INTRODUCTION


In the year 1757 John Wesley, traveling and preaching, night and day, throughout the United Kingdom, arrived in Glasgow. He “walked to its College, saw the new library, with the collection of pictures,” and admired examples of the art of Raphael, Vandyke, and Rubens. Had he possessed the foresight of the Hebrew seers, he would have paused, as he crossed the University quadrangle, to admire a coming and nobler proof of genius; for it was in this same year that a young man, obscure, diffident, but with a mind burdened with mighty anticipations, and destined to become recognized as a chief benefactor of the human race, came to Glasgow to seek employment as an artisan, where, failing to find it among the citizens, he found sympathy in the learned Faculty of the University, and was allowed a humble chamber within its walls. The room is reached from the quadrangle by a spiral stairway, and is still preserved in its original rudeness, as too sacred to be altered. In the court below he put out a sign as “Mathematical Instrument Maker to the University.” He lived on poor fare, and eked out his subsistence by combining, with his work for the Faculty, the manufacture of musical instruments; he made organs, and repaired flutes, guitars, and violins; but meanwhile studied assiduously the laws of physics, that he might apply them in an invention which was to produce the “greatest commercial and social revolution in the entire history of the world,”[1] a revolution with which Methodism was to have important relations.

After some years of struggle with want, sickness, the treachery of men, and the disappointment of his hopes, James Watt, the young artisan of Glasgow University, gave to the world the Steam-Engine, and today the aggregate steam-power of Great Britain alone equals the manual capability for labor of more than four hundred millions of men; more than twice the number of males capable of labor on our planet.[2] Its aggregate power throughout the earth is equal to the male capacity, for manual work, of five or six worlds like ours. The commerce, the navigation, the maritime warfare, the agriculture, the mechanic arts of his race have been revolutionized by the genius of this young man. His invention was introduced into Manchester about, seventy years ago but now, in that city and its vicinity, are more than fifty thousand boilers, with an aggregate power of a million horses.

The invention of the steam-engine was more important to the new than to the old world. It was vastly important to the latter through the former, for it was the potent instrument for the opening of the boundless interior of the North American continent to the emigration of the European populations, and the development of that immense commerce which has bound together and enriched both worlds,[3] and by which New York city alone now exceeds, in amount of tonnage, more than twice over, all the commercial marine of Great Britain in the year before Watt’s invention.[4] The great rivers of the new world, flowing with swift current, could convey their barges toward the sea, but admitted of no return. The invention of Watt, applied by the genius of Fulton, has conquered their resistance, and opened the grand domain of the Mississippi valley for the formation of mighty states in a single generation, and marshaled the peoples of Europe to march into the wilderness in annual hosts of hundreds of thousands.

Wesley, who might have saluted, in the quadrangle of Glasgow University, the struggling and dependent man whose destiny it was to achieve these stupendous changes, was himself actually preparing the only means that could supply the sudden and incalculable moral wants which they were to create. Methodism, with its “lay ministry” and its “itinerancy,” could alone afford the ministrations of religion to the overflowing population; it was to lay the moral foundations of many of the great states of the West. The older Churches of the colonies could never have supplied them with “regular” or educated pastors in any proportion to their rapid settlement. And in the sudden
growth of manufacturing cities in both England and America, occasioned by Watt’s invention, Methodism was to find some of the most urgent necessities for its peculiar provisions.

Watt and Wesley might well then have struck hands and bid each other godspeed at Glasgow in 1757: they were co-workers for the destinies of the new world.

The rapid settlement of the continent, especially after the Revolution, presented indeed a startling problem to the religious world. Philosophers, considering only its colonial growth, anticipated for it a new era in civilization. Hume perceived there “the seeds of many a noble state – an asylum for liberty and science. Montesquieu predicted for it freedom, prosperity, and a great people; Turgot, that “Europe herself should find there the perfection of her political societies and the firmest support of her well-being.” Berkeley pointed to it as the seat of future empire. Locke and Shaftesbury studied out a constitutional polity for a part at least of its empire. The fervid spirit of Edwards, seeing, with Bossuet, in all history only the “History of Redemption,” dreamed, in his New England retirement, of a millennium which was to dawn in the new world, and thence burst upon the nations and irradiate the globe. The coming Revolution was discerned, and its vast consequences anticipated by sagacious minds a half-century before the Declaration of Independence. The frequent Indian wars, and especially the “Old French War,” concluded but twelve or thirteen years before the Revolution, trained the whole manhood of the colonies to arms, and prepared it to cope with the veteran military strength of the mother country. The Treaty of Peace in 1763 was virtually a treaty of American Independence. It gave to England the dominion of the continent, (excepting the southwestern Spanish possessions,) from Baffin’s Bay to the Gulf of Mexico, from ocean to ocean. It was impossible that this vast colonial domain should long continue under foreign rule. Choiseul, the astute minister of Louis XV., seeking to retain a remnant of the French-American territory, suggested to the English cabinet the importance of the French jurisdiction in Canada, to keep alive in the Anglican colonies a sense of dependence on British protection, and failing of his design, yielded readily, exclaiming, “We have caught them at last!” France, by alliance with the revolting colonies, was to wreak full retribution on her ancient enemy.

The Revolution verified these anticipations, and in its train came events quite anomalous in the religious history of nations. No Protestant prelate had hitherto lived upon the continent; it now presented not merely a Church without a bishop, and a state without a king, but a state territorially larger than any other in the civilized world without an ecclesiastical Establishment. The State, separated from the Church, enfranchising it by divorcing it. Religion was to expect no more legal support, except temporarily, in a few localities where the old system might linger in expiring. The novel example was contrary to the traditional training of all Christian states, and might well excite the anxiety of Christian thinkers for the moral fate of the new world. How were Christian education, Churches, and pastors to be provided for this boundless territory and its multiplying millions of souls? If the “voluntary principle” were as legitimate as its advocates believed, yet could it possibly be adequate to the moral wants of the ever-coming armies of population which, under the attractions of the new country, were about to pour in upon and overspread its immense regions; armies far surpassing the northern hordes, whose surging migrations swept away the Roman empire, and with which was to be transferred to the new world much of the worst barbarism of the old? The colonial training of the country had been, providentially, to a great extent religious, as if preparatory for its future history.

Puritanism, with whatever repulsive characteristics, had produced in New England the best example of a commonwealth, in the true sense of that term, which the civilized world had yet seen: the best in morals, intelligence, industry, competence, and household comfort; a people to whom the Church and the schoolhouse were as indispensable as their homes. “We all,” they declared in the “oldest of American written constitutions,” “we all come into these parts of America to enjoy the liberties of the Gospel in purity and peace.” “He that makes religion as twelve and the world as thirteen has not the spirit of a New England man.” Protestant missions were to have their birth there: the colonial provision, in 1736, for “preaching the Gospel to the Indians” was “the first united Protestant missionary effort in behalf of the heathen world.” It preceded by a generation that of the Dutch, in Ceylon, under the auspices of their East India Company. It led to the formation of a Society for Missions among the English nonconformists, which again led, according to Bishop Burnet, to the organization of the “Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge” in the national Church.

