

John Wesley - Evangelist: Chapter 2

London and Oxford: School and College Life

THE youthful Wesley was now to pass into circumstances widely different from all with which he had hitherto been familiar. In his eleventh year he entered the Charterhouse, London, as a foundation scholar (of whom there were about forty, and sixty 'town-boys'), on the nomination of the Duke of Buckingham, who often befriended the Wesley family. From the seclusion of his rural home to the centre of a great city, and from the companionship of sisters to the company of a hundred youths of various ages, dispositions, character, and training, was a very great change, and must have proved a shock to this delicately sensitive and susceptible spirit, however much it may have been tempered by preparatory conversation at the Rectory. In respect of character, he was prepared to stand in the presence of any of them, and probably few, if any, had undergone so severe a discipline as he—a discipline that was not a restraint from which in youthful restlessness he desired to be freed, but a habit of life which had the approval of his young conscience and judgment. All that can be learnt of him during his stay at the Charterhouse points to diligence and good behaviour. His previous mental discipline, his rooted habits of order, regularity, and obedience, would well prepare him for the routine and restrictions of school-life. He had not now to take his first lessons in method, as would many of his compeers; for in his youth he was an adept in these matters, as is revealed by the rigidity with which he followed his father's advice to run round the Charterhouse garden three times every morning—a distance of about a mile—for the benefit of his health. Southey says that for his quietness, regularity, and application he became a favourite with the master, Dr. Walker; and he adds, Wesley seems never to have looked back with melancholy upon the days that were gone; earthly regrets of this kind could find no room in one who was continually pressing onward to the goal.'

How much soever Wesley may have been inured to privation, he could not but suffer painfully: from the practice of the older boys taking from the younger their portions of meat, so that during a great part of his residence he fared mainly on dry bread. In after days he imputed his vigorous health partly to this fact. 'From ten to fourteen,' says he, 'I had little but bread to eat, and not great plenty of that. I believe this was so far from hurting me that it laid the foundation of lasting health.'

The following story, anticipatory of the power over multitudes which Wesley in after life exercised, was related by his brother; Charles to his daughter, Miss Sarah Wesley, who inserted it in a letter to Dr. Adam Clarke. 'When John Wesley was a little boy at the Charterhouse School, the master, missing all the little boys from the playground, supposed them, by their quietness, to be in some mischief, Searching, he found them all assembled in the schoolroom around my uncle, who was amusing them with instructive tales, to which they attentively listened rather than follow their accustomed sports. The master expressed much approbation towards them and John Wesley, and he wished him to repeat this entertainment, as often as he could obtain auditors and so well employ his time.'

As to his progress in learning, the testimony of his brother Samuel, then an usher at Westminster School, who kept careful watch over his younger brother, is conclusive. He says in a letter to his father, 'My brother Jack, I can faithfully assure You, gives you no manner of discouragement from breeding your third son (Charles) a scholar;' and again, 'Jack is with me, and a brave boy, learning Hebrew as fast as he can.'

Reference must be made here to some very curious and unexplained phenomena which occurred at the home in Epworth during the months of December, 1716, and January, 1717. Sundry strange noises were heard and sights witnessed in different parts of the house, for which no reasonable explanation has been forthcoming—the general belief of the family inclining to the acknowledgment of them as of supernatural origin. But John was away, and our interest in them is confined solely to their influence upon his mind. It is not improbable that his inquiry into these strange events may have increased in him a persuasion of the reality of supernatural phenomena, his belief in which he so often afterwards declared. 'The very fact that he was not a personal witness to the phenomena may have deepened their effect upon him The kind of effect on his mind is illustrated by that which it had on his sister Emily, who announces herself, with the naive decision of eighteen, as "inclined to infidelity" at the time of these noises, and by them reclaimed to a belief in the spiritual world A series of unexplained phenomena, interesting and meaningless as they were, furnished his mind with a stock of recollections firmly rooted in the supernatural which justified his freely adding to their number any analogous instances of superhuman agency without investigation.'

The fullest accounts were afterwards gathered by Mr. Samuel Wesley, and subsequently published by Dr. Priestley who thinks it most probable that it was a trick of the servants, assisted by some of the neighbours. In reply to this, Southey says, 'It may be safely asserted that many of the circumstances cannot be explained by any such supposition, nor by any legerdemain, nor by ventriloquism, nor by any secret of acoustics. In the present instance no manifestation of Divine power is supposed more than in the appearance of a departed spirit. Such things may be preternatural and yet not miraculous; they may not be in the ordinary course of nature, and yet imply no alteration of its laws.' A Wesley, on going down to Epworth four years later, carefully inquired into the particulars, speaking to each of the persons who were then in the house, and taking down what each could testify of his or her own knowledge, This account he afterwards published, but without comment.

After a careful analysis and comparison, both of the contemporary and the subsequent records of these remarkable phenomena, the author of *Modern Spiritualism* says, 'The Wesley case indicates pretty clearly that the main reason for the apparently inexplicable element in these narratives is the defect of the evidence. When we have only second-hand accounts written down months or years after the events, or accounts from uneducated or irresponsible persons, we find abundance of marvellous incidents; when, as here, we have almost contemporary accounts at first hand from sober-minded witnesses, the statement of the marvellous is reduced to a minimum. But the peculiarly instructive feature of the Wesley case is that we can see how the witnesses, whilst in the earlier letters they narrate of their own personal experience only comparatively tame and uninteresting episodes, allow their imaginations to embellish the experiences of other members of the household; and that these same embellishments nine years later are incorporated in the first-hand accounts as genuine items of personal experience.' And in seeking an explanation of the records, he appears to fasten on a morbid craving for notoriety and excitement on the part of Hetty Wesley, and he remarks that 'the explanations adopted by the sympathetic spectators repeat accurately their individual beliefs and temperament, or the current traditions of the country at the time;' and adds, 'In the Wesley household, as in most modern outbreaks, the disturbances were supposed to indicate a spirit of a doubtful character.'

