

i.

ESCHATOLOGICAL DOCTRINES IN THE WRITINGS OF  
JOHN AND CHARLES WESLEY.

BY

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ABBREVIATIONS.

- J. Journal of John Wesley - Standard Edition (8 vols.)  
Edited - Curnock.
- L. Letters of John Wesley - Standard Edition (8 vols.)  
Edited - Telford.
- W. Wesley's Works (14 vols.) - 3rd. Edition. Mason, 1829.
- S.S. Standard Sermons of John Wesley (2 vols.) - edited  
and annotated by E.H.Sugden.
- N.N.T. Wesley's Notes on the New Testament. (Wesleyan  
Methodist Book Room).
- J.C.W. Journal of Charles Wesley, with Selections from his  
Correspondence and Poetry. (2 vols.) -  
edited by Jackson, 1849.
- P.W. Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley (13 vols.)  
- collected and arranged by G. Osborn. 1868-72.
- M.H.B. Methodist Hymn Book (1933).

(N.B. Wesley's Notes on the New Testament are professedly  
a translation and abridgement of Bengel's "Gnomon Novi  
Testamenti", yet at times Wesley differs from him.)

All words and phrases underlined in the text represent  
italics in all the standard works.

CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION - STRANGERS AND PILGRIMS.

There is in the teaching of Jesus, and in the experience of the Early Church, a tension between this present life, and the life of the world to come, a tension expressed in the words of the Apostle Paul:

"For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and be with Christ, which is far better; nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you".<sup>1</sup>

The Christian does not despise this life. How can he? For did not his Lord take upon Himself frail flesh, and do not the Gospels reveal a Jesus who enjoyed living? Obviously life is a trust committed to us by God, presenting us with opportunities for love and friendship, opportunities for service and witness and evangelism, opportunities for the appreciation of beauty and for the pursuit of truth. Yet the Christian knows that this world is not his true home, that here he is but a stranger and pilgrim, that his real destiny is a heaven of eternal fellowship with God.

In the writings of John and Charles Wesley this tension is clearly felt and seen. They realise that they are 'strangers and pilgrims'. The Christian sees all things in the light of eternity. He comes from God, he goes to God, and in this interlude which he calls his life he is to do God's

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<sup>1</sup> Philippians 1, 21-24.

will. But he can never 'settle down' in the world, and imagine he is at home. John Wesley says:

"How truly wise is this man! He knows himself: an everlasting spirit, which came forth from God, and was sent down into an house of clay, not to do his own will, but the will of Him that sent him. He knows the world: the place in which he is to pass in his way to the everlasting habitations; and accordingly he uses the world as not abusing it, and as knowing the fashion of it passes away".<sup>2</sup>

This realisation gives life and relevance to religion. In a letter to Joshua Strangman Wesley writes:

"I want you to experience all the power, all the spirit of religion; to be all dead to the world, all alive to God; a stranger, a sojourner on earth, but an inhabitant of heaven; living in eternity, walking in eternity".<sup>2</sup>

The early Methodists were taught to sing:

"Strangers and pilgrims here below,  
This earth, we know, is not our place;  
And hasten through the vale of woe,  
And, restless to behold Thy face,  
Swift to our heavenly country move,  
Our everlasting home above."<sup>3</sup>

And again:

"The angels are at home in heaven,  
The saints unsettled pilgrims here".<sup>4</sup>

It is a truth of which the Christian must be continually reminding himself. Indeed, one of the great blessings of pain and suffering is that it serves to do just this. "Without some suffering we should scarce remember that we are not proprietors here, but only tenants at will, liable to lose all we have at a moment's warning".<sup>5</sup>

The Christian knows that his sojourn upon earth will be a brief one. Although John Wesley himself lived to the ripe

<sup>1</sup> Sermon XXVIII, S.S.II, 29.

<sup>2</sup> L.III, 41.    <sup>3</sup> P.W.IV, 262.    <sup>4</sup> P.W.IX, 205.    <sup>5</sup> L.IV, 185.

old age of eighty seven he always felt that his hold on life was slender. As a young man he was convinced that he was not destined to live long, and several times illness brought him to the point of death. But, in the light of eternity, even eighty seven years are but a moment. He could have sung with conviction the opening words of Bernard of Cluny's hymn: "Brief life is here our portion".<sup>1</sup> There is nothing permanent about our life or about our world; both will soon pass away. "Transient our life, and dark, and vain".<sup>2</sup> And, brief and uncertain as it is, we dare not plan and scheme too far ahead with any certainty or security. We never know when God's call may come, and then all our plans and schemes will have to remain incomplete and unrealised.

"Where indeed is the hope of those who were so lately laying deep schemes, and saying, 'Today or tomorrow we will go to such a city, and continue there a year, and traffic, and get gain'? How totally had they forgotten that wise admonition, 'Ye know not what shall be on the morrow! For what is your life? It is a vapour that appeareth awhile, and then vanisheth away!' Where is all your business? Where your worldly cares, your troubles or engagements? All these things are fled away like smoke; and your soul is left".<sup>3</sup>

But not only is life brief, it is also unreal, insubstantial. One of John Wesley's sermons is given the title, "Human Life a Dream". He defines a dream as "a fragment of life broken off at both ends",<sup>4</sup> and says this is a true definition of human existence. This life has no real substance; it is but a poor shadow. Wesley imagines one who has just died. To him God says,

<sup>1</sup> M.H.B. No.652.

<sup>2</sup> P.W. IX, 205.

<sup>3</sup> Sermon CXXI, W.VII, 322.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p.319.

'Awake, thou that sleepest', and as he awakes from his dream he is told, "See, all is real here! all is permanent; all eternal! Far more stable than the foundations of the earth; yea, than the pillars of that lower heaven".<sup>1</sup> Now he begins to see and hear and feel in a way he has never done before. And all those things he once thought so real - houses and cities and hills, all the honour and pomp and wealth of this world are vanished away, 'like as a shadow that departeth'. Never forget, says Wesley, that this life is but a dream; continually remind yourself of it, and if you are ever in danger of forgetting, ask a friend to keep reminding you, that death may not take you by surprise. For, he says, "soon you will awake into real life. You will stand a naked spirit, in the world of spirits, before the face of the great God!"<sup>2</sup> And he concludes the sermon with the verse:

"Vanish then this world of shadows;  
 Pass the former things away!  
 Lord, appear! appear to glad us  
 With the dawn of endless day!  
 O conclude this mortal story,  
 Throw this universe aside!  
 Come, eternal King of glory,  
 Now descend, and take thy bride!"<sup>3</sup>

At Watchnight Services, at the end of a year, Methodists still sing Charles Wesley's hymn:

"Our life is a dream,  
 Our time, as a stream,  
 Glides swiftly away,  
 And the fugitive moment refuses to stay;  
 The arrow is flown,  
 The moment is gone,  
 The millennial year  
 Rushes on to our view, and eternity's here".<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p.320.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.325.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.325.

<sup>4</sup> P.W.VI,14.

But not only is human life brief and insubstantial; it is also a misery. There is much in human experience that makes the Christian long to be out of it all. He feels he is a prisoner, held in 'bodily chains'. The body is 'this vile house of clay', 'this cumbrous clay', and the spirit longs for release. There is the burden of inbred sin which seems inescapable. There is all the trouble and misery of life. There are doubts and griefs and fears. There is 'the intolerable load of life'. And so there are times when the Wesleys long passionately, morbidly, for death. John tells us, with obvious approval, that one result of his preaching was that his hearers felt a longing to die.

"About one I began preaching near Portkellis to a much larger congregation; and about half an hour after four, at Gwennap, to an immense multitude of people on 'To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain'. I was at first afraid my voice would not reach them all; but without cause, for it was so strengthened that I believe thousands more might have heard every word. In the close of my sermon I read them the account of Thomas Hitchen's death, and the hearts of many burned within them, so that they could not conceal their desire to go to Him, and to be with Christ".<sup>1</sup>

But it is Charles who expresses this view in an excess which fails to ring true. That one should face death unafraid, that 'in age and feebleness extreme' one should long for release, that one should earnestly desire the promised life of heaven in its fulness and completeness and joy seems proper and right for a Christian. We can understand and approve the lines:

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<sup>1</sup> J.III, 263.

"Happy in Thy glorious love,  
 We shall from the vale remove,  
 Glad partakers of our hope,  
 We shall soon be taken up,  
 Meet again our heavenly friends,  
 Blest with bliss that never ends,  
 Join'd to all Thy hosts above,  
 Happy in Thy glorious love".<sup>1</sup>

Or even:

"O, when wilt Thou, my Life, appear!  
 How gladly would I cry,  
 'Tis done, the work Thou gav'st me here,  
 'Tis finished, Lord' - and die!"<sup>2</sup>

But the following verses must surely express only a passing mood of depression and life-weariness:

"O when shall I be taken home!  
 O that my latest change were come,  
 For which I wait in pain!  
 Weary of life through inbred sin!  
 Speak, Jesu, speak the sinner clean,  
 Nor let my faith be vain...

O death, thou art on every side,  
 Thy thousand gates stand open wide,  
 The weary to receive:  
 Yet I can find no rest for me,  
 I suffer all my misery,  
 And still alas I live!

Still my imprison'd spirit waits;  
 In vain for me thy thousand gates  
 Stand open day and night.  
 And other souls their exit make,  
 On every moment's wings they take  
 Their everlasting flight.

Envious I hear the passing bell  
 With sweetly-melancholy knell  
 Their happy change declare;  
 But I can see no end of strife,  
 The' intolerable load of life  
 I still am forced to bear".<sup>3</sup>

Charles Wesley has three poems which bear the same title,

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<sup>1</sup> P.W.IV, 222.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.I, 172.

<sup>3</sup> P.W.III, 157-9.

"Desiring to be Dissolved". In them he expresses the mood that the burden of life has become intolerable for him, and he prays earnestly for release, the release of death.

"Welcome, weariness and pain,  
 Pledges of relief and ease!  
 Loss of strength to me is gain,  
 Let my wretched days decrease;  
 All my days shall soon be past,  
 Pain and grief shall bring the last..."

Grief hath shook the house of clay,  
 Grief hath sapp'd the ground of life,  
 Grief hath hasten'd on the day;  
 Grief shall quickly end the strife,  
 Grief shall soul and body part,  
 Grief for sin shall break my heart".<sup>1</sup>

It seems at times as if the desire for death has taken the place of the desire for heaven and for Christ, and that death is to be welcomed for its own sake. The following verses seem less than Christian.

"O death, my hope is full of thee,  
 Thou art my immortality,  
 My longing heart's desire;  
 The mention of thy lovely name  
 Kindles within my breast a flame,  
 And sets me all on fire..."

I gasp to end my wretched days,  
 To rush into thy cold embrace,  
 And there securely rest;  
 Come, O thou friend of sorrows, come,  
 Lead to the chambers of the tomb,  
 And lull me on thy breast".<sup>2</sup>

But, inextricably interwoven with this idea of life as brief and insubstantial and burdensome, as something to be endured, and to escape from at the earliest possible moment, and death as supremely desirable, is the contrary thought  
 that

<sup>1</sup> P.W.III, 161-2.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.III, 163.

this life is good in itself. As we shall see later, while the Wesleys longed for the perfect life of heaven, they believed that a foretaste could be enjoyed here and now. In this life we could know 'heaven begun below'. Christ offered us now forgiveness and assurance and perfect love and victory over sin. And a man's Christian experience was seriously deficient if he could show forth no spirit of joy.

Indeed John Wesley gives a solemn warning against the danger of concentrating too much on the after-life. He believed that one of the devices of Satan was to distract a man from his tasks in this world by persuading him to concentrate upon a future heaven. In his sermon on "Satan's Devices" he says:

"But while we are reaching to this, as well as to that glorious liberty which is preparatory to it, we may be in danger of falling into another snare of the devil, wherein he labours to entangle the children of God. We may take too much thought for tomorrow, so as to neglect the improvement of today. We may so expect perfect love, as not to use that which is already shed abroad in our hearts. There have not been wanting instances of those who have greatly suffered hereby. They were so taken up with what they were to receive hereafter, as utterly to neglect what they had already received. In expectation of having five talents more, they buried their one talent in the earth. At least they did not improve it as they might have done, to the glory of God, and the good of their own souls".<sup>1</sup>

Wesley believed that human life was a gift from God, to be used to His honour and glory. Our years, be they many or few, were, like our talents, to be used wisely, generously and responsibly. For the day would come when God would call us to give account of our stewardship.

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<sup>1</sup> S. S. II, 198.

"'See that ye walk circumspectly', says the Apostle, 'not as fools, but as wise men, redeeming the time'; saving all the time you can for the best purposes; buying up every fleeting moment out of the hands of sin and Satan, out of the hands of sloth, ease, pleasure, worldly business; the more diligently, because the present 'are evil days', days of grossest ignorance, immorality, and profaneness".<sup>1</sup>

These are the opening words of a sermon entitled, "On Redeeming the Time", a very practical sermon, in which Wesley speaks on the danger of wasting time on excessive sleep! Time is valuable, precious and God-given, and it is a sin to spend more of it in bed than is absolutely necessary. He says:

"What is it to redeem the time from sleep? It is, in general, to take that measure of sleep every night which nature requires, and no more; that measure which is most conducive to the health and vigour both of the body and mind".<sup>2</sup>

For excessive sleep hurts one's substance, one's health and one's soul. And he quotes, with complete approval, the words of William Law:

"Some people will not scruple to tell you, that they indulge themselves in sleep because they have nothing to do; and that if they had any business to rise to, they would not lose so much of their time in sleep. But they must be told that they mistake the matter; that they have a great deal of business to do; they have a hardened heart to change; they have the whole spirit of religion to get".<sup>3</sup>

Life is good because it offers opportunities for prayer and service and witness. Time, this present moment, is precious because it may be used for God. So Charles, who at one moment can long only for death, can yet pray that he may make the most of his time here on earth.

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon XCIII, W.VII, 67.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp.67-8.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.72.

"I would the precious time redeem,  
 And longer live for this alone,  
 To spend, and to be spent, for them  
 Who have not yet my Saviour known".<sup>1</sup>

The worth of this life is implied in John Wesley's emphasis upon the necessity for good works. He who in his preaching laid such stress upon the doctrine of Justification by Faith was at pains to make it quite clear that faith did not dispense with the necessity for good works; they must follow as a consequence of faith. He was invited to preach a sermon before the Humane Society, and he took as his text: "Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25,34). He says:

"Some, in order to exalt the value of faith, have utterly deprecated good works. They speak of them as not only not necessary to salvation, but as greatly obstructive to it. They represent them as abundantly more dangerous than evil ones, to those who are seeking to save their souls".<sup>2</sup>

This Wesley regards as an utterly false and pernicious belief, and he says quite simply, but firmly:

"We must continue to declare, that whenever you do good to any for his sake; when you feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty; when you assist the stranger, or clothe the naked; when you visit them that are sick or in prison; these are not splended sins, as one marvellously calls them, but 'sacrifices wherewith God is well pleased'".<sup>3</sup>

Now if this life has no value, if all that matters is the invisible Kingdom of Heaven, then any doctrine of good works becomes unnecessary.

When Wesley turns to the work of the Humane Society

<sup>1</sup> P.W.V,106.

<sup>2</sup> Sermon XCIX - "The Reward of the Righteous", W.VII,130.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.,p.133.

itself, his words of approval and commendation make it clear that he regards human life as precious, and well worth saving from accidental and untimely death. The Society, says Wesley, was first established in May, 1774, and in the first two and a half years of its existence the number of lives preserved and restored was one hundred and seven. He continues:

"Add to these, those that have been since restored; and out of two hundred and eighty four persons who were dead, to all appearance, no less than a hundred and fifty seven have been restored to life! Such is the success which has attended them in so short a time. Such a blessing has the gracious providence of God given to this infant undertaking".<sup>1</sup>

But if this life has no real value, if death is to be sought as the great Deliverer, then why trouble to bring men back from its very brink? Why not let them slip away unobserved? Why does Wesley speak of the restoring of life to those who to all appearances seem dead as 'success', and the sign of the blessing of God? A man so preserved, says Wesley, is blessed indeed; he is restored to his rejoicing family.

"He has now an opportunity of assisting his wife in the things of the greatest moment. He may now again strengthen her hands in God, and help her to run with patience the race that is set before her. He may again join with her in instructing their children, and training them up in the way wherein they should go; who may live to be a comfort to their aged parents, and useful members of the community".<sup>2</sup>

Thus those who, by First Aid, by the practice of artificial respiration, are able to restore to life 'persons apparently struck with sudden death, whether by an apoplexy, convulsive

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p.133.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.135.

fits, noxious vapours, strangling or drowning' are doing a good work. For human life, with its family relationships and obligations is sacred, and wherever possible death is to be cheated of its prey.

This seems a far cry from Charles Wesley's poems, "Desiring to be Dissolved". But Charles is not as inhuman as some of his poems would suggest. He can and does suffer grief at the death of a dear one or a beloved friend. When his first-born child died in infancy, he wrote:

"Dead! dead! the child I loved so well!  
Transported to the world above!  
I need no more my heart conceal;  
I never dared indulge my love;  
But may I not indulge my grief,  
And seek in tears a sad relief?"<sup>1</sup>

And on the death of Mrs. Lefevre, his friend, he wrote:

"But need we now our grief conceal,  
Forced in the tenderest nerve to feel  
The universal loss?  
We cannot curb our swelling sighs,  
Or stop the fountains of our eyes,  
Remembering what she was".<sup>2</sup>

Here, then, in this tension, never wholly resolved, between this present life and the life to come, between world-affirming and world-renouncing, between life as something to be delivered from as soon as possible and life to be preserved by every possible means, between 'rejoicing for a brother deceased' and grieving for the death of a friend, is the basis of the Wesleys' eschatological doctrines.

<sup>1</sup> P.W.VI, 252.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.VI, 264.

PART I.

PRESENT SALVATION.

Introduction:            Realized Eschatology.

The phrase 'realized eschatology', which has become all too familiar in theological discussions and controversy, was first coined by Dr. C. H. Dodd, perhaps the greatest New Testament scholar of our time. As one of his students in Manchester in 1934 one can still recall the thrill of his lectures. With characteristic Welsh fervour he 'preached' to us. He was 'possessed' by his subject; it became his ever-recurring theme. And his enthusiasm infected us. This seemed to be the one key that would unlock the whole New Testament. This was the obvious clue to so much of its mystery. Why had no one seen it before? True, with the passing of the years, one has come to take a more sober view of the theme. One has learnt to look at it critically, to see it in its true perspective, to recognise its exaggerations. But it still remains an outstanding contribution to New Testament exegesis, and to theological thought.

