

COKE, THOMAS BISHOP



THOMAS COKE

An Honored Methodist

Name

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NO. 7 in a series on OUR METHODIST HERITAGE

THOMAS COKE, the "foreign minister of Methodism," was a stocky Welshman who stood exactly five feet one inch—three inches shorter than John Wesley.

Portraits suggest his charm. He had glossy black hair, set off by very fair skin, and his lively, dark eyes impressed women and men alike. His voice was eloquent and even rough American frontiersmen softened when he prayed or preached.

Of all Wesley followers, none came so close to being his ideal preacher. None did he trust more. And so responsive was Dr. Coke to opportunities Wesley helped create, he deeply enriched our Methodist heritage at four points:

1. *Organization.* He was our first bishop, and he tried to shape the new church to Wesley's instructions.
2. *Missionary Outreach.* This was Coke's passion. He lost his life while on a mission to India.
3. *Social Justice.* This forthright little Welshman never saw a gray band between right and wrong.
4. *Education.* He fought for it. Methodism's first college bore the print of his name.

Our "little doctor" dreamed great dreams, envisioned tremendous new ideas, and spent most of his 66 years traversing the earth for Christ.

The son of a prosperous physician and magistrate, Thomas Coke was born in Brecon, south Wales, on September 9, 1747. After graduation from Oxford University as a doctor of civil law, he became chief magistrate of his home town. Then, deciding on a church career, he was ordained deacon in the Church of England in 1770, priest in 1772.

Before long, he became distrustful of his spiritual resources, for devout people were depending upon him to lead them to salvation while he himself was unsure

of the way. About this time he became acquainted with Thomas Maxfield, the first Methodist lay preacher, who suggested that Coke read John Wesley's writings. However, just as Peter Boehler's advice long failed to penetrate Wesley's mind almost 35 years earlier [see *Thanks to the Moravians*, January, page 30], so Maxfield's counsel did not get through to Dr. Coke.

Nevertheless, Coke persevered in his quest for the well-being of his soul. Not content with routine duties, he preached at cottage services. One evening while walking toward a meeting place, he prayed for the assurance of God's pardoning love. That same night he comprehended the fullness of salvation through Christ's redemption, which Maxfield had taught.

At once his preaching became ringing. But the worldly people were offended by his summons to spiritual rebirth, while sinners seethed at his demands to reform, so his enemies induced the rector to dismiss him.

About that time, 29-year-old Dr. Coke was introduced to 73-year-old John Wesley. The latter recognized Coke's potential, and for seven years the "little doctor" served as secretary and right-hand man to Wesley. Coke thereafter was shuttling between England and Ireland, making 27 visits in all. He presided at the first Irish Conference in 1782, and continued to oversee the societies there for most of 30 years.

The year 1784 was epochal for Coke and Methodism. The War of Independence over, American Methodists had no ordained clergymen to administer the Sacraments. Heeding appeals (especially from Francis Asbury, whom he had sent over as a lay preacher in 1771), John Wesley, a presbyter of the Anglican Church, at four o'clock in the morning, September 2, 1784, placed his hands on Thomas Coke, setting him apart as General Superintend-

UNUSUAL Methodists

ASTRONAUT

Leroy Gordon Cooper has had a long wait since April, 1959. It was four years ago this month that Air Force Major Cooper was announced as one of the first seven U.S. astronauts of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's Project Mercury. Since then, space flights have become almost commonplace in the public mind, following spectacular success by Cooper's fellow spacemen. But by far the longest and most grueling flight so far attempted in the U.S. program will be a projected 18-orbit mission, tentatively set for May. The astronaut scheduled to be on board the Mercury capsule: Methodist Gordon Cooper.

The 36-year-old Cooper, a native of Shawnee, Okla., has had a varied military career spanning 18 years of duty around the world. His father, who died in 1960, was an Air Force colonel. It was while the family was living in Hawaii that Gordon met Trudy Olson of Seattle, Wash., a fellow University of Hawaii student. They were married in 1947, and their family now includes two daughters, Camala and Janita. The Coopers last July moved from Hampton, Va., to Houston, Texas, site of the NASA manned space-flight center.

HIS MOTHER

Hattie Cooper has had her eyes on the skies a long time—since her beloved "Gordo," then seven, made his first flight beside his father in the cockpit of their plane. "I'll never forget *that* day," she recalls.

Today, Mrs. Cooper lives alone in the rustic Colorado mountain home where she and her late husband retired in 1957. Sundays find her in Carbondale, a mile from her home, at the Community Methodist Church which her husband helped to build.

Of her famous son's coming space flight, Mrs. Cooper confides: "Of course I'll be nervous. But I'm certain that if his strength gives out, the good Lord will provide a little more . . . but I'll have no fingernails left."



Standing outside the Mercury spacecraft, Major Gordon Cooper checks equipment in preparation for the longest U.S. space flight yet attempted.

Mrs. Hattie Cooper's warmly expressive face reflects a mother's pride—and concern—for her son.



nt to go to America. [See *John Wesley Completes a Decision*, February, page 26.]

Coke's arrival in America was followed by a dramatic meeting with Asbury. From the first, they were in agreement on extending the Gospel in the new nation.

The Christmas Conference in Lovely Lane Chapel, Baltimore, Md., was called, and the Methodist Episcopal Church was born. [See *And So, The Methodist Church Starts*, November, 1959, page 28.] As presiding officer and first general superintendent, Coke ordained Asbury deacon, elder, and then consecrated him general superintendent. [Watch for *Asbury—A Methodist St. Francis*, by Bishop Nolan B. Harmon, in the May issue.]

Coke loved America and his American brethren. "Perhaps I have in this little town baptized more children and adults than I should in my whole life if stationed in an English parish," he once noted in a letter. He spent less than three years in the United States, although he made nine visits. One biographer appraised his work succinctly: "His stay was brief, but no man ever did in so short a time a work so far reaching in its consequences."

The friendship of these two dissimilar individuals—for each was distinctively individual—was very close. Coke almost always supported Asbury; he was appreciative of his rugged fellow superintendent (they called themselves bishops after the Conference of 1788); he encouraged Asbury in all his endeavors and helped him in his writing; and he backed Asbury in establishing the episcopacy. They collaborated in preparing the 10th edition of the *Discipline* (1796-7).

Their only major difference of opinion was over formalism. Coke would have liked to encourage American Methodist preachers to wear robes and bands in the pulpit, but he acceded to Asbury's preference for plain garb and plain worship in plain churches.

BEFORE he traveled to America in 1784, Coke had a major role in an epoch-making event in England—drawing up the Deed of Declaration, British Methodism's Magna Charta. The previous deeds for the then 359 Methodist chapels and preaching houses had left the titles open to question and they made no provision for continuity of Methodist Societies after the founder's death. Coke prepared the document which defined the conference of the "people called Methodists," limited the control to 100 preachers (whom Wesley designated), and prescribed the method of selecting their successors, as well as giving the conference clear titles to real estate.

Thomas Coke stands as "father" of Methodist missions. In January, 1784, he published *A Plan of the Society for the Establishment of Missions Among the Heathens*, a document which deserves a prominent place in the

Reprints Available of *We Believe*

Our Methodist Heritage—in which this article is No. 7—was preceded by another 12-article series entitled *We Believe*, now available in a paperback book of that title (Abingdon, 65¢) at all Cokesbury Book Stores.—EDS.

history of Christian missions. He clearly stated his conviction: believers have a sacred obligation to give Christian witness to all mankind. This was a bold concept in world terms. Beginning with the depressed, unreached groups in Ireland, Wales, and Scotland, the Good News was to be taken to remote India and Africa. Calling all interested persons (whatever their church affiliation) to contribute to the plan, Coke put his name at the head of the list.

COKE'S proposal was offered eight years prior to William Carey's¹ voyage to India. It is one of Christendom's earliest documents projecting modern Protestant missions.

Even though Coke's plans were shunted aside, it was not the end of the matter. Possessed of a missionary passion, he gave himself unstintingly to spreading Methodism beyond the seas. He sailed at least 100,000 miles in 100 voyages; he visited the Channel Islands four times, France and Holland once each, the West Indies five times, and the United States nine.

Coke was one of the first ecclesiastical leaders to see the need for missions in Africa. He wrote: "During a series of years we have compelled Africa to weep tears of blood, let us now endeavour to brighten her countenance with smiles of joy, as some compensation for the injuries we have done her."

He was 165 years ahead of the Peace Corps. In 1796, he launched a startling innovation: tradespeople as missionaries. He enlisted carpenters, bricklayers, and farmers to teach vocation as well as to proclaim salvation to the Fula in Sierra Leone, Africa. The initial venture was a heartbreaking failure, due to lack of wisdom in choosing personnel. But Coke learned his lesson, for a second enterprise in 1811 succeeded admirably—a work still being carried on.

In all his travels and missionary projects, Coke financed his own way. By the time of his death, he had given away all his own fortune and those which he inherited from two wives.

He never let an opportunity to extend the Gospel slip away. The fall of the Bastille on July 14, 1789, stirred the hope that social liberty soon would be given to the masses on the European continent.

Alas! He found Paris a city in turmoil—food scarce and prices high, law and order broken down. Thirty-six persons turned out for the initial preaching service by his assistant, and the congregation dwindled to six when Coke preached in French the next day. What is more, he was warned that his life was in peril because foreigners were suspected as being enemies.

Nevertheless, Coke did not give up hope of evangelizing France. Several years later, when Britain joined other European powers in a war against France, he sought to take Methodism to prisoners of war in camps and on ships. In an 1811 letter, outlining plans to send preachers among the captives, he wrote: "What a glorious thing it would be thus to send religion into France!" He himself preached to the prisoners.

¹ William Carey (1761-1834), an English Orientalist and missionary, helped found the Baptist Missionary Society. He first went to India in 1793, and he translated the Scriptures into Assam tongues.—EDS.

With his multitude of administrative duties, his missionary enterprise, his ceaseless money-raising efforts, his evangelizing, and his preaching, Dr. Coke manifested a deep feeling against injustice anywhere.

The plight of the Negro was of particular concern. That any human being, regardless of color, should be denied the message of God's love marked the height of social sin.

"I bore public testimony against slavery." This statement, made while he was preaching in Virginia, is typical of Coke's attitude and courage. During his first visit to America, he roundly denounced slavery and all those connected with it. He set down, "... I preached the Colonel Bedford's funeral sermon. But I said nothing good of him, for he was a violent friend of slavery."

The diminutive, dapper doctor braved near-riots because of his frank pronouncements. He recorded: "The testimony I bore in this place against slave-holding provoked many of the unawakened to retire out of the barn, and to combine together to flog me ... A high-headed Lady also went out, and told the rioters ... she would give 50 pounds if they would give that little

Doctor 100 lashes. When I came out, they surrounded me, but had only the power of talk ... God restrained the rage of the multitude."

Coke displayed not only fearlessness in his preaching against slavery but also shrewd judgment in dealing with people. Again he set down: "We had a good time during the sermon and the Sacrament, but when I enlarged to the Society on *Negro-Slavery*, the principal leader raged like a lion, and desired to withdraw from the Society. I took him at his word, and appointed that excellent man (Brother Skelton) Leader in his stead."

He minced no words in denouncing slavery in the West Indies, in both Dutch-held and English-held islands, and he carried his appeal to high government circles. He won the right for Methodists to give spiritual enlightenment to the slaves in British territory and to assure the Negroes freedom to practice the Christian religion (which privilege previously had been banned).

Oxonian Dr. Coke was a man after John Wesley's own heart in his concern for education. At his first conference with Francis Asbury, he brought up the subject and the two agreed to establish a school or col-

The sensitivity of Thomas Coke is revealed in this love letter he wrote to his wife early one Sunday morning in 1806. The little doctor was to be gone only a few hours—and on the Lord's business—yet he took the time to pen an endearing message to his frail Penelope, whom he met and wed when he was 58, she 43. Their marriage was one seldom surpassed for its mutual devotion and bliss. This letter, now badly faded, is among the many treasures in Lovcly Lane Church Museum, Baltimore, Md.

Most beloved of my heart
and soul under God,

Gwynneth,
Lord's Day Morning,
May 4th 1806.

I am just going to leave you for a few hours. May our most kind Friend, our most adorable Lord and Saviour, take care of you. Yes: He will. He is ours by every endearing tie; and has already delivered^{us} out of ten thousand sorrows, and will continue to deliver us until death, and will bless us together to all eternity. His ministry has woven our hearts together, has made us one by a series of wondrous Providence. Yes, my Penelope, you are twined round my heart: I never think of you, but I find you there, & find you in that position. O that you may, more than ever, be in the Spirit this day. And may our Lord bless me in public, & bring me back again in safety to my precious, precious & most beloved Wife.

T. Coke

lege. Practical Asbury favored a school for teaching boys basic academic knowledge, but the doctor won him over to his idea of a college. Once their desires were divulged, John Dickins [see *New Light on John Dickins*, September, 1961, page 17] took the lead in founding Cokesbury College at Abingdon, Md.

The purpose of Cokesbury Dr. Coke set forth as: "It is to receive for education and board the sons of the elders and preachers of The Methodist Church, poor orphans, and the sons of the subscribers, and of other friends. . . . The institution is also intended for the benefit of our young men who are called to preach, that they may receive a measure of that improvement which is highly expedient as preparation for public service . . . we are determined to have a college in which religion and learning go hand in hand together, or to have none at all."

He thus enunciated the principle which has stimulated Methodists to establish universities and colleges throughout the United States and in many other countries—and his emphasis on religion and learning as partners in education continues today as the church's primary service in higher education.

Cokesbury College burned twice and was not rebuilt after the second fire. [See *Cokesbury College: A 175-Year-Old Symbol*, June, 1962, page 2.]