As to Wesley's moral state at this time, he afterwards wrote, 'The next six or seven years were spent at school; where, outward restraints being removed, I was much more negligent than before, even of outward duties, and almost continually guilty of outward sins, which I knew to be such, though they were not scandalous in the eyes of the world. However, I still read the Scriptures, and said my prayers, morning and evening. And what I now hoped to be saved by, was, (1) not being so bad as other people; (2) having still a kindness for religion; and (3) reading the Bible, going to church, and saying my prayers.'

Tyerman is hasty enough to conclude from this that Wesley 'entered the Charterhouse a saint, and left it a sinner.' He is justly rebuked by the more cautious words of a very careful and life-long student of the entire round of Wesleyan and Methodist history, and who is probably more familiar with the details than any living man at the present time—Dr. James H. Rigg—who says, referring to Wesley's words just quoted, 'Such is the sentence which Wesley, the sternest of judges in such a case, pronounced on his own moral and religious state when he was at the Charterhouse—a sentence pronounced, it must be remembered at a time when all Wesley's judgments as to such cases were far more severe than they became as revised, after many years' experience, in his later life. It was in 1738 that he so wrote of himself. It is, clear that Wesley never lost, even at the Charterhouse, a tender respect for religion, the fear of God, and the forms of Christian propriety. That he was at this time unconverted there can be no doubt; but when Mr. Tyerman, with such awful emphasis, tells us that having gone to the Charterhouse a "saint"-child, at ten years of age he left it "a sinner" at seventeen, he uses language which can scarcely fail to convey an altogether exaggerated impression as to the character of the boy's moral and spiritual faults and failings Isaac Taylor says, with reference to the privations and oppressions which Wesley endured at school, that "he learned as a boy to suffer wrongfully with cheerful patience, and to conform himself to cruel despotisms without acquiring either the slave's temper or the despot's" For my part, I cannot help thinking that not a little grace must have been still working in the soul of the brave and patient boy, to enable him to bear himself as he did. Wesley must have carried a heart, not only bright and hopeful, but forgiving, not only elastic and vigorous, but patient and generous, or he could not have looked back in after days on the years spent at the Charterhouse, not only without bitter ness, but with pleasure, and, to use Southey's phrase, have retained so great a predilection for the place that he made it his custom to walk annually through the scene of his schoolboy years It was no slight evidence of at least the powerful restraining influence of religion that Wesley passed through such an ordeal as his six or seven years' residence at the Charterhouse without contracting any taint of vice.'

With a school exhibition of 40 per annum, obtained at the Charterhouse, Wesley proceeded to Oxford, entering Christ Church as a commoner on July 23, 1720. He had been preceded at Oxford by his brother Samuel, his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather, and his mother's father.

He was now thrown into circumstances entirely new to him. Hitherto, he had had but little experience of the world. At home he would not be altogether ignorant of the rude, untutored, boorish character of many of the Epworth parishioners. But these would create only sentiments of disgust and revulsion in him, as would the visions of youthful wickedness to which he would be introduced at the Charterhouse by one hundred youths gathered from such homes as the time produced, homes in which the cultivation of virtue would certainly not generally be of a high order. This was no favourable ground for the development of lofty moral character in one disposed to yield to its influence; but, as the conscience and judgment of the young Wesley had been thoroughly instructed and disciplined, he would probably only feel shocked and revolted. He who would not perform the common offices of life without a reason would not be likely unreasoningly to yield to the deceits of wrongdoing. And by how much he resisted the evil, by so much would he be strengthened for further resistance.

At this stage of his moral training, and at a very susceptible age, he entered the University—'a gay, sprightly, and virtuous youth, full of good classics, and also with some knowledge of Hebrew.' Sad indeed is the picture of University life in the eighteenth century, as presented by our most trustworthy historians. If it were not wholly bad, and the worst accounts do not warrant such a supposition, though the gleams of light in the dark picture are but few, yet the University reflected the spirit of an age which by its heartlessness, its indifference, its frivolity—in one word its utter worldliness—was widely severed from the present one, so proud of its truth, its earnestness, its energy, and its high and noble aims. Idleness, trifling, hard drinking, lewdness, gambling, were common. Crosse's words to his mother, often quoted, written a little later in the century, show what awaited the unsuspecting freshman. 'Oxford,' he says, 'is

a perfect hell upon earth. What chance is there for an unfortunate lad, just come from school, with no one to watch and care for him—no guide I often saw my tutor carried off perfectly intoxicated.' Happily, Wesley was not without a guide. True it was an unseen, but not less a real, one. His heart was held too firmly in his mother's hand for him to have been easily dragged downwards. Tyerman does not hesitate to take a pessimistic view of Wesley's religious state during his early years at Oxford. But Tyerman was better at collecting facts than at drawing inferences from them.

There is absolutely not a whisper of any moral delinquency in Wesley. He was not an idler, as his progress showed, still less was he a profligate, or anything approaching it. He probably walked on the highest plane of Oxford life, far above the depth of immorality which characterized many of those around him. As to extravagance, he had not the means of indulging in it, if he were disposed so to do, even though the 40 of his exhibition be multiplied by four, as Overton suggests.

The term of Wesley's residence in Oxford may be separated into two distinct periods, of which the dividing line is his election to a Fellowship at Lincoln College, and his removal thither. 'Of the earlier portion of the former period our information is but scanty, and we are left very much to conjecture. We may estimate the influences amidst which he pursued his way, we may keep in mind the inner light which never failed him, and we may mark the progress which he made and the position he gained. But little of the correspondence of the period has been preserved. He may not yet have adopted his practice of carefully preserving all letters that he received. It was in 1740 that he 'spent two days in Oxford looking over the letters he had received for the sixteen or eighteen years last past.'