Dodd published two books which propounded his thesis, The Parables of the Kingdom (1935), and The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments (1936). Stated briefly his thesis was that the great 'Day of the Lord' which the Old Testament prophets had foretold, and for which the Jews had looked, the great crisis of human history, the great moment of the divine intervention, had come. And it had come with the coming of Jesus. His ministry, His miracles, His manifest power over the kingdom of evil - of disease, of evil spirits, of death - were the signs that the Kingdom of God, the hope of many generations,

had arrived.

"Here then is the fixed point from which our interpretation of the teaching regarding the Kingdom of God must start. It represents the ministry of Jesus as 'realized eschatology', that is to say, as the impact upon this world of the 'powers of the world to come' in a series of events, unprecedented and unrepeatable, now in actual process".<sup>1</sup>

From this point of view the parables of Jesus are expounded. The emphasis is upon the words, "The time is fulfilled".

"For many generations" says Dodd, "the faith of the Jewish people had buoyed itself upon the hope that at long last God would assert His sovereignty in His world, while it sadly confessed that in the present age the powers of evil were strong. In a succession of pictures Jesus declares that the hour has struck and God has acted. The strong man is despoiled; the powers of evil are disarmed. The hidden power of God has manifested itself, as the productive energies of the earth bring the harvest in its time".<sup>2</sup>

In "The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments" Dodd attempts to show that this was not only the main theme of the teaching of Jesus, but that it was also at the heart of the preaching of the apostles. For them, too, the age of fulfilment has dawned, and this has taken place through the life and ministry and death and resurrection of Jesus. The same is true of the preaching of Paul, who makes it clear that

"by virtue of the death (and resurrection) of Christ the boundary between the two ages is crossed, and those who believe belong no more to the present evil age, but to the glorious Age to Come".<sup>3</sup>

The supernatural has manifestly entered history, and eternal life is now realized in present experience.

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<sup>1</sup> "The Parables of the Kingdom" (3rd. Ed. 1936) p.51.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.198.

<sup>3</sup> "The Apostolic Preaching & its Developments" (1st. Ed. 1936) p.14.

Dodd never claimed, as so many of his critics have accused him, that in the New Testament eschatology is fully realized. He points out the existence of an unresolved tension, the tension between the Kingdom as having come, and the Kingdom as yet having a future consummation. But he does emphasise, perhaps too strongly, the present realization.

Now the idea of 'realized eschatology' is to be clearly seen in the writings of the Wesleys. They declared that the believer tasted here and now the glories of the world to come. In the hymns of Charles Wesley alone there are at least one hundred and twenty five references to the life of heaven having become a present possibility for the believer. Of course it is not the fulness of the heavenly life, but it is a real foretaste, the pledge and promise of what will one day be his. The quotations given below contain several characteristic words of Charles Wesley - antepast, antedate, anticipate, earnest, pledge. But implicit in them all is the conception of realized eschatology.

"Our Lord is come,  
And eternity's here".<sup>1</sup>

It is an anticipation of the fuller life of heaven:

"Heaven already is begun,  
Everlasting life is won".<sup>2</sup>

"With Thee even now in heaven we live".<sup>3</sup>

"You know the joys of heaven".<sup>4</sup>

"Thou art my peace, my present heaven".<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> P.W.V, 32.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.I, 353.

<sup>3</sup>P.W.XII, 49.

<sup>4</sup> P.W.IX, 330.

<sup>5</sup> P.W.VIII, 374.

"Heaven on earth in Jesu's love".<sup>1</sup>

"And find in Thee their present heaven".<sup>2</sup>

"Blest with the antepast of heaven"<sup>3</sup>

"Such antedated heaven it brings".<sup>4</sup>

"Bless'd with anticipated heaven".<sup>5</sup>

"The pledge of future bliss  
He now to us imparts".<sup>6</sup>

"Faithful and good Thou art,  
We taste the heavenly powers,  
The glorious earnest in our heart  
Ensures the kingdom ours".<sup>7</sup>

It was this experience which was the source of the indestructible joy of the first Methodists. The ordinary folk, the miners and the fishermen, the soldiers and the labourers, endured the persecution to which they were frequently subjected, overcame the uncertainty and insecurity of their lives and fearlessly pursued their way because they took their heaven with them wherever they went. An unbelievable happiness and peace had become theirs here and now. It was not merely that their religion held out to them the promise of a better world, a better life, a deeper joy when this life came to an end. But this life was theirs now. And heaven was in their hearts.

This 'realized', or better, 'anticipated'<sup>8</sup> eschatology' is seen most clearly in the description of their great moments in Christian experience, conversion, sanctification or

<sup>1</sup> P.W.III,167.    <sup>2</sup> P.W.II,352.    <sup>3</sup> P.W.I,91.    <sup>4</sup> P.W.I,14.

<sup>5</sup> P.W.IX,203.    <sup>6</sup> P.W.V,363.    <sup>7</sup> P.W.IV,41.

<sup>8</sup> Using 'anticipate' in its proper sense, and not, as it is so often wrongly used today in the weak sense of 'expect'.

perfect love and the regular participation in the Sacrament of Holy Communion. To these we now turn.

CHAPTER TWO.JUSTIFICATION AND REGENERATION.

John Wesley was, from a remarkably early age, greatly concerned with the salvation of his soul. The atmosphere of the Epworth Rectory, the example of his father (who, though at times stubborn and misguided, was a conscientious and devoted pastor), the profound and lasting influence of his mother, the sense of destiny which took hold of him as he was told of his miraculous deliverance from the Rectory fire, all helped to make him take religion seriously even at school. The words which he wrote in the preface to his published sermons might have been said by him with equal truth before his conversion:

"I have thought, I am a creature of a day, passing through life as an arrow through the air. I am a spirit come from God, and returning to God: just hovering over the great gulf; till, a few moments hence, I am no more seen; I drop into an unchangeable eternity! I want to know one thing - the way to heaven; how to land safe on that happy shore".<sup>1</sup>

In his Journal Wesley has given us a very detailed account of his religious life. At school he read the Scriptures and said his prayers morning and evening -

"and what I now hoped to be saved by was (i) not being so bad as other people; (ii) having still a kindness for religion; and (iii) reading the Bible, going to Church and saying my prayers".<sup>2</sup>

At the University he continued his devotional practices. When

<sup>1</sup> S.S.I, 31.

<sup>2</sup> J.I, 466.

he was twenty two he came to realise that true religion was concerned, not merely with words and deeds, but also with thoughts and motives. This was the result, it seems, of his father pressing him to enter into holy orders, and of his reading of two books that deeply impressed him, Thomas a Kempis' Christian Pattern and Jeremy Taylor's Holy Living and Holy Dying. When he was elected Fellow of Lincoln College in 1726, he wrote:

"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".<sup>1</sup>

Later he joined his brother Charles and a few undergraduates in what came to be called "The Holy Club". The members engaged in searching self-examination, in careful study of the Bible, in prayer and meditation, and in visitation of the poor and the prisoners. Then followed the visit to Georgia, where he attempted to impose on others something of his own self-discipline, with tragic results. On the journey out he had been deeply impressed by a company of Moravians who seemed to have an assurance he lacked. They had evidenced no fear of death during a terrifying storm, and possessed a faith which he envied. He had approached one of their leaders, a Mr. Spangenberg, and asked his advice.

"He told me he could say nothing till he had asked me two or three questions. 'Do you know yourself? Have you the witness within yourself? Does the Spirit of God bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God?' I was surprised, and knew not what to answer. He observed it, and asked, 'Do you know Jesus Christ?'

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<sup>1</sup> J.I., 467.

I paused and said, 'I know He is the Saviour of the world'. 'True' he replied, 'but do you know He has saved you?' I answered, 'I hope He has died to save me'. He only added, 'Do you know yourself?' I said, 'I do'. But I fear they were vain words".<sup>1</sup>

On his return to England, disappointed and depressed, he wrote:

"It is now two years and almost four months since I left my native country, in order to teach the Georgian Indians the nature of Christianity. But what have I learned myself in the meantime? Why, what I the least of all suspected, that I, who went to America to convert others, was never myself converted to God".<sup>2</sup>

True, later Wesley himself said he felt this was an exaggeration; but at this time there is no doubt that Wesley's religion, which he practised as sincerely and as devotedly as he possibly could, brought him no assurance and no abiding joy. It was a burden to be borne. But the Moravians, and especially Peter Bohler with whom he had long conversations on his return from Georgia, had awakened within him a hope. He began to realise, as he saw their triumphant faith and certainty, what religion could mean. It was on May 24th, 1738, in a Moravian meeting in Aldersgate Street, London, that John Wesley's hope was realised. And salvation, with its assurance of divine pardon, became for him a present possession.

"I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death".<sup>3</sup>

Seven months later he could still write: "I received such a sense of forgiveness of sins as till then I had never known".<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> J.I,151.

<sup>2</sup> J.I,421-2.

<sup>3</sup> J.I,476.

<sup>4</sup> J.II,125.

Here, then, in this intensely personal experience, was the realisation of all his hopes and dreams. This, which he had striven for from his earliest years, this, for which he had undergone the most rigid discipline and self-sacrifice, this, which he had never believed possible this side of heaven, had become his in a moment.

In 1739 Charles Wesley wrote a poem entitled, "Congratulations to a Friend, Upon Believing in Christ", to which Osborn added the note: "Probably addressed to John Wesley, on the occasion of his 'finding peace', by his brother Charles". In this poem Charles sees John's evangelical experience as 'realized eschatology':

"What morn on thee with sweeter ray,  
Or brighter lustre e'er hath shined?  
Be blest the memorable day  
That gave thee Jesus Christ to find!  
Gave thee to taste His perfect grace,  
From death to life in Him to pass...

Thy heart has felt its sins forgiven,  
And tastes anticipated heaven".<sup>1</sup>

It was upon this experience that John Wesley based his preaching. "He preached" says J.E.Rattenbury "a present salvation, to be received by faith, and realized here and now".<sup>2</sup>

Charles Wesley's spiritual pilgrimage had followed closely the pattern of his brother's, though his conversion had preceded John's by three days. He describes it in prose:

"I now found myself at peace with God, and rejoiced in hope of loving Christ...I went to bed still sensible

<sup>1</sup> P.W.I,180-1.

<sup>2</sup> The Conversion of the Wesleys p.35.

of my own weakness, (I humbly hope to be more and more so,) yet confident of Christ's protection".<sup>1</sup>

But two days later he wrote his great 'Conversion Hymn' which expresses, as only poetry can, the wonder of it all:

"O how shall I the goodness tell  
 Father, which Thou to me hast showed?  
 That I, a child of wrath and hell,  
 I should be called a child of God,  
 Should know, should feel my sins forgiven,  
 Blest with this antepast of heaven".<sup>2</sup>

Eighteen days after his great Aldersgate Street experience John Wesley preached the first of his sermons before the University of Oxford, in St. Mary's Church. The title he gave to it was 'Salvation by Faith', and his text Ephesians 2,8: "By grace are ye saved through faith". As usual Wesley gives a careful analysis of the text, discussing first the meaning of faith. This he defines as follows:

"Christian faith is, then, not only an assent to the whole Gospel of Christ, but also a full reliance on the blood of Christ; a trust in the merits of His life, death and resurrection; a recumbency upon Him as our atonement and our life, as given for us, and living in us. (It is a sure confidence which a man hath in God, that, through the merits of Christ, his sins are forgiven, and he reconciled to the favour of God:) and, in consequence hereof, a closing with Him, and cleaving to Him, as our 'wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption', or, in one word, salvation".<sup>3</sup>

Before May 24th, John Wesley would no doubt have defined faith, as would the vast majority of his contemporaries in the Church of England, as assent to the Creeds and the teaching of Holy Scripture. But, from his own experience, he learnt that it was much more than that; it was an act of personal trust and

<sup>1</sup> J.C.W. I,92.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.I,91.

<sup>3</sup> S.S. I,40-41.

committal to Christ and His work. And when he turns to examine the word 'salvation' he is quite clear about its present realization.

"And first, whatsoever else it imply, it is a present salvation. It is something attainable, yea, actually attained, on earth, by those who are partakers of this faith. For thus saith the Apostle to the believers at Ephesus, and in them to the believers of all ages, not, Ye shall be (though that also is true), but, 'ye are saved through faith'".<sup>1</sup>

In a sermon on the same text, probably written by John Wesley in 1764 and published in 1765, called "The Scripture Way of Salvation", while the treatment of the subject is entirely different, the same emphasis on present salvation is still there.

"And first let us inquire, What is salvation? The salvation which is here spoken of is not what is frequently understood by that word, the going to heaven, eternal happiness. It is not the soul's going to paradise, termed by our Lord, 'Abraham's bosom'. It is not a blessing which lies on the other side death; or, as we usually speak, in the other world. The very words of the text itself put this beyond all question: 'Ye are saved'. It is not something at a distance; it is a present thing; a blessing which, through the free mercy of God, ye are now in possession of. Nay, the words may be rendered, and that with equal propriety, 'Ye have been saved'; so that the salvation which is here spoken of might be extended to the entire work of God, from the first dawning of grace in the soul, till it is consummated in glory".<sup>2</sup>

When Wesley asks the question, But what are we saved from? his answer is unequivocal. We are saved from sin, from its guilt, from its power, from fear. (Incidentally it is interesting to notice, as Sugden does in his notes to the

<sup>1</sup> S.S.I, 41.

<sup>2</sup> S.S.II, 444-5.

Standard Sermons, that Wesley makes no mention of salvation from Hell).

God's pardon, God's acquittal of sinful men, God's regarding the repentant sinner as if he had never sinned, is Justification. Wesley knew from his own experience that God offered full pardon for sins here and now. Had there not been given to him on that night in the Aldersgate Street meeting the assurance that Christ had taken away his sins, even his? He had once thought that such assurance was impossible in this life. In "A Farther Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion" he wrote:

"I was ordained deacon in 1725, and priest in the year following. But it was many years after this before I was convinced of the great truths above recited. During all this time I was utterly ignorant of the nature and condition of justification. Sometimes I confounded it with sanctification; (particularly when I was in Georgia): at other times I had some confused notion about the forgiveness of sins; but then I took it for granted the time of this must be either the hour of death, or the day of judgment".<sup>1</sup>

But he now knew differently. He says -

"By salvation I mean, not barely, according to the vulgar notion, deliverance from hell, or going to heaven; but a present deliverance from sin, a restoration of the soul to its primitive health, its original purity".<sup>2</sup>

In his great sermon on "Justification by Faith" John Wesley makes it quite clear that "the plain scriptural notion of justification is pardon, the forgiveness of sins"<sup>3</sup>. Through the sin of Adam, whereby he became spiritually dead and separated from God, all men have become involved in the

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<sup>1</sup> W.VIII, 111.

<sup>2</sup> W.VIII, 47.

<sup>3</sup> S.S.I, 120.

in the same death. There was nothing that man could do about it: he was dead to God. But God could, and did, do something. In the fulness of time He was made man, was 'wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities', 'bare our sins in His own body on the tree', and thereby 'made a full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world'. So there has been accomplished for us our justification.

"So that, for the sake of His well-beloved Son, of what He hath done and suffered for us, God now vouchsafes, on one only condition (which Himself also enables us to perform), both to remit the punishment due to our sins, to reinstate us in His favour, and to restore our dead souls to spiritual life, as the earnest of life eternal".<sup>1</sup>

Justification is not the being made actually just and righteous; that is sanctification. But it is

"that act of God the Father, whereby, for the sake of the propitiation made by the blood of His Son, He 'showeth forth His righteousness' (or mercy) 'by the remission of the sins that are past'...And from the time we are 'accepted through the Beloved', 'reconciled to God through His blood', He loves, and blesses, and watches over us for good, even as if we have never sinned".<sup>2</sup>

All our past sins of thought, word and deed are forgiven, wiped out, not to be remembered or mentioned against us, any more than if they had not been. And this act of acquittal is not something that will be declared in the last day, in the Final Judgment; it is declared now. Although Wesley points out that both St. Paul and our Lord speak on one occasion as if

<sup>1</sup> S.S.I, 118.

<sup>2</sup> S.S.I, 120-1.

justification were in the future ("Not the hearers of the law, but the doers of the law shall be justified", Romans 2,13; and "By thy words thou shalt be justified", Matthew 12,37), yet he maintains that this is not the usual meaning. In all other references the word means a present justification. This point is made also in A Farther Appeal:

"First: The nature of Justification. It sometimes means our acquittal at the last day (Matthew 12,37). But this is altogether out of the present question; that justification whereof our Articles and Homilies speak, meaning present forgiveness, pardon of sins, and consequently, acceptance with God... I know nothing material which has been objected as to the nature of justification; but many persons seem to be very confused in their thoughts concerning it, and speak as if they had never heard of any justification antecedent to that of the last day. To clear up this, there needs only a closer inspection of our Articles and Homilies; wherein justification is always taken for the present remission of our sins".<sup>1</sup>

It seems that more than once Wesley had to deal with this misconception, that justification, acquittal before God, had reference only to the Day of Judgment. In his Journal for December, 1739 he writes:

"In the afternoon I was informed how many, who cannot in terms deny it, explain justification by faith. They say: (1) Justification is twofold; the first in this life, the second at the last day... In flat opposition to this I cannot but maintain (at least till I have clearer light): (1) That the justification which is spoken of by St. Paul to the Romans and in our Articles is not twofold. It is one and no more. It is the present remission of our sins, or our first acceptance with God".<sup>2</sup>

Again and again in his letters John Wesley reminds his friends that they must seize the present offer of salvation.

<sup>1</sup> W.VIII,46,49.

<sup>2</sup> J.II,326.

He writes to John King - "With what is past or what is to come we have little to do. Now is the day of salvation. The great salvation is at hand if you will receive it as the free gift of God".<sup>1</sup> And to an unknown preacher - "Keep to our one point - present inward salvation by faith, by the divine evidence of sins forgiven".<sup>2</sup>

The thought is expressed, too, that the experience of justification, of divine forgiveness, with its assurance of peace and joy, is in fact a foretaste of heaven. In a letter to Gradock Glascott he says:

"It is an unspeakable blessing that God has given you to taste of the powers of the world to come. And He is willing to give always what He gives once. You need lose nothing of what you have received; rather, expect to receive more at every moment, grace upon grace".<sup>3</sup>

And again, "'being justified by faith' we taste of the heaven to which we are going, we are holy and happy, we tread down sin and fear, and 'Sit in heavenly places with Christ Jesus'".<sup>4</sup> In his first sermon "Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount" he speaks of the inward kingdom, the joy of our redemption, as "heaven already opened in the soul".<sup>5</sup> Yet, of course, it is only a foretaste, only the beginning; and there is much in the Christian life after conversion which is anything but heavenly. Writing in A Plain Account of the People Called Methodists, Wesley gives an account of the forming of the bands, small groups of the same sex and age, who shared with each other the most intimate fellowship. These who, being

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<sup>1</sup> L.VII,380.