In about half a century after King James’s translation of the Bible, Massachusetts gave it, through Eliot, to her Indians: the first Bible printed in America. The healthful influence of New England was to permeate the whole
country. It was to give from its pure and hardy stock one third of the white population of the nation, and especially
to extend its race and type of character over all the northern tier of states, from the Atlantic to beyond the
Mississippi. Rhode Island was settled by the Baptists for “soul liberty.” If the Dutch colony of New York was
founded chiefly in commercial designs, still it represented the principles of the Protestant Reformation. West New
Jersey and Pennsylvania were settled by the Quakers in the best spirit of their peaceful faith. Delaware was
colonized by the Swedes; Gustavus Adolphus, the Scandinavian hero of Protestantism, designed the colony, and
designed it to be “a blessing to the whole Protestant world.” He fell fighting for his faith at Lutzen, but left the
design to Oxenstiern, who zealously promoted it, declaring that its “consequences would be favorable to all
Christendom, to Europe, to the whole world.” The descendants of the settlers have been scattered over the country,
and constitute probably one part in two hundred of its population.[5] If the United States have verified the
prediction of Oxenstiern, the Swedes have worthily shared in its accomplishment. Maryland was settled by Roman
Catholics with a religious design – for religious liberty, and with a spirit on the part of its founder, befitting such a
design. When the settlers, led by the son of Baltimore, first landed, they “took possession of the province ‘for their
Saviour’ as well as for their lord the King!” The cavalier colonists of Virginia, if not very admirable examples of
their religion, nevertheless promptly introduced the Church of the parent land. The first legislature, chosen by the
people, established the Church, and the next year it had a pastor for every six hundred of the population. The
colonies of the Carolinas, with less religious interest, felt the religious influence of the older settlements, being
founded chiefly by emigrants from Virginia and New England, with a wholesome infusion of Quaker, Irish and
Scotch Presbyterian, and Huguenot blood and virtue. The Huguenots, encouraged by Coligny, first attempted the
colonization of South Carolina for the enjoyment of their religion. They gave the name of their king, Charles IX., to
the Carolinas. They failed, but their Protestant countrymen have not failed to constitute an important increment of
the population of the states which have grown from the two colonies, as, also, of the Atlantic states generally from
New York to Georgia. After the revocation of the Edict of Nantes they came, in large numbers, to America, and the
Carolinas were their favorite refuge. They brought with them “the virtues of the Puritans without their bigotry.”
Georgia was colonized by Protestant Englishmen, highland Scots, and Moravians, as “the place of refuge for the
distressed people of Britain and the persecuted Protestants of Europe.” The Jew was admitted, though not the
Papist. The two Wesleys accompanied thither its founder, the benevolent Oglethorpe, the friend of their father and
the friend of all men. It was Whitefield’s favorite resort among the colonies. It interdicted spirituous liquors and
slavery. The Cap of Liberty was on its seal; and its motto – Non sibi sed alsi, Not for themselves but others –
declared the philanthropic purpose of its projectors.[6] Thus were most of the colonies founded in religious
motives, their infancy molded by religion, their adolescence invigorated and hardened by war – the preparation for
their independence and liberty, and for a new civilization such should be based on the sovereignty of the people, and
should emancipate the new world from the ecclesiastical and political traditions of the old.

But now came a solemn crisis in the history of these providentially trained populations, scattered almost from the
frozen zone to the tropics, treading a virgin soil of exhaustless resources, and flushed with the consciousness of a
new development of humanity. Their territory was to enlarge more than two thirds; their population beyond any
recorded example. Though, in their colonial growth, Edwards, inspired by the “Great Awakening,” saw the vision
of the millennium flashing upon their mountains and valleys, yet the Revolution and national consolidation,
endowing them with new and unexampled powers, oppressed them with new problems. A state may exist without a
king, a Church without a bishop, a nation without an ecclesiastical establishment; but a people cannot be without
religion, without God; they had better cease to be. And where now, with a political system which recognized no one
religion by tolerating all, which made no provision for the spiritual wants of the people, should men, who believed
religion to be the fundamental condition of civil righteousness and liberty, look for the safety of the marvelous
destiny that had opened upon the new world?

The Revolution ended with the treaty of peace in 1783, and then commenced a national progress never anticipated
in the most sanguine dreams of statesmen. The inventive genius of Watt and Fulton was to wave a wand of
miraculous power over the land; and not only the Valley of the Mississippi, stretching over twenty degrees of
latitude and thirty of longitude, with twelve millions of souls in our day, was to open, like a new world, to
navigation and settlement; but the nearly seven thousand miles of “principal rivers flowing into the Atlantic, the
nearly five thousand flowing into the Gulf of Mexico, the eighteen thousand flowing into the Mississippi – the sea
river; the five thousand flowing into the Pacific: the thirty-five thousand miles of principal rivers – above a third
more than the circumference of the globe; besides the minor streams, making, with the former, more than forty thousand miles of navigable waters, were to be thrown open as the highways of population and commerce. The masses of Europe, in millions, were to enter these highways. The growth of population was to transcend the most credulous anticipations. The one million and a quarter (including blacks) of 1750, the less than three millions of 1780, were to be nearly four millions in 1790; nearly five and a third millions in 1800; more than nine and a half millions in 1820; nearly thirteen millions in 1830. Thus far they were to increase nearly thirty-three and a half per cent, in each decade. Pensioners of the war of the Revolution were to live to see the “Far West” transferred from the valleys of Virginia, from the eastern base of the Pennsylvanian Alleghenies, and the center of New York, to the great deserts beyond the Mississippi; to see mighty states, enriching the world, flourish on the Pacific coast, and to read, in New York, news sent the same day from San Francisco. Men, a few at least, who lived when the population of the country was less than three millions, were to live when it should be thirty millions. If the ratio of increase should continue, this population must amount, at the close of our century, but thirty-six years hence, to one hundred millions; exceeding the present population of England, France, Switzerland, Spain, Portugal, Sweden, and Denmark. A step further in the calculation presents a prospect still more surprising: by the year 1930, which not a few living in our day shall see, this mighty mass of commingled races will have swollen to the aggregate of two hundred and forty-six millions, nearly equaling the present population of all Europe.