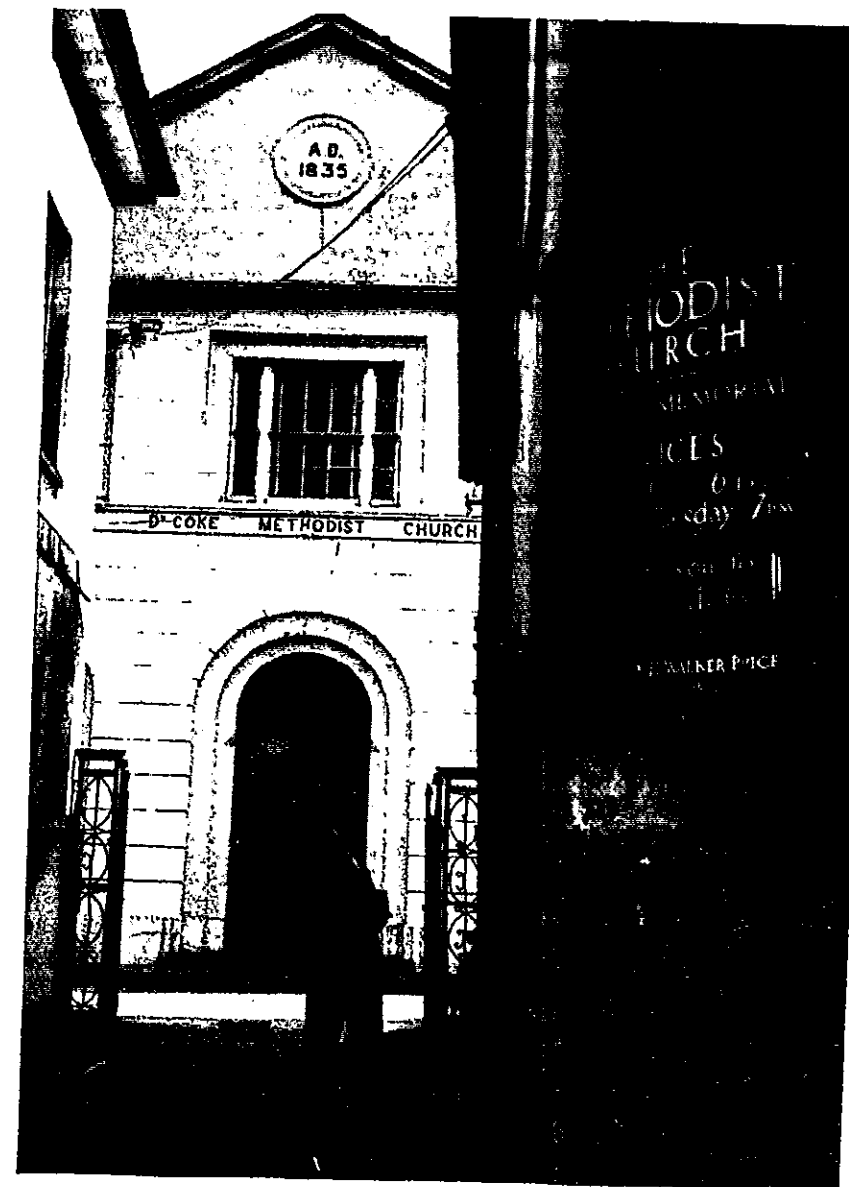
Thomas Coke was a prolific writer, publishing scores of pamphlets and books. His ponderous four-volume *Commentary on the Bible* was his most ambitious undertaking. Besides joining with Bishop Asbury in revising the *Discipline*, he collaborated in writing the first official biography of John Wesley. And he wrote a three-volume *History of the West Indies*, penned the *Memoirs of Mrs. Penelope Goulding Coke*, kept a *Journal*, and dashed off uncounted letters.

Coke's appreciation for the things of nature is one of his most winsome traits. His *Journal* abounds with observations on the wonders of God's creation, as "The oaks have spread out their leaves: and the dogwood . . . whose innumerable white flowers form one of the finest ornaments of the forest, is in full blossom." Again, "The Eastern sky was covered with a most beautiful canopy of purple, which was all over decorated with spangles of gold. The heavens did indeed declare the glory of God. I would, I think, at any time go 10 miles to see so noble a display of the handy work of my Maker. And this God is my God."

An aspect of the energetic and fastidious "little doctor" which has escaped the majority of people is his romance—a very touching love story. Love very tender, yet intense—this was the affection of Thomas Coke and his Penelope.

An heiress of a considerable fortune, Penelope Goulding Smith in her twenties turned her back on dancing and cards, which she once had enjoyed with lighthearted companions, for participation in Methodist benevolent activities. She and Coke met when he solicited money from her for missions, and they were wed a short time later, April 1, 1805. He was 58, she 43.

Frail and sickly, she nevertheless was a devoted helpmeet, giving up her comfortable home to travel with him constantly, distributing tracts, nursing the sick, even doing drudgery in the homes of the poor to free them



Dr. Coke Methodist Church in Brecon, Wales—birthplace of Thomas Coke—contains tablets in memory of the "father of Methodist missions" and his two wives, Penelope Goulding and Ann Loxdale.

for attending Methodist preaching services. Her insistence upon going along with him in the face of perils contributed to her death January 25, 1811, because a violent storm at sea shattered what was left of her scant vitality.

Yet, the zealous churchman who had been a bachelor most of his life, found companionship with another 11 months after his precious Penelope was entombed! Again, he married a spinster, Ann Loxdale. Like his first mate, she was a dedicated worker, highly esteemed for her charity in Liverpool Methodist circles. And, like the first Mrs. Coke, she was in "precarious health." She died December 5, 1812, less than a year after their wedding. Her body was placed alongside Penelope's in the Coke family vault at Brecon, Wales.

Dr. Coke did not long survive. His career was at its height when he embarked in 1814 to carry Methodism to India. From his own resources, he paid 6,000 pounds to finance missionaries and to purchase equipment, including a printing press. Early in the morning of May 3, he was found lifeless in his cabin, apparently a victim of apoplexy, and his body was buried in the Indian Ocean.

His friend, Francis Asbury, a man not noted for extravagant language, wrote: "By vote of Conference, I preached the funeral sermon for Doctor Coke—of blessed mind and soul—of the third branch of Oxonian Methodists—a gentleman, a scholar, and a bishop, to us—and as a minister of Christ, in zeal, in labours, and in services, the greatest man in the last century."

Talk of Protestant mergers raises the question . . .

How BIG Should a Church BE?

By GERALD H. KENNEDY
Bishop, Los Angeles Area

ANY METHODIST finds it easy—almost inevitable—to be enthusiastic about the ecumenical movement. In the 18th century, John Wesley said, "Is thy heart right, as my heart is with thine? Dost thou love and serve God? It is enough. I give thee the right hand of fellowship." He said also that the mark of a Methodist was not his opinions and that Methodists were willing to think and let think.

We have had freedom of theological thought within the framework of our Articles of Religion, and it has been more than 50 years since we had a heresy trial. Even then the man was acquitted, and it is impossible for me to imagine any minister or layman in our connection being brought to trial, unless he was obviously beyond the pale of Christianity.

This background makes it very difficult for me to understand the statement from the Central Committee on the World Council of Churches meeting in Toronto in 1950. The principle was adopted that "the member churches of the World Council of Churches do not necessarily recognize each other as true, healthy, or complete churches,

but they consider the relation of *other* churches to the *Una Sancta* as a question for mutual consideration." I can remember Bishop G. Bromley Oxnam's impatience with the debate, which ended with this statement, when he related what had happened. For such a statement does not augur well for the formation of the One Great Church which some of the brethren talk about so eloquently. At least not in the near future!

At so many of the conferences I have attended, we spend much time in confessing our sin of division, our denominational pride, and our insistence that we are the one true Church. I get a little weary of confessing this sin, which I do not think I am guilty of, and which I do not believe characterizes Methodism. I hasten to add that we have sins to confess which may be just as serious as these. But to confess sins just because others are confessing is hypocrisy. And so often the ones whose confessions of prideful division are most eloquent are the ones who will be the last to do anything about it.

There is something one is not supposed to say about the ecumenical

This year marks important anniversaries of several Methodist churches—including our own—which grew out of early missionary activity. In much of this work Thomas Coke played an important part. Dr. Smith is pastor of Trinity Methodist Church, Atlanta, Georgia.

WE METHODISTS often complain that we have no really great missionary heroes equal to William Carey or David Livingstone. Such complaining springs not so much from the facts of our history as from our ignorance of those facts. The truth is, we do have a remarkable little Welshman who for over a hundred years has been consigned to one or two dusty pages of Methodist history. This personality is Thomas Coke. He holds an enviable, though unrecognized, place in the history of

sations grew the friendship and later the opportunity whereby Coke entered the Methodist Societies. Leaving South Petherton, at the request of the angry members who resented his evangelistic leanings, Coke became John Wesley's assistant on the London Circuit. The elderly leader of Methodism needed a secretary, which position the young Coke filled admirably.

A Plan for the Society

In January of 1784 Thomas Coke published a document which is worthy of note: "A Plan of the Society for the Establishment of Missions Among the Heathens." Coke stated very clearly his conviction: all believing Christians have a sacred obligation to proclaim the Gospel to the unreached. This was not a provincial missionary scheme but an ideal presented in bold world terms. Beginning with the depressed, unreached groups in Ireland, Wales and Scotland, the Gospel was to be taken to remote India and Africa. As soon as possible, all interested people (whatever their denomination) were to make subscriptions to the Plan. Coke's name headed the list. Each subscriber of two guineas became a member of the Society with the right to vote at the annual meetings.

Coke's *Plan* came into existence eight years prior to William Carey's voyage to India. In terms of calendar years it is one of the earliest documents projecting modern Protestant missions. This remarkable piece of writing was followed two years later by a pamphlet (unknown until its accidental discovery in a London office a few years ago) "An Address to the Pious and Benevolent." Regrettably these two pieces of writing did not create much of an impression among the Methodists. In fact, the documents were ignored by most Methodists, that is, all but John Wesley himself. Wesley severely rebuked the young Dr. Coke for a scheme which he thought highly premature

THOMAS COKE

our impetuous missionary bishop

by W. THOMAS SMITH

Christian world missions, and it is time Methodists recognized both the place and the man.

Thomas Coke was born in beautiful Brecon, Wales, in 1747, the son of Bartholomew (a well-to-do medical practitioner) and Anne Phillips Coke. At the age of sixteen he entered Jesus College, Oxford. Here his simple, honest faith was sorely tested by the prevailing Deism, so popular in academic circles. After graduating from the university (Oxford conferred three degrees on Coke, including that of Doctor of Civil Law) young Coke rather naturally turned to Holy Orders, not so much out of any real conviction as in an attempt to find a vital religious faith. During his first curacy at South Petherton in Somersetshire he experienced a genuine religious awakening which was prompted by associations with the Wesleyan Revival.

Coke had an opportunity to meet John Wesley and out of their conver-

and rash. Furthermore, Wesley pointed out that missionaries could not be obtained and there was the additional unpleasant factor that some subscriptions would come from non-Methodists. Wesley maintained that it was not wise to have people outside the Society controlling Methodist preachers and missionaries.

In many respects Wesley was correct. Coke was projecting an ideal (true, a beautiful ideal), yet one altogether unrealistic. It was premature and it lacked sufficient groundwork. Here we see a remarkable failing of Coke—a hasty idealism without adequate roots for future growth.

Without question, Thomas Coke was impetuous. Wesley once made this observation:

"Dr. Coke and I are like the French and the Dutch. The French have been compared to a flea, the Dutch to a louse. I creep like a louse, and the ground I get I keep; but the Doctor leaps like a flea and is sometimes obliged to leap back again."

Yet it must be said in all fairness to Coke, his weakness was his strength. He was impulsive because he was quick to recognize human need. For the remainder of his life, he continued to act in haste. But he *acted!*

So it was that Coke's admirable *Plan* and *Address* were put aside. But Coke was not to be thus neglected. If his ideas were not to be taken seriously, then he would go himself. In all of his travels, he paid his own way. Literally, he used his family fortune in financing missionary interests.

America

In September of 1784 Coke sailed from England to America, at Wesley's request, as Superintendent for the Methodists in the recently liberated colonies. During the voyage

Coke read the biographies of two missionaries, Francis Xavier and David Brainerd. At the famous Christmas Conference, meeting in Baltimore that year, many far-reaching plans were made. American Methodism was formally organized as a church. Among the plans was a program of missions. American preachers were assigned to Nova Scotia. Coke wrote in his *Journal*:

"One of the week-days at noon, I made a collection towards assisting our Brethren who are going to Nova-Scotia: and our friends generously contributed fifty pounds currency (thirty pounds sterling)."

Much of Thomas Coke's world vision and activity include the United States itself. In all, he made nine

Thomas Coke.



Methodist Prints

visits to this country. He is the first Superintendent (the term was later changed to Bishop) in American Methodism. He was the moving spirit in the missionary zeal of the young church. Whenever frontier Americans saw Dr. Coke or heard him preach, they knew an offering for missions would be forthcoming.

Coke dearly loved his American brethren. During one visit in the United States, he made this interesting observation:

" . . . Perhaps I have in this little tour baptized more children and adults than I should in my whole life, if stationed in an English Parish. . . ."

Unfortunately, Coke was not always understood and appreciated by the Americans. He filled the necessary role of "errand boy" between England and the new world. He was the travelling bishop, always on the move. This was a fact some Americans could not understand. We have a few lines from a letter by Francis Asbury to Coke:

" . . . And although you may be called to Europe to fulfill some prior engagements, and wind up your temporal affairs, nothing ought to prevent your hasty return to the continent, to live and die in America. . . . I conclude, that I consider you are not a citizen of Wales or England, but of the United States of America. . . ."

West Indies

Coke's first visit to the West Indies was the result of a storm as he was making his second trip to the United States. For four months his ship was storm tossed in mid-Atlantic and finally driven far to the South.

" . . . The Captain being convinced of the impossibility of reaching the port of *Halifax* this winter, it was the unanimous opinion of all, that no other refuge was left us, under God, but sail for the West Indies. . . ."

The ship limped into harbour in the West Indies on Christmas Morning.

"This day we landed in Antigua, and in going up the town of *St. John's* we met Brother *Baxter* in his band, going to perform divine services. After a little refreshment I went to our Chapel, and read prayers, preached, and administered the sacrament. . . ."

Methodism had already been introduced to the West Indies by the Gilbert brothers some years earlier. In 1758 Nathaniel Gilbert of Antigua and two of his Negro servants were converted by John Wesley at Wandsworth in England. Gilbert returned to Antigua and began preaching to the slaves. In 1778 John Baxter, a shipwright, was sent to Antigua. He took up the work of the now deceased Gilbert. It was this same John Baxter who accidentally met Coke on Christmas Day.