<sup>2</sup> L.II,110.

<sup>3</sup> L.IV,243.

<sup>4</sup> L.II,293.

<sup>5</sup> S.S.I,327.

justified by faith, had 'peace with God', nevertheless felt the bitterness of the struggle.

"For the war was not over, as they had supposed; but they had still to wrestle with flesh and blood, and with principalities and powers: So that temptations were on every side; and often temptations of such a kind, as they knew not how to speak in a class".<sup>1</sup>

In addition to Justification, Salvation also implies Regeneration. Although at times John Wesley seems to have identified the two, yet usually he made a clear distinction between them. In his sermon on "The New Birth" he says:

"If any doctrine within the whole compass of Christianity may be properly termed 'fundamental' they are doubtless these two - the doctrine of justification, and that of the new birth; the former relating to that great work which God does for us, in forgiving our sins; the latter, to the great work which God does in us, in renewing our fallen nature. In order of time, neither of these is before the other; in the moment we are justified by the grace of God, through the redemption that is in Jesus, we are also 'born of the Spirit'; but in order of thinking, as it is termed, justification precedes the new birth. We first conceive His wrath to be turned away, and then His Spirit to work in our hearts".<sup>2</sup>

The New Birth, then, is a real experience, a real change, here and now, which takes place at the moment of faith. It is

"that great change which God works in the soul when He brings it into life; when He raises it from the death of sin to the life of righteousness".<sup>3</sup>

This change, this resurrection of the soul, this rebirth is not something for which a man has to wait until the point of departure from this world, or until he reaches heaven. It is

<sup>1</sup> W.VIII, 257-8.

<sup>2</sup> S.S.II, 226-7.

<sup>3</sup> S.S.II, 234.

something which takes place at the very moment of justification. Indeed Wesley, in his earlier writings, seems to insist that conversion must always be an instantaneous experience. He was no doubt influenced here by his own experience, which impressed him with its immediacy, and by the experience of the vast majority of his followers. Later he came to see that the experience might well be a gradual one. In 1785 he wrote a letter to Miss Mary Cooke, in which he said:

"There is an irreconcilable variability in the operations of the Holy Spirit on the souls of men, more especially as to the manner of justification. Many find Him rushing upon them like a torrent, while they experience

'The o'erwhelming power of saving grace'.

This has been the experience of many; perhaps of more in this late visitation than in any other age since the times of the Apostles. But in others He works in a very different way:

'He deigns His influence to infuse,

Sweet, refreshing, as the silent dews'.

It has pleased Him to work the latter way in you from the beginning; and it is not improbable He will continue (as He has begun) to work in a gentle and almost insensible manner. Let Him take His own way; He is wiser than you; He will do all things well. Do not reason against Him; but let the prayer of your heart be,

'Mould as Thou wilt Thy passive clay'".<sup>1</sup>

But, whether the experience be seemingly sudden or gradual, there must be afterwards a continual growth in grace.

In his sermon on "The New Birth" Wesley uses the analogy of natural birth. The child in the womb, just before birth, has all his senses, though he has only a very

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<sup>1</sup> L.VII, 298.

imperfect use of them. He has eyes, but he sees nothing; he has ears, but he hears no sound. He has no knowledge of the world outside of the womb. And "to that manner of existence which he then has, we do not even give the name of life. It is then only when a man is born, that we say he begins to live".<sup>1</sup> We reckon his life from the moment of birth. But when he is born, he is born into a new world, a world utterly different from the dark, narrow world of the womb. Now his eyes are open, and though as yet he may be able to distinguish very little, yet he can see. His ears are opened, and he hears the sounds which strike upon them. He begins to breathe and to live in a manner entirely different from what he did before. So it is with the man who is born again. He is unaware of the existence of the spiritual world. His spiritual eyes are as yet blind; his spiritual ears are stopped. He is unaware of God and of the things of God until his rebirth. "Therefore" says Wesley, "though he is a living man, he is a dead Christian".<sup>2</sup> But when he is born again, he is born into a new world. In the words of the Apostle Paul, the 'eyes of his understanding are opened', and he is able to see 'the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus'. His spiritual ears are unstopped, and he is able to hear the inward voice of God speaking the words of forgiveness and peace and joy. He begins, so to speak, to breathe in God, and God breathes in him. He daily increases in the knowledge of God, and all his spiritual

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<sup>1</sup> S.S.II,232.

<sup>2</sup> S.S.II,233.

senses are alive to God. "And now he may be said properly to live: God having quickened him by His Spirit, he is alive to God through Jesus Christ".<sup>1</sup>

Again, in modern terms, we may speak of this as 'realized eschatology'. For the man who is reborn is already living in the spiritual world; he is already participating in those things which are eternal; he is already tasting of the powers of the world to come. But it is, of course, not fully realized. A new-born baby is alive in the world; but as he grows to maturity, so his knowledge, his comprehension, the sphere of his life widens. And not until many years have passed does he reach adulthood. So, says Wesley,

"A child is born of a woman in a moment, or at least in a very short time; afterwards he gradually and slowly grows, till he attains to the stature of a man. In like manner, a child is born of God in a short time, if not in a moment. But it is by slow degrees that he afterwards grows up to the measure of the full stature of Christ. The same relation, therefore, which there is between our natural birth and our growth, there is also between our new birth and our sanctification".<sup>2</sup>

In another sermon - on "The Repentance of Believers" - he expresses this thought of a future, ultimate realization even more forcefully:

"We allow that at the very moment of justification we are born again: in that instant we experience that inward change from 'darkness into marvellous light'; from the image of the brute and the devil, into the image of God; from the earthly, sensual, devilish mind, to the mind which was in Christ Jesus. But are we then entirely changed? Are we wholly transformed into the image of Him that created us? Far from it; we still retain a depth of sin; and it is the

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<sup>1</sup> S.S.II, 234.

<sup>2</sup> S.S.II, 240.

consciousness of this which constrains us to groan, for a fuller deliverance, to Him that is mighty to save. Hence it is, that those believers who are not convinced of the deep corruption of their hearts, or but slightly, and, as it were, notionally convinced, have little concern about entire sanctification. They may possibly hold the opinion, that such a thing is to be, either at death, or some time they know not when, before it.<sup>1</sup> But they have no great hunger or thirst after it".<sup>1</sup>

So, great and wonderful as is the change wrought in our nature by our rebirth through the Holy Spirit, it is as nothing compared with that moment - which lies in the future, beyond death - when we shall be changed into the very image of His glory.

Wesley argues that the experience of rebirth or regeneration is absolutely essential for ever man. It is necessary, even if we are to know happiness in this world, for 'no wicked man is happy'; it is necessary for holiness, and 'without holiness no man shall see the Lord'; and it is necessary in order to obtain eternal salvation. To the man who argues that surely a life of moral respectability, and constant attendance at church and sacrament is sufficient, Wesley declares that these can never be substitutes for rebirth.

"One of these will ask with full assurance, 'What! shall not I do as well as my neighbours?' Yes, as well as your unholy neighbours; as well as your neighbours that die in their sins! For you will all drop into the pit together, into the nethermost hell! You will all lie together in the lake of fire; 'the lake of fire burning with brimstone! Then, at length, you will see (but God grant you may see it before!) the necessity of holiness in order to glory; and, consequently, of the new birth, since none can be holy, except he be born again".<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> S.S.II, 395-6.

<sup>2</sup> S.S.II, 236.

We turn now to the hymns of Charles Wesley. Hildebrandt has pointed out that on numerous occasions in his hymns Charles Wesley uses the repetition of the word 'now', as though by that repetition he would emphasise the fact that salvation, with all its blessings, can be ours at this present moment. The blessings are not to be enjoyed only after death; they are not to be enjoyed at some future time. They are to be ours now. To one who is uncertain as to whether he has ever known justifying grace, to one who has only known 'God's fear', to one who has never known the joy of sins forgiven, to one who is a sincere seeker, he says, 'Now is the acceptable time'.

"Thou great mysterious God unknown,  
Whose love hath gently led me on  
Even from my infant days,  
Mine inmost soul expose to view,  
And tell me if I ever knew  
Thy justifying grace.

If I have only known Thy fear,  
And follow'd with an heart sincere,  
Thy drawings from above,  
Now, now the farther grace bestow,  
And let my sprinkled conscience know  
Thy sweet forgiving love".<sup>1</sup>

In one of his great penitential hymns Charles Wesley sees himself as one responsible for Christ's crucifixion - 'who with clamour pursued Thee to Calvary's top'. But he sees in the blood flowing from the Cross that which can melt his passion and pride, and 'wash off his foul load'. And this he would know at the very present moment:

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<sup>1</sup> P.W.IV, 235-6.

"Now, now let me know  
Its virtue below,  
Let it wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow".<sup>1</sup>

One further example may be given. Wesley appeals to the omnipotent Lord and King to come to his aid, and grant him present salvation.

"Omnipotent Lord, my Saviour and King,  
Thy succour afford, Thy righteousness bring;  
Thy promises bind Thee compassion to have;  
Now, now let me find Thee almighty to save".<sup>2</sup>

The same emphasis is to be found in countless hymns in which Wesley speaks of salvation and forgiveness being ours at the present moment, the very moment we dare to believe and claim His promise.

"'Tis done: Thou dost this moment save,  
Thou dost with pardon bless;  
Redemption through Thy blood I have,  
And heaven in Thy peace".<sup>3</sup>

In this, too, is expressed the thought of anticipated heaven. Again:

"Our Father doth forgive  
The moment we believe".<sup>4</sup>

It is God's will, not merely that we should be forgiven for past sins, but that we should now be saved from the very act of sin:

"Thy counsel is, to save me now  
From every act of sin".<sup>5</sup>

How foolish, then, to postpone accepting God's proffered gift; how foolish to delay even for a day.

<sup>1</sup> P.W.IV,366.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.II,197.

<sup>3</sup> P.W.XI,45.

<sup>4</sup> P.W.XII,256.

<sup>5</sup> P.W.XI,46.

"Why should I till tomorrow stay  
 For what Thou wouldst bestow today,  
 What Thou more willing art to give  
 Than I to ask, or to receive?

This moment, Lord, Thou ready art  
 To break, and to bind up my heart,  
 To pour the balm of Gilead in,  
 Forgive, and take away my sin.

Thou waitest now to show Thy grace,  
 To fold me in Thy kind embrace,  
 And, stablishing in peace and power,  
 To bid me go and sin no more".<sup>1</sup>

With his brother, Charles Wesley knows that he is already justified, that he has already escaped the condemnation of Hell, and that all the opposition from men and evil spirits and even sin itself cannot reach him.

"Thee, O my great Deliverer, Thee  
 My Ransom, I adore;  
 Thy death from hell hath set me free,  
 And I am damn'd no more.

In Thee I sure redemption have,  
 The pardon of my sin;  
 Thy blood I find mighty to save;  
 Thy blood hath made me clean.

I feel the power of Jesu's name,  
 It breaks the captive's chain;  
 And men oppose, and fiends exclaim,  
 And sin subsists in vain".<sup>2</sup>

The fact that a man can experience such a sense of justification here, that he can know his sins forgiven now, that he is delivered here and now from the dark dungeon in which he has been imprisoned fills Wesley with an incredible wonder. He enters into a new freedom. He feels he is really living for the very first time, and he can do no other than

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<sup>1</sup> P.W.XIII, 51.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.I, 285.

shout for joy. And he who felt that such a freedom and joy were not possible this side of heaven, revels in it now.

"His name the sinner hears,  
And is from sin set free;  
'Tis music in his ears,  
'Tis life and victory;  
New songs do now his lips employ,  
And dances his glad heart for joy.

Stung by the scorpion sin,  
My poor expiring soul  
The balmy sound drinks in,  
And is at once made whole.  
See there my Lord upon the tree!  
I hear, I feel He died for me".<sup>1</sup>

And perhaps the greatest of all Wesley's songs of deliverance -

"Long my imprison'd spirit lay,  
Fast bound in sin and nature's night:  
Thine eye diffused a quickening ray;  
I woke; the dungeon flamed with light!  
My chains fell off, my heart was free,  
I rose, went forth, and follow'd Thee".<sup>2</sup>

In every case it is the immediacy of the experience and deliverance which seems so unbelievable.

Here is true 'realized eschatology'; for the believer feels he is anticipating the joys and triumphs of heaven. He is already tasting here and now the blessings of the world to come.

"Sure earnest of the joys above,  
He bids you reign, enthroned in love;  
His gracious kingdom here receive  
With meekness in His sight to live,  
And then His glorious kingdom share,  
And reign with Christ triumphant there".<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> P.W.III,72.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.I,105.

<sup>3</sup> P.W.X,444.

Three of the rewards of heaven are the conqueror's crown, the beatific vision, and deep, uninterrupted fellowship with God. Greatly daring Charles Wesley says that even these the Christian can anticipate in this life. These, too, become, to some extent, blessings of a present salvation.

"That crown the conqueror here receives,  
Who the good fight of faith hath won".<sup>1</sup>

and:

"Saved to the utmost here by Jesu's grace,  
'I here' he cries, 'have seen His glorious face'".<sup>2</sup>

For:

"The God of my salvation  
If Thou in me appear,  
With bless'd anticipation  
I see and taste Thee here".<sup>3</sup>

We have seen that John Wesley included the new birth, part of the process of salvation, as a present experience, and he thought of his own conversion as a regeneration. But here Charles takes a different view from his brother. His hymns and his Journal reveal him as a man who yearned for complete mastery over sin, and his own sinful nature always puzzled him. He was prepared to take such a text as 'whatsoever is born of God sinneth not' quite literally. And as he knew that in fact he did frequently sin, therefore he concluded that he was not born of God. For him:

"While one evil thought remains  
I am not born of God".

<sup>1</sup> P.W.II, 357.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.III, 125.

<sup>3</sup> P.W.VIII, 320.

John did not take it so literally. He believed that at conversion the believer's fallen nature was renewed, really though not completely. He claimed that regeneration took place at the time of conversion, or justification; but what Charles called "The New Birth" John called "Sanctification". As J.E.Rattenbury says:

"He (Charles) did in a metaphorical sense, employ the term 'born of God' at least once to describe the entirely new life into which he entered at his conversion, but almost invariably he uses the term 'new birth' for an experience which is to be sought in the future".<sup>1</sup>

But, one feels, this difference between the brothers is one of definition and emphasis rather than one of disagreement. Apart from this one term, Charles is no whit behind his brother in claiming the blessings of salvation as a present possession.

But he, with John, could still look forward with confidence to the fuller realization of heaven. The foretaste was a guarantee of the final feast, and the salvation, which is enjoyed here and now, is completed in heaven.

"For me, for all mankind,  
The ransom price was given,  
That all might here their Eden find,  
And then remove to heaven".<sup>2</sup>

Or again -

"On earth Thy salvation to see,  
And then to enjoy it above".<sup>3</sup>

1 "The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley's Hymns" p.260.

2 P.W.III,65.

3 P.W.IX,293.

Indeed, in one great hymn he asks the question - Why, if God gives us forgiveness in a moment, can He not perfect us, and take us straight to heaven now? And his answer is that, much as God has wrought in us already, there is still much to be done before we are ready to be removed to heaven.

"Stupendous word of power Divine!  
 'And cannot the Almighty raise  
 Into a saint this soul of mine,  
 Transformed by instantaneous grace?'  
 He can the general guilt remove,  
 This moment speak our sins forgiven,  
 And perfect all mankind in love,  
 And snatch us up at once to heaven.

He can; but hath He said He will?  
 His word must His design explain;  
 Or doth He thus with sinners deal,  
 And give the tree before the grain?  
 He wills us long in grace to grow,  
 He bids us step by step proceed:  
 And on we to perfection go,  
 Till made in all things like our Head".<sup>1</sup>

Anderson Scott once wrote that St. Paul viewed salvation

"under three different aspects: (1) as something already achieved (Eph.2,5): (2) as an experience which has begun and is going on (I.Cor.1,18): (3) as something which lies in the future; 'much more...shall we be saved...through Him' (Rom.5,9)".<sup>2</sup>

This was exactly the Wesleys' view too. In the 'Minutes of a Conversation' he held with some of his preachers in 1746 John Wesley said -

"In asserting salvation by faith, we mean this: (1) that pardon (salvation begun) is received by faith producing works. (2) That holiness (salvation continued) is faith working by love. (3) That heaven (salvation finished) is the reward of this faith".<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> P.W.XIII, 39-40.

<sup>2</sup> "St. Paul, the Man and the Teacher"

(Cambridge, 1936) p.87.

<sup>3</sup> W.VIII, 290.

Little wonder that the three words are found together frequently in the hymns - 'pardon and holiness and heaven'. With the first part of this we have been concerned in this chapter: salvation begun here and now. We turn now to the second part: salvation continued, or holiness.

CHAPTER THREESANCTIFICATION.

It cannot be claimed that John Wesley was a systematic theologian. He was, of course, deeply concerned with theology, with a theology based upon Scripture and human experience. Indeed his preaching was always Biblical and doctrinal. But, as Lindstrom has said:

"His view of Christianity is dominated by a few central doctrines, which are reflected in Christian experience. First and foremost is salvation, its conditions and nature, and here Wesley is primarily concerned with justification and sanctification as the two fundamental doctrines. Of these it is undoubtedly sanctification that received major attention".<sup>1</sup>

It was through the exposition of this doctrine that Wesley made his greatest contribution to theology. Of this he was quite convinced himself. Just a year before he died he wrote a letter to Robert Carr Brackenbury, one of his preachers, in which he said:

"This doctrine is the grand depositum which God has lodged with the people called Methodists; and for the sake of propogating this chiefly He appeared to have raised us up".<sup>2</sup>

Wesley strongly repudiated any suggestion that he had either invented or discovered the doctrine. Flew, in his authoritative book, The Idea of Perfection, has traced the doctrine from its beginnings in the teaching of Jesus and of the New Testament, through Augustine, Aquinas and the leaders of the Reformation, to name but a few. As we shall see

<sup>1</sup> "Wesley and Sanctification" p.15.