A contemporary thus writes of him in 1724, when he was about twenty-one years of age, 'He appeared very sensible and acute collegian, baffling everyone by the subtleties of logic, and laughing at them for being so easily routed, a young fellow of the finest classical taste, of the most liberal and manly sentiments.' One of his earliest biographers, the friend of his later days, the Rev. Henry Moore, says, 'His perfect knowledge of the classics gave a smooth polish to his wit, and an air of superior elegance to all his compositions. He had already begun to amuse himself occasionally writing verses, though most of his poetical pieces of this period were either imitations or translations of the Latin. Sometime in this year, however, he wrote an imitation of the 85th Psalm, which he sent to his father, who says, "I like your verses on the 85th Psalm, and would not have you bury your talent."' A letter to his brother Samuel at this time, frequently quoted; shows a sprightliness of style both in prose and verse, while a sentence reveals a tinge of sadness, 'The two things which I most wished for of almost anything in the world, were to see my mother and Westminster once again; and to see them, both together was so far above my expectations, that I almost looked upon it as next to an impossibility. I have been so very frequently disappointed when I had set my heart on any pleasure, that I will never again depend on any before it comes.'

At present he is apparently without any distinct purpose in life, and though there is every reason to believe him to be strictly moral, and free from any viciousness of temper or desire, yet so far there is no prominent indication of a serious settling down to any great pursuit, neither are there evidences of any deep spirituality of character.

'If the tree is to be judged by its fruits,' says Canon Overton, 'Wesley's days at Charterhouse and Christ Church could not have been idly spent, for he carried with him an amount of mental culture which would compare favourably with that of some of the best specimens of these days of incessant examination. Mental culture, however, is one thing, spiritual growth another. There are abundant traces of the former, none of the latter, between his leaving Epworth and his last year at Christ Church.'

Although his fees were made as light as possible, he seems to have been in frequent financial straits, from which he was occasionally relieved by the kindness of friends and by intermittent supplies from the often scanty store at home. He does not appear to have been in vigorous health in these earlier years of his college career. Such health as he had, he preserved by temperance; for he tells us, 'When I grew up, in consequence of reading Dr. Cheyne, I chose to eat sparingly and drink water. This was another great means of continuing my health, till I was about seven and twenty.' He names this book in a letter to his mother dated November 1, 1724.

Such was Wesley up to his twenty-first year. He thus speaks of himself: 'Being removed to the University for five years, I still said my prayers both in public and in private, and read, with the Scriptures, several other books of religion, especially comments on the New Testament. Yet I had not all this while so much as a notion of inward holiness; nay, went on habitually and, for the most part, very contentedly in some or other known sin—indeed, with some intermissions and short struggles, especially before and after the Holy Communion, which I was obliged to receive thrice a year. I cannot tell what I hoped to be saved by now, when I was continually sinning against that little light I had; unless by those transient fits of what many divines taught me to call repentance.'

But better times are approaching, and though many years elapsed before Wesley attained rest and peace and Christian joy, yet from this time forward, and with accelerating earnestness, he seeks the salvation which he had in view. A very gracious change in his life and character now begins. Towards the close of 1724, he, being then in his twenty-second year, began to think of entering into deacon's orders, a step on which he expended much careful thought. Some doubts arising in his mind as to the motives which ought to influence him in taking Holy Orders, he frankly proposed them to his father; who, in his reply, dated January 26, 1725, after sundry advices, adds, 'But the principal spring or motive, to which all the former should be only secondary, must certainly be the glory of God, and the service of His Church in the edification of our neighbour. And woe to him who with any meaner leading view attempts so sacred a work.' He then mentions the qualifications necessary, and adds, 'You ask me which is the best commentary on the Bible. I answer, the Bible itself. For

the several paraphrases and translations of it in the polyglot, compared with the original, and with one another, are, in my opinion, to an honest, devout, industrious, and humble man, infinitely preferable to any comment I ever saw. But Grotius is the best, for the most part, especially on the Old Testament: He hints that he thought it too soon for him to take Orders. His mother, however, took a different view. Writing in the course of the next month, she says, I think the sooner you are a deacon the better, because it may be an inducement to greater application in the study of practical divinity, which, of all other studies, I humbly conceive to be the best for candidates for Orders.' And she goes on to say, 'The alteration of your temper has occasioned me much speculation. I, who am apt to be sanguine, hope that it may proceed from the operations of God's Holy Spirit, that by taking off your relish for earthly enjoyments, He may prepare and dispose your mind for a more serious and close application to things of a more sublime and spiritual nature. If it be so, happy are you, if you cherish those dispositions! And now, in good earnest, resolve to make religion the business of your life; for, after all, that is the one thing that, strictly speaking, is necessary. All things besides are comparatively little to the purposes of life. I wish you would now enter upon a strict examination of yourself, that you may know whether you have a reasonable hope of salvation by Jesus Christ. If you have, the satisfaction of knowing it will abundantly reward your pains; if you have not, you will find a more reasonable occasion for tears than can be met with in a tragedy. This matter deserves great consideration by all, but especially by those designed for the Ministry, who ought, above all things, to make their own calling and election sure, lest, after they have preached to others, they themselves should be cast away.' Nothing could be more likely to move him to earnestness of purpose such words from the pen of his dearly loved and always honoured mother. He began now to apply himself with diligence to the study of divinity. His father soon intimated that he had changed his mind, and was inclined to his taking Orders that summer. 'But in the first place,' says he, 'if you love yourself or me, pray heartily.' And again he wrote, 'God fit for your great work! Fast, watch, and pray; believe, love, endure, and be happy; towards which you shall never want the most ardent prayers of your affectionate father.'

Wesley afterwards wrote, 'When I was about twenty-two, my father pressed me to enter Holy Orders. At the same time, the providence of God directing me to Kempis's Christian's Pattern, I began to see that true religion was seated in the heart, and that that God's law extended to all our thoughts as well as words and actions. I was, however, very angry with Kempis for being too strict, though I read him in Dean Stanhope's translation. Yet I had frequently much comfort in reading him, such as I was an utter stranger to before.'