From the beginning Coke took this chain of little islands with its vast number of Negro slaves and impoverished inhabitants completely to his heart. At this first visit Coke ordained Baxter to continue his work and left his three companions (two were planning to serve in Nova Scotia) William Warrener, William Hammett and John Clark, to work in the West Indies. Thus Methodism grew under British auspices. In many ways the most constructive work of Coke's entire ministry was done here. In all he made at least five trips to the islands. His three-volume *History of the West Indies* represents his great interest in the people, their history and their numerous and tragic social and economic problems. He worked untiringly in behalf of the mistreated natives. He gives this revealing account of his visit to the Governor of St. Eustatius:

"He received us with his usual acrimony, and scemed, and spoke, as if he was determined to pull down the work of God . . . as soon as this man was re-elected . . . the flames of persecution were kindled afresh. The poor slaves . . . were cart whipped, and many of them imprisoned. . . ."

He made a special trip to Holland in an attempt to secure from the Dutch government laws safeguarding the religious liberties of the inhabitants of that island.

" . . . If a coloured man should be found praying—for the first offense he should receive thirty-nine lashes; and for the second, if free, he should be whipped and banished; but if a slave, he whipped every time."

Coke made a similar plea for the British-owned islands where Negroes were beaten for attending Methodist

worship. He saw pulpit Bibles actually hung from the gallows and clergymen burned in effigy. As a result of his labors, he saw a flourishing Methodist witness throughout the islands.

"A very extraordinary name has been fixed on the Methodists in this island—'Hallelujah!' Even the little negroes in the street call them by the name of *Hallelujah* as they pass along."

While in the West Indies Coke made this observation:

" . . . I have found a peculiar gift for speaking to the Blacks. It seems to be almost irresistible. Who knows but the Lord is preparing me for a visit in some future time to the coast of *Africa*?"

Africa

Coke had an amazing and genuine interest in Africa. His writings indicate that he was one of the earliest missionary leaders to take an interest in that long neglected continent.

"During a series of years we have compelled Africa to weep tears of blood; let us now endeavour to brighten her countenance with smiles of joy, as some compensation for the injuries we have done her."

In 1796 as agent for the British Conference Coke undertook an impressive missionary project in Sierra Leone to the Foulahs. The plan was a heartbreaking failure due to lack of wisdom in choice of personnel, a lesson our present missionary boards have wisely taken to heart. Coke learned, too, for a second such enterprise in 1811 succeeded admirably.

Later Activity

Since the beginning of West Indian missionary work Coke had been the agent of the British Conference. In the years which followed he had to move against a stubborn inertia in convincing his fellow Methodists that God was interested in the masses of Asia and Africa. Slowly his persistence won. He was placed in charge of the British missionary program.

Perhaps one of the most dramatic episodes in the missionary history of British Methodism came in 1813. For the first time the political situation in Europe and Asia made it practical to plan a mission to the East, provided the Conference voted the necessary funds. In the summer of 1813 Coke

went to the Conference in Liverpool. He was sixty-six years old. An invitation had come to open a mission in Ceylon and from there work might be taken to India. Coke wrote: "God Himself has said to me. 'Go to Ceylon.' I am as convinced of the will of God in this respect as that I breathe."

After several days of debate the British Conference appeared set in its determination not to finance the project. In a heroic plea to the Conference, Coke offered to give six thousand pounds (the present purchasing

power of this sum equals one hundred fifty thousand dollars). The offer was accepted.

Gathering a party of seven volunteers, five for Ceylon, one for Java, and one for the Cape of Good Hope, Coke made plans to leave. As the party sailed on December 31, 1813, Coke offered this moving prayer: "Here we are, before God, six missionaries and two dear sisters, now embarked in the most important and most glorious work in the world. . . ."

Coke did not live to see the ful-

fillment of the dream. On the morning of May 3, 1814, the little doctor was found lifeless on the floor of his cabin. He was buried in the Indian Ocean.

What He Accomplished

At the outset it is agreed that Thomas Coke demonstrates certain rather obvious weaknesses in administrative ability and in personal judgment. His missionary committee had a poor record in financial arrangements. In spite of this, Coke stands as "Father of Methodist Missions." He possessed a great missionary passion combined with a keen realization of human need. To this end he gave himself unstintingly. In sea voyages alone he covered the equivalent of four times around the earth, at least 100,000 miles, making separate 100 voyages. He was constantly sailing between England and Ireland, making twenty-seven visits in all. He visited the Channel Islands four times, France once, Holland once; he made nine trips to the United States and five to the West Indies. He was responsible for the following permanent missions:

- A. West Indies
- B. Sierra Leone in Africa
- C. Ceylon
- D. Gibraltar
- E. Mission to the French Prisoners
- F. Home Missions in Wales
- G. Home Missions in Scotland

Coke had an amazing ability to create interest and enthusiasm. He possessed the power to move people.

As Coke was nearing the end of his life he wrote to a friend:

"Yet I cannot repent of the thousands of hours which I have spent in at once the most vile, the most glorious drudgery of begging from house to house. The tens of thousands of pounds which I have raised for the missions, and the beneficial effects thereof, form an ample compensation for the time and the labour. . . ."

More than all else, Thomas Coke represents the pioneer missionary executive. He made blunders to be sure, but far outweighing the blunders is the enthusiasm for the cause of a world parish. Coke was a man of vast and glorious dreams. He had the vision and the desire to proclaim the Gospel throughout the world.

The Christmas Conference, 1784

By FRANK MASON NORTH

Eternal God, beneath Thy hand
Stretch far the coasts of every land;
The boundless plain, the hidden mine,
The streams, the forests—all are Thine.
At Thy command the mountains rise;
Thou art the Lord of earth and skies.

Thine are the men of zeal and worth
Who search Thy ways through all Thy earth,
Who face the storm, who brave the sea,
In light and darkness, seeking Thee,
Who flash the message through the air,
That God, our God, is everywhere.

Come we some stalwart souls to praise,
Who found Thee in the far-off days,
Who saw in continents Thy will—
Thy truth in prairie, lake, and hill,
But knew that only in man's heart
The everlasting life Thou art.

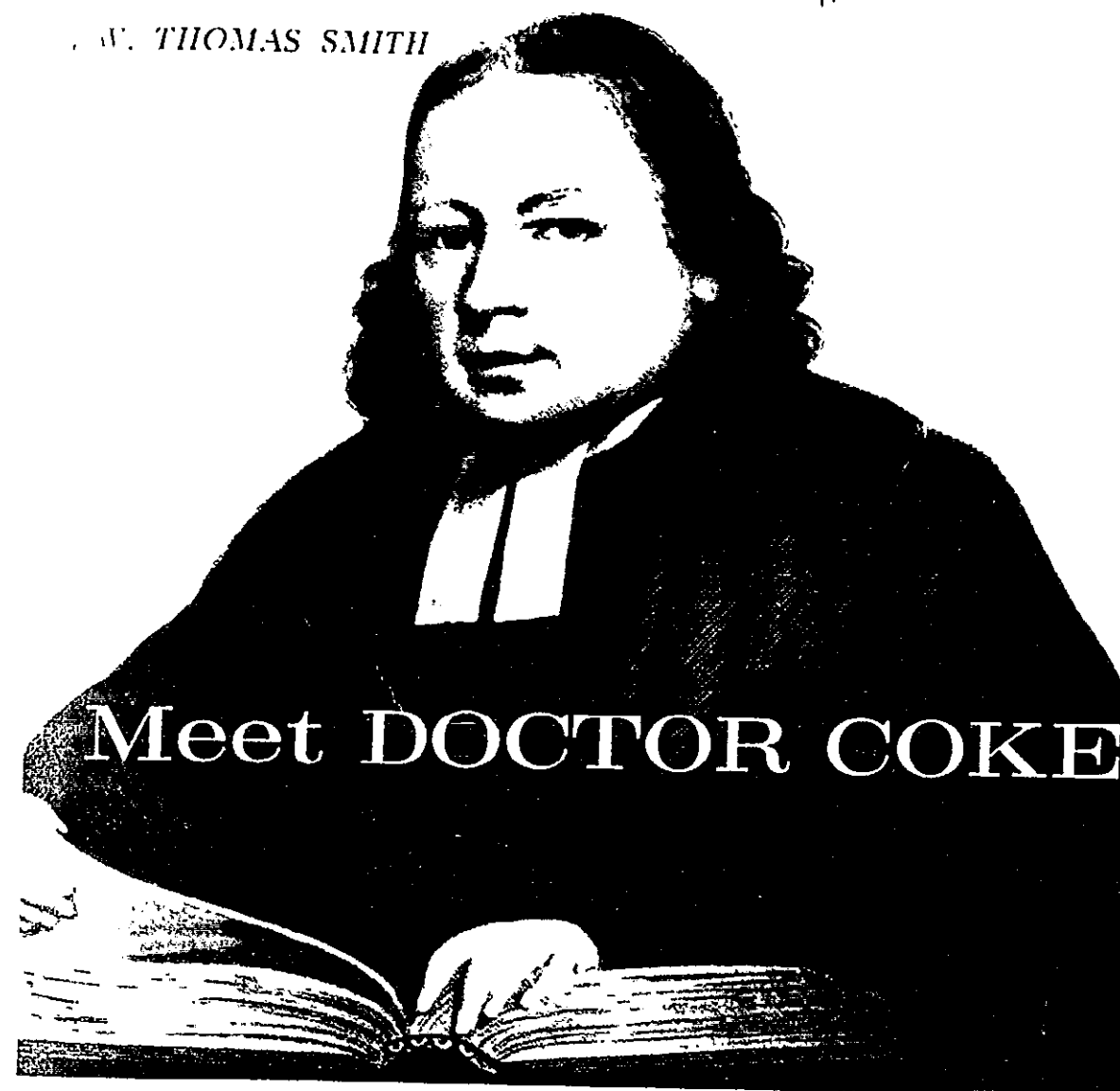
Here now these rugged spirits meet
From lonely trail, from city's street,
From Southern heat, from Western breeze,
From kin and comrades overseas;
Their throbbing purposes we feel,
As bowed with them our spirits kneel.

Within their counsels can there be
A world-wide Church's destiny?
Will here they make a valid plan
To search the world for every man?
They did their part! Grant, Lord, that we
May now fulfil their prophecy!

Today as yesterday the same,
Breathe Thou on us the sacred flame;
The paths our valiant fathers trod,
Help us to find, O Changeless God;
Reveal in us anew this hour
The love of Christ, His life, His power.

Editors' Note: This poem by Dr. North appeared on page 21 in the Dec., 1934, *World Outlook*

W. THOMAS SMITH



ON MAY 3 in the year 1814, a missionary was buried at sea with a dream of his lifetime as yet unfulfilled. He was Thomas Coke, the first bishop whom John Wesley took upon himself to ordain. It is a sad fact that we have so nearly forgotten this little man who did such a big job among Methodists.

Not only was he the presiding officer at the famous Christmas Conference, he was the executor of Wesley's design for American Methodists. Life had fashioned him to become instrumental in instilling a missionary passion, social conscience, and educational ideal in what was to become one of the great denominations of Christendom.

Thomas Coke was a Welshman born in Brecon in September of 1747. The house in which the family lived still stands in Brecon on High Street.

Thomas Coke at 16 entered Jesus College, Oxford, not as a serving boy as had George Whitefield or as a student depending on scholarship aid like the Wesleys, but as "gentleman commoner" with numerous social privileges.

Deism was all the rage and the naïve lad came under its sway as his tutor laughed, "Eh, Coke! Do you believe the Adam and Eve story, eh?"

For a time he tried to conform himself to this skeptical mood. Later making a complete about-face, he began to read some of the ponderous and dull religious

W. Thomas Smith is pastor of Trinity Methodist Church, Atlanta, Ga.

works of the time. Serious study marked the remainder of his college days. He was graduated with a bachelor's degree, a master's, and a doctor's degree.

His ordination as deacon took place in Christ Church cathedral, where John Wesley was ordained. Political friends assured young Coke of an immediate rise in the church. Such promises, however, proved as empty as the friendship of those who made them. A disappointed young clergyman became curate in Somersetshire.

For more than five years Coke preached from his lofty pulpit to a congregation which responded warmly at first but later turned against him. For, as Coke developed a friendship with Thomas Maxfield and started reading the works of John Fletcher and Wesley's sermons, his personal religious life assumed new earnestness.

So it was that one evening, while on his way to hold a prayer meeting, a new peace descended upon his soul: "I was given a vivid consciousness of the divine presence, and from that moment became a new creature."

This new religious interest prompted the desire to meet the man responsible for so much of it. Coke learned that the venerable John Wesley was to be in southwest England and hastened to see him. August 13, 1776, Wesley records in his *Journal*:

"I preached at Taunton, and afterwards went with Mr. Brown to Kingston. . . . Here I found a Clergyman, Dr.

Coke, late Gentleman Commoner of Jesus College in Oxford, who came twenty miles on purpose. I had much conversation with him; and an union then began, which I trust shall never end."

Young Dr. Coke had hoped Wesley would extend an immediate offer to join the Methodists. "I expected that he would have said, 'Come with me, and I will give you employment according to all that is in your heart.'"

But Wesley was far too wise to extend such a premature invitation. Rather, he advised the young man to put his own house in order with visiting, prayer services in the homes, and ". . . doing all the good he could."

Disappointed, Coke followed instructions nevertheless. His entire ministry assumed a Methodist zeal that many stodgy, pseudo-aristocratic families highly resented. Matters reached such an *impasse* that Coke's announcement regarding church repairs (a new west door and a gilded weather cock) provoked the desired occasion for a sudden dismissal.

Amid clanging bells the curate was abruptly told he could no longer preach there. A riot was narrowly escaped as Coke delivered his farewell sermon the following Sunday in the village square. The way was now open for Coke and Wesley to join forces. They needed each other. The older man, 74, wanted a youthful, well-trained associate. The young man, approaching 30, was in need of an experienced teacher. Wesley is said to have remarked after first hearing Coke preach, "How the little Doctor loves to mouth his words."

Our plump little gentleman (he stood five feet one inch) was learning humility; a story recounts that while traveling in a coach he refused to use his new heaver hat as a bucket for carrying water from a spring to revive a gentleman who was "scized by a fit." Another preacher gladly performed this service.

The year 1784 saw Coke involved in many situations—earlier Wesley had sent him to preside at the Irish Conference (a duty he continued to perform for the remainder of his life). Especially important was the writing of the Deed of Declaration whereby the Conference was given legal status and also assumed ownership of all chapels. In this venture Coke's legal knowledge proved extremely useful.