<sup>2</sup> L.VIII, 238.

Wesley confessed that he was deeply influenced by the writings of Thomas a Kempis, Jeremy Taylor and William Law. But primarily he believed and preached the doctrine because he found it in the Bible, and in the spiritual experience of a great number of his followers.

His own exposition of the doctrine was bitterly attacked by theologians and Church leaders of his own day, and since that time many have felt that his emphasis upon it gave some justification, at least, to the accusation of his contemporaries that he was guilty of 'enthusiasm'. The doctrine, as expounded by Wesley, has not received general acceptance by the Christian Church. It has not even been proclaimed by Methodist preachers as Wesley urged. It has been left to the various holiness sects to take it, and isolate it, and distort it. It was Dale, the distinguished Congregationalist, who, in 1879, said:

"There was one doctrine of John Wesley's - the doctrine of perfect sanctification - which ought to have led to a great and original ethical development; but the doctrine has not grown; it seems to remain just where John Wesley left it. There has been a want of the genius or the courage to attempt the solution of the immense practical questions which the doctrine suggests. The questions have not been raised - much less solved. To have raised them effectively indeed, would have been to originate an ethical revolution which would have had a far deeper effect on the thought and life - first of England, and then of the rest of Christendom - than was produced by the Reformation of the sixteenth century".<sup>1</sup>

An American scholar has seen the doctrine as "an original and unique synthesis of the Protestant ethic of grace with the Catholic ethic of holiness".<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "The Evangelical Revival & Other Sermons", p.39 (Quoted Sangster, "The Path to Perfection", p.168.

<sup>2</sup> G.C.Cell, "The Rediscovery of John Wesley", p.347.

The doctrine occupied the thought of Wesley for almost the entire course of his long life. He was concerned with it several years before his conversion. In view of the many critics who claimed that Wesley had introduced this doctrine later in his ministry, and that he had shifted his ground during the years of controversy about it, he wrote a book which he entitled, "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection as believed and taught by the Reverend Mr. Wesley from the year 1725 to the year 1777".<sup>1</sup> And he began:

"What I purpose in the following papers is, to give a plain and distinct account of the steps by which I was led, during a course of many years, to embrace the doctrine of Christian Perfection".<sup>2</sup>

He tells how in 1725 he read Jeremy Taylor's "Holy Living and Holy Dying", and was deeply impressed, especially with the references to 'purity of intention'.

"Instantly", he says "I resolved to dedicate all my life to God, all my thoughts and words and actions; being thoroughly convinced there was no medium; but that every part of my life, (not some only) must either be sacrificed to God, or myself, that is, in effect, to the devil".<sup>3</sup>

The next year he read Thomas a Kempis' "Christian Pattern", and this impressed him with the need not only of purity of intention, but also purity of affection. A year or two later William Law's "Christian Perfection" and "Serious Call" were put into his hands; and again he was convinced "of the

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<sup>1</sup> Jackson, the editor of Wesley's Works, adds a footnote to this title to explain that Wesley revised and enlarged this book several times, and each time the date of the most recent revision was specified in the title. The last revision seems to have appeared in 1777. Hence this date in the title of the book.

<sup>2</sup> W.XI, 366.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 366.

absolute impossibility of being half a Christian", and he resolved "to be all-devoted to God, to give Him all my soul, my body, my substance".<sup>1</sup>

In 1733 John Wesley preached a sermon before the University of Oxford which he called "The Circumcision of the Heart"; and although this was five years before his conversion, it was - and is - retained as one of the 'Standard Sermons'. In a letter to John Newton in 1765 Wesley wrote:

"January 1st, 1733, I preached the sermon on the Circumcision of the Heart, which contains all that I now teach concerning salvation from all sin and loving God with an undivided heart. In the same year I printed (the first time I ventured to print anything) for the use of my pupils, A Collection of Forms of Prayer; and in this I spoke explicitly of giving 'the whole heart and the whole life to God'. This was then, as it is now, my idea of Perfection, though I should have started at the word".<sup>2</sup>

In the sermon the 'circumcision of the heart' is defined as:

"that habitual disposition of the soul which, in the sacred writings, is termed holiness; and which directly implies, the being cleansed from sin, 'from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit': and, by consequence, the being endued with those virtues which were also in Christ Jesus; the being so 'renewed in the spirit of our mind' as to be 'perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect'".<sup>3</sup>

It was in this spirit of utter dedication and high resolve that John Wesley sailed for Georgia, and it was while in Savanna that he wrote:

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p.367.

<sup>2</sup> L.IV, 299.

<sup>3</sup> S.S.I, 267-8.

"Is there a thing beneath the sun,  
That strives with Thee my heart to share?  
Ah! tear it thence, and reign alone,  
The Lord of every motion there!"<sup>1</sup>

Wesley continues, in the "Plain Account" to quote from a number of his published works - "The Character of a Methodist", the Prefaces to successive volumes of hymns, the Minutes of the Conferences he held with his preachers, - to demonstrate that he had never wavered in his views on perfection, nor altered them. While that is true, his conversion did teach him a tremendous truth, that the experience of perfection, as the experience of justification, was entirely the gift of God.

Wesley expounded this doctrine, not only in the two works already mentioned, the "Plain Account of Christian Perfection" and the pre-conversion sermon on "The Circumcision of the Heart", but also in a sermon, "Christian Perfection", which he first published in 1741. In the "Plain Account" he tells how the sermon came to be written. He had visited the Bishop of London, Dr. Gibson, at the end of 1740, and discussed the doctrine with him, giving his own account of it. Whereupon the Bishop had said, "Mr. Wesley, if this be all you mean, publish it to all the world. If anyone then can refute what you say, he may have free leave".<sup>2</sup> This sermon was the resultant publication.

It begins with a consideration of the negative aspect - in what sense Christians are not perfect. They are not free

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<sup>1</sup> W.XI, 369.

<sup>2</sup> W.XI, 374.

from ignorance, nor are they free from mistakes; they are still guilty of errors of fact and judgment, though Wesley claims that they do not err in things essential to salvation. They are not free from such infirmities as

"the weakness or slowness of understanding, dullness or confusedness of apprehension, incoherency of thought, irregular quickness or heaviness of imagination".<sup>1</sup>

Nor are they free from temptation. Wesley also emphasises the fact that none can be absolutely perfect in this life.

"There is no perfection of degrees, as it is termed; none which does not admit of a continual increase. So that how much soever he is perfect, he hath still need to 'grow in grace', and daily to advance in the knowledge and love of God his Saviour".<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, in the "Plain Account" Wesley went further, and claimed that the man who has attained to perfection still stands in need of God's forgiveness.

"It follows that the most perfect have continual need of the merits of Christ, even for their actual transgressions, and may say for themselves as well as for their brethren, 'Forgive us our trespasses'..... The best of men still need Christ in His priestly office, to atone for their omissions, their short-comings, (as some not improperly speak), their mistakes in judgment and practice, and their defects of various kinds. For these are all deviations from the perfect law, and consequently need an atonement".<sup>3</sup>

To return to the sermon Wesley next turns to the more positive aspect, in what sense Christians are perfect. He points out that, according to the Scriptures (especially I John), when a man is justified he does not sin, he does not continue in sin. Sin has 'no more dominion over him', and he is free

<sup>1</sup> S.S.II, 155.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.156.

<sup>3</sup> W.XI, 395, 396.

from all outward sin ("the ceasing from the outward act, from any outward transgression of the law"<sup>1</sup>). True, he says, Christians have sinned - even Peter and Paul - but they need not have done. "Whosoever is tempted to any sin, need not yield; for no man is tempted above that he is able to bear".<sup>2</sup> But perfection is concerned, not only with outward, but also with inward sins, with the sins of the heart. By perfection Wesley means that the Christian is freed from all evil thoughts and tempers.

Much of the confusion and misunderstanding of the doctrine arises from the names by which it is known. Wesley himself will not use the phrase "sinless perfection", but he does persist in using the name "Christian perfection", although he says he prefers "Perfect Love". The word "perfect" is itself ambiguous. Contrary to normal usage, Wesley maintains that there are degrees of perfection, and he hedges about the word 'perfect' with innumerable qualifications. He can even accuse his brother Charles of "setting perfection so high as effectually to renounce it".<sup>3</sup> It is unfortunate that Wesley persisted in using the title "Christian Perfection"; but he was no doubt influenced by the fact that it was scriptural, and had become well known, not only from his own writings, but also from William Law's book of that title.

Much, too, hangs upon the definition of sin. Wesley's

<sup>1</sup> S.S.II, 158.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.164.

<sup>3</sup> L.V, 20.

own definition was quite clear: "a voluntary transgression of a known law".<sup>1</sup> Now we may consider this an accurate definition ( as does Sangster<sup>2</sup>, and, apparently, Tennant); or we may feel, with Flew, that "our worst sins are often those of which we are unconscious".<sup>3</sup> But, be that as it may, Wesley makes it abundantly clear that when he speaks of the Christian as free from sin he does not include involuntary transgressions or sins of omission. In the "Plain Account" he says specifically:

"(1) Not only sin, properly so called, (that is, a voluntary transgression of a known law), but sin, **improperly** so called (that is, an involuntary transgression of a divine law, known or unknown) needs the atoning blood. (2) I believe there is no such perfection in this life as excludes these involuntary transgressions which I apprehend to be naturally consequent upon the ignorance and mistakes inseparable from mortality. (3) Therefore sinless perfection is a phrase I never use, lest I should seem to contradict myself. (4) I believe a person filled with the love of God is still liable to these involuntary transgressions. (5) Such transgressions you may call sins, if you please: I do not, for the reasons above-mentioned".<sup>4</sup>

Thus we may say Wesley's view was: (a) at regeneration we are free from transgressions or outward sins (i.e. voluntary ones), (b) at entire sanctification we are free from inward sin (i.e. 'all evil thoughts and tempers'), but (c) there may still remain involuntary transgressions.

Wesley himself said he much preferred the name "Perfect Love" to any other; and his definitions of the

<sup>1</sup> W.XI, 396.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. "The Path to Perfection" pp 71-76.

<sup>3</sup> "The Idea of Perfection" p.333.

<sup>4</sup> W.XI, 396.

doctrine were almost always made in terms of love. It is this positive aspect of the doctrine which seems more fruitful than the negative discussion on sinlessness. In 1739, in his tract, "The Character of a Methodist," he gives the definition:

"One who has 'the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost given unto him'; who 'loves the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his mind and with all his strength'. God is the joy of his heart, and the desire of his soul; which is constantly crying out, 'Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee! My God and my all! Thou art the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever!'"<sup>1</sup>

In a letter written in 1758 he writes:

"By 'perfection' I mean 'perfect love' or the loving God with all our heart, so as to rejoice evermore, to pray without ceasing, and in everything to give thanks. I am convinced every believer may attain this; yet I do not say he is in a state of damnation or under the curse of God till he does attain".<sup>2</sup>

In 1759, as a result of discussion in Conference, he published "Thoughts on Christian Perfection" in which perfection is defined as

"the loving God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength. This implies that no wrong temper, none contrary to love, remains in the soul; and that all the thoughts, words, and actions, are governed by pure love".<sup>3</sup>

It will be seen that the definitions are substantially the same. Perfection is seen in terms of love - love, not merely as an emotion, but as an act and attitude of will,

<sup>1</sup> W.VIII, 341.

<sup>2</sup> L.IV, 10.

<sup>3</sup> W.XI, 394.

directed towards God and one's neighbour. It is a love which so fills the heart as to leave no room for sin. It is an habitual disposition of the soul, in which every thought and motive and intention and desire, as well as every deed, is yielded up to God. It is the total resignation of the will to the will of God.

So far we have been concerned with a brief enunciation of Wesley's doctrine. But how far is this related to the subject of our thesis? Again, I believe, we are to see this doctrine, as Wesley saw it, in terms of what we now call 'realized eschatology'. For this experience, so often thought of as the goal of the Christian life, as something to be attained, if not after death, then only at the point of death, is, according to Wesley's teaching, available here and now. And, as always, he bases his belief on the Scriptures. Towards the end of the sermon on "Christian Perfection" he says:

"Thus doth Jesus 'save His people from their sins'; and not only from outward sins, but also from the sins of their hearts; from evil thoughts and from evil tempers. 'True' say some, 'we shall thus be saved from our sins; but not till death; not in this world'. But how are we to reconcile this with the express words of St. John? - 'Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world'. The Apostle here, beyond all contradiction, speaks of himself and other living Christians, of whom (as though he had foreseen this very evasion, and set himself to overturn it from the foundation) he flatly affirms, that not only at or after death, but in this world they are as their Master. (I. John 4,17)".<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> S.S.II, 172.



Again, in the "Plain Account" Wesley, quoting from the "Thoughts on Christian Perfection", asks - "Why so few have received the blessing". And he answers -

"Prayer is especially wanting. Who continues instant therein? Who wrestles with God for this very thing? So, 'ye have not, because ye ask not; or because ye ask amiss', namely, that you may be renewed before you die. Before you die! Will that content you? Nay, but ask that it may be done now; today, while it is called today. Do not call this 'setting God a time'. Certainly, today is His time as well as tomorrow. Make haste, man, make haste!"<sup>1</sup>

Wesley was continually exhorting his preachers to emphasise the truth that this experience of 'perfection' or 'sanctification' or 'full salvation' can and should be the believer's now. To George Merryweather he writes:

"Speak and spare not. Let not regard to any man induce you to betray the truth of God. Till you press the believers to expect full salvation now you must not look for any revival".<sup>2</sup>

And to John Bredin:

"Be all a Methodist; and strongly insist on full salvation to be received now by simple faith".<sup>3</sup>

This was the point at which Wesley's doctrine was most strongly attacked. Most of his opponents were prepared to agree that the work of sanctifying grace begins in the heart at the moment of justification and regeneration, and that it should continue so that the believer gradually dies to sin. But they were committed to the belief that sin could not be eradicated until the very moment of death. As Sangster has

<sup>1</sup> W.XI,403.

<sup>2</sup> L.IV,321.

<sup>3</sup> L.VI,42.

pointed out, the Reformers had **denied** the Catholic doctrine of Purgatory, as also did Wesley.

"It follows, therefore, that there was no difference of view between Wesley and the main stream of Protestant theology in his century, in denying any future probation for sinners in the life beyond death. The only difference was here: that while Wesley's Calvinistic contemporaries asserted that complete cleansing came in the moment of death by a stroke of divine power, Wesley believed that the same complete cleansing could be ante-dated by five, ten or twenty years. 'Why not?' he reasoned. 'You believe that sin can be radically dealt with in articulo mortis: why not now?'"<sup>1</sup>

There were, it seems, two points at issue. First, whether or not the experience could be enjoyed any appreciable time before death; and, second, whether or not it was an instantaneous experience.

With regard to the former Wesley was prepared to concede that most Christians were, in fact, sanctified only at the moment of death. But, he says, this is so only because the doctrine of Perfection has not been faithfully preached. Believers had not been encouraged to pray for it or to expect it before death. He grants also

"that few of those to whom St. Paul wrote his Epistles were so (i.e. sanctified) at the time he wrote, nor he himself at the time of writing his former epistles".<sup>2</sup>

To this he merely adds: "Yet this does not prove that we may not today". The fact is that Wesley's belief on this point was founded not merely on his understanding of the Scriptures,

<sup>1</sup> Op.cit. p.68.

<sup>2</sup> W.VIII, 285.

but also on the experience of very many of his followers.

He writes:

"In London alone I found six hundred and fifty two members of our society who were exceeding clear in their experience and of whose testimony I could see no reason to doubt. I believe no year has passed since that time, wherein God has not wrought the same work in many others".<sup>1</sup>

All who claimed the experience were carefully and searchingly investigated and questioned by Wesley himself. And by the testimony of most of them he was convinced. In the "Plain Account", for example, he tells the story of Jane Cooper, "both a living and a dying witness of Christian Perfection", and gives her own testimony as to "the manner wherein it pleased God to work that great change in her soul".<sup>2</sup> Indeed, in his Journal and Letters he gives many such accounts.

But the astonishing thing is that Wesley never claimed this experience for himself. Indeed on one occasion at least he seemed clearly to disclaim it. When Dr. Dodd attacked Wesley's "The Character of a Methodist", and added sarcastically,

"A Methodist, according to Mr. Wesley, is one who is perfect, and sinneth not in thought, word or deed"

Wesley replied,

"Sir, have me excused. This is not 'according to Mr. Wesley'. I have told all the world I am not perfect; and yet you allow me to be a Methodist. I tell you flat I **have**

<sup>1</sup> W.VI,491.

<sup>2</sup> W.XI,409f.

not attained the character I draw. Will you pin it upon me in spite of my teeth?"<sup>1</sup>

Attempts have been made to explain this. Bett<sup>2</sup> was convinced that Wesley had experienced 'perfection', but that he refrained from professing it because of the 'peculiar publicity of his life', the danger of innocent words and deeds being distorted and exaggerated. But surely such caution is not in accord with the character of Wesley. Flew asks,<sup>3</sup> "Was it some fastidiousness, some half-unconscious suspicion that avowal would be perilous to the health of his soul?" Again one remains unconvinced. In a letter to John King in 1787 Wesley wrote:

"One great means of retaining it (i.e. the perfect love of God) is frankly to declare what God has given you, and earnestly to exhort all the believers you meet with to follow after full salvation".<sup>4</sup>

While all his life Wesley fulfilled the second of those conditions, constantly urging his people 'to follow after full salvation', there is not one word of evidence in all his writings that he ever testified that God had given to him the experience of perfect love. And when one remembers how central was this doctrine for Wesley, how constantly he proclaimed it in sermon, pamphlet and letter, how he urged his people to expect it and how disappointed he was to find societies whose members made no claim to it, the mystery of his own silence seems incredible.

1 L.V,43.

2 "The Spirit of Methodism" p.16.