Wesley's objections to Kempis related to two points in particular, which he thus expresses, 'I cannot think that when God sent us into the world he had irreversibly decreed that we should be perpetually miserable in it. If our taking up our cross imply our bidding adieu to all joy and satisfaction, how is it reconcilable with what Solomon affirms of religion, that her ways are of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace Another of his tenets is, that all mirth or pleasure is useless, if not sinful, and that nothing is an affliction to a good man—that he ought to thank God even for sending him misery. This, in my opinion, is contrary to God's design in afflicting us; for though He chasteneth those whom He loveth, yet it is in order to humble them.' With characteristic diffidence, he again applies to his father and mother for help in his difficulties. The former replied, 'As for Thomas a Kempis, all the world are apt to strain either on one side or the other; but, for all that, mortification is still an indispensable Christian duty. The world is a syren, and we must have a care of her; and if the young man will rejoice in his youth, yet let him take care that his joys be innocent; and, in order to this, remember, that for all these things God will bring him into judgment. I have only this to add of my friend and old companion, that, making some grains of allowance, he may be read to great advantage; nay, that it is almost impossible to peruse him seriously without admiring, and I think in some measure imitating, his heroic strains of humility, piety, and devotion. But I reckon you have, before this, received your mother's letter, who has leisure to bould the matter to the bran.' Yes, his mother had threshed out the matter for him, closing her counsels with, 'Would you judge of the lawfulness or unlawfulness of pleasure, of the innocence or malignity of actions—take this rule: whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, or takes off the relish of spiritual things; in short, whatever increases the strength and authority of your body over your mind; that thing is sin to you, however innocent it may be in itself.'

Another subject on which he differed from Kempis, and on which he desired his mother's views, was the doctrine of Predestination, a subject that was afterwards to occupy much of his thought and time. He thus states his views, 'If it was inevitably decreed from eternity that such a determinate part of mankind should be saved, and none beside them, a vast majority of the world were only born to death, without so much as a possibility of avoiding it. How is this consistent with either the Divine Justice or Mercy Is it merciful to ordain a creature to everlasting misery Is it just to punish man for crimes which he could not but commit That God should be the author of sin and injustice, which must, I think, be the consequence of maintaining this opinion, is a contradiction to the clearest ideas we have of the Divine nature and perfections.' Mrs. Wesley replies: 'I have Kempis by me; but have not read him lately. I cannot recollect the passages you mention; but believing you do him justice, I do positively aver that he is extremely in the wrong in that impious, I was about to say blasphemous, suggestion that God, by an irreversible decree, has determined any man to be miserable even in this world. His intentions, as Himself, are holy, just, and good; and all the miseries incident to men here or hereafter proceed from themselves.'

Another difficulty, on which he sought counsel, had reference to the minatory sentences of the Athanasian Creed. He was too minute and conscientious to allow any great question to escape him without thorough investigation.

Other difficulties were suggested to him by reading Jeremy Taylor's works, and, as usual, he opened his mind upon them all to his best friend. Taylor had affirmed that, 'Whether God has forgiven us or no, we know not, therefore still be sorrowful for ever for having sinned.' Wesley remarks, 'That we can never be so certain of the pardon of Our sins, as to be assured they will never rise up against us, I firmly believe. We know that they will infallibly do so, if we apostatize; and I am not satisfied what evidence there can be of our final

perseverance, till we have finished our course. But I am persuaded we may know if we are Now in a state of salvation, since that is expressly promised in the Scriptures to our sincere endeavours, and we are surely able to judge of our own sincerity.' We may say with his biographer, Moore, He saw the blessing even now, but not the way to attain it.'

Of this period he writes, at a subsequent date, 'In the year 1725, being in the twenty-third year of my age, I met with Bishop Taylor's Rule and Exercises of Holy Living and Dying. In reading several parts of this book, I was greatly affected; that part in particular which relates to purity of intention. Instantly I resolved to dedicate to God all my thoughts, and words, and actions; being thoroughly convinced that there was no medium but that every part of my life (not some only) must either be a sacrifice to God, or myself, that is in effect, to the devil' Can any serious person doubt of this, or find a medium between serving God and serving the devil' He adds, 'In the year 1726 I met with Kempis's Christian's Pattern. The nature and extent of inward religion, the religion of the heart, now appeared to me in a stronger light than ever it had done before. I saw that giving even all my life to God (supposing it possible to do this, and go no further) would profit me nothing, unless I gave my heart, yea, all my heart, to Him. I saw that "simplicity of intention and purity of affection," one design in all we speak or do, and one desire ruling all our tempers, are indeed ~ the wings of the soul," without which she can never ascend to, the mount of God.'

Another book to which his attention was drawn, and which became: a great favourite with both the Wesleys in their Oxford days, was Scougall's Life of God in the Soul of Man. This it was that Charles Wesley put into, Whitefield's hands soon after their first meeting, and of which Whitefield says, 'While reading in it that true religion was a union of the soul with God, or Christ formed within us, a ray of light divine instantly darted in upon my soul, and from that moment, but not till then, did I know that I must be a new creature Though I had fasted, watched, and prayed, and received the Sacrament so long, yet I never knew what true religion was, till God sent me that excellent treatise by the hands of my never-to-be-forgotten friend.'

An incident occurred about this time, which has a special interest, as being the first recorded instance of that direct appeal to individuals on the subject of personal religion which he afterwards practised on every available opportunity and with such signal results. It is thus related by him, 'About a year and a half ago I stole out of company at eight in the evening with a young gentleman with whom I was intimate. As we took a turn in an aisle of St.

Mary's Church, in expectation of a young lady's funeral, with whom we were both acquainted, I asked him if he really thought himself my friend, and, if he did, why he would not do me all the good he could. He began to protest; in which I cut him short by desiring him to oblige me in an instance, which he could not deny to be in his own power; to let me have the pleasure of making him a whole Christian, to which I knew he was at least half persuaded already; that he could not do me a greater kindness, as both of us would be fully convinced when we came to follow that young woman. He turned exceedingly serious, and kept something of that disposition ever since. Yesterday was a fortnight, he died of a consumption. I saw him three days before he died; and, on the Sunday following, did him the last good office I could here, by preaching his funeral sermon, which was his desire when living.'