This growth of population, could it take place in an old country, supplied for ages with religious and educational foundations, would suggest anxious moral questions to the reflections of the philosopher and Christian; but here it was to occur in the wilds of savage life. “Westward the star of empire takes its way,” sang Berkeley as he contemplated the grand prospect; to the West this overwhelming flood was to sweep, and thither was to move with it the power of the nation, the political forces which were to take their moral character from these multitudes and impart it to the nation, if not to much of the rest of the world. The center of “representative population” has continually tended westward. In 1790 it was twenty-two miles east of Washington; it has never been east of the national metropolis since, and never can be again. At the census of 1800 it had been transferred thirty miles west of Washington; in 1820 it was seventy-one miles west of that city; in 1830 one hundred and eight miles. Its westward movement from 1830 to 1840 was no less than fifty-two miles; more than five miles a year. During about fifty years it has kept nearly the same parallel of latitude, having deviated only about ten miles southward, while it has advanced about two hundred miles westward. Thus were the political destinies of the country to move into the “Great West,” the arena of its moral and religious struggles.

Obviously then the ordinary means of religious instruction – a “settled” pastorate, a “regular” clergy, trained through years of preliminary education – could not possibly meet the moral exigencies of such an unparalleled condition. Any unfavorable contingencies, hanging over the federal organization or unity of the nation, could hardly affect these exigencies, except to exasperate them. A religious system, energetic, migratory, “itinerant,” extempore, like the population itself; must arise; or demoralization, if not barbarism, must overflow the continent.

Methodism entered the great arena at the emergent moment. It was preparing to do so while Wesley stood in the quadrangle at Glasgow beneath the window within which Watt was preparing the key to unlock the gates of the Great West. In the very next year Wesley was to find the humble man who was to be its founder in the United States. About the same time a youth in Staffordshire was preparing, through many moral struggles, to become its chief leader and the chief character in the ecclesiastical history of the new world, the first resident bishop of Protestantism in the western hemisphere. Methodism was not to supersede there other forms of faith, but to become their pioneer in the opening wilderness, and to prompt their energies for its pressing necessities. It was to be literally the founder of the Church in several of the most important new states, individually as large as some leading kingdoms of the old world. It was to become at last the dominant popular faith of the country, with its standard planted in every city, town, and almost every village of the land.

Moving in the forefront of emigration, it was to supply, with the ministrations of religion, the frontiers from the Canadas to the Gulf of Mexico, from Puget’s Sound to the Gulf of California. It was to do this indispensable work by means peculiar to itself; by districting the land into Circuits which, from one hundred to five hundred miles in extent, could each be statedly supplied with religious instruction by but one or two traveling evangelists, who, preaching daily, could thus have charge of parishes comprising hundreds of miles and tens of thousands of souls. It was to raise up, without delay for preparatory training, and thrust out upon these Circuits thousands of such

itinerants, tens of thousands of Local or Lay Preachers and Exhorters, as auxiliary and unpaid laborers, with many thousands of Class Leaders who could maintain pastoral supervision over the infant societies in the absence of the itinerant preachers, the latter not having time to delay in any locality for much else than the public services of the pulpit. Over all these circuits it was to maintain the watchful jurisdiction of traveling Presiding Elders, and over the whole system the superintendence of traveling Bishops, to whom the entire nation was to be a common diocese. It was to govern the whole field by Quarterly Conferences for each circuit, Annual Conferences for groups of circuits, quadrennial Conferences for all the Annual Conferences. It was to preach night and day, in churches where it could command them, in private houses, school-houses, court-houses, barns, in the fields, on the highways. It was to dot the continent with chapels, building them, in our times at least, at the rate of one a day. It was to provide academies and colleges exceeding in number, if not in efficiency, those of any other religious body of the country, however older or richer. It was to scatter over the land cheap publications, all its itinerants being authorized agents for their sale, until its “Book Concern” should become the largest religious publishing house in the world. The best authority for the moral statistics of the country, himself of another denomination, was at last to “recognize in the Methodist economy, as well as in the zeal, the devoted piety and the efficiency of its ministry, one of the most powerful elements in the religious prosperity of the United States, as well as one of the firmest pillars of their civil and political institutions.”[7] The historian of the Republic records that it has “welcomed the members of Wesley’s society as the pioneers of religion;” that “the breath of liberty has wafted their messages to the masses of the people; encouraged them to collect the white and Negro, slave and master, in the greenwood, for counsel on divine love and the full assurance of grace; and carried their consolation and songs and prayers to the furthest cabins in the wilderness.”[8] It has been said that Methodism thus seems to have been providentially designed more for the new world than for the old. The coincidence of its history with that of the United States does indeed seem providential; and, if such an assumption might have appeared presumptuous in its beginning, its historical results, as impressed on all the civil geography of the country and attested by the national statistics, now amply justify the opinion. Here, if anywhere, the results of Methodism appear to confirm the somewhat bold assertion of a philosophic thinker, not within its pale, who affirms “that, in fact, that great religious movement has, immediately or remotely, so given an impulse to Christian feeling and profession, on all sides, that it has come to present itself as the starting point of our modern religious history; that the field preaching of Wesley and Whitefield, in 1739, was the event whence the religious epoch, now current, must date its commencement; that back to the events of that time must we look, necessarily, as often as we seek to trace to its source what is most characteristic of the present time; and that yet this is not all, for the Methodism of the past age points forward to the next-coming development of the powers of the Gospel.”[9] But what was this phenomenon of modern religious history, this “religious movement of the eighteenth century, called Methodism?” It was not a new dogmatic phase of Protestantism. They err who interpret its singular history chiefly by its theology. Its prominent doctrine of justification by faith was the prominent doctrine of the Reformation. Its doctrines of the “witness of the Spirit” and of “sanctification” had been received, substantially, if not with the verbalism of Methodism, by all the leading Churches of Christendom.[10] Wesley, Fletcher, and Sellon appealed to the standards of the Anglican Church in support of their teachings in these respects. Wesley taught no important doctrine which is not authorized by that Church, unless it be what is called his Arminianism. But even this was dominant in the Anglican Church in certain periods of its history. He interpreted its apparently Calvinistic Article by the history of the Articles, and, with many eminent authorities, denied it a strictly Calvinistic significance. Arminianism prevailed in the English Church under the Stuarts. Sancroft, Barrow, Burnet, South, Chillingworth, Cudworth, Bull, More, Hammond, Wilkins, Tillotson, Stillingfleet were Arminians.[11] The “Theological Institutes of Episcopius,” says an author, but eighteen years before the birth of Wesley, “were generally in the hands of our students of divinity in both universities as the best system of divinity that had appeared.”[12] Arminianism had spread, “as is well known, over much of the Protestant regions of Europe. The Lutheran Churches came into it; and in England there was a predisposing bias in the rulers of the Church toward the authority of the primitive fathers, all of whom before the age of Augustine, and especially the Greek, are acknowledged to have been on that side which promoted the growth of this Batavian Theology.”[13] Arminianism had been tried, then, but with no such results as accompanied it under Methodism. If it be replied that its legitimate influence had been neutralized, by the latitudinarian errors associated with it, by many of the English divines mentioned, and by its great continental representatives, Grotius, Casaubon, Vossius, Le Clerc, Wetstein, and innumerable others, yet it had been taught with evangelical purity by Arminius himself and his immediate associates, [14] but with no such power as attended Methodism. In fine, none of the important doctrines taught by
Wesley and his followers were peculiar to them. That their theology was necessary to their system, of course, cannot be denied; but, we repeat, it was not peculiar to the system. It had existed, every one of its essential dogmas, in the general Church, without the remarkable efficacy of Methodism. Calvinistic Methodism was powerful alike with Arminian Methodism in the outset, and failed at last only by the failure of its ecclesiastical methods. Methodism differed from other religious bodies, in respect to theology, chiefly by giving greater prominence, more persistent inculcation to truths which they held in common, particularly to the doctrines of Justification by Faith, Assurance, and Sanctification. These were the current ideas of its Theology, but they were rendered incandescent by its spirit, and effective by its methods.