The decision to send Coke to America caused one of the most severe storms ever to break over the heads of Wesley and Coke. A step regarding America had to be taken. Dr. Lowth, Bishop of London, refused to be moved from his inertia by Wesley's repeated requests for an ordained man for the people in newly free United States.

Wesley put his thoughts thus:

"Lord King's account of the primitive church convinced me, many years ago, that bishops and presbyters are the same

order, and consequently have the same right to ordain. . . ."

February 7, 1784, Coke was called to Wesley's private study and there a plan was presented. Enemies of Coke (and there were many) claimed he was originator of the plan and that it grew out of his ambition to become a bishop. At Conference the following July, Wesley told the preachers he planned to send Coke to America, accompanied by Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey.

While Coke was in London preparing to leave, a letter arrived from Wesley asking that he come at once to Bristol to receive "fuller powers" and that he bring James Creighton with him.

AT 4 O'CLOCK on Thursday morning, September 2, 1784, Wesley placed his hands on Thomas Coke and thus gave to American Methodism its first in a succession of general superintendents (the term later adopted was "bishop"). Charles Wesley, furious at his brother's action, wrote:

*So easily are Bishops made,
By man or woman's whim:
Wesley his hands on Coke hath laid,
But who laid hands on him?*

In spite of charges and the wrath of many, the step seems highly justified by results both immediate and in subsequent history. Coke and his companions sailed September 18, 1784, and arrived in New York on November 3.

Once in America, Coke journeyed south, hoping to find Asbury. The meeting took place at Barratt's Chapel:

" . . . In this Chapel. . . I had a noble congregation. . . . After the sermon, a plain, robust man came up to me in the pulpit, and kissed me: I thought it could be no other than Mr. Asbury, and I was not deceived. . . ."

Asbury could not permit the thought of a general superintendent appointed by Wesley, and he insisted that a Conference be called of all the preachers. This now famous Christmas Conference convened at Baltimore's Lovely Lane Chapel. By unanimous vote Coke and Asbury were elected general superintendents of the new Methodist Episcopal Church.

On Christmas Day, Coke ordained Asbury a deacon and on the following day ordained him elder. Coke preached *On the Godhead of Christ*. On December 27, Asbury was consecrated general superintendent by Coke, assisted by Vasey, Whatcoat, and Philip W. Otterbein, a German Reformed minister, present at Asbury's request. Coke's sermon text was Revelation 3:7-11.

Springing out of this Conference came several important actions which helped determine the course of Methodism. Led by Coke, the Conference took positive action against slavery. The doctor was

fearless in denouncing slavery and urged the Methodists to free their slaves.

At times Coke showed more courage than wisdom in the methods and plans for his campaign. Yet the fact remains, through his urging and his action, the slavery issue was put on the heart and conscience of American Methodists. Coke and Asbury called on George Washington to present a petition for abolition of the nefarious trade:

"He received us very politely, and was very open to access. . . . After dinner we . . . opened to him the grand business on which we came. . . . He informed us that he was of our sentiments, and had signified his thoughts on that subject to most of the great men of the State. . . ."

Cokesbury College was Coke's dream child. He observed:

"Our new college . . . we trust, will unite together those two great ornaments of human nature, Genuine Religion and Extensive Learning. . . . Our object is (not to raise Gospel-Ministers, but) to serve our pious friends and our married Preachers in the education of their sons."

Asbury was always the unwilling partner in this venture. Coke was its champion and the failure of the institution was a heartbreaking disappointment.

AT THE Christmas Conference it was voted that Nova Scotia become a mission field. At Coke's suggestion two preachers were appointed to go there. The doctor was not above begging for the cause of a world parish, and as he was nearing the end of his life he wrote:

"Yet I cannot repent of the thousands of hours which I have spent in at once the most vile, the most glorious drudgery of begging from house to house. The tens of thousands of pounds which I have raised for the missions, and the beneficial effects thereof, form an ample compensation for the time and the labour. . . ."

Coke's first visit to the United States closed in June, 1785. During the following 19 years he made eight subsequent trips to this country. Without question his visits were too brief. He might have accomplished more had he remained for a longer time, yet we must realize that someone had to assume the "errand boy" role. There had to be a tie between Wesley, the British Conference, and the New Methodist Episcopal Church.

Following Wesley's death in 1791, Coke had duties in the British Isles as well as in America.

In the course of his lifetime, he made five trips to the West Indies. It was in his ministry there that we see Thomas Coke in one of his best roles—that of the compassionate missionary bishop indicated in his *History of the West Indies*.

In England Coke experienced his most painful opposition in the form of a resentment against what was considered his aspiration to become the second Wesley. It must be said, in all fairness, that Coke

was not without ambition. When he learned of Wesley's death, his rush to get to England was a bit too rash. As a result, the honor of being president of the Conference was not given him for several years.

COKE DID not marry until late in life. His first wife, the wealthy Penelope Goulding Smith, died five years after they were married. He then married Ann Loxdale, a spinster who died 11 months later.

One of the most attractive aspects of the character of Coke is his love of nature. His *Journal* abounds with references to the beauties of woods, field, sea.

"In traveling from this Conference to Virginia, we were favored with one of the most beautiful prospects I ever beheld . . . the Peach trees being all in full blossom. . . ."

In spite of danger (for example, he was captured by pirates) and personal discomfort, the plucky little doctor did not stop:

"The weather was cold . . . although I clothed myself almost from top to toe in flannel, I could but just bear the cold. . . . Sometimes we lost our way. In one instance we lost twenty-one miles . . . we were obliged to lie on the floor, which indeed I regarded not, though my bones were a little sore in the morning. . . ."

He made this further interesting observation regarding life in America:

" . . . The preachers in Europe know but little, in the present state of Methodism, of the trials of two thirds of the Preachers on this Continent. And yet . . . the people in this country enjoy greater plenty and abundance of the mere necessities of life, than those of any country I ever knew. . . ."

Coke's last days were spent in convincing a reluctant British Conference to send a mission to Ceylon and later to India. The only way to secure the venture was by giving the last of his fortune, 6,000 pounds. Sailing for Asia had been Coke's dream, and as he was en route to Ceylon death overtook him on May 3, 1814. He was buried in the Indian Ocean.

From the standpoint of actual service rendered, Thomas Coke stands as one of Methodism's leading figures. From the aspect of personal life, he remains one of its most colorful personalities. Though he was lacking in many qualities of genius, subsequent history has, nonetheless, proved that his capabilities far outweigh his limitations. Asbury, who is not noted for extravagant language, wrote:

"By vote of Conference, I preached the funeral sermon for Doctor Coke—of blessed mind and soul—of the third branch of Oxonian Methodists—a gentleman, a scholar, and a bishop, to us—and as a minister of Christ, in zeal, in labours, and in services, the greatest man in the last century."

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THOMAS COKE, PREACHER

[The following article, by the minister of Young Harris Memorial Methodist church, Athens, Georgia, U.S.A., is a welcome contribution to our commemoration of Dr. Coke. Unfortunately it arrived too late for inclusion in an earlier issue.—EDITOR.]

THE year 1964 has marked the 150th observance of Thomas Coke's death—he died on 3rd May 1814, en route to Ceylon. An increased and long-overdue interest in Coke raises the question: What of Coke as preacher? He is remembered as bishop, inveterate traveller, founder of missions: he indeed filled these roles. He was also, by "calling" and "vocation", a preacher.¹

The ebullient Dr. Coke was a Welshman—enough said! The Welsh term is *hwyl*—a condition of near-ecstasy, a mood or temper peculiar to Welsh intonation. Welsh preachers have long been famous for it. Whilst Coke probably spoke almost no Welsh, all the exuberance—the *hwyl*—was his to a marked degree. He loved preaching, and in it found personal fulfilment and discipleship.

After rather diligent years as a student at Oxford, earning a Master of Arts and later a Doctor of Civil Law degree, young Coke in 1770 entered his first parish at South Petherton. During these early Anglican days he was a sincere, stilted reader of homilies. Through Thomas Maxfield he was introduced to Methodist warmth. The more familiar he became with Wesley's writings, the more he departed from prayer book and manuscript. He laboured assiduously, night after night, preparing his sermons. A story—very likely apocryphal—is that such crowds came to hear him that a balcony had to be added to his South Petherton church. We do know that attendance at Holy Communion tripled. Stuffey vestrymen eventually ousted the young curate who had taken on Methodist enthusiasm.

Coke's first published homily appeared in 1774. It was *A Sermon Upon Education*, preached on Tuesday, 14th September 1773, at Crewkerne, Somerset, on the anniversary of a public school. The purpose of the printing—"... the principal, if not the sole motive,

¹ Thomas Coke: *Four Discourses on the Duties of a Minister of the Gospel* (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1880), pp. 208, 245, 272-5.

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... is the vindication of his [Coke's] character . . ."—may have been achieved in spite of the tedious style of writing.

In the Methodist Mission House, London, the present writer discovered three unpublished sermons in Coke's neat handwriting which belong to this period. The first, undated, is based on Proverbs iii. 17, and contains the following:

There are two opinions which the inconsiderate are apt to take upon trust. . . . a vicious life . . . of liberty, pleasure, and happy advantages. . . . a religious life is a servile and most uncomfortable state.

The second, on the parable of the prodigal son, Luke xv. 17-18, was delivered in South Petherton, 6th September 1772. The third sermon, on Matthew vii. 24, stresses building on a rock—

And may God Almighty so guide and enable us to live here, that we may be completely and eternally happy in the world to come.

In the Methodist Archives Centre in London there are two Coke sermons: one dated 27th September 1772, from Acts x. 4; the other based on Philippians iv. 6. A manuscript dated 7th February 1773, on Luke viii. 15 is at Wesley's Chapel, London. The October 1960 issue of *World Parish* contained a Coke sermon from John xvi. 6-11.

Coke's becoming a Methodist in 1777 witnessed the full change in preaching style. Vast crowds are said to have heard him in London—at the Foundery in Moorfields, at West Street, and at the new chapel in City Road. Dorothea Jordan, actress and society leader, wrote to the Duke of Clarence (whose mistress she was):

We went to the Methodist Chapel last night to hear a famous preacher of the name of Coke. The place was crowded beyond imagination. His doctrine was very good and perfectly orthodox as far as faith goes, . . . but his manner and delivery were so truly [sic] ludicrous that I was forced to pinch myself to keep from laughing. Mr. Coke told us that he was once nearly drowned . . . , but that his faith saved him for God or Jesus Christ, he does not know which, threw in his way a limb of a lime tree on which he got and rode triumphantly to land. He also told us that he should preach tomorrow, and take that opportunity to ordain two young men whom the societies of brethren in London was going to send out to preach the Gospel to the blacks.²

In 1786 John Wesley criticized one of his preachers who spoke so low that they lost a good part of what he said; and what they could hear was spoken in a dead, cold, languid manner, as if he did not feel anything he spoke. . . . Dr. C. leaned to the other extreme.³

Coke was an intense preacher. "What an afflicting spectacle", he wrote, ". . . a lukewarm . . . minister."⁴ And again: "Frozen discourses will never set on fire the souls of hearers."⁵ What causes preachers to fail? He answers: ". . . a dull, lukewarm spirit: zeal is a holy fervour. . . . Alas! he who can indulge . . . a stupid, lethargic spirit, will make but a miserable reprover of the deadness of devotion which he observes in others. . . ."⁶

² Written from Liverpool, 9th October 1809 (see *Proceedings*, xxx, p. 188). In 1787, Coke had dined with the Duke of Clarence (Prince William Henry) in Antigua (see *Coke's Journal*, p. 57).

⁴ *Discourses*, p. 267.

⁵ *ibid.*, p. 266.

⁶ *Letters*, vii, p. 346.

⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 210-12.

Coke's preaching style was florid—aimed to reach emotion rather than cool intellect. Little wonder that he was received with less than enthusiasm by the Scottish Calvinists! Coke's friend and biographer aptly commented:

As a preacher, his talents were always displayed to the greatest advantage, when he applied himself to the hearts of his hearers; and at this point he seemed invariably to aim. . . . His public address, however, was too rapid for the tardy movements of sober, theological discussion. Into a detail of argument he seldom entered; but he supplied the deficiency by a copious appeal, which he generally made to Scripture, with which his mind was abundantly stored.⁷

Coke's sanguine approach aroused a similar enthusiastic response in his American congregations. On 6th July 1789 he wrote:

All the shouting seasons, in spite of my proud reluctance . . . were a matter of great praise and rejoicing to me. . . . I shall defend them, both from the pulpit and the press. . . .⁸

A casual reading of Coke's *Journals* reveals the vast amount of preaching to such responsive congregations in brush arbores, Anglican churches, private dwellings, taverns, and the United States Congress. His preaching to negro slaves in the West Indies is revealing: "Since my visit to the islands, I have found a peculiar gift of speaking to the blacks."⁹

Coke's personal letters and *Journal* show a rashness and a marked tendency to overstate a case. These qualities mean a loss of preciseness, but show a verve and a vigour which could well give his preaching evangelistic warmth and appeal.

Coke's voice was rich and melodious, but in times of excitement reached a very high pitch, and after preaching three sermons a day he became hoarse. Thomas Ware noted ". . . his voice . . . [was] of a woman rather than of a man." Said Samuel Woolmer:

He possessed naturally a good understanding, and a lively imagination. . . . His principal *forte* in preaching, was bold assertion and warm declamation. He was generally too warm for a theological reasoner. His subjects were seldom in an argumentative strain; but he was sound, sensible and lively, calculated to arrest the attention and captivate the heart. He was rather luminous than profound. His style was generally glowing and flowery; and often eloquent and sublime.¹⁰

At the Christmas Conference, 1784, Coke delivered his *Sermon on the Godhead of Christ*, John i. 1. As was his custom, proof texts were massed to demonstrate Christ's divinity: in creation, preservation of natural life, forgiveness of man's sin, miracles, works of grace and regeneration. At Asbury's consecration as General Superintendent, Coke presented his well-known *Sermon Preached at*

⁷ Samuel Drew: *The Life of the Rev. Thomas Coke, LL.D.* (New York: T. Soule and T. Mason, 1818), p. 381.

⁸ *History of American Methodism* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964), i, p. 300. (Letter written to Freeborn Garrettson.)

⁹ *Extracts of the Journals of the Rev. Dr. Coke's Five Visits to America* (London: G. Paramore, 1793), p. 93.