3 Op. cit. p.330.

4 L.VII,369.

Wesley argues strongly for the instantaneous nature of the experience. As we have said, he maintains that the work of sanctification begins at the very moment of rebirth, and there is a gradual growth in grace. But the moment arrives when full salvation is experienced. Lindstrom describes Wesley's conception thus:

"The gradual process is interrupted, that is, by the direct intervention of God, which in a single instant, raises man to a higher plane. It is this combination of the gradual and the instantaneous that particularly distinguishes Wesley's conception of the process of salvation. Visually, it takes the form of an ascent by steps".<sup>1</sup>

Here Wesley must rely, not on his own experience, but on the testimony of his followers. In a passage, part of which we have already quoted, Wesley says:

"In London alone I found six hundred and fifty two members of our society who were exceeding clear in their experience, and of whose testimony I could see no reason to doubt. I believe no year has passed since that time, wherein God has not wrought the same work in many others; and every one of these (without a single exception) has declared that his deliverance from sin was instantaneous; that the change was wrought in a moment. Had half of these, or one third, or one in twenty, declared it was gradually wrought in them, I should have believed this, with regard to them, and thought that some were gradually sanctified and some instantaneously. But as I have not found, in so long a space of time, a single person speaking thus, I cannot but believe that sanctification is commonly, if not always, an instantaneous work".<sup>2</sup>

In a letter to Sarah Rutter he writes:

"Gradual sanctification may increase from the time you was (sic) justified; but full deliverance from sin, I believe, is always instantaneous - at least, I never yet knew an exception".<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Wesley and Sanctification", p.121.

<sup>2</sup> W.VI, 491.

<sup>3</sup> L.VIII, 190.

Wesley is continually urging his people to receive this gift of sanctification at once - now. Words such as these, written to Mary Cooke, are consistent with his own teaching, but they serve to deepen the mystery of his own disavowal of the experience.

"You know well that one thing, and one only, is needful for you upon earth - to ensure a better portion, to recover the favour and image of God. The former by His grace you have recovered; you have tasted of the love of God. See that you cast it not away. See that you hold fast the beginning of your confidence steadfast unto the end! And how soon may you be made partaker of sanctification! And not only by a slow and insensible growth in grace, but by the power of the Highest overshadowing you in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, so as utterly to abolish sin and to renew you in His whole image! If you are simple of heart, if you are willing to receive the heavenly gift, as a little child, without reasoning, why may you not receive it now? He is nigh that sanctifieth; He is with you; He is knocking at the door of your heart!"<sup>1</sup>

In the "Plain Account" John Wesley compares the process of sanctification, the 'dying to sin', with physical dying. To the question, Is this death to sin, and renewal in love, gradual or instantaneous? he gives the reply -

"a man may be dying for some time; yet he does not, properly speaking, die, till the instant the soul is separated from the body; and in that instant he lives the life of eternity. In like manner, he may be dying to sin for some time; yet he is not dead to sin, till sin is separated from his soul; and in that instant he lives the full life of love...Yet he still grows in grace, in the knowledge of Christ, in the love and image of God; and will do so, not only till death, but to all eternity".<sup>2</sup>

We have seen that although Wesley believed, from his own

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<sup>1</sup> L.VII, 293.

<sup>2</sup> W.XI, 402.

experience and that of the vast majority of his followers, that normally conversion or justification was instantaneous, yet later he came to see that God does not invariably work in this way.<sup>1</sup> He found that there were among his followers men and women the reality of whose conversion he could not doubt, yet who could not put a time or a date to the experience. Yet apparently he never met with any who convinced him that their experience of 'perfection' was also, in this sense, gradual. Could it be that Wesley's own experience was of this nature, but that he was so predisposed to the idea of 'instantaneousness' that he could not persuade himself that the experience was his? Certainly few of the Methodist writers and preachers today who are most diligent in proclaiming the worth and importance of this doctrine contend for an instantaneous experience.

Two further aspects of the doctrine need to be mentioned. Just as Wesley believed that the man who was justified could have an assurance given to him (the Holy Spirit witnessing with his own spirit) that he was saved from the guilt and power of sin, so the man who was sanctified could be given a similar assurance. Indeed he can say:

"There cannot be a lasting, steady enjoyment of pure love without the direct testimony of the Spirit concerning it, without God's Spirit shining on His own work".<sup>2</sup>

And although in his earliest years John Wesley had believed

<sup>1</sup> See p.30 above.

<sup>2</sup> L.VI, 88.

that, once having had the experience of 'perfection', it was impossible for a man ever to lose it; later he came to believe that it was possible not only for it to be lost, but also to be regained. He writes:

"I believe a saint may fall away; that one who is holy or righteous in the judgment of God Himself may nevertheless so fall from God as to perish everlastingly".<sup>1</sup>

And, as regards the regaining of it, he writes to Mrs. Bennis:

"Some years since, I was inclined to think that one who had once enjoyed and lost the pure love of God must never look to enjoy it again till they were just stepping into eternity. But experience has taught us better things. We have now numerous instances of those who had cast away that unspeakable blessing and now enjoy it in a larger measure than ever".<sup>2</sup>

Those who had had the instantaneous experience were not to imagine that it would remain a permanent experience; but it was, in Sangster's phrase, "a moment-by-moment life".<sup>3</sup> Nor must it ever be regarded as the end of the journey; but the sanctifying work of grace in the heart must continue even beyond the grave, in paradise and to all eternity.

We turn now to the hymns of Charles Wesley. In the earlier volumes he maintained, with his brother John, that 'perfection' could and should be experienced in this life, here and now. To his sermon on "Christian Perfection" John had appended a hymn of his brother's, "The Promise of Sanctification". It contained the following verses:

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<sup>1</sup> "Perseverance of the Saints", W.X, 285.

<sup>2</sup> L.V, 138.

<sup>3</sup> Op. cit. p.85.

"Thy sanctifying Spirit pour,  
 To quench my thirst and wash me clean;  
 Now, Father, let the gracious shower  
 Descend, and make me pure from sin.

Purge me from every sinful blot;  
 My idols all be cast aside;  
 Cleanse me from every evil thought,  
 From all the filth of self and pride.

Give me a new, a perfect heart,  
 From doubt, and fear, and sorrow free;  
 The mind which was in Christ impart,  
 And let my spirit cleave to Thee...

From all remaining filth within  
 Let me in Thee salvation have:  
 From actual and from inbred sin,  
 My ransom'd soul persist to save...

Now let me gain perfection's height!  
 Now let me into nothing fall!  
 Be less than nothing in my sight,  
 And feel that Christ is all in all".<sup>1</sup>

He refused to accept the idea that the believer must always be striving against sin to the end of his life, with no real victory over it:

"Tell me no more, ye carnal saints,  
 'The best must always strive with sin,  
 God will not answer all your wants,  
 God will not make you thoroughly clean,  
 Sin must have some unhallow'd part,  
 Christ cannot fill up all the heart".<sup>2</sup>

The same thought is expressed in the lines:

"But may we not strive  
 Yet never arrive  
 To be saints, or to live without sin, while alive?

No, no, never fear,  
 If we look for Him here,  
 But our uttermost Saviour in us shall appear".<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> S.S.II, 174-6. (P.W.II, 319f.)      <sup>2</sup> P.W.II, 162.

<sup>3</sup> P.W.V, 320.

There is, in these earlier poems, the same absolute confidence that God will do what He has promised, and deliver the believer from all sin.

"I without sin on earth shall live,  
Even I, the chief of sinners, I:  
My glory, Lord, to Thee I give,  
O God of truth, Thou canst not lie;  
What Thou hast said shall surely be:  
All things are possible to me".<sup>1</sup>

Like John, Charles makes frequent use of italics to emphasise the fact that perfection is offered to the believer here and now.

"Let others from themselves remove,  
And chase salvation far away;  
But Thou canst perfect me in love,  
Canst perfect me in love today".<sup>2</sup>

Again, like John, Charles never claims that he has achieved such perfection himself. Indeed it is noteworthy that all his hymns are praying for, not rejoicing in, perfection. But in the earlier hymns, at least, he looks with confidence to experiencing it in the not-too-distant future.

"His blood shall sanctify throughout  
My spirit, soul and body here".<sup>3</sup>

and:

"When Thou dost in our flesh appear,  
We shall the promise prove,  
Saved into all perfection here,  
Renew'd in sinless love".<sup>4</sup>

As time went on, however, Charles came to modify his views, and when in 1762 he published "Short Hymns on Select

<sup>1</sup> P.W.V, 300.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.V, 310.

<sup>3</sup> P.W.V, 308.

<sup>4</sup> P.W.V, 325.

Passages of Scripture" it was clear to all - and not least to John - that he had set himself against the concept of the instantaneous nature of perfection. In the Preface to the volumes he writes:

"God, having graciously laid His hand upon my body, and disabled me from the principal work of the ministry, has thereby given me an unexpected occasion of writing the following hymns.... Several of the hymns are intended to prove, and several to guard, the doctrine of Christian Perfection. I durst not publish one without the other. In the latter sort I use some severity; not against particular persons, but against Enthusiasts and Antinomians, who, by not living up to their profession, give abundant occasion to them that seek it, , and cause the truth to be evil spoken of".<sup>1</sup>

Wesley's doctrine of Perfection was, of course, particularly open to abuse, and it seems that about this time many were claiming perfection who gave little evidence of it in their lives. We have seen how John carefully examined and questioned all who made such claims. He tells, in his "Plain Account", how he received a letter from a friend, who sought to encourage him in this difficult situation, and who advised that those who had been deluded should be prayed for, and endeavour be made "to reclaim them in the spirit of meekness".<sup>2</sup> Charles, on the other hand, denounced and ridiculed the offenders without mercy.

But this, alone does not explain the differences which now grew up between the brothers on this doctrine. Charles was always much more sensitive and introspective

<sup>1</sup> P.W.IX,vii.

<sup>2</sup> W.XI,407.

than John, and there was in him a mystical strain of which John was always suspicious. The pulse of John's spiritual life seemed to beat steadily, whereas that of his brother could fluctuate greatly. Charles was coming to feel that such was the 'depth of his inbred sin', so far did he seem from Christian perfection that there seemed little possibility of his ever achieving it before death. He was afraid lest he, or any of the Methodist people, should be guilty of self-deception. Years earlier he had written:

"We would not our own souls deceive,  
Or fondly rest in grace begun;  
Thy wise, discerning unction give,  
And make us know as we are known;  
Search, and try out our hearts and reins,  
And show if sin in us remains".<sup>1</sup>

He still maintained, with John, that Christian perfection was attainable by simple faith, but, becoming increasingly aware of the exceeding sinfulness of sin, and of the proneness of the human heart to self-deception, he felt that sanctification must be a long and slow process.

J.E.Rattenbury has pointed out that the years preceding 1762 were years of trouble and sorrow for Charles; and this fact, together with the consequent deepening of his spiritual life, caused him to modify his views.

"The interval, 1749-62 was one of importance in Charles Wesley's spiritual career. It was a period in which he experienced much trouble; the deaths of children, the serious illness of his wife, disagreements with John, great sorrow of heart because of the increasing divergence of the itinerant preachers from the Church of England".<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> P.W.V, 314.

<sup>2</sup> "The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley's Hymns" pp.310-311.

Fears, sorrows, moods, sickness all contributed to the intensity of his spiritual struggle, and deepened and enriched his conception of perfection. And, as Rattenbury says, "the easy professions of perfection by persons whom he did not admire created a revolt in his mind against John's doctrine of 'Instantaneousness'".<sup>1</sup> He always felt that John was too credulous and gullible.

When John saw the 1762 volumes of hymns for the first time on publication, he added certain comments of his own, and altered certain lines and phrases to bring them more in line with his own teaching. But in a letter which John wrote to his brother he made it clear that he believed the real difference between them lay in the point of definition. Charles' conception of perfection had been deepened and enriched by his own experiences, as we have seen - so deepened and enriched that he could no longer believe in the possibility of its attainment in this life. With this John agreed; but his own definition was not so full or deep, and, therefore he maintained it was attainable here and now.

"That perfection which I believe, I can boldly preach, because I think I see five hundred witnesses of it. Of that perfection which you preach, you do not think you see any witnesses at all. Why, then, you must have far more courage than me, or you could not persist in preaching it. I wonder you do not in this article fall in plumb with Mr. Whitfield. For do not you as well as he ask, 'Where are the perfect ones?' I verily believe there are none upon earth, none dwelling in the body. I cordially assent

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p.311.

to his opinion that there is no such perfection here as you describe, at least, I never met with an instance of it; and I doubt I never shall. Therefore I still think to set perfection so high is effectually to renounce it".<sup>1</sup>

The following examples, with John Wesley's comments appended, bring out the differences between the brothers.

"'Tis not a sudden stroke of grace  
Destroys at once the cursed race,  
When first to Christ we come;  
But by degrees insensible  
The Lord shall all our sins expel,  
And utterly consume".<sup>2</sup>

Against this John Wesley writes: - "both suddenly and gradually".

Again:

"Yet till Thy time is fully come,  
I dare not hastily presume  
To snatch the perfect grace,  
But humbly patient to the end,  
And praying at Thy feet attend  
Till Thou unveil Thy face".<sup>3</sup>

John's comment is - "Now is the accepted time".

There is no brotherly comment on this last example, but the difference between the ideas of perfection as attainable in a moment, and as given only gradually is clearly marked.

"That heavenly principle within,  
Doth it at once its power exert,  
At once root out the seed of sin,  
And spread perfection through the heart?  
No; but a gradual life it sends  
Diffusive through the faithful soul,  
To actions, words and thoughts extends,  
And slowly sanctifies the whole".<sup>4</sup>

But Charles continued to preach perfection as attainable

<sup>1</sup> L.V., 20.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.IX, 96.

<sup>3</sup> P.W.IX, 396.

<sup>4</sup> P.W.X, 275.

through faith, and John sought understanding and agreement with his brother in a series of letters.<sup>1</sup> Apart from the disagreement as to the instantaneousness of the experience, the main difference between the brothers does seem to be in their definition. John, no more than Charles, believed that perfection could be fully realized in this life. Writing to Hetty Roe, John says:

"Without needing to use any other arguments, you have a clear proof in your own experience that our blessed Lord is both able and willing to give us always what He gives once; that there is no necessity of ever losing what we receive in the moment of justification or sanctification. But it is His will that all the light and love which we then receive should increase more and more unto the perfect day".<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, John Wesley's whole conception of the plan of salvation is, in Lindstrom's phrase, "an ascent by steps". For him salvation begins at Baptism with prevenient grace already at work. This grace continues to work in the heart until, by repentance and faith, man is justified. This is usually, though not invariably, thought of by Wesley as an instantaneous experience, and it delivers man from the guilt of sin. It is accompanied by regeneration, the giving of a new, clean heart, and deliverance from the power of sin. Then begins the process of sanctification, culminating in the instantaneous experience of entire sanctification or Christian perfection or perfect love. This delivers man from the root of sin, and it, too, is obtained by faith. Further

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. L.IV, 187-8 & V, 38-39.

<sup>2</sup> L.VII, 96.

growth in grace follows until death and the entrance to paradise. Here the process continues; for Wesley says:

"Can we reasonably doubt but that those who are now in paradise, in Abraham's bosom, will be continually ripening for heaven, will be perpetually holier and happier, till they are received into the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world".<sup>1</sup>

Glorification is reached in heaven, but Wesley can even conceive of progress continuing to all eternity.

"Can those who are perfect grow in grace? Undoubtedly they can; and that not only while they are in the body, but to all eternity".<sup>2</sup>

When we ask, as we must, what great truths Wesley was concerned to emphasise in this great doctrine, the answer is at least fourfold.

He is concerned to set no limit to the grace of God; for there can be no limit to what God can do with a heart fully dedicated to Him. Charles Wesley can sing:

"All things are possible to God,  
To Christ, the power of God in man,  
To me, when I am all renew'd,  
When I in Christ am born again,  
And witness, from all sin set free,  
All things are possible to me".<sup>3</sup>

The Christian life is not merely the story of God's repeated forgiveness for the same oft-repeated sins. God offers victory over sin. We must witness to God's enabling love as well as His forgiving love. We dare not say that in this life God cannot set the heart free from all sin, however impossible

<sup>1</sup> W.VII, 327-8.

<sup>2</sup> W.XI, 426.

<sup>3</sup> P.W.V, 301.

it may seem to us as we contemplate our own hearts, and the exceeding sinfulness of sin.

There are obviously great dangers in this doctrine, not the least the danger of spiritual pride, of Pharisaism. To claim perfection seems to imply presumption. But this is to forget that Wesley stresses that the experience is a free gift of God, appropriated solely through faith. It is as much all the work of God as is justification. And when all is of God there can be no room for pride or boasting or self-satisfaction. There is no thought of merit, of good works, or even of obedience; for, as Lindstrom says:

"Whereas gradual sanctification (i.e. from the moment of rebirth) was due to God's grace and man's obedience to it, instantaneous sanctification was considered exclusively God's own work".<sup>1</sup>

The great practical value of the doctrine is surely its constant reminder that the process of sanctification is a continuous one which must continue from conversion through death to the moment of glorification in heaven. True there are crises, stages on the journey; but the goal is absolute perfection, 'the measure of the fulness of the stature of Christ' - a goal which must lie for ever beyond this life. Eric Baker says, with truth,

"Perfection at any moment consists not in conformity to some absolute rule, but in the completeness of the response made at that moment to the love of God at whatever stage we may have arrived in our pilgrimage".<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Op.cit. p.134.

<sup>2</sup> "The Faith of a Methodist", p.43.

But the call is always to 'gain perfection's height'.

"Finish then Thy new creation,  
 Pure and spotless let us be;  
 Let us see Thy great salvation  
 Perfectly restored in Thee:  
 Changed from glory into glory,  
 Till in heaven we take our place,  
 Till we cast our crowns before Thee,<sup>1</sup>  
 Lost in wonder, love and praise".

So, wonderful as may be the experience of perfection given to men here and now, it is but a pledge and a foretaste of what God will give at the last. So, in his sermon on

"Satan's Devices" John Wesley writes:

"And if you thus 'taste of the good word, and of the powers of the world to come', you will not murmur against God, because you are not yet 'meet for the inheritance of the saints in light'. Instead of repining at your not being wholly delivered, you will praise God for thus far delivering you. You will magnify God for what He hath done, and take it as an earnest of what He will do. You will not fret against Him, because you are not yet renewed, but bless Him because you shall be; and because 'now is your salvation' from all sin 'nearer than when you' first 'believed'. Instead of uselessly tormenting yourself because the time is not fully come, you will calmly and quietly wait for it, knowing that it 'will come, and will not tarry'. You may therefore the more cheerfully endure, as yet, the burden of sin that still remains in you, because it will not always remain. Yet a little while, and it shall be clean gone. Only 'tarry thou the Lord's leisure': be strong, and 'He shall comfort thy heart': and put thou thy trust in the Lord!"<sup>2</sup>

Charles says the same thing in one of his greatest hymns:

<sup>1</sup> P.W.IV, 219-220.