In these two facts – the spirit, and the practical system of Methodism – inheres the whole secret, if secret it may be called, of its peculiar power.

The “Holy Club” was formed at Oxford in 1720, for the sanctification of its members. The Wesleys there sought personal purification by prayer, watchings, fastings, alms, and Christian labors among the poor. George Whitefield joined them for the same purpose; he was the first to become “renewed in the spirit of his mind;” but not till he had passed through a fiery ordeal, till he had spent “whole days and weeks prostrate on the ground in prayer,” “using only bread and sage tea” during “the forty days of Lent, except on Saturdays and Sundays.” He became morbid in his spiritual earnestness; he lost the power of memory at times; he “selected the coarsest food, wore patched raiment, uncleaned shoes, and course gloves.” He prayed “till the sweat ran down his face, under the trees, far into the winter’s nights;” but he escaped at last his ascetic delusions, and was saved “by laying hold on the cross by a living faith;” receiving “an abiding sense of the pardoning love of God, and a full assurance of faith.” He was hooted and pelted with missiles in the streets by his fellow-students, but was preparing meanwhile to go forth a sublime herald of the new “movement;” a preacher of Methodism in both hemispheres; the greatest preacher, it is probable, in popular eloquence, of all the Christian ages.

John and Charles Wesley continue the ineffectual ascetic struggle, poring over the pages of the “Imitatione,” and the “Holy Living and Dying;” in all things “living by rule;” fasting excessively; visiting the poor and the prisoner. They find no rest to their souls, untroubled, as yet, by any dogmatic question, but seeking only spiritual life. Wesley proposes to himself a solitary life in the “Yorkshire dales;” “it is the decided temper of his soul.” His wise mother interposes, admonishing him prophetically “that God had better work for him to do.” He travels some miles to consult “a serious man.” “The Bible knows nothing of solitary religion,” says this good man, and Wesley turns about with his face toward that great career which was to make his history a part of the history of his country and of the world. “Holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord,” is the cry of his spirit; but he still finds it not. “I am persuaded,” he writes, “that we may know if we are now in a state of salvation, since that is expressly promised in the Holy Scriptures to our sincere endeavors, and we are surely able to judge of our own sincerity.” Taylor’s Holy Living and Dying teaches him utter purity of motive; “instantly he resolves to dedicate all his life to God; all his thoughts and words and actions; being thoroughly convinced there is no medium.” The dedication is made, but the light does not come. The two brothers determine to seek it in the wilderness of the new world to “forsake all,” become missionaries to the colonists and savages, and perish, if need be, for their souls. They accompany Oglethorpe to Georgia, and on the voyage they witness the joyous faith of Moravian peasants and artisans in the perils of storms; they are convinced that they themselves have no such faith. They question the Moravians, and get improved views of the spiritual life, but still grope in the dark. They learn more from the Moravian missionaries in the colonies, but sink into deeper anxiety. They preach and read the Liturgy every day to the colonists, and teach their children in schools. They fast much, sleep on the ground, refuse all food but bread and water. John goes barefooted to encourage the poor children who had no shoes. The colonists recoil from their severities, and they return to England defeated.

In sight of Land’s End John writes in his Journal: “I went to America to convert Indians, but O, who shall convert me? Who is he that will deliver me from this evil heart of unbelief?” On arriving in England he again writes: “This then have I learned, in the ends of the earth, that I am ‘fallen short of the glory of God.’ I have no hope but that, if I seek, I shall find Christ.” “If;” he adds, “it be said that I have faith, for many things have I heard from many such miserable comforters, I answer, so have the devils a sort of faith, but still they are strangers to the covenant of promise. The faith I want is a sure trust and confidence in God, that through the merits of Christ my sins are forgiven, and I reconciled to the favor of God.”
The Moravians meet him again in London, where they maintain several religious meetings in private houses. Both the Wesleys, turning away from St. Paul’s, Westminster Abbey, the dead Churches, seek light from heaven in these humble assemblies. They become the associates of Peter Bohler, a Moravian preacher, an later a Moravian bishop, a man of learning from the University of Jena, who, in good Latin, converses with them on divine subjects. John Wesley cleaves to him.

“February 7th, 1738 – a day much to be remembered,” writes the troubled inquirer when he first meets Bohler; “I did not willingly lose an opportunity of conversing with him.” The Moravian expounds to him faith, justification by faith, sanctification by faith; he begins to “see the promise, but it is afar off.” Bohler accompanies the Wesleys to Oxford, Where he daily delivers two Latin discourses on the doctrines of grace. A hundred devout hearers attend these meetings; but none with more eagerness than the Wesleys. John Wesley has many walks and conversations with him in the venerable cloisters and neighboring groves. After one of these walks Wesley writes: “By him, in the hand of the great God, I was, on Sunday, [March 5th, 1738,] clearly convinced of unbelief; of the want of that faith whereby alone we can be saved.” About ten days later Bohler himself writes in London: “I had an affectionate conversation with John Wesley. He informed me of the opposition he had met with among some clergymen to whom he had unfolded his present convictions, declaring that faith was not yet his own. He asked me what he ought to do; whether he ought to tell the people his state or not. I answered that I could give him no rule in this respect, that he must follow the promptings of the Saviour; adding, however, that I earnestly wished he would not remove this grace so far into the future, but would believe that it is near to him, that the heart of Jesus is open, and his love to him very great. He wept bitterly while I was talking upon this subject, and afterward asked me to pray with him. I can freely affirm that he is a poor broken-hearted sinner, hungering after a better righteousness than that which he has hitherto had, even the righteousness of Christ. In the evening he preached from the words ‘we preach Christ crucified,’ etc. He had more than four thousand hearers, and spoke in such a way that all were amazed – many souls were awakened.” “John Wesley,” continues Bohler, in another document, “returned to Oxford today. I accompanied him a short distance. He once more opened to me his whole heart. I entreated him to believe in the Lord Jesus crucified,” etc. He had more than four thousand hearers, and spoke in such a way that all were amazed – many souls were awakened.” “John Wesley,” continues Bohler, in another document, “returned to Oxford today. I accompanied him a short distance. He once more opened to me his whole heart. I entreated him to believe in the Lord Jesus crucified,” etc. He had more than four thousand hearers, and spoke in such a way that all were amazed – many souls were awakened.”