¹⁰ Samuel Woolmer: *The Servant of the Lord* (London: T. Cordeux, 1815), pp. 18-19.

Baltimore based on Revelation iii. 7-11, on the nature and task of a Christian bishop: "Humility . . . Meekness . . . Gentleness . . . Patience . . . Fortitude . . . Impartiality . . . Zeal . . . Wisdom . . . Communion with God and Confidence in Him."¹¹

Coke published other sermons—this was the tract age—including numerous, wordy, stiff funeral orations. Any reading of these will indicate that Coke's appeal must have come from the spirit and personality of Coke the man and preacher, not Coke the writer.

The doctor was at his eloquent best when preaching on missions, e.g. from Psalm lxviii. 31: ". . . Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God." Theologically he was highly orthodox, especially in his view of the Trinity and of the divinity of Christ. On several occasions he bordered on heresy-hunting. In October 1779 he bluntly charged Joseph Benson and other fellow-Methodists with Unitarian leanings. Woolmer noted:

When opposing the adversaries of his Master, especially the Arians and Socinians, he was violent, hardly knowing when to put his sword into the scabbard, and sometimes rather unguarded in his expressions, which were more calculated to provoke anger, than to convince of evil.¹²

At Taunton in 1807, so heated was his charge that Job David described him as damning "all Arians and Socinians indiscriminately to *hell flames without the faintest hope of their salvation*." David criticized Coke for the

dogmatic and magisterial tone in which you conveyed your sentiments . . . the *coarse, vulgar, degrading epithets* you employed . . . [He then asked Coke:] Do you consider yourself infallible? Are you the centre of all wisdom, knowledge and piety? . . .

Alas, Coke possessed the eighteenth-nineteenth century habit of borrowing other preachers' materials, and for this he received due criticism, as did Wesley before him.

Coke must be seen as a peripatetic preacher who did not have time for careful Sunday-by-Sunday preparation. He naturally developed certain basic themes which he used repeatedly. He was constantly "on the go". Notices in Paris, during the Revolution, announced "the eminent English divine" lately arrived to preach "in French" (and three people came to hear him).

Coke's zealotry must not be dismissed as pious emotionalism. Said he:

The man who engages in this solemn work is not merely accountable to God for his own soul, but becomes responsible also for the souls of those who have been committed to his care.¹³

At the close of his addresses on the ministry, and almost at the close of his life, Coke prayed:

O my God, give to all the ministers of Thy gospel a tender and paternal heart toward their people.¹⁴

W. THOMAS SMITH.

¹¹ *The Substance of a Sermon Preached at Baltimore* . . . (London: G. Paramore, 1785), pp. 14-22.

¹² Woolmer, *op. cit.*, p. 19. ¹³ *Discourses*, p. 195. ¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 312.

THOMAS COKE AND AMERICAN METHODISM, 1784-92

WILLIAM PHÆBUS, sometime physician and Methodist preacher and a member of the Christmas Conference of 1784, in his report of that Conference said:

Wesley ordained Coke his apostle or messenger to us . . . Then with his power and in the fear of God, we assembled at the city of Baltimore . . . and received Thomas Coke, L.L.D. with his testimonials from the greatest man to us in the world.¹

This was Coke's function for America: agent for Wesley. In his lifetime he and his work were constantly overshadowed by the two fathers of American Methodism, Wesley and Asbury. Caught between them during Wesley's life and equally pressed between England and America after Wesley's death, Coke was constantly subject to the misunderstanding of those whom he faithfully tried to represent.

Nor have the histories rectified the misunderstandings. Jesse Lee, first historian of the infant American church, entertained an open hostility to Coke. Later works, focusing on Wesley and Asbury, have frequently reflected his views or given inadequate attention to the problem. An appreciative biography by Bishop Warren Candler in 1923 has been too little read. America needs to take a new look at Dr. Coke and acknowledge a debt to his selfless service. One step in this direction is a recent doctoral dissertation at Boston University by Thomas Smith. It is to be hoped that this issue of the *Proceedings* will inspire the reading of these works and further recognitions of Coke's work.

Coke's relationship to America can be summarized in three significant periods. These were the Christmas Conference of 1784, the Conferences of 1787, and the first General Conference in 1792. Each of these was of major significance in the development of the church.

The year 1784 was the year of the establishment of the Methodist Conferences both in England and America. Coke was closely associated with both events, and the establishment in America should not be considered without keeping in mind his experience in the English settlement in July before embarking for America in September.

Wesley discussed the American problem and a tentative outline of its solution with Coke in February of 1784. This discussion continued until at the Leeds Conference in July the matter was laid before a select group of preachers. That Coke was to be superintendent of this American venture seems not to have been questioned.

¹ William Phœbus: *An Apology for the Right of Ordination* . . . (New York: T. Kirk, 1804), pp. 23, 25.

for the discriminating scrutiny of John C. Bowmer! And, by the way, could not a branch, with infinite tact, offer its services to any circuit celebrating a centenary or bicentenary event and wanting a worthy record of historical value? Certainly the branch must be the watchdog to ensure that places of Methodist historical interest do not fall into neglect, and that important anniversaries are properly celebrated. Through the pages of the *Proceedings* branches can set down their meetings and activities for the interest and stimulus of others.

Overseas members will doubtless have their own branches, and news of their activities, including details of local research, would be of special value. From other countries it would also be a great benefit to know of students engaged in doctoral theses on any form of historical research with Methodist interest, so that other students in that same general field would have the opportunity of a correspondence that might be mutually instructive.

So, members of the Society, use us more, and let us use you more, that together we may serve the interests of Methodism and fulfil those objects of the Society for which it was founded. The expansion of our work and influence depends on you.

MALDWYN L. EDWARDS.

We acknowledge, with thanks, the receipt of the following journals and publications, and would assure the societies concerned of our continued friendly interest in their work.

The Journal of Ecclesiastical History, October 1963.

The Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research, November 1963.

The Amateur Historian, Summer, Autumn and Winter 1963.

The Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society of England, July 1963.

The Journal of the Friends' Historical Society, Autumn 1962.

The Baptist Quarterly, July and October 1963.

The Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society, September 1963.

The Bulletin of the Society for African Church History, April 1963.

It is with considerable pleasure than we learn of the formation of yet another local branch of our Society—to be known as the Devon and Exeter Branch. An inaugural meeting, attended by about twenty people, was held on Tuesday, 10th March 1964. We extend to the branch our very best wishes, and shall look forward to receiving further news of its development.

ERRATUM

We regret to say that in our December 1963 issue (*Proceedings*, xxxiv, p. 95), under "News from our Branches", Publication No. 6 of the Cornish Branch was given the title *Samuel Drew*. It should have read *Samuel Dunn*. We extend our apologies to the author and to the branch.

EDITOR.

He had the qualifications of orders, education and Wesley's appointment. That this appointment should be by formal ordination ceremony seems not to have been settled, however, until, after the Conference, Coke wrote to Wesley urging it. Consequently "everything was done", Whatcoat and Vasey were ordained, and Coke was "set apart as a Superintendent", the Prayer Book was prepared, and Wesley wrote a letter to explain the plan to the American preachers. Whatever else was in Wesley's mind was conveyed to Coke privately, to whose subsequent actions we must look to discern the whole plan.² Whatever he did carried Wesley's authority, and no evidence has survived to question his actions in Wesley's behalf.

Thus armed, the three missionaries arrived in New York. They were met by John Dickins, who heartily approved of the new plan and urged it to be effected immediately. But as Coke was careful of the propriety of Wesley's instruction to work in harmony with Asbury, he set out to the south to find him. In about ten days he came upon the site of an ensuing Quarterly Conference at Barrett's Chapel in Maryland, to which Asbury came. The fifteen preachers at the Conference mutually agreed to the expediency of calling a general conference of the preachers to consider Wesley's proposals. Although no such conference was proposed in any of the extant records of Wesley's plan, Coke evidenced no surprise or hesitation at calling a conference. Wesley was accustomed to doing all things in conference; this was the Methodist plan, in Britain and America.

The chief point of issue of the Christmas Conference was the source of authority for the new American church. Here Asbury and Coke contributed opposing ideas. Coke insisted that one of the prime resolutions of the Conference be the full recognition of Wesley's authority. So the *Minutes* of the Conference stated:

During the Life of the Rev. Mr. Wesley, we acknowledge ourselves his Sons in the Gospel, ready in Matters belonging to Church-Government, to obey his Commands. And we do engage after his Death to do everything that we judge consistent with the Cause of Religion in America and the political Interests of these States, to preserve and promote our Union with the Methodists in Europe.³

This was the basis of authority in British Methodism; here in America the assumption was the same. John Dickins had told Coke: "Mr. Wesley has determined the point, and therefore it is not to be investigated, but complied with." Asbury probably judged such sentiments to be ill-advised, but he did not seriously oppose the passage of "the binding minute". Asbury, on his part, recognizing the temper of the American preachers, insisted that all things be put to vote. This was pointed up in his refusal to accept the appointment as Superintendent without the vote of the Conference. And Coke freely accepted this.

² See *Proceedings*, xxxiii, p. 11. In the letter reproduced there we see how fully Wesley entrusted the execution of his plan to Asbury and Coke.

³ *Minutes*, 1785.

That these facets of the Conference were mutually exclusive sources of authority in the new church was yet to appear. The Christmas Conference was an experimental design, constructed first from the musings of Wesley and his advisers since at least 1755. Coke had recently added his conclusions. Finally the form of the church was pragmatically arrived at in the deliberations of the practical but unlettered preachers at Baltimore.

These men, from John Wesley to Adam Fonerdan, were working together in the great new task. The advice of Wesley transmitted through Coke was understood and gladly accepted. The Christmas Conference was not deceived by Coke concerning Wesley's mind, nor did the Conference claim privileges and powers which Wesley did not expect them to possess and employ. That later historians can see in that event the basis for the later tension between Wesley and the Conference, and the Conference and its episcopacy, in no wise detracts from the basic concord of the Christmas Conference. Some of the tenets of the Conference, such as the liturgy, fell by the wayside; the vexing problem of authority was to be a tare in the harvest, but more good seed was in good ground. Coke had planted well.

It was inevitable that the opposing notions of authority which the Christmas Conference had left unresolved would lead to a crisis in the church. This crisis was precipitated in 1787 on Coke's second visit to America.

Three conferences had been scheduled for the late spring and summer of 1787. Wesley, however, decided that Coke should visit in the early spring, possibly to allow time for him to return for the conferences in Ireland and England. This caused some irritation among the preachers, particularly Asbury, who disliked the necessity of adjusting his schedule to Coke's always limited time in America. The more serious issue, however, was Wesley's order, delivered through Coke, to appoint Whatcoat Superintendent to act with Asbury and Garrettson as Superintendent for the British possessions.

When Coke arrived in Charleston in March, Asbury somewhat unwillingly acquiesced in Whatcoat's appointment. But as Asbury and Coke met the Conference the problems became serious. The sessions were marked with unrest. Rumours were rife that Wesley intended to recall Asbury. The preachers complained of the change of the Conference dates, and Coke was accused of attempting to administer the church by mail from the distance of Europe. Behind all complaints was jealousy of the Conference right of self-determination, the American temper.

Coke, upholding Wesley's authority, pointed to the "binding minute", and would have forced Whatcoat's appointment. Upon this Jesse Lee reported:

They had made the engagement of their own accord, and among themselves, and they believed they had a right to depart therefrom when

they pleased, seeing it was not a contract, made with Mr. Wesley, . . . but an agreement among themselves.⁴

By this means the issue of authority was settled. From that time the Conference of the American preachers was clearly the ultimate authority of the American Methodist connexion.

The period from the Conference of 1787 to the Conference of 1792 was marked with unrest and confusion. Coke attempted to calm the storm before leaving for Ireland in 1787. His effort was partially successful. But during the year the estrangement between Wesley and Asbury developed. Only scraps of correspondence have survived to tell that tale, but it was climaxed by Wesley's censorious letter to Asbury of 20th September 1788.⁵

Having thus cut loose from Wesley's authority, the American church did not yet have a clear understanding of its own organizational problem. Asbury's solution was to attempt to govern the church through the unfortunate expedient of the Council. Asbury conceived this governing committee to be more practical than the scattered conferences among which agreement had become more difficult. But the Council was always suspect as nothing more than Asbury's cabinet.

During Coke's 1791 visit opposition to the Council was climaxed with a demand for a general conference of all the preachers, the first such conference since 1784. James O'Kelly was the chief agitator of this opposition, but Coke himself assumed formal leadership of the call for the general conference.

In the midst of these discussions Coke became involved with two other problems. The first was his approach to Bishop White about the possibility of reunion with the Anglican communion in America. This excursion was probably undertaken solely on Coke's own initiative, but in the light of Wesley's letter to Asbury of 31st October 1784, where he suggested a cautious approach to Mr. Ogden and Mr. Jarrett, it seems probable that Wesley would have approved of Coke's advances. However, Coke, realizing the magnitude of the gap and being straitened for time by reason of Wesley's death, did not pursue the matter further than his brief conversation with Dr. White in Philadelphia. The second of Coke's problems was Wesley's death, and his emotional attack on Asbury and the American preachers who had contributed to the rejection of Wesley's authority in 1787.

Before his departure Coke printed a circular outlining his programme for the forthcoming general conference.

Wilmington, Delaware, May 4th, 1791.

Five things we have in view. 1. The abolition of the arbitrary aristocracy. 2. The investing of the nomination of the presiding elders in

⁴ Jesse Lee: *A Short History of the Methodists* (Baltimore: McGill and Cline, 1810), p. 127.

⁵ For Wesley's probable final word, see *Proceedings*, xxxii, p. 96.

the conferences of the districts. 3. The limitation of the districts to be invested in the general conference. 4. An appeal allowed each preacher on the reading of the station. And 5. A general conference of at least two-thirds of the preachers as a check upon every thing.⁶

When the general conference convened in Baltimore in November 1792, the preachers were prepared for a thorough revision of the organization of the church. Coke struck the keynote of the Conference in his opening remarks: "The members of this conference are the representatives of the people, and we are to all intents the legislature of the Methodist Episcopal Church."⁷

During the extremely difficult days of the sitting of the Conference Coke alone presided. Asbury purposely absented himself, since his own conduct was under review in O'Kelly's criticisms. O'Kelly's demand to break Asbury's absolute power of stationing was rejected, resulting in the withdrawal of O'Kelly's party from the connexion. But this schism did not break the Conference, which proceeded to a careful revision of the discipline. The most notable accomplishment was the General Conference itself as a standing body, to meet every four years as the supreme governing body of the church.