<sup>2</sup> S.S.II, 203.

"Jesus, the First and Last,  
On Thee my soul is cast:  
Thou didst Thy work begin  
By blotting out my sin;  
Thou wilt the root remove,  
And perfect me in love.

Yet when the work is done,  
The work is but begun:  
Partaker of Thy grace,  
I long to see Thy face;  
The first I prove below,<sup>1</sup>  
The last I die to know".<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> P.W.XIII, 221.

CHAPTER FOUR.HOLY COMMUNION.

In 1745 there was published in Bristol a volume which bore as its title page - "Hymns on the Lord's Supper by John and Charles Wesley, Presbyters of the Church of England. With a Preface concerning the Christian Sacrament and Sacrifice, extracted from Dr. Brevint". In all the book contained one hundred and sixty six hymns, forming a commentary upon, or illustrations of, the points made by Dr. Brevint in his book. Brevint was born in Jersey and educated in France. He became a Fellow of Jesus College, Oxford in 1638, but left England to avoid persecution, and served as a pastor in Normandy and later as chaplain to Marshal Turenne. He returned to England in 1661, was appointed Dean of Lincoln in 1681, and died there fourteen years later. His work, "Christian Sacrament and Sacrifice", we are told, was written at the request of the Princesses of Turenne and Bouillon. After discussing "the importance of well understanding the nature of this sacrament" Brevint goes on to expound the meaning of the sacrament as a memorial of the sufferings and death of Christ, as a sign of present graces, as a pledge of future glory, and as a sacrifice. Charles Wesley groups his hymns under the same section headings; and it is section four - "The Sacrament ~~is~~ a Pledge of Heaven" with which we are concerned. For here again we find Wesley expressing his doctrine in terms of what we now call 'realized eschatology'.

Brevint had drawn the distinction between an 'earnest' and a 'pledge' - "an earnest may be allowed upon account, for part of that payment which is promised, whereas pledges are taken back".<sup>1</sup> Thus the Sacrament is itself a pledge, and will no longer be needed in heaven; but the "zeal, love and those degrees of holiness which God bestows in the use of His Sacraments will remain with us when we are in heaven".<sup>2</sup>

"Wherefor", says Brevint, "as the kingdom of Israel was once made over to David with the oil that Samuel poured upon his head; so the body and blood of Jesus is, in full value, and heaven with all its glory, in sure title, made over to true Christians by that bread and wine which they receive in the Holy Communion: the minister of Christ having as much power from his Master for doing this as any prophet ever had for what he did".<sup>3</sup>

Wesley was not concerned to maintain this distinction in his hymns. He uses the terms 'pledge' and 'earnest' interchangeably, as in:

"Title to eternal bliss  
 Here His precious death we find,  
 This the pledge, the earnest this,  
 Of the purchased joys behind:  
 Here He gives our souls a taste,  
 Heaven into our hearts He pours:  
 Still believe, and hold Him fast;  
 God and Christ and all is ours!"<sup>4</sup>

But he is concerned to expound the idea of anticipation and realization.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of these hymns is the sense of joy and thrill which they express. This was a characteristic note of the whole Evangelical Revival. The

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<sup>1</sup> P.W.III,199.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.III,199.

<sup>3</sup> P.W.III,199.

<sup>4</sup> P.W.III,292.

evangelical experience which had been granted to the first Methodists gave them something to sing and shout about, and 'rapture' was one of Charles Wesley's favourite words. "The positive rollicking character" of these hymns, says Rattenbury "was a novelty in Eucharistic worship". And he continues:

"Wesley, through the medium of Methodist experience, realized that eternal life is present as well as future; that the Communion of Saints between those who are here and those who are gone before is a fact; that heaven, of which no doubt he thought as having a local significance, was also realizable on earth".<sup>1</sup>

This is illustrated in the following hymn, where again the conception of 'earnest' is in evidence:

"O what a soul-transporting feast  
Doth this communion yeild!  
Remembering here Thy passion past,  
We with Thy love are fill'd.

Sure instrument of present grace  
Thy sacrament we find,  
Yet higher blessings it displays,  
And raptures still behind.

It bears us now on eagles' wings,  
If Thou the power impart,  
And Thee our glorious earnest brings  
Into our faithful heart.

O let us still the earnest feel,  
The' unutterable peace,  
This loving Spirit be the seal  
Of our eternal bliss".<sup>2</sup>

Indeed, says Wesley, there can be no greater joy this side of heaven than that experienced in the sacrament. Such is the fulness of the blessing received that 'our souls can hold no more'.

1 "The Eucharistic Hymns of Charles Wesley", p.63.

2 P.W.III,285.

"Whither should our full souls aspire,  
At this transporting feast?  
They never can on earth be higher,  
Or more completely blest.

Our cup of blessing from above  
Delightfully runs o'er,  
Till from these bodies they remove  
Our souls can hold no more".<sup>1</sup>

One of the blessings of the Sacrament is that it enables us to see and to anticipate by faith the life of heaven. The Supper of the Lord leads us on in thought and imagination - as in the teaching of Jesus Himself - to the great Marriage Feast of the Lamb.

"Come, let us join with one accord  
Who share the supper of the Lord,  
Our Lord and Master's praise to sing;  
Nourish'd on earth with living bread,  
We now are at His table fed,  
But wait to see our heavenly King;  
To see the great Invisible  
Without a sacramental veil,  
With all His robes of glory on,  
In rapturous joy and love and praise  
Him to behold with open face,  
High on His everlasting throne!

The wine which doth His passion show,  
We soon with Him shall drink it new  
In yonder dazzling courts above;  
Admitted to the heavenly feast,  
We shall His choicest blessings taste,  
And banquet on His richest love.  
We soon the midnight cry shall hear,  
Arise, and meet the Bridegroom near,  
The marriage of the Lamb is come;  
Attended by His heavenly friends,  
The glorious King of saints descends  
To take His bride in triumph home".<sup>2</sup>

Although there is no mention of Holy Communion in the

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<sup>1</sup> P.W.III, 289.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.III, 283-4.

following great hymn, we are reminded of the doctrine of the Communion of Saints; and again, with the eye of faith, we see the glory of the life of heaven. The hymn is no doubt inspired by the words of the Communion Office: "Therefore, with Angels and Archangels, and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify Thy glorious Name".

"Lift your eyes of faith, and see  
 Saints and angels join'd in one,  
 What a countless company  
 Stands before yon dazzling throne!  
 Each before his Saviour stands,  
 All in milk-white robes array'd;  
 Palms they carry in their hands,  
 Crowns of glory on their head.

Saints begin the endless song,  
 Cry aloud, in heavenly lays,  
 Glory doth to God belong,  
 God the glorious Saviour praise;  
 All from Him salvation came,  
 Him who reigns enthroned on high;  
 Glory to the bleeding Lamb  
 Let the morning stars reply.

Angel-powers the throne surround,  
 Next the saints in glory they;  
 Lull'd with the transporting sound,  
 They their silent homage pay;  
 Prostrate on their face before  
 God and His Messiah fall,  
 Then in hymns of praise adore,  
 Shout the Lamb that died for all.

Be it so! they all reply;  
 Him let all our orders praise,  
 Him that did for sinners die,  
 Saviour of the favour'd race;  
 Render we our God His right,  
 Glory, wisdom, thanks and power,  
 Honour, majesty and might;  
 Praise Him, praise Him evermore!" <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> P.W.III, 293-4.

Another hymn gives a picture of the hosts of heaven in terms of Revelation 7,9-17; having passed through the sufferings, trials and persecutions of this life, and emerged 'more than conquerors at last', they are fed continually by the Lamb.<sup>1</sup>

St. Paul not only linked the Sacrament with the great Marriage Feast of the Lamb, but also with the Second Coming of Christ, which will inaugurate the Feast. "For as often as ye eat this bread and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death till He come".<sup>2</sup> Charles Wesley, too, looks forward to that great day of Visitation and Judgment.

"Where shall this memorial end?  
Thither let our souls ascend,  
Live on earth to heaven restored,  
Wait the coming of our Lord....

He whom we remember here,  
Christ shall in the clouds appear;  
Manifest to every eye,  
We shall soon behold Him nigh.

Faith ascends the mountain's height,  
Now enjoys the pompous sight,  
Antedates the final doom,  
See the Judge in glory come".<sup>3</sup>

Though the Last Day will be a day of judgment and doom the believer has no fear. He looks forward with confidence and glad anticipation to 'the dreadful, joyful day'.

"Then let us still in hope rejoice,  
And listen for the archangel's voice  
Loud echoing to the trump of God,  
Haste to the dreadful, joyful day,  
When heaven and earth shall flee away,  
By all-devouring flames destroy'd".<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> P.W.III,294-5.

<sup>2</sup> I. Corinthians 11,26.

<sup>3</sup> P.W.III,287-8.

<sup>4</sup> P.W.III,284.

But the Sacrament not only enables us to see by faith the vision of heaven, and to anticipate the Final Triumph of Christ. As in the experiences of Justification and Sanctification, so around the Table of the Lord there is given an actual foretaste of the life of heaven.

"By faith and hope already there,  
Even now the marriage-feast we share,  
Even now we by the Lamb are fed".<sup>1</sup>

And again:

"How glorious is the life above,  
Which in this ordinance we taste;  
That fulness of celestial love,  
That joy which shall for ever last!"<sup>2</sup>

(where Wesley himself italicises the word 'taste').

Indeed, such is the joy and rapture experienced by the believer that he feels heaven has already begun for him.

"Here He gives our souls a taste,  
Heaven into our hearts He pours:  
Still believe, and hold Him fast;  
God and Christ and all is ours!"<sup>3</sup>

And -

"Happy the souls to Jesus join'd,  
And saved by grace alone;  
Walking in all Thy ways we find  
Our heaven on earth begun".<sup>4</sup>

As we have said, Wesley uses the words of Brevint - 'earnest' and 'pledge' - without the distinction which Brevint tries to make between them. It is not that Wesley owes the words to Brevint; having found them in the New Testament, he absorbs them into his poetic vocabulary, and they occur again and again in hymns

<sup>1</sup> P.W.III,285.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.III,290.

<sup>3</sup> P.W.III,292.

<sup>4</sup> P.W.III,286.

other than those on the Lord's Supper. To them he adds such characteristic words as 'foretaste', 'token', 'antedate' and 'type'. Apart from hymns already quoted we may add:

"We feel the earnest in our hearts  
Of our eternal rest".<sup>1</sup>

"Type of the heavenly marriage-feast,  
Pledge of our everlasting rest".<sup>2</sup>

"He hallow'd the cup Which now we receive,  
The pledge of our hope With Jesus to live,  
(Where sorrow and sadness Shall never be found,)  
With glory and gladness Eternally crown'd".<sup>3</sup>

This was the experience, not only of Wesley himself, but of many of the early Methodists. In a letter to his wife Wesley writes:

"In the sacrament, Mr. Thomson cried to me, 'This is heaven! I could not bear any more'".<sup>4</sup>

At a time when in the Anglican Church the Sacrament was celebrated infrequently and attended poorly, the Methodists flocked in their hundreds to share in its unbelievable joy and triumph.

Yet, though the blessing of the Sacrament filled the soul to overflowing, and the ecstasy was such that men could scarcely bear, it was only a foretaste of what they believed the future held in store for them. Wonderful and thrilling as was the present experience of Wesley and his followers, they were in no doubt at all but that the full life of heaven was more wonderful than they could imagine. In other words, their eschatology was not by any means fully realized here and now, and

<sup>1</sup> P.W.III, 287.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.III, 295.

<sup>3</sup> P.W.III, 286.

<sup>4</sup> G.W.J. II, 179.

they longed for the final consummation in heaven. The present experience guaranteed the bliss that was to come.

"Yet still an higher seat  
We in Thy kingdom claim,  
Who here begin by faith to eat  
The supper of the Lamb:

That glorious heavenly prize  
We surely shall attain,  
And in the palace of the skies  
With Thee for ever reign".<sup>1</sup>

Charles Wesley tries again and again to describe the glory that awaits the believer, but each time he has to confess that it is beyond description. The sacramental feast is wonderful and joyous enough, but it is as nothing compared with the heavenly feast.

"Sure pledge of ecstasies unknown  
Shall this Divine communion be;  
The ray shall rise into a sun,  
The drop shall swell into a sea".<sup>2</sup>

Always Wesley looks forward to this final feast:

"To heaven the mystic banquet leads;  
Let us to heaven ascend,  
And bear this joy upon our heads  
Till it in glory ends.

Till all who truly join in this,  
The marriage supper share,  
Enter into their Master's bliss,  
And feast for ever there".<sup>3</sup>

While, in a sense, Christ fills our souls in the Sacrament, yet there remains a hunger which only heaven can fill.

"But if Christ the bread impart,  
The grace to each divide,  
Every true believer's heart  
Is fill'd and satisfied:

<sup>1</sup> P.W.III, 287.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.III, 290.

<sup>3</sup> P.W.III, 289.

Fill'd, we hunger still, for love  
 For larger tastes of heavenly grace,  
 Till we share the feast above,  
 The sight of Jesus' face".<sup>1</sup>

So, in the Sacrament, heaven and earth are joined. The believer finds his heaven begun on earth, and by faith he is transported to heaven:

"Gather'd to the well-known sign,  
 We our elder brethren join,  
 Swiftly to our Lord fly up,  
 Hail Him on the mountain-top".<sup>2</sup>

As we eat of the bread and drink of the wine we feel our oneness with all those who have gone on before, and a link is forged between the Church militant here upon earth, and the Church triumphant in heaven. This could not be more perfectly or more simply expressed than in the short hymn:

"Happy the souls to Jesus join'd,  
 And saved by grace alone;  
 Walking in all Thy ways we find  
 Our heaven on earth begun.

The church triumphant in Thy love  
 Their mighty joys we know;  
 They sing the Lamb in hymns above,  
 And we in hymns below.

Thee in Thy glorious realm they praise,  
 And bow before Thy throne;  
 We in the kingdom of Thy grace,  
 The kingdoms are but one.

The holy to the holiest leads,  
 From hence our spirits rise,  
 And he that in Thy statutes treads  
 Shall meet Thee in the skies".<sup>3</sup>

Present and future, heaven and earth, the saints above and the saints below, the holy and the holiest, the believer and his

<sup>1</sup> P.W.X, 500.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.III, 288.

<sup>3</sup> P.W.III, 286-7.

Christ are joined together.

There is another aspect of the teaching of Charles Wesley on the Sacrament which illustrates further his conception of realized eschatology. He sees in the Sacrament the supreme opportunity of claiming and appropriating all the blessings of Christ's sacrifice. Again, there is an echo of the Communion Office - "that by the merits and death of Thy Son Jesus Christ, and through faith in Him, we and all Thy whole Church may obtain remission of our sins, and all other benefits of His passion" - in the lines:

"All the benefits receive  
Which His passion did procure;  
Pardon'd by His grace we live,  
Grace which makes salvation sure".<sup>1</sup>

We 'do this in remembrance of Him', and the very act of remembering His death recalls His great gifts to us:

"And can we call to mind  
The Lamb for sinners slain,  
And not expect to find  
What He for us did gain,  
What God to us in Him hath given,  
Pardon, and holiness and heaven?"<sup>2</sup>

The same thought is expressed in the verse:

"Thy sacrifice without the gate  
Once offer'd up we call to mind,  
And humbly at Thy altar wait  
Our interest in Thy death to find;  
We thirst to drink Thy precious blood,  
We languish in Thy wounds to rest,  
And hunger for immortal food,  
And long on all Thy love to feast".<sup>3</sup>

As we contemplate the cross of Christ in the Sacrament, as the

<sup>1</sup> P.W.III, 292.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.III, 297.

<sup>3</sup> P.W.III, 298.

bread is broken and the wine outpoured, so our thirst is quenched in His redeeming blood, and our hunger is satisfied by His spiritual food.

Finally Charles Wesley emphasises, what is of supreme importance to him, the grace which accompanies the sacred bread and wine, and applies the 'benefits of His passion':

"O glorious instrument Divine,  
Which blessings to our souls conveys,  
Brings with the hallow'd bread and wine  
His strengthening and refreshing grace,  
Presents His bleeding sacrifice,  
His all-reviving death applies!"<sup>1</sup>

We have discussed these hymns on the Lord's Supper in detail because we believe that here is one of Wesley's unique contributions to the theology of the Sacrament. Little wonder that the two brothers laid such stress upon this ordinance, or that by their own personal example of frequent celebration, they led a revival in sacramental religion. Here the drama of salvation is enacted. Here the whole Gospel of Christ is proclaimed (John Wesley insisted that the Sacrament was a converting as well as a confirming ordinance). Here we share in the marriage-feast of the Lamb. Here the work of Christ is offered for our appropriation through grace. Here we feel our oneness with the saints of heaven. Here we taste the life of the world to come.

Modern theologians have discovered, what Wesley knew - the eschatological nature of the Sacrament. C.H.Dodd has traced

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<sup>1</sup> P.W.III, 300.

it for us in the pages of the New Testament. He says:

"The Eucharist was from the beginning an eschatological sacrament, an anticipation of that heavenly banquet which was the august and mysterious symbol of the perfection of life in the Age to Come..... Past, present and future are indissolubly united in the sacrament. It may be regarded as a dramatization of the advent of the Lord, which is at once His remembered coming in humiliation and His desired coming in glory, both realized in His true presence in the Sacrament".<sup>1</sup>

D.M.Baillie has discussed its significance in "The Theology of the Sacraments"<sup>2</sup>, and quotes from Edmund Schlink and

Principal D.S.Cairns. Schlink writes:

"In the Lord's supper we already share here on earth in that future glory. In the Lord's supper we are present at the death of Christ, and at His return, at His first and second advent".<sup>3</sup>

In a letter Cairns says:

"In the sacrament we are really rehearsing or rather anticipating the day when the whole human race will be home, gathered round the Father's table, after Iliads and Odysseys yet to be! Retrospect and prophecy is one; that is what the sacrament is to me, with renewal of the covenant face to face".<sup>4</sup>

These are truths Wesley knew and proclaimed over two hundred years ago. They are expressed in that joyous hymn, of which Rattenbury says, "it throbs with expectation of the heavenly feast of which the Sacrament is both an earnest and pledge, and expresses joyously the triumphant spirit of the Evangelical Revival".<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments", pp. 232-4  
(See also his "History and the Gospel", pp.163-5).

<sup>2</sup> pp.67f and pp.105f.

<sup>3</sup> "Intercommunion" (edited by Donald Baillie and John Marsh)  
p.296, quoted Baillie p.105.