The next month John Wesley preaches “Salvation by faith” before the University of Oxford. He has begun his career. The Churches of London are startled by his sermons; by no new truth, but the emphasis and power with which he declares old and admitted truths of the Anglican theological standards, the “new birth,” the “witness of the Spirit,” and, subsequently, the doctrine of “sanctification,” a doctrine which, as taught by Wesley, is in accordance with the highest teachings of the Anglican Church, “is,” says a strict churchman, “essentially right and important; combining, in substance, all the sublime morality of the Greek fathers, the spiritual piety of the Mystics, and the divine philosophy of our favorite Platonists. Macarias, Fenelon, Lucas, and all their respective classes, have been consulted and digested by him, and his ideas are essentially theirs.”[16] His doctrine of faith seemed like a new truth to the apathetic formalism of the Church, but it was the doctrine of its Homilies and of its best theologians.

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The genius of Methodism was, then, evangelical life, and in theology, its chief concern was with those doctrines which are essential to personal religion. “What was the rise of Methodism?” asked Wesley in his conference of 1765. He answered, “In 1729 my brother and I read the Bible; saw inward and outward holiness therein; followed after it, and incited others so to do. In 1737 we saw this holiness comes by faith. In 1738 we saw we must be justified before we are sanctified. But still holiness was our point; inward and outward holiness. God then thrust us out to raise a holy people.” Whitefield had startled the metropolitan Churches before Wesley’s arrival, and, flaming
with apostolic zeal, had left for Georgia, the vessel which bore him passing in the channel that which brought Wesley; but he soon returned, and now the Methodistic movement began in good earnest.

Its apostles were excluded from the pulpits of London and Bristol; they took the open field, and thousands of colliers and peasants stood weeping around them. They invaded the fairs and merrymakings of Moorfields and Kennington Common; ten, twenty, sometimes fifty, and even sixty thousand people, made their audiences.[18] Their singing could be heard two miles off, and Whitefield’s voice a mile. The lowest dregs of the population were dragged out of the moral mire and purified. The whole country was soon astir with excitement; the peasantry of Yorkshire, the colliers of Kingswood and Newcastle, the miners of Cornwall, gathered in hosts around the evangelists, for they saw that here were at last men, gowned and ordained, who cared for their neglected souls.

Societies were organized for their religious training; without, however, the remotest design of forming a sect or creating a schism. Terms of membership in these societies were necessary, and thus originated the “General Rules,” a purely catholic document, with not one dogmatic proposition: the terms of Methodist communion throughout the world. Places for their assemblies must be provided, and on the 12th of May, 1739, the foundations of a building were laid in Bristol: the first chapel founded by Methodism in the world. On the 14th of November the “Old Foundry,” in London, was opened for worship by Wesley.[19] Methodism thus early began its edifices, its material forbearances.

In this year also its first hymn book, its virtual Liturgy, was published. It is the recognized epoch (birth) of the denomination.

The societies need instructors in the absence of Wesley, who now begins to “itinerate” through the kingdom, for the (Anglican) clergy will not take charge of them, and exclude them from the communion table. Wesley appoints intelligent laymen to read to them the Holy Scriptures. One of these, Thomas Maxfield, sometimes explains his readings; he is a man of superior talents; the Countess of Huntingdon (now an influential Methodist) hearing him often, encourages him to preach. Wesley, on learning the novel fact, revolts from it, for he is yet a rigid churchman; but his mother knows Maxfield, and warns her son not to resist the providence of God, for she believes this is a providential provision for the great work begun in the land. Wesley at last acknowledges the obvious truth, and thus begins the lay ministry of Methodism, whose ten thousand voices were soon to be heard in most of the ends of the earth. The societies multiply faster than the lay preachers; these must therefore travel from one assembly to another, and thus begins the “itinerancy.” The travels of the itinerants must be assigned definitive boundaries, and thus arises the “circuit system.” The societies must provide for their chapel debts and other expenses; the members of that of Bristol are distributed into companies of twelve, which meet weekly to pay their “pennies” to a select member, appointed over each, and thus originates the financial economy of Methodism. They find time, when together, for religious conversation and exhortation, and thus begins the “class-meeting,” with its “leader,” the nucleus of almost every subsequent Methodist society in the world, and a necessary pastoral counterpart to the itinerancy. Many men of natural gifts of speech, who are not able to travel as Preachers, appear in the societies; they are licensed to instruct the people in their respective localities, and thus arise the offices of “Local Preachers” and “Exhorters,” laborers who have done incalculable service, and have founded the denomination in the United States, the West Indies, Africa, and Australia. Wesley finds it necessary to convene his itinerants annually for consultation and the arrangement of their plans of labor, and thus is founded (June 25, 1744) the Annual Conference. Several of these bodies have to be formed in the extended field of the Church in the United States, and, for their joint action on important measures, it becomes necessary to assemble them together once in four years, and thus arises the American General Conference.

Wesley has been pronounced one of the greatest of ecclesiastical legislators, [20] and the historian of his country has declared that “his genius for government was not inferior to that of Richelieu.”[21] Wesley believed that not himself; but divine Providence legislated the system of Methodism. He devised no system; he but accepted the suggestions of Providence as they seemed evolved in the progress of the movement. To him expediency was a moral law, and nothing expedient that was not morally right. He knew not to what his measures would come, nor was he anxious about the future.

As yet he was a stanch churchman: he lived and died loyal to the Anglican Church. The Methodists, he insisted, were not raised up to form a sect, but to spread “scriptural holiness over these lands.” Their mission being purely spiritual, their practical or disciplinary system was founded purely in their spiritual designs. An Arminian himself;
Wesley admitted Calvinists to membership in his societies.

“One condition, and only one,” he said, “is required – a real desire to save their souls.” “I desire,” he writes to the Methodistic churchman, Venn, “to have a league, offensive and defensive, with every soldier of Christ.” “We do not impose,” he declared, “in order to admission, any opinions whatever;” “this one circumstance is quite peculiar to Methodism.” “We ask only, ‘Is thy heart as my heart? If it be, give me thy hand.’ “ ‘Is there any other society in Great Britain or Ireland so remote from bigotry? So truly of a catholic spirit? Where is there such another society in Europe or in the habitable world?’” In organizing the Methodist Episcopal Church, he gave it Articles of Religion abridged from the English Articles; but he did not insert or require them in the General Rules, or terms of membership. They were an “indicatory rather than an obligatory” symbol, as we shall hereafter see.

Though faithful to the national Church, he saw, in advanced life, that the treatment of his people by the clergy would sooner or later alienate them from the Establishment, but that and all other contingencies he committed to Divine Providence. His task was to work while the day lasted; to do the duty nearest to him; God would take care of the rest.