Hitherto he seems to have waged a single-handed combat; and to have struggled manfully alone, cheered and counselled only by the helpful words from his distant home. But about this time he met with the inestimable benefit of a Christian friend, which, he says, he never had till now. Who this friend was has not been disclosed; but Wesley was so far encouraged that he says, 'I began to alter the whole form of my conversation, and to set in earnest upon a new life.

I set apart an hour or two a day for religious retirement. I communicated every week. I watched against all sin in word or deed. I began to aim at and pray for inward holiness.' Added to this, in pursuance of an advice given by Bishop Taylor, he began to take a more exact account than he had done before of the manner in which he employed his time, writing down how he occupied every hour. His practice was to carry with him a small memorandum book, in which a single page was assigned to each day, and a single line to each hour. By means of signs and contracted words he was enabled to record how every hour was spent, from four o'clock in the morning, when he rose, to nine at night, when he retired. Several of these diaries have been preserved.

This he continued to do, wherever he was, for many years. When he left England, ten years afterwards, the variety of scenes through which he passed induced him also to transcribe, from time to time, the more material parts of his diary, adding here and there such little reflections as occurred to his mind. Both these series of memoranda were intended only for his own eye; but in 1739, after his return from Georgia, in order to vindicate himself from some aspersions on his character, made by a certain Mr. Williams, he published 'extracts' from the Journal, and, at intervals of two or three years, continued the practice to the end of his days, Twenty-one of these 'extracts' were published, and form what is now so well known as John Wesley's Journal.

Wesley's progress thus far in Christian knowledge and character is definite and decided. Canon Overton remarks, 'While thoroughly believing in the reality and importance of a later change, can any one deny that, from this time forward to the very close of his long life, John Wesley led a most holy, devoted life, aiming only at the glory of God, the welfare of his own soul, and the benefit of his fellow-creatures and if that is not to be a good Christian, what is' The question whether he was a Christian or not until the Aldersgate Street incident is a matter of definition. At the time when he affirmed himself not to be one, he knew as well as Overton, and better, what he meant by being a Christian.

The time drew near when it was expected that the election of a Fellow of Lincoln College would take place, and his friends exerted themselves to secure it in his behalf. When Dr. Morley, the Rector of Lincoln, was spoken to on the subject, he said, 'I will inquire into Mr. Wesley's character.' He did so, and gave him leave to stand a candidate, and afterwards became his friend in the matter, and used all the influence he had in his favour. It was not possible for his uncommon seriousness to escape his opponents, who poured upon him their banter and ridicule. His father reminded him that it was 'a callow virtue' that could not bear to be laughed at; adding, 'I think our Captain and Master endured something more for us before He entered into glory; and unless we follow His steps, in vain do we hope to share that glory with Him.' And his mother wrote, 'If it be a weak virtue that cannot bear being laughed at, I am sure it is a strong and well-confirmed virtue that can bear the test of a brisk buffoonery.'

Notwithstanding the opposition that was raised against him, his high character for learning and diligence was rewarded by success, and he was elected to the fellowship on Thursday, March 17, 1726. His father very emphatically expressed his gratification in a letter of April 1. 'I have both yours, since your election; in both you express yourself as becometh you.' And then, after referring to the difficulty, he had in providing for the expenses of the election, he goes on to say, 'What will be my own fate before the summer is over, God knows; sed passi graviora — wherever I am, my Jack is Fellow of Lincoln.' And his mother tells him, in her usual strain of piety, 'I think myself obliged to return great thanks to Almighty God for giving you good success at Lincoln. Let whoever He pleased be the instrument, to Him, and to Him alone, the glory appertains.'

This marks an important epoch in Wesley's career. He has already begun to seek in earnest the salvation of his soul, subjecting himself to severe discipline, and putting his whole conduct under the most rigorous control; thus laying the foundation of those habits of life which were afterwards so conspicuously illustrated in him. In this resolute purpose to promote his growth in goodness, he seized upon his removal from Christ Church to free himself from some associations which he felt to be prejudicial. Reviewing this period of his life some years later, he says, 'Removing soon after [he had entered Holy Orders] to another college, I executed a resolution which I was before convinced was of the utmost importance—shaking off at once all my trifling acquaintance. I began to see more and more the value of time. I applied myself closer to study. I watched more carefully against actual sins. I advised others to be religious, according to that scheme of religion by which I modelled my own life. But meeting now with Mr. Law's Christian Perfection and Serious Call, although I was much offended at many parts of both, yet they convinced me more than ever of the exceeding height and breadth and depth of the Law of God. The light flowed in so mightily upon my soul, that everything appeared in a new view. I cried to God for help, and resolved not to prolong the time of obeying Him, as I had never done before. And by my continued endeavour to keep His whole Law, inward and outward, to the utmost of my power, I was persuaded that I should be accepted of Him, and that I was even then in a state of salvation.'

This very significant passage shows the depth of Wesley's purpose to reform his whole life and to bring it, as far as he was able, into entire accord with the Divine will. The fervour of his appeal for Divine help in this, and the carefulness with which he endeavoured to regulate his outward conduct, are also evident. Nor must the fact of his coming into contact for the first time with the writings of William Law be overlooked, considering their influence upon his future views and his subsequent relations to their author. At an early period he published carefully prepared abridgments of the Christian Perfection and the Serious Call.

Wesley received helpful and stimulating letters from his father. In one he exhorts him to master St. Chrysostom, and the Articles, and the Form of Ordination; to bear up stoutly against the world, etc., to keep a good, an honest, and a pious heart, and to pray hard and watch hard. In another, his father intimates that he had designed an edition of the Bible, in Hebrew, Chaldee, Septuagint, and Vulgate, and, desiring his son's assistance, says, 'What I desire of you is, first, that you would immediately fall to work, and read diligently the Hebrew text in the polyglot, and collate it exactly with the Vulgate, writing all, even the least, variations between them. To these I would have you add the Samaritan text, You may learn the Samaritan alphabet in a day. In twelve months' time, sticking close to it in the forenoons, you will get twice through the Pentateuch; for I have done it four times the last year, and am going over it the fifth. You shall not lose your reward, either in this or the other world.'