Thus in the great moments of the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Christmas Conference of 1784 and the first General Conference of 1792, the church looked to Thomas Coke as a source of order and form. The fervour and indefatigable labours of Asbury and the American preachers were here moulded into the effective economy of Methodism largely by the skill and wisdom of Thomas Coke.

J. HAMBY BARTON.

⁶ Alexander M'Caine: *The History and Mystery of Methodist Episcopacy* (Baltimore: Richard Matchett, 1827), p. 64.

⁷ William Guirey: *The History of the Episcopacy* (n.p., n.d., c. 1805), p. 372.

The Rev. John J. Perry

IT is with great regret that we record the death of the Rev. John J. Perry, Chairman of the East Anglia branch, which took place in Norwich on 29th January 1964. Mr. Perry, who was 71, was a highly-honoured member of the Wesley Historical Society, and was especially well known to habitual attenders at the Annual Meeting, over which he had on a number of occasions presided.

He commenced his ministry in 1918, after training at Didsbury College. He travelled widely throughout the country, and latterly was superintendent of the Preston (Wesley) and Norwich (St. Peter's) circuits.

John Perry was a faithful and beloved minister, a fine churchman, a man of great integrity of mind and heart, and a wise counsellor and friend. He was widely read; he was a lover of Charles Wesley's hymns and an authority on Wesleyana. His was a very gracious personality. I know that much more could be written, for I was proud to be one of his friends.

R. W. TROWER (Norwich).

(3001/10)

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DR. COKE AND BRITISH METHODISM

FORTY years ago a Methodist missionary historian observed that "John and Charles Wesley have so held the admiration and the reverence of their followers that there is no small danger of these forgetting the great gift given by God to the Church in Thomas Coke".¹ This warning, particularly relevant in the year of the 150th anniversary of Coke's death, has been heeded by our Society, which has arranged appropriate recognition in the choice of Coke as the subject for this year's annual lecture. Meanwhile, the briefest introduction to some of the more important aspects of Coke's life and work may be of value to those not well acquainted with his full and varied career.²

Coke really entered the Methodist arena on 13th August 1776. John Wesley had preached at Taunton, and was spending the night with the vicar of nearby Kingston. It was in his "large old parsonage . . . just fit for a contemplative man" that there occurred, in Professor Gordon Rupp's happy phrase, "a fateful conjunction of evangelical planets". "Here", wrote Wesley in his *Journal*, "I found a clergyman, Dr. Coke, late Gentleman Commoner of Jesus College in Oxford, who came twenty miles on purpose. I had much conversation with him; and a union then began which I trust shall never end."

Coke was then twenty-eight years old. Born on 9th October 1747, he was the son of Bartholomew Coke, a respected apothecary of Brecon. Though, in common with most of his contemporaries, he was not unaffected by the moral and spiritual enervation of Oxford, on leaving the university he determined to take holy orders. After three years in his native town, where he followed his father in a career of distinguished civic service and like him became chief magistrate, he was ordained deacon in 1770 with a curacy at Road in Somerset. Moving to South Petherton in the same county, he became

¹ C. G. Findlay and W. W. Holdsworth: *The History of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society*, ii, p. 11.

² This article is concerned with Coke's work in Britain and overseas; for Coke and America, see above, pp. 104-8.

friendly with the vicar of Kingston, who introduced him to the writings of John Wesley and to Fletcher's recently-published *Checks to Antinomianism*. It was the reading of these which led Coke to seek the meeting with Wesley in 1776.

Much to Coke's disappointment, Wesley did not invite him to join him, but, having encouraged him, sent him back to continue his work at South Petherton. There he transformed the parish into what was in effect a Methodist circuit, and was rewarded by dismissal from his curacy—an event which was marked by the ringing of the church bells and the provision, by his enemies, of hogsheads of cider for the villagers to celebrate his departure. By August 1777 Wesley, when riding again to Taunton, had with him Dr. Coke, "who has bid adieu to his honourable name, and determined to cast in his lot with us." Thomas Coke, "a man of small stature, ruddy complexion, brilliant eyes, long hair, feminine but musical voice, and gowned as an English clergyman",³ had brought his gifts, his zeal and his considerable wealth to the office of an itinerant Methodist preacher.

Soon he was to occupy a place in Methodism second only to that of Wesley himself. From the Conference of 1778, when his name first appeared in the *Minutes*, his influence quickly grew, and by 1781 he was a member, with Fletcher and four others, of a special committee charged to deal with difficulties which arose during Conference. Fletcher was then in poor health, and the illness of "Wesley's designated successor", who died in 1785, was in no small measure responsible for Coke's rise to prominence. Coke brought to Methodism a courage and an optimism which were just the qualities needed at that time. Not only was he a fervent preacher, but he was also an energetic right-hand man, upon whom Wesley could implicitly rely, and who was able to relieve the ageing Wesley of much of the administrative work connected with the growing number of Methodist societies and preaching-houses. In particular, Coke had a legal training, with an Oxford Doctorate of Civil Law, gained in 1775, which was to prove invaluable in the period of the development of Methodist organization as the eventual separation from the Established Church became increasingly inevitable.

Thus he was much involved in the protracted problem of the new chapel at Birstall, where the trustees refused to accept the normal Methodist provision for the appointment of preachers by the Conference alone, and he was appointed by the Conference of 1783 to "visit the societies throughout England" with a view to having all the Methodist preaching-houses "settled on the Conference plan". Largely as a result of the Birstall difficulties, Wesley, by the legal Deed of Declaration lodged in the Court of Chancery, provided, in 1784, for the continuance of Methodism through a Conference of one hundred specified men. Coke's guidance played a vital part in the taking of this important step. He had a large share in drawing up

³ Richard Pyke: *The Dawn of American Methodism*, p. 107.

the deed, though he differed from Wesley in that he wished to include every preacher in full connexion as a member of the Conference; the conception of the "Legal Hundred" was Wesley's alone.

The year 1784 was a significant one for Coke. It saw his much-discussed "setting-apart" as Superintendent for Methodist work in America and his first visit to that country. Earlier in the same year he had published his first major plan for overseas missionary work, which was to become his absorbing passion, and to which he was now beginning to devote himself in real earnest. He spent much of the next few years abroad and in Ireland, and was indeed absent from England when Wesley died in 1791.

It was partly because of his many overseas interests that he was not appointed Wesley's successor as the sole leader of Methodism. Henceforward there was to be an annually-elected President of the Conference, but Coke did not hold this office until 1797; he served for a second term in 1805. He was, however, elected to the newly-created post of Secretary of the Conference—a position he held, with four brief breaks (during two of which he was President), until his death.

Also Coke was, to some extent, distrusted. He was the only clergyman of the Established Church who was active as a Methodist itinerant, and on the relationship of Methodism to the Establishment he held strong views which were not universally acceptable. He was also suspected of being ambitious. Perhaps this element in his character has been unduly stressed. Although Charles Wesley had his doubts about Coke, his brother believed him to be "as free from ambition as from covetousness". Rather did Coke possess an ebullience and a tendency to indiscretion which sometimes served him ill, not least in his dealings with the Establishment, particularly as he seemed, in a modern phrase, to want "to take episcopacy into his system". In America, to Wesley's displeasure, he assumed the title of "Bishop", and his secret suggestion to Bishop White of Philadelphia in 1791 that it might be possible to reunite American Methodism with Anglicanism by the laying-on of bishops' hands on the Methodist preachers in America seemed to depend upon his receiving episcopal office. Again, not long before his death, he intimated to Lord Liverpool that he would be willing to return to the Anglican fold if the Prince Regent could appoint him as a bishop in India!

This same talent for indiscretion was evidenced in his private plan to solve the problem of the administration of the Lord's Supper in Methodism by the episcopal ordination of a number of preachers. He explained to the Bishop of London that "a very large part of our Society have imbibed a deep prejudice against receiving the Lord's Supper from the hands of immoral clergymen." Coke's proposals were brought before the Archbishop of Canterbury, who, in rejecting them, took great exception to his infelicitous choice of words. Earlier, in 1794, he had been the prime mover of the secret meeting at Lichfield of eight leading preachers who proposed to solve

the difficulties of Methodism by establishing an episcopal form of government. In the years following Wesley's death a major problem in the Methodist societies concerned relations with the Establishment, and especially the question of whether Methodist preachers not episcopally ordained should be allowed to administer the Holy Communion. This matter was largely dealt with by the 1795 Plan of Pacification, the acceptance of which by those who shared Coke's ecclesiastical views was due principally to his efforts.

In spite of his preoccupation with overseas missionary work, Coke laboured hard to guide Methodism in Britain in the formative decades after 1791. Nor was he simply concerned with administration and church government. Coke was always an evangelist, both at home and abroad. He was the virtual founder of Home Missions with plans for work in "the most destitute parts of England"—areas including, for example, Rutland and the Derbyshire Peak, which were not likely to be reached by ordinary circuit action, and to eight of which preachers were appointed by the Conference of 1806. He was greatly concerned to establish work in the more distant parts of the British Isles, and the Highlands and the Channel Islands were listed in his 1786 missionary appeal. Himself a Welshman, he was sensitive to the needs of the Principality, and persuaded the Conference of 1800 to send two men to preach there in the Welsh language; this work was most successful, and by 1803 a Welsh District—the North Wales District—was formed.

Coke had particularly close associations with Ireland, where he was held in great affection, and from whence he received good financial support for his own work overseas. He early deputized for Wesley as President of the Irish Conference, and in the years following Wesley's death he regularly occupied the presidential chair except when absent abroad. He made frequent visits to Ireland, and was almost exclusively responsible for the links between English and Irish Methodism. He had a great concern to evangelize the distressed peasantry of the west and south, and organized and financed work among them in their own language.

The multiplicity of Coke's interests was immense. He even found time for literary activity, and wrote, with Moore, a life of Wesley, and a commentary on the Bible, which evoked from Dr. Adam Clarke a charge of plagiarism. Yet without doubt his most important and most original writings were his brief missionary pamphlets of 1784 and 1786, *A Plan of the Society for the Establishment of Missions amongst the Heathen* and *An Address to the Pious and Benevolent proposing an Annual Subscription for the Support of Missionaries*. Though these were the first schemes of their kind ever published, they raised little initial interest, and even Wesley, though he signified his approval of missionary work in principle, could not support so vague and general a scheme. But Coke, the invincible optimist, was not easily deterred. He was the incarnation of that missionary spirit which was to translate the Arminian passion of

Methodism into world evangelism, and it was to the preaching of the gospel overseas that he was to devote the rest of his life. This was the work for which he must always be remembered, and which he was prepared to finance by using his travels and contacts personally to solicit subscriptions, sometimes even from door to door. To these he added the whole of his own large fortune, plus that of his two wives, one of whom he met in the course of one of his begging excursions. The taking of collections for foreign missions and the submitting of accounts to Coke were authorized by the Conference of 1800, but at a time of considerable apathy, and even opposition, there was little real missionary organization, and so much depended on Coke's leadership and zeal. He was the General Superintendent of Missions and, from 1804, the president of a committee of finance and advice, which, in a sense, limited his benevolently dictatorial powers. The real organization of a missionary work which he, almost alone, had established within Methodism was only precipitated by his death.

The very extent of his missionary activity was considerable. Apart from the main centres of operation, he was always trying to open up new work. Thus in 1796 he inaugurated a mission in the Foulah country of Sierra Leone, and when it failed he immediately resolved to make a second attempt. In 1804, at the request of the Methodist soldiers in the garrison, he sent a preacher, who unfortunately died, to Gibraltar. As with the work at home, Coke's rôle in all this was far more than that of an administrator. He himself was actively engaged, and some of his escapades were remarkable by any standards, as when he visited Paris at the height of the French Revolution, and, having purchased for £120 a church seating two thousand people, preached there to a congregation of thirty-six; this forlorn enterprise concluded in an invitation to have tea with a nun, who insisted on paying his expenses!

Unquestionably his greatest missionary work was in the West Indies. An account of this is a history in itself. For most of his life, foreign missions, for Coke, meant the West Indies. He was so keen to get the right men to labour there that other fields, such as Nova Scotia, suffered at West Indian expense. It was in 1786 en route to Nova Scotia that he made his famous landing at Antigua, when his ship was blown off course. He made four visits to the West Indies, and by the time of his death Methodist work, in spite of vicissitudes, had spread to most of the islands. Coke attempted some organization of the work, and kept in close touch with the West Indian missionaries. On a number of occasions he interceded with the British Government to alleviate the persecution of the Methodist people there, and he even visited Holland in an abortive attempt to petition the Stadtholder for religious liberty for the people of St. Eustatius.

Coke's last visit to the West Indies was in 1793, after which really intensive missionary work on his part was curtailed. Yet he constantly retained a burning desire to be employed, and his great

ambition was to evangelize India and the East. The revision of the East India Company's charter in 1813 made possible his last great adventure. The Liverpool Conference of that year, in spite of some initial opposition, finally authorized Coke to undertake a mission to Ceylon and Java with six men, plus one for the Cape of Good Hope. Coke spent the night before this decision was made on his knees in prayer. He was now "dead to Europe and alive to India"; he gave £6,000 to pay for the expedition and devoted himself to preparations, including the learning of Portuguese. At the end of 1813 the buoyant, 66-year-old doctor left England for the last time, but his dreams were to be unfulfilled; on 3rd May 1814 Thomas Coke died aboard the *Cabalva* in the middle of the Indian Ocean.

Of Dr. Coke, enthusiast and visionary, scholar and evangelist, no easy assessment is possible. He had his defects, but these were often only the extension of qualities which were invaluable to one called to a position of leadership at such a point in the history of Methodism. His real work has often been little known and less appreciated, but it is doubtful whether the Methodist Church owes more to any man save Wesley himself. Thomas Coke, a man of many valiant parts, was perhaps, as Dr. H. B. Workman indicates,⁴ the last real Methodist apostle.

N. KEITH HURT.

⁴ Townsend, Workman and Eayrs: *A New History of Methodism*, i, p. 71.