Such, then, was Methodism – such its spirit and its methods. “It was a revival Church in its spirit; a missionary Church in its organization.”[22]

It spread rapidly over Great Britain, into Scotland, into Ireland, to Nova Scotia, the United States, the West Indies, France, Africa, India, and was to achieve its most remarkable triumphs among the Cannibal Islands of the Southern Ocean. Wesley became almost ubiquitous in the United Kingdom, preaching daily. His lay preachers soon filled the land with the sound of the Gospel. Chapels rose rapidly in most of the country. Hostilities also arose; mobs assailed the itinerants; their chapels were pulled down: for months, and even for years, riots were of almost constant occurrence. In some sections the rabble moved in hosts from village to village, attacking preachers and people, destroying not only the churches, but the homes of Methodists. In Staffordshire “the whole region was in a state little short of civil war.” In Darlaston, Charles Wesley could distinguish the houses of the Methodists by their marks of violence as he rode through the town. At Walsall he found the flag of the rioters waving in the market-place, their head-quarters. In Lichfield “all the rabble of the country was gathered together, and laid waste all before them.” The storm swept over nearly all Cornwall.

Newcastle was in tumult. In London even occurred formidable mobs. In Cork and Dublin they prevailed almost beyond the control of the magistrates. Methodism had, in fine, to fight its way over nearly every field it entered in Great Britain and Ireland. The clergy and the magistrates were often the instigators of these tumults. [23] Not a few of the itinerants were imprisoned, or impressed into the army and the navy; some were martyred. But the devoted sufferers held on their way till they conquered the mob, and led it by thousands to their humble altars. Howell Harris, amid storms of persecution, planted Methodism in Wales, where it has elevated the popular religious condition, once exceedingly low, above that of Scotland, and has in our day more than twelve hundred churches, Arminian and Calvinistic. Wesley traversed Ireland as well as Great Britain. He crossed the channel forty-two times, making twenty-one visits; and Methodism has yielded there some of its best fruits.

Whitefield, known as a Calvinist, and forming no societies, was received in Scotland. His congregations were immense, filling valleys or covering hills, and his influence quickened into life its Churches. He aided Harris in founding Calvinistic Methodism in Wales. The whole evangelical dissent of England still feels his power. With the Countess of Huntingdon, he founded the Calvinistic Methodism of Great Britain; but such was the moral unity of both parties, the Arminian and the Calvinistic, that the essential unity of the general Methodistic movement was maintained, awakening to a great extent the spiritual life of both the national Church and of the Nonconformists, and producing most of those “Christian enterprises” by which British Christianity has since been spreading its influence around the globe. The British Bible Society, most of the British Missionary Societies, Tract Societies, the Sunday School, religious periodicals, cheap popular literature, Negro emancipation, Exeter Hall with its public benefits and follies, all arose directly or indirectly from the impulse of Methodism.

Whitefield crossed the Atlantic thirteen times and journeyed incessantly through the colonies, passing and repassing from Georgia to Maine like a “flame of fire.” The Congregational Churches of New England, the Presbyterians and the Baptists of the Middle States, and the mixed colonies of the South, owe their later religious life and energy mostly to the impulse given by his powerful ministrations. The “great awakening” under Edwards had not only
subsided before Whitefield’s arrival, but had reacted.[24] Whitefield restored it; and the New England Churches received under his labors an inspiration of zeal and energy which has never died out. He extended the revival from the Congregational Churches of the Eastern to the Presbyterian Churches of the Middle States. In Pennsylvania and New Jersey, where Frelinghuysen, Blair, Rowland, and the two Tennents had been laboring with evangelical zeal, he was received as a prophet from God, and it was then that the Presbyterian Church took that attitude of evangelical power and aggression which has ever since characterized it. These faithful men had begun a humble ministerial school in a log cabin “twenty feet long and nearly as many broad.” “The work is of God,” said Whitefield, “and therefore cannot come to naught.” The fame of Princeton has verified his prediction. “Nassau Hall received a Methodistic baptism at its birth, Whitefield inspired its founders, and was honored by it with the title of A.M.; the Methodists in England gave it funds; and one of its noblest presidents (Davies) was a correspondent of Wesley, and honored him as a ‘restorer of the true faith.’” Dartmouth College arose from the same impulse. It received its chief early funds from the British Methodists, and bears the name of one of their chief Calvinistic associates, whom Cowper celebrated as “The one who wore a coronet and prayed.” Whitefield’s preaching, and especially the reading of his printed sermons in Virginia, led to the founding of the Presbyterian Church in that state, whence it has extended to the South and Southwest. “The stock from which the Baptists of Virginia and those in all the South and Southwest have sprung was also Whitefieldian.”[25] The founder of the Freewill Baptists of the United States was converted under the last preaching of Whitefield.

Though Whitefield did not organize the results of his labors, he prepared the way for Wesley’s itinerants in the new world. When he descended into his American grave they were already on his tracks. They came not only to labor, but to organize their labors; to reproduce amid the peculiar moral necessities of the new world both the spirit and the methods of the great movement as it had at last been organized by Wesley in the old, and to render it before many years superior to the former, in both numerical and moral force, to the Methodism of the latter.[26] Such is a rapid review of the early development both of the United States and of Methodism preparatory for those extraordinary advancements which both have made. The next year, as has been remarked, after Wesley stood in the quadrangle of Glasgow University, where Watt about the same time hung out his sign, the Methodist apostle stood preaching in the open air in an obscure village of Ireland to the people who were destined to form the first Methodist Church in the United States.

In two years more they arrived at New York, in six years more they were organized as a society, and thenceforward, coincidentally with the opening of the continent by the genius of Watt and Fulton, Methodism has maintained Christianity abreast of the progress of immigration and settlement throughout the states and territories of the Union.

We are now prepared to trace the humble beginnings and extraordinary progress of its mission.

*and so Steven's work is introduced. It is completed in four volumes.*

**ENDNOTES**

1 Quarterly Review, London, 1858.

2 Emerson (English Traits, chap. 10,) enlarges the estimate a third: “Equal to six hundred millions of men, one man being able, by the aid of steam, to do the work which required two hundred and fifty men to accomplish fifty years ago.”

3 As late as 1784 an American vessel took to Liverpool eight bales of cotton; the custom officers did not believe they could have come from America, and seized them as contraband. In 1857 Liverpool imported a million and a half bales of cotton from the United States. (London Quarterly Review, 1859.)


5 Bancroft’s estimate for 1837, vol. iii, chap. 15.

6 “It is remarkable that in every charter granted to the Southern colonies the ‘propagation of religion’ is mentioned as one of the reasons for the planting of them.” Baird: Religion in America, book iii, p 6.


9 Isaac Taylor’s “Wesley and Methodism:” Preface.


13 Hallam, vol. ii, p. 43.

14 Professor Stuart, of Andover, says, (Creed, etc., of Arminius, Biblical Repository, vol. I,) “Let the injustice, then, of merging Pelagius and Arminius together no more be done among us, as it often has been.” “Most of the accusations of heresy made against him [Arminius] appear to be the offspring of suspicion, or of a wrong construction of his words.”