He found a much more congenial society at Lincoln than he had been able to secure at Christ Church. Writing to his brother Samuel he says, 'As far as I have ever observed, I never knew a college beside ours, whereof the members were so perfectly satisfied with one another, and so inoffensive to the other part of the University. All I have yet seen of the Fellows are both well-natured and well-bred; men admirably disposed as well to preserve peace and good neighbourhood among themselves as to promote it wherever they have any acquaintance.'

Wesley had allowed his hair, which was of a light brown colour, to grow to sufficient length to reach to his shoulders. His mother advised him on the grounds of health to have it cut. Writing to his brother Samuel, he says, 'My mother's reason for my cutting off my hair, is because: she fancies it prejudices my health. As to my looks, it would doubtless mend my complexion to have it off, by letting me get a little more colour, and perhaps it might contribute to my making a more genteel appearance. But these, till ill-health is added to them, I cannot persuade myself to be sufficient grounds for losing two or three pounds a year. I am ill enough able to spare them.' Five years after he wrote, 'As to my hair, I am much more sure, that what this enables me to do, is according to the Scripture, than I am that the length of it is contrary to it.' His brother Samuel took a middle path, and advised him to have it cut shorter, and this advice he followed. In the former letter he asserts, what his whole after life confirmed, 'Leisure and I have taken leave of one another; I propose to be busy as long as I live, if my health is so long indulged to me.' Charles Wesley came up to Oxford from Westminster School, and entered

Christ Church soon after John had left it. For some months after his arrival in Oxford, Charles is said to have been moral in his conduct and very agreeable in his spirit and manners; but the strict authority over him which his brother Samuel had exercised, as his tutor and guardian, being now withdrawn, he was far from severe and earnest in his studies. After a while, however, he became studious, though his spirit was not devout. His brother John wrote, 'He pursued his studies diligently, and led a regular, harmless life; but if I spoke to him about religion, he would warmly answer, "What, would you have me to be a saint all at once" and would hear no more.'

Wesley spent from April 26 to September 21 of this year at Epworth and Wroot, his father having both livings in his charge, residing occasionally in the small rectory at the latter place. It was a happy time, during which he read prayers and preached twice every Sunday, and otherwise helped his father as he was able. He pursued his studies meanwhile, and enjoyed the frequent opportunities of conversing with his honoured parents, keeping a diary of what passed, noting the subjects of conversation, and the practical observations made by his seniors, and sometimes adding his own.

The acquisition of Wroot added but little to the domestic comforts of the Epworth family, for the profits barely covered the expense of serving it; while the country around was little better than a swamp.

The following extract from one of Samuel Wesley's letters may serve to give an insight into the state of things in the Epworth home. 'I had been thrown behind by a series of misfortunes. My parsonage barn was blown down ere I had recovered the taking of my living; my house, great part of it, burnt down about two years since; my flax, great part of my income, now in my own hands (hemp was the principal crop of the neighbourhood), I doubt wilfully fired and burnt in the night, whilst I was last in London; my income sunk about one half by the low price of grain; and my credit lost by the taking away my regiment. I was brought to Lincoln Castle June 23 last past. About three weeks since, my very unkind people, thinking they had not yet done enough, have, in the night, stabbed my three cows, which were a great part of my poor numerous family's subsistence. For which God forgive them.'

Wesley had occasionally written some verse of varied character, and while thus at Epworth he began a paraphrase on Psalm civ. 1-18, which he afterwards finished. It shows his aptitude in poetical composition, as do the exquisite translations from the German, Spanish, and French languages, with which he at a later period enriched the Church's psalter. His mother's counsel may have checked his exercises in this direction-'I would not have you leave off making verses; rather make poetry your diversion, though never your business.' The poet of Methodism had not yet been revealed.

Wesley returned to Oxford, September 21, 1726, and resumed his Studies. His literary character was now established in the University. He was recognized by all parties as a man of talents and an excellent critic in the learned languages; his skill in logic was universally known and acknowledged, and his compositions were distinguished by an elegant simplicity of style and justness of thought that strongly marked the excellence of his classical taste. The high opinion that was entertained of him was publicly expressed by his being chosen Greek Lecturer and Moderator of the Classes (November 6), though he had been elected Fellow only eight months, was little more than twenty-three years of age, and had not yet proceeded Master of Arts. His duties commenced in the October term of this year.

Canon Overton gives the following explanation of the duties attached to these offices :—'Greek lecturer does not mean teacher of Greek generally; it is a technical term the explanation of which illustrates the tradition of piety as well as learning which belonged to Lincoln College. The object was to secure some sort of religious instruction to all the undergraduates; and for this purpose a special officer was appointed, with the modest stipend of 20 a year, who was to hold a lecture every week in the College Hall, which all the undergraduates were to attend, on the Greek Testament. As became a learned society, the lecture was to be in the original language, but the real object was to: teach divinity, not Greek. The duty of "Moderator of the Classes" was to sit in the College Hall, and preside over the "Disputations," which were held at Lincoln College every day in the week except Sunday.'

For several years he held this office, in which he says he could not avoid acquiring some degree of expertness in arguing, and especially in detecting plausible fallacies, which served him in good stead in his many controversies; and he praised God for giving him 'this honest art.'

