for the series; for example, in vol. 22, p. 108, this sentence appears: "He dined with us the next day but was still so muddied that I could make no impression on him." The mud is cleaned up for us by an erratum note - the man was *muddled*, apparently because of heavy tipping the night before.

In conclusion, this is a book that anyone interested in John Wesley can't afford not to buy. It reminds us of the enormous debt of gratitude we owe to Reginald Ward and Richard Heitzenrater (editors and transcribers extraordinary), to Abingdon Press, and to Robert Feaster who, when he was President of the United Methodist Publishing House, made certain that the *Wesley Works* project was picked up from the Oxford University Press and carried forward on this side of the Atlantic.

John G. McEllhenney
Phoenixville, P A