15 Bohler’s manuscript autobiography and letters, at Bethlehem, Pa. Also his Letters to Count Zinzendorf, published (with a portrait of Bohler) by Rev. T. Reichel. These works are yet untranslated. See “Moravian” (Bethlehem, Pa.) for October 24, and November 7 and 14, 1861. Dr. Sack gives, in Niedner’s Zeitschrift fur Historische Theologia, Gotha, (second number, 1864,) a historical account of Wesley’s relations to the Moravians, and a translation of his Journal during his visit to Herrnhut in 1738.

16 Knox: “Bishop Jebb’s Thirty Years’ Correspondence,” Letter xix.

17 “I venture to avow it, as my conviction, that either Christian faith is what Wesley here describes, or there is no proper meaning in the word.” Coleridge: Note to Southey’s Life of Wesley, chap. 20.


19 The Bristol chapel was begun first, the Foundry opened first.

20 Buckle’s History of Civilization.


22 A churchman has declared that when Wesley appeared the Anglican Church was “an ecclesiastical system under which the people of England had lapse into heathenism, or a state hardly to be distinguished from it;” and that Methodism “preserved from extinction and reanimated the languishing Nonconformity of the last century, which, just at the time of the Methodistic revival, was rapidly in course to be found nowhere but in books.” — Isaac Taylor’s Wesley and Methodism pp. 56, 59. A high American authority says, “That something of vital Christianity exists among professed believers of every name; that the doctrine of justification by faith is generally understood and preached; that we are not blind Pharisees, or dead Formalists, or practical Socinians and Deists; we may trace the cause in great part (we cannot tell how largely) to the holy Club of Oxford Methodists.” — Bibilotheca Sacra, Jan., 1864, art. iv. The results of Methodism have been so extraordinary that Methodist writers can hardly record them (however legitimate and necessary to its history) without an apparent tone of exaggeration. Such candid concessions as are here cited from non-Methodistic authorities relieve much the difficulties of my attempt to record truthfully a providential phase of our common Christianity, which, aside from sectarian biases, must be grateful to all devout Protestants. I know of no Methodist writers who claim more for the denomination than is here accorded.

23 The contemporary books of Methodism abound in proofs. Buckle says, “The treatment which the Wesleyans received from the clergy many of whom were magistrates, shows what would have taken place if such violence had not been discouraged by the government. Wesley has himself given many details, which Southey did not think proper relate, of the calumnies and insults to which he and his followers were subjected by the clergy.” — History of Civilization, vol. I, p. 804.

24 Dr. Holmes says in his American Annals, “That the zeal which had characterized the New England Churches of an earlier period had, previous to Whitefield’s arrival, subsided, and a lethargic state ensued.” Dr. Chauncey (“Reasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New England”) declares that the reaction which had set in had depressed the religious condition of the colonies to as low a point as that described in Edwards’ Narrative.


26 Figures are proverbially veracious. We have authentically the statistics of the leading Christian denominations of the United States for the first half of our century. They attest conclusively the peculiar adaptation of the ecclesiastical system of Methodism to the moral wants of the country.

During the period from 1800 to 1850 the ratio of the increase of the ministry of the Protestant Episcopal Church has been as 6 to 1, of its communicants as 6 to 1; of the ministry of the Congregationalists as 4 to 1, of their communicants as 2 2/3 to 1; of the ministry of the regular Baptists as 4 to 1, of their communicants as 5 2/3 to 1; of the ministry of the Presbyterians (“old and new schools”) as 14 to 1, of their communicants as 5 2/3 to 1; of the ministry of the Methodist Episcopal Church (North and South) as 19 2/3 to 1, of its communicants as 17 ¾ to 1. It must be borne in mind, however, that most if not all these religious bodies have, during the whole of this period, been more or less pervaded by the Methodistic impulse given by Whitefield and his successors, and much of their success is unquestionably attributable to that fact. See Chris. Adv. & Jour., Feb. 19, 1860, and “An Itinerant Ministry;” a sermon, by Rev. S. Clements, p. 19. New York, 1860.
Here is one sample of the older holiness teaching that the Holy Club and Wesley would have read to guide their entry into His Rest. It is the same message, but it is not expressed quite as clearly as Wesley and his fellow workers were able to do later on.

**CONFORMITY TO THE WILL OF GOD**

The essence of virtue consists in the attitude of the will. This is what the Lord would teach us when he said, "The kingdom of God is within you." (Luke xvii. 21.) It is not a question of extensive knowledge, of splendid talents, nor even of great deeds; it is a simple matter of having a heart and loving. Outward works are the fruits and consequences of loving, and the spring of all good things is at the bottom of the soul.

There are some virtues which are appropriate to certain conditions, and not to others; some are good at one time, and some at another; but an upright will is profitable for all times and all places. That kingdom of God which is within us, consists in our willing whatever God wills, always, in everything, and without reservation; and thus his kingdom comes; for his will is then done as it is in Heaven, since we will nothing but what is dictated by his sovereign pleasure.

Blessed are the poor in spirit! Blessed are they who are stripped of everything, even of their own wills, that they may no longer belong to themselves! How poor in spirit does he become who has given up all things to God! But how is it that our will becomes right, when it unreservedly conforms to that of God? We will whatever He wills; what He does not will, we do not; we attach our feeble wills to that all-powerful one that regulates everything. Thus nothing can ever come to pass against our wishes; for nothing can happen contrary to the will of God, and we find in his good pleasure an inexhaustible source of peace and consolation.

The interior life is the beginning of the blessed peace of the saints, who eternally cry, Amen, Amen! We adore, we praise, we bless God in everything; we see Him incessantly, and in all things his paternal hand is the sole object of our contemplation. There are no longer any evils; for even the most terrible that come upon us, work together for good, as St. Paul says, to those that love God. (Rom. viii. 28.) Can the suffering that God destines to purify and make us worthy of himself, be called an evil?

Let us cast all our cares, then, into the bosom of so good a Father, and suffer Him to do as He pleases. Let us be content to adopt his will in all points, and to abandon our own absolutely and forever. How can we retain anything of our own, when we do not even belong to ourselves? The slave has nothing; how much less, then, should we own anything, who in ourselves are but nothingness and sin, and who are indebted for everything to pure grace! God has only bestowed upon us a will, free and capable of self-possession, that we may the more generously recompense the gift by returning it to its rightful owner.

We have nothing but our wills only; all the rest belongs elsewhere. Disease removes life and health; riches make to themselves wings; intellectual talents depend upon the state of the body. The only thing that really belongs to us is our will, and it is of this, therefore, that God is especially jealous, for He gave it to us, not that we should retain it, but that we should return it to Him, whole as we received it, and without the slightest reservation.

If the least desire remain, or the smallest hesitation, it is robbing God, contrary to the order of creation; for all things come from Him, and to Him they are all due.