Wesley took his master's degree on February 14, 1727. He delivered three lectures on the occasion—one on natural philosophy, *De Anima Brutorum*; another on moral philosophy, *De Julio Cesare*; and a third on religion, *De Amore Dei*. He is said to have gained considerable reputation in his disputation. His degree gave him one advantage, which he gladly hailed; it set him more at liberty to choose his own employment, and since, as he said, he knew his own deficiencies best, and which of them it was most necessary should be supplied, he hoped greatly to profit by his freedom. He had in anticipation laid down the following plan of studies, from which he did not suffer himself to deviate. : Mondays and Tuesdays were devoted to the Greek and Latin classical historians and poets; Wednesdays to logic and ethics; Thursdays to Hebrew and Arabic; Fridays to metaphysics and natural philosophy; Saturdays to oratory and poetry, chiefly composing; Sundays to divinity. In the intermediate hours between these more fixed studies, he read French, and a great variety of modern authors in almost every department of science. He followed the method of first reading an author regularly through; then, in a second reading, to transcribe important passages, either for the information they conveyed, or for their beauty of expression.

In one of his sermons he makes the following observations on his conduct at this time:—

'When it pleased God to give me a settled resolution to be, not a nominal, but a real Christian (being then about twenty-two years of age), my acquaintance were as ignorant of God as myself. But there was this difference: I knew my own ignorance; they did not know theirs. I faintly endeavoured to help them, but in vain. Meanwhile I found, by sad experience, that even their harmless conversation, so called, damped all my good resolutions. But how to get rid of them was the question which I resolved in my mind again and again. I saw no possible way, unless it should please God to remove me to another college. He did so in a manner utterly contrary to all human probability. I was elected Fellow of a college where I knew not one person. I foresaw abundance of people would come to see me, either, out of friendship, civility, or curiosity, and that I should have offers of acquaintance new and old. But I had now fixed my plan. Entering now, as it were, into a new world, I resolved to have no acquaintance by chance, but by choice, and to choose such only as I had reason to believe would help me on my way to heaven. In consequence of this, I narrowly observed the temper and behaviour of all that visited me. I saw no reason to think that the greater part of these truly loved or feared God. Such acquaintance, therefore, I did not choose; I could not expect they would do me any good. Therefore, when any of these came to see me, I behaved as courteously as I could. But to the question, "When will you come to see me" I returned no answer. When they had come a few times, and found I still declined returning the visit, I saw them no more. And, I bless God, this has been my invariable rule for about threescore years. I knew many reflections would follow. But that did not move me, as I knew full well, it was my calling to go "through evil report and good report."

These last words are appropriately placed in the borders of Vertue's three engraved portraits of Wesley, after the painting by Williams.

He seems at this time to have cherished the spirit of a recluse, for he says in one of his letters to his mother (March 19, 1727), 'The conversation of one or two persons, whom you may have heard me speak of (I hope never without gratitude), first took off my relish for most other pleasures; so far that I despised them in comparison of that. I have since proceeded a step further; to slight them absolutely. And I am so little at present in love with even company—the most elegant entertainment next to books—that, unless the persons have a religious turn of thought, I am much better pleased without them. I think it is the settled temper of my' soul that I should prefer, at least for some time, such a retirement as would seclude me from all the world, to the station I am now in. Not that this is by any means unpleasant to me, but I imagine it would be more improving to be in a place where I might confirm or implant in my mind what habits I would, without interruption, before the flexibility of youth be over.'

A school in Yorkshire was proposed to him. It lay in a little vale, 'so pent up between two hills, that it is scarcely accessible on any side; so that you can expect little company from without, and within there is none at all.' This seemed to offer what he desired, but from some unexplained cause the proposal was not renewed. It will afterwards be seen how often, when in the excitement of his great public work, he cast longing eyes towards such conditions of peace and seclusion, from which he was again and again diverted by the trumpet call of duty. As, on one occasion, after preaching at an attractive place, he exclaimed, 'How many days should I spend here if I was to do my own will Not so; I am "to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish his work." Therefore this is the first day I ever spent here, and perhaps it may be the last.' And again, 'How gladly could I spend a few weeks in this delightful solitude I But I must not rest yet. As long as God gives me strength to labour, I am to use it.'

It must have been somewhere about this time that he formed the habit of early rising, which he continued throughout his life. In a sermon on 'Redeeming the Time,' he makes the following statement:— 'If any one desires to know exactly what quantity of sleep his own constitution requires, he may very easily make the experiment which I made about sixty years ago. I then waked every night about twelve or one, and lay awake for some time. I readily concluded that this arose from my lying longer in bed than nature required. To be satisfied, I procured an alarum, which waked me the next morning at seven (near an hour earlier than I rose the day before); yet, I lay awake again at night. The second morning I rose at six; but, notwithstanding this, I lay awake the second night. The third morning I rose at five; but, nevertheless, I lay awake the third night. The fourth morning I rose at four (as, by the grace of God, I have done ever since); and I lay awake no more. And I do not now lie awake (taking the year round) a quarter of an hour together in a month. By the same experiment, rising earlier and earlier every morning, may any one find how much sleep he really wants.'

The Rector of Epworth and Wroot was now advancing in years and infirmities He had led a very active life, had passed through much trouble, and had known not a few hardships. His health was enfeebled, and the parish of Wroot was not in the highest degree healthy. It was a little village distant from Epworth about five miles, and surrounded by bogs, so that often when the waters were out the journey

from one place to the other could be made only by boat, and in winter was even dangerous. It had gained the name of Wroot-out-of-England, from its inaccessible position. It seemed desirable that John should come to Epworth and help his father in his work

Accordingly, after paying a visit to his brother Samuel at Westminster, he went down to Lincolnshire early in August 1727. Wroot as assigned to him as his sphere of labour, himself and his father occasionally changing. He had not long resided there before he was seized with ague, a disease peculiar to the neighbourhood, rendered endemic by the conditions of the land. With this disease upon him he travelled on horseback to Oxford to oblige Dr, Morley, returning to the same manner to Wroot after a few days' stay, though several times very ill on the road. Often in the future was he both to travel and to labour When in the grip of disease!

The following letter, written to Wesley at the close of this year, by a Fellow of his own college, confirms the assertion by one of his earliest biographers, that 'Mr. Wesley's general knowledge and agreeable conversation endeared him to all his acquaintance at Oxford.