THE ANNUAL LECTURE

in connexion with the Sheffield Conference, 1964,

WILL BE DELIVERED IN THE

Millhouses Methodist Church,

On Wednesday, 8th July, at 7-30 p.m.,

BY

Mr. JOHN A. VICKERS, B.A.

Subject: "THOMAS COKE, APOSTLE OF METHODISM."

The chair will be taken by the REV. G. THACKRAY EDDY, M.A., B.D.

The Annual Meeting of the Society will be held at the same Church at 5-30 p.m.

Mrs. Herbert Ibberson kindly invites members of the Society to Tea in the schoolroom at 4-30 p.m. It is essential that all those who desire to accept this invitation should send their names to the Rev. Eddie Greetham, 20, Hartington Road, Sheffield, 7, not later than Monday, July 6th.

Buses 17, 24 and 61 from the City Centre go to Millhouses. Book to Springfield Road (fare 8d.). The spire of the church is visible from this bus stop.

Members are invited to visit the Exhibition arranged by the Society at the Central Library, Surrey Street.

latter-day Montanists with a superior disregard for Church order and sacraments.⁵ Before any Methodist historian rushes in to take up the cudgels he should reflect that Rupert E. Davies in his *Methodism*⁶ has traced the spiritual ancestry of Methodism itself to the Montanists. Whether or not such a spiritual identification is justifiable, and in whatever respects it is allowable, there can be no doubt that Bible Christian history, along with that of the Primitive Methodists, enables us to isolate and inspect the charismatic tradition in Methodism.

THOMAS SHAW.

⁵ Summarized, but without the Montanist reference, in *The Preacher's Quarterly*, March 1965.

⁶ Penguin edn., pp. 13 ff.

Miss Sandra Judson, one of our members, has presented to the Archives Library a copy of the Bibliography which she submitted for the University of London Diploma in Librarianship under the title *Biographical and Descriptive Works on the Rev. John Wesley*. Although the writer has confined herself to London libraries, this is a most comprehensive work, listing 2,172 items. It is well indexed, and will for many years to come be a useful work of reference to all students of Wesley and early Methodism who use the Archives and Research Centre. We are grateful to Miss Judson for placing her work at the disposal of students in this way.

The Handbook of the Methodist Conference, Plymouth, 1965 is now on sale, and readers may obtain copies from the Rev. R. Keith Parsons, The Manse, Northlew, Okehampton, Devon, price 2s. 6d. plus 7d. postage.

Not since 1929, when seventeen days on the Riviera cost less than £10, has a Conference handbook come from Plymouth—a city changed beyond recognition from that of 36 years ago. This year's production, with its cover picture of the bridge over the Tamar, is as attractive as the city. As such handbooks go, this one follows traditional lines, and it contains some commendable historical articles. In Methodist studies much has happened since 1929, and both Devon and Cornwall now have a local historical branch. Furthermore, as this year marks the 150th anniversary of the beginnings of the Bible Christian Connexion, there was conceivably no lack of appropriate subjects and relevant material. Fifteen pages are allotted to the history of Methodism in the West Country—Mr. Paul Bolitho writes on "Wesley and the West", the Rev. Thomas Shaw on "The Church of the Bible Christians", Dr. Oliver A. Beckerlegge on "Methodism's Many Branches", and Mr. Douglas Cock on "Methodist Schools of the West"—and the whole section is excellently illustrated.

The Rev. Amos S. Cresswell has written *The Story of Cliff*—a useful account of Methodism's famous training college for evangelists which brings to light much information about the origin of the college that many who are familiar with its present work and the enthusiasm of its Whitsuntide gatherings will undoubtedly read for the first time. Interwoven is the story of *Joyful News* from its first appearance under the editorship of Thomas Champness on 22nd February 1883 to its final issue at the end of 1963. There are biographies too of each of the college's Principals. The booklet of 36 pages may be obtained, price 2s. 6d. plus 3d. postage, from the Joyful News Bookroom, Cliff College, Calver, Sheffield.

THOMAS COKE
Miscellaneous Notes

DURING the past twelve months some reparation has been made for the years of neglect to which the name and career of Thomas Coke have been subjected. The various tributes that have been paid to his memory have reminded us how many-sided was his contribution to the development of Methodism as a church and a world communion. The present article is not intended as a further tribute, but merely as a series of footnotes to what has been written—an essay in pedantry that is justifiable only on the assumption that devotion does not preclude accuracy.

(1) **Date of Birth**

The Rev. N. Keith Hurt (*Proceedings*, xxxiv, p. 129), following Crowther, Etheridge and other biographers, gives this as 9th October 1747. Other writers, headed by Coke's official biographer, Samuel Drew, incline to 9th September. This reflects an apparent contradiction in the primary sources. The baptismal entry in the register at St. Mary's Church, Brecon, is clearly dated 5th October 1747. This would be decisive for the earlier date were it not that Coke himself wrote in his *Journal* for 9th October 1792 (1816 edn., p. 184): "This is my birthday. I am now forty-five . . ." That Coke remembered the day but mistook the month of his own birth is inherently improbable. The more natural explanation is the simple one, i.e. that in observing his birthday on 9th October he was allowing for the adjustment of the calendar in 1752. His date of birth was therefore neither 9th September nor 9th October, but 28th September (O.S.), which became 9th October (N.S.) after 1752.

(2) **His Doctorate**

The degree which Coke obtained in 1775, during his curacy at South Petherton, was that of Doctor of Civil Law, not Doctor of Laws. It is true that he frequently described himself as LL.D., even on the title-pages of his publications, and was regularly so described by others. In fact, Oxford had no power to confer a doctorate in Canon Law (see *Proceedings*, xi, p. 144). Nevertheless, at that time, the terms LL.D. and D.C.L. appear to have been interchangeable in popular usage. Coke's sponsor on this occasion was no less a person than the Prime Minister, Lord North, who wrote on 8th June 1775 supporting Coke's request that he might "be allowed to accumulate the Degrees of Bachelor and Doctor in Civil Law, paying Fees for both Degrees but doing exercise for that of Doctor only" (Letter to Convocation; copy among the Deaville Walker papers, MMS Archives).

(3) **His first Curacy**

There is very little evidence that Coke's first parish was at Rode (*Proceedings*, xxxiv, p. 129: the spelling "Road" is an eighteenth-century variant). Jonathan Crowther's statement "He became curate of Rodd near Bath" (*Life of Coke*, p. 103) is echoed in the memorial sermons of Coke's friends and fellow-preachers Samuel Warren and Samuel Woolmer, and by later biographers. But Coke himself never mentions this curacy, and it has left no mark in the parish records for the period. Coke was ordained deacon on Trinity Sunday 1770, and had definitely taken up residence in South Petherton by 14th July 1771. In 1770 there was a curate named John Martin at Rode. Of Coke's movements during the period we have no more than hints, but the fact that he became Bailiff of Brecon in September 1770 suggests that most of his time would be spent

in his native town. Sutcliffe was probably near the mark when he wrote that Coke "preached occasionally for his friends, and at Road, near Frome". (Coke's *Journals*, 1816 edn., p. 7.)

(4) Visits to the West Indies

In his article on "Thomas Coke and the West Indies" (*Methodist History*, October 1964), W. Thomas Smith reaches the tentative conclusion that Coke probably paid a fifth visit to the West Indies on his way to attend the General Conference of 1800 at Baltimore. That this was his intention is clear from his letter to Ezekiel Cooper, dated 18th December 1798, quoted by Dr. Smith. But there is little doubt that this plan was never executed, and that in spite of the various assertions of his biographers, Coke paid no further visit to the Caribbean after his fourth tour in 1792-3.

No doubt through the pressure of his other commitments, Coke did not leave England for America until February 1800. From the heading of a letter written to Henry Dundas on 10th February of that year (the original of which may be seen at the Methodist Archives Centre in London), we learn that he was at that time aboard ship and waiting to sail from Falmouth Roads. This corrects the statement of Dr. Frank Baker in a footnote to the *Letters of Francis Asbury*, p. 185 (based on Drew's *Life of Coke*, 1817, p. 305), that Coke set out in 1799.

In the absence of any journal of this voyage, we are unable to construct a detailed itinerary, but we know from the *Journal of Francis Asbury* (ii, p. 231) that Coke was in America before the end of April, and was in Baltimore for the General Conference which opened on 6th May (not 20th May, as stated by Dr. Smith). This scarcely leaves time for even a fleeting visit to the West Indies under eighteenth-century conditions of travel. The fact that Coke makes no mention of any fifth visit in his three-volume *History of the West Indies* (1808-11) is virtually decisive.

(5) The Ordination of John Baxter

Dec. 25 [1786].—This day we landed in *Antigua*, and in going up the town of *St. John's* we met brother *Baxter* in his band, going to perform divine service . . . (Coke's *Journal*, 1816 edn., p. 83).

This dramatic arrival of Coke in the West Indies has often been described. Almost every account assumes that, when they encountered each other in the street on that memorable Christmas morning, Coke and Baxter were strangers, and goes on to describe how Baxter was ordained shortly afterwards. Neither statement is true. During his first visit to America two years before, Coke had intended to return home via the West Indies, but this part of his plans was thwarted. He therefore summoned Baxter to meet him in Baltimore just before he sailed for England; and at the Conference which met there on 1st June 1785, Baxter was ordained along with several American preachers. The evidence for this is in a passage from Coke's *Journal* which is missing from the English editions but appears in the version printed in the Philadelphia edition of the *Arminian Magazine* (vol. i, 1789). It is worth noting that Baxter's name is missing from the list of those chosen for ordination by the Christmas Conference, held in Baltimore six months previously; the presumption is that Wesley had himself instructed and authorized Coke to ordain Baxter. The ordination at Baltimore explains, none the less, why Baxter is listed as an elder in the American *Minutes* of 1785, and also why he was in clerical attire ("in his band") when he met Coke on Christmas morning 1786.

(6) Mission to Paris, 1791

The brief account in *Proceedings*, xxxiv, p. 133 of Coke's visit to Paris contains several inaccuracies. It appears to be based on Crowther's account (*Life of Coke*, p. 310); but the latter is both more picturesque and less reliable than Drew's version (*Life of Coke*, pp. 239 ff.), which is based, at least in part, on an unpublished journal of Coke.

The main facts are as follows. On arriving in Paris, Coke rented a room near the river, and at the same time entered into negotiations for the purchase of a disused church for a sum of £120. It was in the *former* that the two Methodist services were held, at the first of which Jean de Queteville, Coke's companion, preached to a congregation of thirty-six. Coke himself, the following day, had only six hearers. This marked lack of success was enough to prompt even Thomas Coke to second thoughts about the mission. Through the intervention of Miss Mary Freeman Shepperd, whose acquaintance he had already made in London, he was able to withdraw from the purchase of the church. Miss Shepperd was not herself a nun, but had taken refuge in a convent, where she entertained the two Methodist preachers to breakfast. (For Miss Freeman, an unusual if not eccentric character, see: Everett, *Adam Clarke Portrayed*, ii, p. 35 f.; Etheridge, *Life of Adam Clarke*, pp. 371 ff.)

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Religion at Oxford and Cambridge, by V. H. H. Green (SCM Press, pp. 392, 14 illustrations, 42s.) is another competent study of the eighteenth-century religious scene by the Chaplain of Wesley's own college at Oxford. Dr. Green has recently given us an excellent one-volume study of our Founder (see *Proceedings*, xxxiv, p. 191), and this essay will help to fill in the background against which Wesley lived and moved and had his being in Oxford. *The Prayer Book Tradition in the Free Churches*, by A. E. Peaston (James Clarke & Co. Ltd., pp. xiv, 202, 18s. 6d.) devotes a chapter to the Methodists without saying much that will be new to readers of the *Proceedings*; but the rest of the book, dealing with the Anglican and the Dissenting traditions (Methodism is grouped in the former) is a worthwhile study. *Irish Methodism* (Epworth House, Belfast, pp. 104, 6s.) is by one of our members, Mr. Fred Jeffery. This paper-back is an excellent introduction to the "Traditions, Theology and Influence" of one of the most vigorous sections of our beloved Church, and it is splendidly produced by our Belfast bookroom. *Studies in the Puritan Tradition* (pp. 40, 5s.) is a composite book by Dr. Geoffrey F. Nuttall, George Yule and Roger Thomas, and is published as a joint supplement to the *Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society* and the *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society*. *The Sociology of Cornish Methodism*, by John C. C. Probert (pp. 48, 2s. 6d.) the eighth Occasional Paper of the Cornish Methodist Historical Association, is a piece of very careful investigation; copies are obtainable from the Secretary of our Cornish Branch. *Miss Hannah Ball, a Lady of High Wycombe*, by Ina De Bord McQuaid (Vantage Press, pp. 160, 14 illustrations, \$3.75) is a new study of this famous pioneer in Sunday schools, and prints the correspondence in both directions, between Miss Ball and John Wesley. EDITOR.

darkness. It seems that Wesley was tempted to cling to the painful darkness and dullness which enveloped his soul, as though by suffering in this way he could find kinship with the sufferings of Christ. After the revival of his spirits he wrote: ". . . so from this day I had no more fearfulness and heaviness which before almost continually weighed me down." He repudiates the idea that it would have been more profitable for him to remain "*in orco*, as they phrase it", saying "Nay, but who art thou O man, who in favour of a wretched hypothesis, thus blasphemest the good gift of God?"¹³ Is it not likely that Wesley's vehemence springs from the fact that he had so recently been in danger of accepting the "wretched hypothesis"?

Secondly, on his own admission, it was the solitariness of mysticism which had tempted him—the belief that, if he were freed from contact with the outside world, he could then achieve his aim of personal holiness. He had now learned that solitude does not automatically produce holiness, and he knew that he must find some other way to holiness than retirement to "a desert".

Thirdly, if our understanding of the part played by Cyprian is correct, Wesley was lured by the concomitant of "darkness" and "solitary religion" which is "stillness". This view is confirmed in Wesley's later review of the influence of mystical beliefs upon him:

I had a plenary dispensation from all the commands of God: the form ran thus, "Love is all; all the commands beside are only means of love: you must choose those which you feel are means to you, and use them as long as they are so."¹⁴

It is significant that it is this third point which is treated at length in the famous letter to Samuel, and there are other similarities between the points mentioned in the letter of 1736 and the attractions felt in 1738. It appears that the letter marked the clarification of Wesley's objections to mysticism, but that the final battle with it had not then been fought. It seems probable that the actual break with the mystics—the moment when they ceased to have a hold upon Wesley—occurred as the ship bearing him towards England neared these shores. He landed in England as a man freed from mysticism's fatal snares.