<sup>4</sup> "David Cairns: An Autobiography" p.201, quoted Baillie p.107.

<sup>5</sup> "The Eucharistic Hymns of Charles Wesley" p.61.

"Ah, tell us no more  
 The spirit and power  
 Of Jesus our God  
 Is not to be found in this life-giving food!....

With bread from above,  
 With comfort and love  
 Our spirit He fills  
 And all His unspeakable goodness reveals.

O that all men would haste  
 To the spiritual feast,  
 At Jesus's word  
Do this, and be fed with the love of our Lord!....

Bring near the glad day  
 When all shall obey  
 Thy dying request,  
 And eat of Thy supper, and lean on Thy breast.....

Then, then let us see  
 Thy glory, and be  
 Caught up in the air,  
 This heavenly supper in heaven to share".<sup>1</sup>

Lecky, the historian of the eighteenth century claimed that one of the main reasons why Britain did not suffer a revolution similar to that of France, was the Evangelical Revival - the preaching and teaching of the Wesleys. And there have been those who have said that they achieved this end by promising their hearers the rewards of heaven, by painting such glowing pictures of the life after death that men forgot the pains and miseries of this life. It is true that the Wesleys did preach - and sing - about the bliss and peace of heaven, but not to the exclusion of a word about this world. Theirs was no gospel concerned exclusively with heaven. They had something to offer men and

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<sup>1</sup> P.W.III, 282-3.

women here and now; justification, forgiveness, rebirth, Christian perfection, a holy feast, 'and all other benefits of His passion'. They offered men and women such a life of joy and victory and assurance here on earth as could only be described as a foretaste of heaven. In other words, the life of the early Methodists, like the life of the early Church, was "not merely an eschatological hope, but an eschatological experience"<sup>1</sup>; it was 'heaven begun below'. And so, because of their experience here and now, because of what they had already 'felt and seen', they could look forward with confidence and without fear to death and whatever lay beyond.

To Wesley's teaching about death, and to the eschatological events we must now turn.

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<sup>1</sup> Rattenbury, "The Eucharistic Hymns of Charles Wesley", p.67.

PART II.

FINAL SALVATION.

CHAPTER FIVE.DEATH AND RESURRECTION.

When in 1735 John Wesley left the security of his College rooms in Oxford, and set sail, with his brother and two friends, Benjamin Ingham and Charles Delamotte, together with a company of emigrants, for the newly-founded colony of Georgia, little did he know that the following months were to be for him a period of self-revelation. He was to discover many surprising, frightening and shattering things about himself, and be brought to the very brink of despair. And one of the earliest discoveries he made, during the Atlantic voyage, was that he was afraid to die. Little wonder that he was afraid. The ship in which he made the journey to North America, the *Simmonds*, was tiny and fragile when compared with a modern ocean liner, and the journey was to take three months. During that time the little ship encountered several terrifying storms, storms which brought home to Wesley most forcibly his fear of death.

In his *Journal* Wesley gives vivid descriptions of the storms, and, with characteristic honesty, describes his own feelings during them. In one the sea broke over the *Simmonds* from stem to stern, and smashed the windows of the state cabin. Eventually Wesley lay down and fell asleep,

"though", he says "very uncertain whether I should awake alive, and much ashamed of my unwillingness to die. Oh

how pure in heart must he be who would rejoice to appear before God at a moment's warning!"<sup>1</sup>

Six days later he writes:

"In the evening another storm began. In the morning it increased so that they were forced to let the ship drive. I could not but say to myself, 'How is it that thou hast no faith?', being still unwilling to die".<sup>2</sup>

What surprised and distressed Wesley most was not his own fear of death, but the fact that a small company of Moravians were able to show no signs of fear. A third storm almost engulfed the ship. The wind roared, the mountainous waves battered the ship and the sea broke over, splitting the mainsail and pouring in between the decks.

"A terrible screaming began among the English. The Germans looked up, and without intermission calmly sang on. I asked one of them afterwards, 'Was you not afraid?' He answered, 'I thank God, no'. I asked, 'But were not your women and children afraid?' He replied mildly, 'No; our women and children are not afraid to die'".<sup>3</sup>

It was here that Wesley discovered his own lack of faith.

Although he gave no systematic teaching on the subject, John Wesley was greatly concerned with death throughout his long life. After his Aldersgate Street experience he had no fear of death, but from his early years he was firmly convinced that he would not live long. Several times he was on the point of death, but he made swift and miraculous recoveries. More tells us that:

"he thought much at this time (March, 1739) on death; and as his constitution seemed to him not likely to

<sup>1</sup> J.I., 138.

<sup>2</sup> J.I., 140.

<sup>3</sup> J.I., 142-3.

support itself long under the great and continual labours he was engaged in, he judged it probable that his course was nearly finished. At this time those fine lines of his friend, Mr. Gambold, was almost continually in his mind:

E'er long, when Sov'reign wisdom wills,  
 My soul an unknown path shall tread,  
 And strangely leave, who strangely fills  
 This fframe, and waft me to the dead.  
 Oh, what is death? 'Tis life's last shore,  
 Where vanities are vain no more;  
 Where all pursuits their goal obtain,  
 And life is all retouched again;  
 Where, in their bright results, shall rise  
 Thoughts, virtues, friendships, griefs and joys".<sup>1</sup>

Wesley records in his Journal a number of occasions when he preached on the subject of death. For instance, on September 6th, 1749 he writes:

"At Alnwick, likewise, I stood in the market-place in the evening, and exhorted a numerous congregation to be always ready for death, for judgment, for heaven. I felt what I spoke; as I believe did most that were present, both then and in the morning, while I besought them to 'present' themselves' a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God".<sup>2</sup>

Twenty three years later he writes:

"Resolving not to shoot over their heads, as I had done the day before, I spoke strongly of death and judgment, heaven and hell. This they seemed to comprehend; and there was no more laughing among them, or talking with each other; but all were quietly and deeply attentive".<sup>3</sup>

In faithfulness to the Scriptures he is concerned to proclaim the inevitability of death, to remind people of their slender hold upon life, and to warn them of the eternal consequences of dying unrepentant. He is deeply conscious of his own responsibilities in this matter, as

<sup>1</sup> More (Vol.I.p.438) - quoted as note, J.II,157.

<sup>2</sup> J.III,428.

<sup>3</sup> J.V,455.

is seen in the following extract from a letter to Sir James Lowther:

"The substance of what I took the liberty to mention to you this morning was: You are on the borders of the grave, as well as I; shortly we must both appear before God. When it seemed to me, some months since, that my life was near an end, I was troubled that I had not dealt plainly with you. This you will permit me to do now, without any reserve, in the fear and in the presence of God... Upon the whole, I must once more earnestly entreat you to consider yourself and God and eternity. (i) As to yourself, you are not the proprietor of anything - no, not of one shilling in the world. You are only a steward of what another entrusts you with, to be laid out not according to your will, but His. And what would you think of your steward if he laid out what is called your money according to his own will and pleasure? (ii) Is not God the sole proprietor of all things? And are you not to give account to Him for every part of His goods? And oh how dreadful an account, if you have expended any part of them not according to His will, but your own! (iii) Is not death at hand? And are not you and I just stepping into eternity? Are we not just going to appear in the presence of God, and that naked of all worldly goods? Will you then rejoice in the money you have left behind you? Or in that you have given to support a family, as it is called - that is, in truth, to support the pride and vanity and luxury which you have yourselves despised all your life long? O sir, I beseech you, for the sake of God, for the sake of your own immortal soul, examine yourself whether you do not love money. If so, you cannot love God. And if we die without the fear of God, what remains? Only to be banished from Him for ever and ever!"<sup>1</sup>

Yet, even from this quotation, it is clear that Wesley uses the motive of the fear of death only sparingly. Indeed, he had himself discovered that even when men, in the presence or under the threat of death, are afraid, the fear does not last long. During the same storm at sea described earlier, most of the passengers had

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<sup>1</sup> L.III, 120, 122.

shared Wesley's fear. But when the storm abated, and he urged them to give thanks to God, they denied that they had been in any danger at all!

"I could not have believed", he writes "that so little good would have been done by the terror they were in before. But for the future I will never believe them to obey from fear who are dead to the motives of love".<sup>1</sup>

Indeed, he goes so far as to say "many burials and some deaths I have been present at, but I never yet knew a soul converted by the sight of either".<sup>2</sup>

Yet Wesley believed that the sight of death - the death of a Christian, with characteristic courage and cheerfulness and trust - could have a profound, and saving, effect upon unbelievers. In one letter he writes:

"The last scene of life in dying believers is of great use to those who are about them. Here we see the reality of religion and of things eternal; and nothing has a greater tendency to solemnize the soul and make and keep it dead to all below".<sup>3</sup>

In another he suggests that not only a Christian death, but a Christian funeral, can have lasting good on those who are present.

"Right precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints; and much good is usually done at their funerals. You do well to improve all those opportunities".<sup>4</sup>

He proudly boasted that the Methodists knew well how to die; and one can almost hear them singing with fervour as the end

<sup>1</sup> J.I.,139.

<sup>2</sup> J.I.,152.

<sup>3</sup> L.V.,96.

<sup>4</sup> L.VI.,259.

draws near, the words of brother Charles:

"Jesus, in Thy great name I go,  
To conquer death, my final foe,  
And when I quit this cumbrous clay,  
And soar on angels' wings away,  
My soul the second death defies,  
And reigns eternal in the skies".<sup>1</sup>

Wesley was concerned to discover what exactly happened at death. Indeed, with his usual, insatiable curiosity and his interest in all matters medical, he discussed the question as to what particular moment a man may be said to have died. The following quotation sounds very modern; in fact, in medical circles today the question raised here is still being discussed.

"What is (consanguineus somni) death? When do we die? You say, 'When the soul leaves the body'. This cannot be denied. But my question is, When does the soul leave the body? When we cease to breathe, according to the maxim, Nullus spiritus, nulla vita? This will not hold; for many have revived after respiration was utterly ceased. When the circulation of the blood stops? Nay, neither will this hold; for many have recovered after the pulse was quite gone. When the vital warmth ceases, and the juices lose their fluidity? Even this is not a certain mark; for some have revived after the body was quite cold and stiff; a case not uncommon in Sweden. But what token then can we surely know? It seems, none such can be found. God knows when the spirit returns to Him; and the spirit itself; but none that dwells in a body".<sup>2</sup>

But Wesley is more concerned with what happens at death. For him it means the immediate entrance into eternity. "This, the eternal world, commences at death, the death of every individual person. The moment the breath of a man

<sup>1</sup> P.W.XIII, 223-4.

<sup>2</sup> "Remarks on the Limits of Human Knowledge", W.XIII, 458.

goeth forth, he is an inhabitant of eternity".<sup>1</sup>

He maintains that neither the body nor the soul of any man is destroyed at death, though, he says, many spirits suffering the tortures of the damned must long passionately for extinction. In the sermon on "Eternity" he says:

"It is a vain thought which some have entertained, that death will put an end to the soul as well as the body: It will put an end to neither the one nor the other; it will only alter the manner of their existence. But when the body 'returns to the dust as it was, the spirit will return to God that gave it'. Therefore, at the moment of death, it must be unspeakably happy, or unspeakably miserable: and that misery will never end".<sup>2</sup>

Wesley rejects, on the one hand, the doctrine of Purgatory, and, on the other, the idea that the souls of the departed go at once to Heaven or Hell. Immediately at death, he claimed, all spirits pass to Hades, a place which bears little resemblance to the Sheol of the Old Testament. Sheol was a place of infinite sadness, where the 'shades' lived a pale, colourless half-life which was no life, a life where there was no remembrance, no fellowship, no God. But the life of Hades, according to Wesley, was a life of consciousness, of activity, and, for the righteous, a life of fellowship with God. There were two departments in Hades, Paradise, the abode of the blessed spirits, and the 'unhappy divisions' of Hades, to

<sup>1</sup> Sermon on "The Discoveries of Faith", W.VII,233.

<sup>2</sup> W.VI,195.

which the unholy spirits went. We are given a definition of Paradise in the "Notes on the New Testament" - "The seat of happy spirits in their separate state, between death and the resurrection".<sup>1</sup>

Wesley's thoughts on the time between death and the Day of Resurrection and Final Judgment are carefully worked out in his sermons on "The Rich Man and Lazarus" and "On Faith". He says:

"It is indeed very generally supposed that the souls of good men, as ~~XXXXX~~ soon as they are discharged from the body, go directly to heaven; but this opinion has not the least foundation in the oracles of God: On the contrary, our Lord says to Mary after the resurrection, 'Touch Me not; for I am not yet ascended to My Father' in heaven. But He had been in paradise, according to His promise to the penitent thief: 'This day shalt thou be with Me in paradise'. Hence it is plain, that paradise is not heaven. It is indeed (if we may be allowed the expression) the ante-chamber of heaven, where the souls of the righteous remain till, after the general judgment, they are received into glory".<sup>2</sup>

And how will the inhabitants of the two divisions of Hades spend their time until the Final Judgment? The souls of the righteous will be "able to traverse the whole universe in the twinkling of an eye, either to execute the divine commands, or to contemplate the works of God".<sup>3</sup> They will increase in knowledge and wisdom as they survey God's works in creation and providence, and "His manifold wisdom in the Church". They will be able to hold fellowship with the illustrious dead of ancient days, with the saints

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<sup>1</sup> N.N.T. (II. Corinthians 12,4).

<sup>2</sup> W.VII, 246.

<sup>3</sup> W.VII, 331.

of all nations and all ages, with the noble army of martyrs, and with their own friends and relations. They will be, permitted, with the angels, to minister to those whom they have left behind, "sometimes by counteracting wicked spirits whom we cannot resist, because we cannot see them; sometimes by preventing our being hurt by men or beasts or inanimate creatures".<sup>1</sup> Above all they "will be continually ripening for heaven",<sup>2</sup> advancing

"in holiness; in the whole image of God, wherein they were created; in the love of God and man; gratitude to their Creator and benevolence to all their fellow-creatures".<sup>3</sup>

They will be "perpetually holier and happier till they are received into 'the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world'".<sup>4</sup>

And what of the unholy spirits?

"They will probably be employed" says Wesley "by their bad masters, in advancing his infernal kingdom, and in doing all the mischief that lies in their power, to the poor, feeble children of men".<sup>5</sup>

Wesley lets his imagination run as he contemplates the mischief these human, unholy spirits can do, in cooperation with the evil angels!

"It is not improbable he (God) may suffer Satan to employ them, as he does his own angels, in inflicting death, or evils of various kinds, on the men that know not God: For this end they may raise storms by sea or land; they may shoot meteors through the air; they may occasion earthquakes; and in numberless ways, afflict those whom they are not suffered to destroy. Where they

<sup>1</sup> W.VII, 333.

<sup>2</sup> W.VII, 328.

<sup>3</sup> W.VII, 332.

<sup>4</sup> W.VII, 328.

<sup>5</sup> W.VII, 234.

are not permitted to take away life, they may inflict various diseases; and many of these, which we judge to be natural, are undoubtedly diabolical.... may not some of these evil spirits be likewise employed, in conjunction with evil angels, in tempting wicked men to sin, and in procuring occasions for them? yea, and in tempting good men to sin, even after they have escaped the corruption that is in the world?"<sup>1</sup>

There will certainly be no room for idleness in Hades!

John Wesley will have nothing to do with 'the Romish purgatory'. His main objection to the doctrine is that it is not scriptural, and "if transubstantiation and purgatory, etc. are not delivered in Scripture, they cannot be doctrines of faith".<sup>2</sup> Nor is the doctrine necessary. For if a man is justified in this world he is no longer under condemnation, and consequently he can have nothing laid to his charge in the next world. No suffering or torment inflicted on the soul, and no merit or good works transferred from another, can possibly expiate sin.

"No suffering, but that of Christ, has any power to expiate sin; and no fire, but that of love, can purify the soul either in time or in eternity".<sup>3</sup>

Wesley goes back again to Christ's reply to the penitent thief. He says:

"Our Lord said to the penitent thief upon the cross, 'Today shalt thou be with me in paradise'. Now, if a purgation in another world were necessary for any, he that did not repent and believe till the last hour of his life might well be supposed to need it; and consequently ought to have been sent to purgatory, not to paradise".<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> W.VII, 330.

<sup>2</sup> W.X, 91.

<sup>3</sup> W.VII, 247.

<sup>4</sup> "Popery Calmly Considered", W.X, 144-5.

In one of his funeral hymns Charles Wesley writes:

"He own'd the soul so dearly loved,  
And cutting short His work of grace,  
Her sins insensibly removed,  
Made meet at once to see His face".<sup>1</sup>

So John, writing to George Blackall, says:

"St. Paul teaches that it is in heaven we are to be joined with 'the spirits of just men made perfect', in such a sense as we cannot be on earth or even in paradise. In paradise the souls of good men rest from their labours and are with Christ from death to the resurrection. This bears no resemblance at all to the Popish purgatory, wherein wicked men are supposed to be tormented in purging fire till they are sufficiently purified to have a place in heaven. But we believe (as did the ancient Church) that none suffer after death but those who suffer eternally. We believe that we are to be here saved from sin and enabled to love God with all our heart".<sup>2</sup>

In his opposition to the doctrine of purgatory John Wesley was true to Reformation theology. He saw - as Calvin had seen - that the fundamental reason for its rejection was not that it is not found in scripture, but that it is positively against the testimony of scripture. For it is contrary to the doctrine of Justification by Faith, and makes the Cross of Christ of none effect. So Calvin wrote:

"We are bound, therefore, to raise our voice to its highest pitch, and cry aloud that purgatory is a deadly device of Satan; and it makes void the cross of Christ; that it offers intolerable insult to the divine mercy; that it undermines and overthrows our faith. For what is this purgatory but the satisfaction for sin paid after death by the souls of the dead? Hence when this idea of satisfaction is refuted, purgatory itself is forthwith completely overturned".<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> P.W.VI, 249.

<sup>2</sup> L.VII, 168.

<sup>3</sup> "Institutes", Book III, Chapter 5, Section 6.

Canon' Fison's exposition of the thought of the Reformers on this matter is as true for Wesley as for Calvin.