He was a most engaging and instructive companion; open and communicative to his friends, and civil and obliging to all' :—
'Lincoln College, December 28, 1727.

SIR,

'Yesterday I had the satisfaction of receiving your kind and obliging letter, whereby you have given me a singular instance of that goodness and civility which is essential to your character; and strongly confirmed to me the many encomiums which are given you in this respect, by all who have the happiness to know you. This makes me infinitely desirous of your acquaintance. And when I consider those shining qualities which I hear daily mentioned in your praise, I cannot but lament the great misfortune we all suffer, in the absence of so agreeable a person from the college, But I please myself with the thoughts of seeing you here on chapter-day, and of the happiness we shall have in. your company in the summer. In the mean time, I return you my most sincere thanks for this favour, and assure you that if it should ever lie in my power to serve you, no one will be more ready to do it, than,

'Sir,

'Your most obliged and most humble servant,

'Lew Fenton.'

It did not seem improbable that, in the ordinary course of things, Wesley would remain in the retirement of parish life, helping his father, to the end of his days, and possibly succeeding him at Epworth. But towards the close of 1729 he was summoned by Dr. Morley, the Rector of Lincoln College, to return to Oxford. Dr. Morley says, 'At a meeting of the society, just before I left college, to consider of the proper method to preserve discipline and good government, among several things agreed on, it was, in the opinion of all that were present, judged necessary that the junior Fellows, who should be chosen Moderators, shall in person attend the duties of their office, if they do not prevail on some of the Fellows to officiate for them.... We hope it may be as much for your advantage to reside at college as where you are, if you take pupils, or can get a curacy in the neighbourhood of Oxon. Your father may certainly have another curate, though not so much to his satisfaction; yet we are persuaded, that this will not move him to hinder your return to college, since the interest of college and obligation to statute require it.'

Such a letter could receive but one answer. Wesley himself felt the attractions of University life, and his father, rigid alike in yielding and enforcing obedience to authority, had so high a regard for Dr. Morley, and remembered so thankfully his indebtedness to him, that he was accustomed to say, 'I can refuse Dr. Morley nothing.' Little did Wesley think, in taking leave of his little flock at Wroot and of the dear home at Epworth, what great issues depended on his entering again the shades of Lincoln College.

Wesley returned to Oxford on November 22, 1729. Oxford moreover now presented a new attraction to him. As was said above, his brother Charles had come up from Westminster School three years before; and during that time he had undergone a very marked change both in character and in habits, apparently without the use of any particular means. In his second year he began to be more serious in his general deportment, and to manifest a deeper concern for the salvation of his soul. That he might keep a stricter watch over himself, he asked his brother's counsel on the keeping of a diary, for noting the state of his mind and the doings of the day. He added, 'God has thought fit (it may be to increase my wariness) to deny me at present your company and assistance. It is through Him strengthening me, I trust to maintain my ground till we meet. And I hope that, neither before nor after that time, I shall relapse into my former state of insensibility. It is through your means, I firmly believe, that God will establish what He hath begun in me; and there is no one person I would so willingly have to be the instrument of good to me as you. It is owing in great measure to somebody's prayers (my mother's, most likely), that I am come to think as I do; for I cannot tell myself how or when I awoke out of my lethargy, only, that it was not long after you went away.'

As the year went on, he became more and more earnest in the pursuit of religion, and began to exert himself in doing good in various ways, and in seeking to awaken attention to religion in the minds of some of his fellow students. In May of this year he wrote to his brother, 'Providence has at present put it into my power to do some good. I have a modest, well-disposed youth lives next me; and have been, thank God, somewhat instrumental in keeping him so. He had got into vile hands and is now broke loose. He durst not receive the Sacrament, but at the usual times, for fear of being laughed at. By convincing him of the duty of frequent communicating, I have prevailed on both of us to receive once a week. I earnestly long for, and desire, the blessing God is about to send me in you. I am sensible this is my day of grace; and that, upon my employing the time before our meeting and next parting, will in great measure depend my condition for eternity.'

John spent a few days of the following month in Oxford. Whether Charles referred to that time, or had any hope of a more prolonged intercourse with his brother, does not appear. In that brief visit, however, John was to see for the first time the beginning of what was to be so great a work in the earth, and to hear applied to a few struggling inquirers a contemptuous epithet which should become the symbol of earnest Christianity in all quarters of the globe. But to Charles, as the instrument, belongs the honour of initiating this work, let him therefore in his own words describe it. In writing to Dr. Chandler, he says, 'My first year at college I lost in diversions; the next I set

myself to study. Diligence led me into serious thinking; I went to the weekly Sacrament, persuaded two or three young students to accompany me, and to observe the method of study prescribed by the statutes of the University. This gained me the harmless name of Methodist. In half a year after this my brother left his curacy at Epworth and came to our assistance. We then proceeded regularly in our studies, and in doing what good we could to the bodies and souls of men.'

It is indicative of the low condition of discipline in the University at the time, that a strict attention to its statutes should excite surprise. What was written of Oxford thirty years after too well reflects the condition of things at this time, as J. R. Green's Oxford Studies, and other historical works, clearly testify.

How great issues have their origin in trifling incidents! The life of a young and volatile collegian undergoes a change; that young man becomes one of the sweetest psalmists the Christian Church has known. His numbers are chanted over the face of continents; in them the Gospel is sung in many lands, and in many languages; they feed the spiritual life of millions in all the earth. Crowned heads and toiling sons of the field alike sing them. But what is the significance of this name of reproach which is fastened on three young men? The grouping of men by common designations, whether in derision only or by choice, binds them together. It gives them new common interests. It separates them from their fellows. It gives definiteness to half-formed professions. In this case it was a profession of severance from gay and negligent companions; a profession of discipleship, of devotion to duty; a profession of a desire, at least, to live a religious life. It became a flag around which others might rally. To-day it distinguishes more than twenty-five millions of people!