



DISCOVERY

Edited by
FREDERICK E. MASER

Comments on a New Find

Possibly the two greatest living authorities on Wesley and Methodism are Dr. Frank Baker of Duke University in Durham, N.C., and Dr. Richard P. Heitzenrater of Perkins School of Theology in Dallas, Texas. From time to time they had graciously assisted in writing this section of *Methodist History*. Methodist scholarship would indeed be a great deal poorer without their valued work.

This quarter we have asked Dr. Baker for his comments on a fascinating find in one of the libraries in Philadelphia. His interesting account follows.

JOHN WESLEY'S GIFT TO PHILADELPHIA

Philadelphia contains a wonderful accumulation of historic buildings, and is also a magnet for lovers of old books. Of the hundreds of libraries which I visited in the mid-1960s in a search for original editions of works by John Wesley I found the Library Company of Philadelphia, established in 1731, one of the most interesting. On the welcome invitation of my old friend and fellow booklover, Dr. Fred Maser, now of Jenkintown, Pennsylvania, I relived my early researches in that venerable library.

Dr. Maser was understandably excited by a clue to the presentation by John Wesley of a small batch of books to the Library Company of Philadelphia just before the Revolution. My own discovery of the books a quarter of a century ago had been a somewhat routine exploration in the normal course of bibliographical research. He invited me to pool our findings. With him it has been a recent and very rewarding detective story. Glancing through Stuther Burt's *Philadelphia, Holy Experiment*, he found on p. 210 a reference to the Library Company, with the following statement: "Just before the Revolution, the last gift of books was from John Wesley, dispatched from England." Dr. Maser immediately phoned the Library, to be assured of the truth of the statement, and to receive a copy of the entry in Minute Book II: 115-16 recording the occasion:

The following Letter addressed to the Directors, was rec[eive]d:

Philadelphia, Jan'y 9, 1775

Gentlemen

I have sent in the Revd: John Wesley's Name, and by his Order, the following Books; for the Library belonging to the Library Company of Philadelphia:

Notes on the New Testament, one Vol: Quarto	
An Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion, 1 Vol.	
Fletcher's Checks to Antinomianism,	2 Vols.
Fletcher's Appeal on original Sin,	1 Vol.

I am, Gentlemen, with Esteem
Yours Affectionately
Thos. Rankin

The Board direct the Secretary to desire the Letter Writer would communicate their Thanks to Mr. Wesley for his present, and that the Books be entered in the numerical Catalogue.

On Dr. Maser's request the librarian reported that the books were still there — except the quarto edition of Wesley's *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*. They were in poor shape, however, though he did send photocopies of the title-page of one and of the inscription in another. The title-page was of Wesley's *Earnest Appeal*, sixth edition, printed by William Pine of Bristol in 1771, and showed the Library's accession number in their "numerical catalogue" — "662." The other bore the engraved book-plate of "The Library Company of Philadelphia," with its own number, "664," the scribbled title, "Checks to Antinomianism," and the bold inscription, "The Gift of the Revd. Mr. John Wesley." (The inscription is not in the handwriting of either Wesley or Rankin, but was apparently made by the library's Secretary.)

Philadelphia was, of course, the true metropolis of North America at the time, as well as its cultural centre, and Methodism had a stronghold there in St. George's Church, where "Captain" Thomas Webb had preached the opening sermon in 1769. Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmore had worked there, followed up in 1771 by Richard Wright and Francis Asbury, all Wesley's immigrant preachers from England. In 1773 Webb outfitted another company of Methodist preachers from England, including Thomas Rankin, whom Wesley had appointed his "General Assistant" in America. Within a few weeks of arriving Rankin had summoned in Philadelphia the first Methodist Conference in America, securing firm links with Wesley and his society and his preachers, both British and American, and symbolically declared that this city formed their headquarters — though Rankin was distressed to find that the supposed amazing strength of American Methodism had been greatly exaggerated by travellers' tales. In presenting these volumes was he striving both to proclaim Wesley's importance and to attempt some proselytizing in this gift of important Methodist writings to this old library? Clearly, he had Wesley's authority, and just as clearly Wesley was by no means a nonentity in Philadelphian eyes.

When the first Continental Congress assembled in Philadelphia, September 1774, Rankin reported to Lord Dartmouth (himself a Methodist sympathizer as well as the British Colonial Secretary) on Dec. 29, 1774, that "Many of its members came to our preaching, and I had an opportunity of conversing with various of them again and again." He felt, however, that in spite of many who were loyal to the Crown, "warlike preparations of every kind" were widespread, and that the political conditions were such "that this land before many months will become a field of blood." (See *Methodist History*, Jan. 1985, 'Discovery,' 119-120.) Such was the unrest of these days, in fact, that it was hardly likely that many contemporary readers were responsible for the wear and tear on the volumes, probably brought over by Rankin from England for prospective sale to loyal Methodists, but now authorized as a gift from Wesley.

Actually the holdings of the Library Company of Wesley items when I saw them twenty-five years ago were far stronger than seems to be implied by what has so far been reported. Wesley's volume of *Appeals* contained all three related items, including the *Farther Appeal*, Part I, 4th edn., Bristol, Grabham, 1758, and Parts II and III, 4th edn., Bristol, Pine, 1765. This volume also contained a similar inscription in the hand of the same clerk or secretary. In the library also was the catalogue entry (though I did not handle the volume itself) of the New Testament *Notes* in quarto, in the 4th edition, printed by William Pine of Bristol in 1768. There were also included many other early Wesley items: *An Extract of the Rev. Mr. John Wesley's Journal*, the first edition of the first extract (Bristol, S. and F. Farley [1740]); *The Doctrine of Salvation, Faith, and Good Works* (9th, Newcastle, Gooding, 1749); several editions of *Primitive Physick*, including a Dublin one of 1752; *A Complete English Dictionary* (London, Strahan, 1753); *The Nature, Design, and General Rules of the United Societies* (7th, Bristol, Pine, 1762); *A Plain Account of the People called Methodists* (6th, Bristol, Pine, 1764); two editions of *Thoughts upon Slavery* of 1775, one a fourth edition from Dublin, another printed in Philadelphia by Joseph Crukshank — over forty items altogether from Wesley's lifetime, as well as many from the nineteenth century. There was even one edition of *A Calm Address to our American Colonies* printed in 1775, the year of its origin, by Chalmers of Dundee. My notes on the occasion of this lengthy visit read, "They have a wonderful collection." Although I was told that the collection was soon moved to a new location adjoining the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, I am confident that their Wesley holdings will still remain strong. One naturally wonders, however, whether many more volumes had emerged from Thomas Rankin's saddle-bags (whether the latter was imported or produced locally) and whether any other had reached the Library Company indirectly from John Wesley himself.

FRANK BAKER