



DISCOVERY

Edited by
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RESEARCHERS RESCUE WESLEY

In the July 1987 issue of *Methodist History* we noted in “Discovery” a sentence from a letter by Thomas Hanby to James Oddie in which, after urging Oddie to “let nobody know but yourself,” he states, “Mr. W. has actually made love to Miss Ritchie, & there is no small stir about it in the Cabinet.” I interpreted the expression “to make love” in the twentieth century meaning of the word, but expressed some doubts concerning its application in this instance in spite of the excellent reputation of Hanby.

Now two researchers have written to clear up the entire matter. Both point out that “to make love” did not mean in the eighteenth century what we mean by that expression today.

My good friend Dr. John McEllhenney, a distinguished author, lecturer and preacher, among other things:

“To make love” meant to flirt, to carry on a courtship, perhaps even a most passionate courtship; it was not a euphemism for sexual intercourse. In no quotation is this clearer than in Horace Walpole’s description of the behavior of the Duke of Hamilton. He wrote that the Duke had been so infatuated with his wife-to-be that, while playing cards at Lord Chesterfield’s, he “made violent love at one end of the room, while he was playing at Pharoah at the other end.”

Now, adds McEllhenney, I can imagine a man playing cards at one end of a room, while flirting with a woman at the other end. But I cannot picture a man consummating a physical relationship with a woman at one end of a room, while studying a hand of cards at the other.

Therefore, I think we can add the evidence of how “to make love” was [meant] in the eighteenth century . . . to settle the question of what Wesley and Miss Ritchie were doing. He was an old man flirting with, perhaps infatuated with, a young woman—not the first and surely not the last.

McEllhenney’s delightful letter was followed by one from another scholar and friend of mine, Keith Arbour, Head of Readers’ Service, American Antiquarian Society. After a suitable introduction Arbour

writes, "At the time Hanby wrote this (his letter to Oddie) the phrase "make love" meant *to court* and did not necessarily subsume even kissing. This usage seems to have held on with tenacious innocence through the late 19th century."

In order to satisfy myself completely that these two researchers were correct I went to that standing arbiter of eighteenth century English, Samuel Johnson. Owing a facsimile copy of the first edition of his *Dictionary*, I did what I should have done long ago and turned to his definitions for "love," etc. Under the heading of "LOVE" he lists the usual definitions that one would expect. Not much help here. But under the heading "TO MAKE LOVE" under the word "MAKE" he defines the term as "To court," "To play the gallant."

When one turns to the word "Court," there are the usual definitions for the term including "to solicit a woman in marriage." There are three meanings for the expression "Gallant." The first—"A gay (not the twentieth century sense) sprightly, airy, splendid man." The second—"A whoremaster, who carresses women to debauch them," and third—"A wooer, one who courts a woman for marriage."

It is in this third sense that we can apply Johnson's definitions to Wesley and Miss Ritchie.

However, one still wonders why Hanby seems shocked by his discovery, why he urges Oddie to complete silence and why the Cabinet is stirred up by the news that Wesley has actually made love to Miss Ritchie. Maybe they thought he was entering another matrimonial venture, and they were concerned as to the effect this might have on Methodism.

At any rate, a "tip of the hat" and a "Thank you" to John McElhenney and Keith Arbour for two delightful letters.