From the time of his landing in England, the principles set out in the letter to Samuel and implanted in his mind on the return journey guided his every contact with mysticism. He regarded mysticism as striking against the nature of true Christian religion. It dissolved a true understanding of the Bible by its addiction to "vain philosophizings"; it warped the true Christian disregard for material things and contorted it into a morbid love of pain and deprivation; it produced antinomianism instead of moral purity and "stillness" instead of good works. It certainly appears that Wesley had won his battle with the mystics.

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¹³ *Journal*, i, p. 416.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, i, p. 420.

Sept 1965

SUSANNA WESLEY, APOLOGIST FOR METHODISM

THE mother of the Wesleys was in many ways a remarkable woman—a statement which is neither novel nor open to question. Attention has usually been focused, however, on her skill in coping with her husband's idiosyncrasies and with the physical, cultural and spiritual needs of her many children, in which process she set the stage for Methodism. But Susanna Wesley was not merely a good manager, a patient though firm educator, and a pious Christian worker. She possessed a keen critical intellect and a thorough grasp of evangelical theology. Moreover she could express her convictions about abstruse and controversial subjects in a literary style at once clear, challenging and attractive.

John Wesley defined a good style as "perspicuity and purity, propriety, strength and easiness joined together".¹ His own literary achievements owe much to his mother's precept and example, though he far outdistanced her in his pursuit of the pithy sentence. Wesley himself published one notable sample of her writing as an appendix to an obituary notice of her in his *Journal* for 1st August 1742. Not unnaturally its subject-matter—her educational theory and methods—has drawn attention away from its style. Many other letters survive to fill out the picture, as also some meditations recently published in the form of prayers by our President Emeritus² and two treatises preserved in manuscript at Headingley College, the one in effect an exposition of the Apostles' Creed, the other "A Religious Conference between M [other] and E [milia]".³

A fact not known to any of her biographers, however, is that Mrs. Susanna Wesley used her considerable literary gifts in defence of Methodism, as the author of an anonymous pamphlet now extremely rare. This pamphlet adds yet a further refutation of the widely-publicized charge made by Samuel Badcock that Mrs. Wesley "lived long enough to deplore the extravagances of her two sons, John and Charles", and that she "considered them as under strong delusion".⁴

For this knowledge we are indebted above all to that painstaking researcher the late Rev. Marmaduke Riggall, who stumbled on the all-important clue in 1921 while transcribing Richard Viney's diary, and quickly realized its significance. In my own collection, in addition to one of the rare originals of Mrs. Wesley's pamphlet, there is

¹ *Letters*, iv, p. 256.

² *The Prayers of Susanna Wesley*, edited and arranged by W. L. Doughty (Epworth Press, 1956).

³ The first was printed in Adam Clarke's *Wesley Family* (2nd edn., 1844), ii, pp. 38-72, and the second appeared in 1898 as Publication No. 3 of the Wesley Historical Society. Both are discussed in Maldwyn Edwards's *Family Circle*, pp. 68-73.

⁴ See Adam Clarke, *op. cit.*, ii, pp. 107-22. It is certainly true, however, that in the early months of the revival Mrs. Wesley was critical of the Methodist emphasis upon assurance of salvation (witness her letter of 8th March 1738-9, quoted by Clarke).

treasured Mr. Riggall's manuscript transcription of the copy in the Methodist Archives in London, together with his voluminous notes, many of them tracing parallel passages in her known treatises and letters. It was his unrealized hope that this work might be issued as a further publication of the Wesley Historical Society.

In the early summer of 1744 Richard Viney, the pious but erratic ex-Moravian tailor, was engaged in sorting and repairing the books and pamphlets in Wesley's library at the Orphan House, Newcastle. Wesley himself was in and out of the building much of the time. In Viney's diary for Sunday, 27th May, Mr. Riggall came across this passage:

I read a pamphlet entitled *Remarks on Mr. Whitefield's Letter to Mr. Westley, on his Sermon on Free Grace, In a Letter from a Gentlewoman to her Friend.* (Mr. W. told me his Mother wrote it.)⁵

There can be no doubt about the identification of this publication, even though Viney is slightly inaccurate in his transcription of the title, which in fact reads *Some Remarks on a Letter from the Reverend Mr. Whitefield to the Reverend Mr. Wesley, in a Letter from a Gentlewoman to her Friend.* This sixpenny pamphlet of twenty-eight pages had appeared in 1741 as a part of the Calvinist-Arminian controversy—an exchange of literary blows which divided Methodism into two camps. John Wesley's published sermon on *Free Grace* had provoked Whitefield's rebuking *Letter*, which in turn was answered by the *Remarks*. The pamphlet is in part a defence of the Wesleys by means of a counter-attack upon Whitefield, in part an exposition of evangelical Arminianism. As Mr. Riggall shows in detail, Viney's parenthetical statement about its authorship is confirmed by the internal evidence both of style and subject-matter.

A further confirmation of Mrs. Wesley's authorship of this early defence of Methodism is to be found in the ledgers of William Strahan, who printed both Wesley's *Free Grace* and Whitefield's *Letter*. His folio ledger recording accounts with publishers from 1739 to 1768 contains this entry on a page devoted to Wesley's publishing ventures: "For the printing and Paper of Mrs. W.'s pamphlet £3. 5. —."⁶ Without the evidence of Viney's diary this would prove as mysterious as other entries in Strahan's ledgers referring to items which have completely disappeared. Nevertheless it presents its own problems. It is the last of four entries under the date of 1st September 1742, subsequent to Mrs. Wesley's death and probably a year after the actual publication of the *Remarks*. Again, contrary to Strahan's normal custom, as exemplified by the items between which this is sandwiched, he furnishes no details about the number of sheets composed, the reams of paper used, or the copies printed. The most likely explanation seems to be that this affords another example (though far less explicit) of a transaction which had been overlooked and called to his attention at a later date, like the payment

⁵ *Proceedings*, xiv, pp. 194-5; cf. J. S. Simon: *John Wesley and the Methodist Societies*, p. 197.

⁶ Add. MSS. 48800, folio 37, British Museum.

made by Charles Wesley in 1755, which Strahan describes as "Owing of a former Account quite forgot by me, but remembered by him".⁷ In the context "Mrs. W." must surely refer to Mrs. Wesley, and we know of no other writing of hers which might fit the circumstances. No further external evidence comes to our aid. The imprint on the *Remarks* is simply "London: Printed, and sold at the Pamphlet-Shops of London and Westminster. MDCCXLI. (Price Sixpence.)". Unfortunately the work contains no printers' ornaments which might prove, nor any press figures (frequently used by Strahan) which would confirm, its issue from his press.

As a literary composition the *Remarks* is perhaps not as impressive as some other examples of Mrs. Wesley's work. Nevertheless it constitutes a competent *apologia* for Methodism, and contains a number of memorable passages. Some reveal the streak of satire which ran through the writings of other members of the family:

Interest [i.e. personal bias] hath an agreeable Way of putting out a Man's Eyes, and making him mistake that for Good, which indeed is Evil. (p. 2.)

One criticism ends with the pungency of a proverb:

As to his Compellations to Mr. Wesley of "Honoured" and "Dear" &c., I look upon them only as so many cant Words which are of no Signification, tho' possibly he might intend, by the frequent Use of them, to cut his Friend's Throat with a Feather. (p. 3.)

Noteworthy theological and even metaphysical observations abound, as in this passage on the nature of God:

We are wont to conceive and speak of the great God after the Manner of Man, and to call him a powerful, a wise, a just, a true, a loving, an holy God, &c., whereas we ought rather to say, He is Power, Wisdom, Goodness, Justice, Truth, Love, Holiness, &c. For as all these Perfections are in Him, they are neither distinguished from one another, nor from his Nature or Essence, in whom they are said to be; for, to speak properly, they are not in Him, but are his very Essence or Nature itself . . .⁸

Mrs. Wesley urged upon her children precision in the use of words, and condemned Whitefield's somewhat slap-dash practice:

Mr. Wesley has said (which is true) "that all might be saved"; but I am sure he never said, "that all will be saved"; and I think there is a great Difference between those two Words, *might*, and *will*. (p. 25.)

In spite of her advanced years (she was 72), Susanna Wesley was a shrewd judge of the religious situation in which she found herself, and was almost certainly correct in asserting that the Wesleys' teaching on Christian perfection was a greater stumbling-block than their insistence on the possibility—though not the certainty—of universal redemption:

I am verily persuaded, that many of the Predestinarians are more angry with the Wesleys for Preaching up Gospel Holiness, than for their pleading so strongly for Universal Redemption; and if they

⁷ Add. MSS. 48802A, folio 10, British Museum.

⁸ Page 11. Mr. Riggall points out that this is an almost exact reproduction of a passage in the "Conference", page 18.

would let the former alone, they would forgive them the latter. (p. 25.) Earlier in the work she had pointed out that Whitefield, in common with other critics, had in fact misunderstood her sons' view of Christian perfection:

I very much fear, that Mr. Whitefield's reviving this pernicious [predestinarian] Controversy, is one Reason why our Lord hath permitted him to fall into that dangerous, most shocking Practice, of making public Opposition against Gospel Holiness, which is the only Christian Perfection the Wesleys ever taught; for absolute Perfection they never preached.⁹ (p. 10.)

Although there is nothing in the *Remarks* which deals specifically with the Wesleys' teaching on Christian assurance of salvation and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, which in the early days attracted even more charges of "enthusiasm" than their teaching on Christian perfection, the whole tenor of the pamphlet leaves little doubt of her complete sympathy with the Methodist movement as a whole. This was the same woman who thirty years before had outraged her husband by conducting society meetings in the rectory at Epworth, and who a few months earlier had urged her son John to see the hand of God in the preaching of a layman, Thomas Maxfield. The prompting of maternal affection undoubtedly cannot be disregarded, but this by itself fails to explain her warm advocacy of her sons' theological views. Her substantial agreement with them on doctrinal matters, as revealed by this pamphlet, is confirmed by a contemporary letter to the Countess of Huntingdon, who may indeed have been (as Mr. Riggall believed) the anonymous "Friend" to whom the *Remarks* were addressed. This particular letter was written "From the Foundry, July First, 1741" in response to Lady Huntingdon's kindness in sending some Madeira wine to one hitherto a stranger. The second paragraph eloquently portrays Mrs. Wesley's affectionate pride:

I do indeed rejoyce in my Sons, and am much pleased, that they have in any measure been Serviceable to yr Ladi^{sh}. You'll pardon the fondness of a Mother if I exceed in commending them, but I've known few (if any) that have labour'd more diligently and unweariedly in the Service of our Dear Lord: And blessed be His Great Name, He hath set His Seal to their Ministry,¹⁰ and hath made them instrumental in bringing many Souls to God. And tho in the Eye of the World they appear despicable, men of no Estate or Figure, & Daily Suffer Contempt, Reproach & Shame among men, yet to me they appear more Honourable than they wd do, if the one were ArchB^p of Canterbury, and the other of York, for I esteem the Reproach of Christ greater Riches, than all the Treasures in England.¹¹

Such a woman indeed deserves not only the title of "Mother of the Wesleys", but that of "Mother of Methodism". FRANK BAKER.

⁹ Here she seems to reverse her argument, claiming that Whitefield's attack on the doctrine of perfection is the *result* rather than the *cause* of his predestinarian advocacy; in fact, however, she did not treat them as essentially distinct controversies, but as a complex and sometimes unrealized attitude of mind which found expression in specific statements on each subject as occasion arose.

¹⁰ In *Remarks*, p. 26, she speaks about God "setting His Seal to their Ministry".

¹¹ Lamplough Collection, Methodist Archives, London.

THE ANNUAL MEETING AND LECTURE

THE visit of the Conference to Plymouth this year coincided, whether by accident or design, with the 150th anniversary of the formation of the Bible Christian Connexion, and we took the opportunity to mark this event both at the

Annual Tea

and the Lecture, which were held at the Greenbank church on Wednesday, 7th July. Mrs. Ibberson was again our generous though invisible hostess, and this year her guests and ours included a number of descendants of the families of the Bible Christian founders. Among those who were present were Mr. John Thorne Reed and his family from Weston-super-Mare (representatives of a family which provided the Bible Christians with outstanding leaders) and Miss Lois Deacon, a West Country authoress, who is a collateral descendant of William Mason, the second President. It was a disappointment that descendants of William O'Bryan and Samuel Thorne were unable through illness to be present, though we received greetings from them. A message of greeting was also received from the Rev. Richard Pyke [whose death since the writing of this report we are very sorry to record.—EDITOR]. The Rev. Dr. Maldwyn Edwards extended a welcome to our guests.

Business Meeting

After the President had opened the meeting, the names of members who had died during the year (including our late Treasurer, Mr. Sydney Walton, and the historical writers Mrs. G. Elsie Harrison and the Rev. J. Brazier Green) were read, and we stood awhile in silent prayer. The annual reports, presented in person or by communication, were received and considered by the meeting. The Treasurer's report showed a balance in hand of £601 11s. 9d., together with £225 invested in War Stock, and estimated liabilities of £612 18s. 2d. The Registrar reported a current membership of 826, being a net increase of 22 on the previous year; 56 new members had been enrolled during the year, 16 had lapsed or retired, and 18 had died.

There was some discussion on the future of the Manuscript Journal and its relation to the Journals now being produced by the local branches, and approval was given for a new scheme which is outlined on the next page.

Reference was made to the excellent work which has improved the approach to the Society's Library in the crypt of Wesley's Chapel in London, for which we are greatly indebted to Dr. Frank Cumbers and his helpers. The Librarian's report stated that over fifty people had visited the Library in person during the year, and that 180 books had been sent out by post.

The reports from the still increasing number of branches were most encouraging: two further branches—the Midlands and London—have been formed during the past year.

The Annual Lecture

The subject of the lecture, given by the Rev. Thomas Shaw, was "The Bible Christians, 1815-1907". It was appropriate that the chair should have been taken by Alderman R. G. Paynter, M.B.E., J.P., a leading layman in what is still a completely ex-Bible Christian circuit in North Cornwall. The crowded church bore witness to the interest of a West Country audience in a denomination which finished its course nearly sixty years ago but which had had long associations with Devon and Cornwall.

Photographs from this
file have not been
included but are
available upon request.
For more information
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