Alas! how many souls there are full of self, and desirous of doing good and serving God, but in such a way as to suit themselves; who desire to impose rules upon God as to his manner of drawing them to Himself. They want to serve and possess Him, but they are not willing to abandon themselves to Him, and be possessed by Him.

What a resistance they offer to Him, even when they appear so full of zeal and fervor! It is certain that in one sense, their spiritual abundance becomes an obstacle to their progress; for they hold it all, even their virtues, in appropriation, and constantly seek self, even in good. O how superior to such fervid and illuminated souls, walking always in virtue, in a road of their own choice, is that humble heart that renounces its own life, and every selfish movement, and dismisses all will except such as God gives from moment to moment, in accordance with his Gospel and Providence!

Herein lies the meaning of those words of the Lord; "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." (Matt. xvi. 24; Luke xiv. 33.) We must follow Jesus Christ, step by step, and not open
up a path for ourselves. We can only follow Him by denying ourselves; and what is this but unreservedly abandoning every right over ourselves? And so St. Paul tells us; "Ye are not your own (1 Cor. vi. 19): no, not a thing remains that belongs to us! Alas for him that resumes possession of anything after once abandoning it!

To desire to serve God in one place rather than in another, in this way rather than in that, is not this desiring to serve Him in our own way rather than in his? But to be equally ready for all things, to will everything and nothing, to leave ourselves in his hands, like a toy in the hands of a child, to set no bounds to our abandonment, inasmuch as the perfect reign of God cannot abide them, this is really denying ourselves; this is treating Him like a God, and ourselves like creatures made solely for his use.

CHRISTIAN MATURITY-

CHRISTIAN PERFECTION is not that rigorous, tedious, cramping thing that many imagine. It demands only an entire surrender of everything to God from the depths of the soul, and the moment this takes place, whatever is done for Him becomes easy. They who are God's without reserve, are in every state content; for they will only what He wills, and desire to do for Him whatever he desires them to do; they strip themselves of everything, and in this nakedness find all things restored an hundred fold. Peace of conscience, liberty of spirit, the sweet abandonment of themselves and theirs into the hand of God, the joy of perceiving the light always increasing in their hearts, and finally the freedom of their souls from the bondage of the fears and desires of this world, these things constitute that return of happiness which the true children of God receive an hundred fold in the midst of their crosses, while they remain faithful.

They are sacrificed, it is true, but it is to that which they love best; they suffer, but they will to endure all that they do receive, and prefer that anguish to all the false joys of the world; their imaginations are troubled; their minds become languid and weak, but the will is firm and peacefully quiet in the interior of the soul, and responds a joyful Amen! to every stroke from the hand that would perfect the sacrifice.

What God requires of us, is a will which is no longer divided between Him and any creature; a simple, pliable state of will which desires what He desires, rejects nothing but what He rejects, and wills without reserve what He wills, and under no pretext wills what He does not. In this state of mind, all things are proper for us; our amusements, even, are acceptable in his sight.

Blessed is he who thus gives himself to God! He is delivered from his passions, from the opinions of men, from their malice, from the tyranny of their maxims, from their cold and miserable raimery, from the misfortunes which the world attributes to chance, from the infidelity and fickleness of friends, from the artifices and snares of enemies, from the wretchedness and shortness of life, from the horrors of an ungodly death, from the cruel remorse that follows sinful pleasures, and finally from the everlasting condemnation of God!

The true Christian is delivered from this innumerable multitude of evils, because, putting his will into the hands of God, he wills only what He wills, and thus finds comfort in the midst of all his suffering in the way of faith, and its attendant hope.

What weakness it is, then, to be fearful of consecrating ourselves to God, and of getting too far into so desirable a state!

Happy those who throw themselves, as it were, headlong, and with their eyes shut, into the arms of "the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort!" (2 Cor. i. 3.) Their whole desire then, is to know what is the will of God respecting them; and they fear nothing so much as not perceiving the whole of his requirements. So soon as they behold a new light in his law, they are transported with joy, like a miser at the finding of a treasure.

No matter what cross may overwhelm the true child of God, he wills everything that happens, and would not have anything removed which his Father appoints; the more he loves God, the more is he filled with content; and the most stringent perfection, far from being a burthen, only renders his yoke the lighter.

What folly to fear to be too devoted to God! to fear to be happy! to fear to love the will of God in all things! to fear to have too much courage under inevitable crosses, too much consolation in the love of God, and too great a detachment from the passions which make us miserable!
Let us refuse, then, to set our affections upon things of the earth that we may set them exclusively upon God. I do not say, that we must abandon them entirely; for if our lives be already moral and well ordered, we have only to change the secret motive of our actions into Love, and we may continue almost the same course of life. God does not overturn our conditions nor the duties attached to them, but we may go on doing that now for the service of God which we did formerly to satisfy the world, and to please ourselves. There will only be this difference: instead of being harassed by pride, by overbearing passion, and by the malicious censures of the world, we shall act with liberty, with courage, and with hope in God. We shall be animated with confidence; the expectation of things eternal, which advance as things temporal recede from us, will support us in the midst of suffering; the love of God, who will cause us to perceive how great is his love toward us, will lend us wings to fly in his ways, and to raise us above all our miseries. Is this hard to believe? Experience will convince us. "O taste and see that the Lord is good!" says the Psalmist. (Ps. xxxiv. 8.)

The Son of God says to every Christian without exception, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me." (Matt. xvi. 24.) The broad way leadeth unto destruction; we must walk in the strait way, though there be few that travel therein. It is only the violent who take the Kingdom by force. We must be born again, renounce and hate ourselves, become children, be poor in spirit, mourn that we may be comforted, and not be of this world, which is cursed because of offences.

Many are affrighted at these truths, and their fear arises from this: that while they know the exacting nature of religion, they are ignorant of its gifts, and of the spirit of love which renders everything easy. They are not aware that religion leads to the highest perfection, while bestowing peace through a principle of love that smooths every rough place.

They who are in truth and indeed wholly consecrated to God, are ever happy. They prove that the yoke of our Redeemer is easy and his burden light; that in Him is the peace of the soul, and that He gives rest to them that are weary and heavy laden, according to his own blessed promise. But how unhappy are those poor, weak souls, who are divided between God and the world! They will and they do not will; they are lacerated at once by their passions and their remorse; they are afraid of the judgments of God and of the opinions of men; they dislike the evil, but are ashamed of the good; they suffer the pains of virtue, without enjoying its consolations. Ah! could they but have a little courage,—just enough to despise the vain conversation, the cold sneers, and the rash judgments of men,—what peace would they not enjoy in the bosom of God!

It is dangerous to our salvation, unworthy of God and of ourselves, and destructive even of our peace of mind, to desire to remain always in our present position. Our whole life is only given us that we may advance with rapid strides...

Bishop Francois Fenelon (1651 to 1715 and R.C.)

The Wesleyan Holiness website