"Anyone who had caught a glimpse of the gracious divine initiative as the secret not only of the beginning of the Christian life but also of its continuation and end as well could not countenance for one moment a doctrine of justification by faith which applied at the beginning only to be reversed by a doctrine of sanctification by works, in purgatory if not on earth, which applied at the end.... It seemed to the Reformers to be a complete reversal in the hereafter of the rediscovered secret of the ways of God with man here and now".<sup>1</sup>

Here, too, Wesley's doctrine of Christian Perfection is relevant. Some Protestant theologians have felt that no Christian is ready to pass at once into the presence of God. Maldwyn Hughes has said that "not all Christians can be held to be ready for the Blessed Life",<sup>2</sup> and has concluded from this that there must be "an Intermediate State between death and judgment". But, as we have seen, John Wesley taught that the Christian could and should experience a large measure of sanctification in this life, and that further growing in grace would continue in paradise and throughout all eternity. This, surely, is sufficient.

Wesley's teaching on the intermediate state, while at times highly imaginative, is in no sense whatever a purgatory. Hades is the place where all men's spirits go on death, to await the General Resurrection, when they will be clothed with the spiritual body. Again it would seem that

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<sup>1</sup> "The Christian Hope" , p.76.

<sup>2</sup> "Christian Foundations", p.223.

he is in line with Reformation teaching.

"Calvin teaches that man's soul, which is immortal in essence, does not perish nor sleep in death, but in so far as it is born again in Christ already enjoys heavenly peace in the expectation of the resurrection of the body, which will bring it consummate blessedness; but the souls of the impious will be held imprisoned in terrible expectation of their final condemnation".<sup>1</sup>

Modern theologians seem to be divided on this point. Both Barth<sup>2</sup> and Brunner<sup>3</sup> would argue that when a man dies he is no longer in time, but in eternity, and that therefore any talk about an intermediate time between death and resurrection is irrelevant. Cullmann, on the other hand, argues that the dead are still in time - "otherwise the problem of I Thessalonians 4,13f would have no meaning".<sup>4</sup> The dead, like the living, look for the Lord's appearing, wait for the Final Day of Resurrection and Judgment". For "the New Testament knows nothing of an immediate resurrection of the body that will occur for each one immediately after his death".<sup>5</sup> Cullmann lists the various New Testament phrases used to describe the intermediate state - "with Christ", "in paradise", "in Abraham's bosom", "under the altar", and, most usual for Paul, "asleep". And he seeks to explain the paradox.

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<sup>1</sup> Quistorp, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things", p.81.

<sup>2</sup> Dogmatics, III, 2. (Cf. Para 47. Sect. 1, "Jesus the Lord of Time", pp.437 ff. and Sect. 5, "Ending Time", pp.587ff.)

<sup>3</sup> "Eternal Hope", pp.153-4.

<sup>4</sup> "Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?" p.49.

<sup>5</sup> "Christ and Time", p.237.

"The alleged contradiction between the passages that speak of the resurrection of the body at the end, and those that reckon with a 'being with Christ' immediately after the individual death of each Christian is resolved as soon as one has recognised that the 'being with Christ' does not yet signify resurrection of the body, but does signify a closer connection with Christ which is already effected through the resurrection power of the Holy Spirit".<sup>1</sup>

This is further explained in his later book:

"It is precisely those images used in the New Testament to describe the condition of the dead in Christ which prove that even now, in this interim state of the dead, the Resurrection of Christ - the anticipation of the End - is already effective. They are 'with Christ'".<sup>2</sup>

It would seem, then, that apart from his rather extravagant descriptions of the activities of the spirits in Hades, Wesley's exposition of the intermediate state between death and the general resurrection is in fairly close agreement with modern New Testament exegesis as exemplified by Oscar Cullmann.

To return to the fact of death itself, John Wesley maintains that physical, as well as spiritual, death came as the result of man's fall.

"And in that day" says Wesley, (i.e. the day when Adam disobeyed and ate of the forbidden fruit), "he was condemned by the righteous judgment of God. Then also the sentence, whereof he was warned before, began to take place upon him. For the moment he tasted that fruit, he died. His soul died, was separated from God; separate from whom the soul has no more life than the body has when separated from the soul. His body, likewise, became corruptible and mortal; so that death then took hold on this also".<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Christ and Time", p.240.

<sup>2</sup> "Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?" p.52.

<sup>3</sup> S.S.I, 117.

Again, in the "Minutes of Some Late Conversations", 1774

Wesley says:

"In Adam all die; that is, (1) Our bodies then became mortal. (2) Our souls died; that is, were disunited from God. And hence, (3) We are all born with a sinful, devilish nature. By reason whereof (4) We are children of wrath, liable to death eternal. (Rom.5,18), (Eph.2,3)".<sup>1</sup>

In his sermon on Genesis 1,3, which he entitles "God's Approbation of His Works", Wesley paints a picture of creation as it came from the hands of God, perfect, without pain or ugliness - or death. Even the animals were created immortal, and presumably had Adam not sinned both he and the animal world would have continued so.

"God Almighty, whether you know it or not, did not make it (creation) as it is now. He Himself made it better, unspeakably better, than it is at present. He made it without any blemish, yea, without any defect. He made no corruption, no destruction, in the inanimate creation. He made not death in the animal creation; neither its harbingers - sin and pain".<sup>2</sup>

Elsewhere, in support of this, Wesley quotes from the Book of Wisdom - "God made not death; neither hath He pleasure in the death of any living".<sup>3</sup> Death was the punishment of

<sup>1</sup> W.VIII, 277. (In the same 'Minutes' Wesley adds: "We conceive, farther, that through the obedience and death of Christ, (1) The bodies of all men become immortal after the resurrection. (2) Their souls receive a capacity of spiritual life. And, (3) An actual spark or seed thereof. (4) All believers become children of grace, reconciled to God, and, (5) Made partakers of the divine nature", pp.277-8. Thus it seems Wesley believed that, through Christ's death, all men (and not merely believers) are saved from the death which is the consequence of Adam's sin, and given immortality).

<sup>2</sup> W.VI, 213.

<sup>3</sup> W.VI, 245.

Adam's disobedience, a punishment in which the whole animal world was involved:

"as all the blessings of God in paradise flowed through man to the inferior creatures; as man was the great channel of communication between the Creator and the whole brute creation; so when man made himself incapable of transmitting those blessings, that communication was necessarily cut off".<sup>1</sup>

Later, however, Wesley seems to have modified these views, and in his sermon on "The New Birth" he interprets Genesis 2,17 as referring to the death of the soul only, and not of the body.

"If it be said, 'Nay, but that threatening, "In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die", refers to temporal death, and that alone, to the death of the body only'; the answer is plain; to affirm this is flatly and palpably to make God a liar; to aver that the God of truth positively affirmed a thing contrary to truth. For it is evident Adam did not die in this sense, 'in the day that he ate thereof'. He lived, in the sense opposite to this death, above nine hundred years after. So that this cannot possibly be understood of the death of the body, without impeaching the veracity of God. It must therefore be understood of spiritual death, the loss of the life and image of God".<sup>2</sup>

Wesley maintains that death must be regarded as a punishment. While he readily agrees that believers in Christ receive benefits from it, he will have nothing of Dr. Taylor's argument in his "Doctrine of Original Sin".

"But this gentleman" says Wesley, "will have death to be an 'original benefit', and that to all mankind; merely intended to increase the vanity of all earthly things, and to abate their force to delude us. He afterwards displays the benefit of shortening human

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<sup>1</sup> W.VI,245.

<sup>2</sup> S.S.II,230.

life to its present standard: 'That death being nearer to our view, might be a powerful motive to regard less the things of a transitory world'. But does the 'nearer view of death', in fact, produce this effect? Does not the common observation of all ages prove the contrary? Has not covetousness been the peculiar vice of old age? As death is nearer to the view we plainly see that men have more and more regard for the things of a transitory world. We are sure, therefore, that death is no such benefit to the generality of men. On the contrary, it is the king of terrors, to them, the burden of their lives, and bane of their pleasures.... Death is not properly a benefit, but a punishment".<sup>1</sup>

So, then, on those occasions when Wesley reminds unbelievers of the fact of death, he does so not only and not often to frighten them with the terrible fate of the impenitent, or even to impress them with the transitoriness of this life (though he can write in his Journal - "Taking a solitary walk in the churchyard, I felt the truth of 'One generation goeth and another cometh'. See how the earth drops its inhabitants as the tree drops its leaves!"<sup>2</sup>). But he does so, for example, to impress upon them that death strips away all disguises and pretence, all earthly distinctions and classes, and leaves only the difference between the good and the bad, the righteous and the unrighteous, the believer and the unbeliever. In his tract, "Advice to a Soldier" he writes:

"Death levels all; it mingles in one dust the gentleman, soldier, clown and beggar; it makes all these distinctions void. When life ends, so do they.

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<sup>1</sup> W.IX, 259.

<sup>2</sup> J.VI, 243.

Holy or unholy, is the one question then. Lo! the books are opened, that all the dead may be judged according to the things that are written therein. O may thy name be found written in the book of life!"<sup>1</sup>

But death had no terrors for the Christian. We have already referred to John Wesley's proud boast that Methodists knew how to die. Scattered throughout his Journal are accounts of the death of many of his followers, and always they are scenes of triumph. They were men and women who had sung - and meant - the words of Charles:

"By earth and hell pursued in vain,  
To Thee the ransom'd seed shall come,  
Shouting, their heavenly Sion gain,  
And pass through death triumphant home".<sup>2</sup>

Hetty, one of Wesley's sisters, had said, when she realised that death was near - "I have ardently wished for death, because, you know, we Methodists always die in a transport of joy"; and although "before the very end sheer physical weakness and pain robbed her of that ecstasy.... before her death the sun had pierced the clouds and peace had come at last".<sup>3</sup> The accounts which John Wesley gives show no sadness or fear. He says on one occasion, "we had a night of solemn joy, occasioned by the funeral of one of our brethren, who died with a hope full of immortality".<sup>4</sup> The testimony of a physician,

<sup>1</sup> W.XI,201.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.IV,303.

<sup>3</sup> M.Edwards, "Family Circle", pp.169-170.

<sup>4</sup> J.II,518.

talking to Charles Wesley, was -

"Most people die for fear of dying; but I never met with such people as yours. They are none of them afraid of death; but calm and patient and resigned to the last".<sup>1</sup>

It was not that they were all robust in the faith, or insensitive to pain. Charles says in his Journal:

"I gave the sacrament to our sister H. who is coming to the grave, a ripe shock of corn. A poor, trembling, tempted soul she has been; but, at the approach of death, all her fears are vanished; and she lies gasping for the fullness of eternal life".<sup>2</sup>

This may be compared with the two accounts of condemned criminals whom Charles had visited regularly in prison, and who had come to believe the gospel. He describes a group on the way to Tyburn:

"They were all cheerful; full of comfort, peace and triumph; assuredly persuaded Christ had died for them, and waited to receive them into paradise.... I never saw such calm triumph, such incredible indifference to dying... That hour under the gallows was the most blessed hour of my life".<sup>3</sup>

Later, in conversation with men condemned to death at Cardiff, he writes:

"I asked one of the malefactors, 'Are you afraid to die?' 'No', he answered, 'I should rejoice to die this moment'... They were very calm and composed, nothing afraid of death, or its consequences. One of them assured me, if it was not left to his choice, he would rather die than life. I asked the reason, and he answered, 'Was I to be any longer in this world I might sin again'".<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> C.W.J.I, 271.

<sup>2</sup> C.W.J.I, 401.

<sup>3</sup> C.W.J.I, 122-3.

<sup>4</sup> C.W.J.I, 298-9.

John Wesley's Journal is likewise full of references to the triumphant faith of Methodists as they walked through the valley of the shadow. In 1742 he writes:

"I again visited many that were sick, but I found no fear either of pain or death among them. One (Mary Whittle) said, 'I shall go to my Lord tomorrow; but before I go, He will finish His work'. The next day she lay quiet for about two hours, and then, opening her eyes, cried out, 'It is done, it is done! Christ liveth in me! He lives in me!'; and died in a moment... I called on another who was believed to be near death, and greatly triumphing over it. 'I know' said she, 'that my Redeemer liveth, and will stand at the latter day upon the earth. I fear not death; it hath no sting for me. I shall live for evermore'".<sup>1</sup>

Nanny Morris, a member of the London society, had claimed that she had experienced entire sanctification, but apparently John Wesley himself had his doubts about her. When he heard she was very ill, he went to see her.

"I asked, 'Do you expect to die now?' She said, 'It is not shown me that I shall. But life or death is all one to me. I shall not change my company. Yet I shall more abundantly rejoice when we stand before the Lord; you and I, and all the other children which He hath given you'. In the evening I called upon her again, and found her weaker, and her speech much altered. I asked her, 'Do you now believe? Do not you find your soul in temptation?' She answered, smiling and looking up, 'There is the Lamb; and where He is, what is temptation? I have no darkness, no cloud. The enemy may come; but he hath no part in me'. I said, 'But does not your sickness hinder you?' She replied, 'Nothing hinders me. It is the Spirit of my Father that worketh in me; and nothing hinders that Spirit. My body indeed is weak and in pain; but my soul is all joy and praise'".<sup>2</sup>

For such believers death held no fear. They knew that

<sup>1</sup> J. II, 522.

<sup>2</sup> J. II, 456.

the close and intimate fellowship which they enjoyed with their Lord could not be interrupted even for a moment by death; but rather that it would make possible an even closer and more glorious communion. They knew that God had already answered their prayer, and given to them

"An humble, lowly, contrite heart,  
Believing, true and clean,  
Which neither life nor death can part  
From Him that dwells within".<sup>1</sup>

Nor were they afraid that death could cause any real separation from those whom they loved, for they ardently believed in the communion of saints. Many of Charles Wesley's hymns testify to the depth and richness of the fellowship which Methodists shared with each other, even when they were 'sundered far'. But Wesley is sure that the fellowship beyond death will be infinitely richer. Writing to Anne Bolton in 1775 John says that he feels he may not see her again in this world, but adds, "To die is not to be lost; but our union will be more complete in the world of spirits than it can be while we dwell in tenements of clay".<sup>2</sup>

And Charles can sing:

"Happy in Thy glorious love,  
We shall from the vale remove,  
Glad partakers of our hope,  
We shall soon be taken up.  
Meet again our heavenly friends,  
Blest with bliss that never ends,  
Join'd to all Thy hosts above,  
Happy in Thy glorious love!"<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> P.W.II,78.

<sup>2</sup> L.VI,144.

<sup>3</sup> P.W.IV,222.

The contemplation of the blessedness of life beyond the grave at times filled the early Methodists with an impatience and a 'home-sickness' for heaven. John Wesley tells how once, while preaching to a great crowd at Gwennap in Cornwall on Philippians 1,21, he read them the account of the death of one of his followers, whereupon "the hearts of many burned within them, so that they could not conceal their desire to go to him, and to be with Christ".<sup>1</sup> At times in the hymns of Charles Wesley, we have said, the longing for death becomes morbid, and represents little more than a passing mood of depression. The following lines, the opening stanza of a poem entitled, "On the Sight of a Corpse", seems unnatural and unconvincing.

"Ah lovely appearance of death!  
 No sight upon earth is so fair!  
 Not all the gay pageants that breathe,  
 Can with a dead body compare:  
 With solemn delight I survey  
 The corpse when the spirit is fled,  
 In love with the beautiful clay,  
 And longing to lie in its stead".<sup>2</sup>

But the ardent longing for death can be the expression of a genuine mood of weariness with all the pain and sorrow and trouble of this earthly life, and with the ceaseless battle which has to be fought here. Then the dead may well be envied.

"O blessed estate of the dead,  
 The dead that have died in the Lord!

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<sup>1</sup> J.III, 263.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.VI, 193.

From trouble and misery freed,  
 And sure of their endless reward:  
 By sorrow no longer oppress'd,  
 When join'd to the spirits above,  
 With Jesus in glory they rest,  
 They rest in the arms of His love".<sup>1</sup>

Many of Charles Wesley's hymns, written on the death of his friends, emphasise the deliverance which death brings to the Christian. On the death of Samuel Hitchens he writes:

"And shall we mourn to see  
 Our fellow-prisoner free?  
 Free from doubts, and griefs and fears,  
 In the haven of the skies!  
 Can we weep to see the tears  
 Wiped for ever from his eyes?

No, dear companion, no!  
 We gladly let thee go  
 From a suffering church beneath  
 To a reigning church above;  
 Thou hast more than conquer'd death,  
 Thou art crown'd with life and love".<sup>2</sup>

One of his funeral hymns expresses the same sense of deliverance and victory:

"Lo! the prisoner is released;  
 Lighten'd of his fleshly load,  
 Where the weary are at rest,  
 He is gather'd into God!  
 Lo! the pain of life is past,  
 All his warfare now is o'er,  
 Death and hell behind are cast,  
 Grief and suffering are no more".<sup>3</sup>

Charles Wesley, as we have seen, was particularly distressed by the persistence of sin in his own life, and

<sup>1</sup> P.W.VI, 188.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.V, 215.

<sup>3</sup> P.W.II, 188.

he could not accept his brother John's contention that entire sanctification, the total eradication of sin, was possible in this life. And so part of his longing for death was a longing for the sinless state.

"O when shall I be taken home!  
 O that my latest change were come  
 For which I wait in pain!  
 Weary of life through inbred sin,  
 Speak, Jesu, speak the sinner clean,  
 Nor let my faith be vain".<sup>1</sup>

He longs for the day when his work here on earth will be completed, and when he will be born into the world above.

"O, when wilt Thou, my Life, appear!  
 How gladly would I cry,  
 'Tis done, the work Thou gav'st me here,  
 'Tis finished, Lord - and die!"<sup>2</sup>

One is reminded of the fact that inscriptions in the catacombs describe the day of death as the 'birth-day'.

"Who can now lament the lot  
 Of a saint in Christ deceased?  
 Let the world who know us not  
 Call us hopeless and unblest'd:  
 When from flesh the spirit freed  
 Hastens homeward to return,  
 Mortals cry, 'A man is dead!'  
 Angels sing, 'A child is born'".<sup>3</sup>

The great funeral hymns of Charles Wesley (of which there are altogether ninety four) pulsate with the sense of joy and thankfulness and triumph. The emphasis is not, as so often in these days, upon the sadness of parting and the sorrow of those who are left, but upon the joy shared with

<sup>1</sup> P.W.III,156.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.I,172.

<sup>3</sup> P.W.II,190.

the one who has arrived safely at the end of his journey, and has entered into the bliss of his Lord. As in these lines "On the Death of Alexander White":

"O what a soul-transporting sight  
 Mine eyes today have seen,  
 A spectacle of strange delight  
 To angels and to men!  
 Nor human language can express,  
 Nor tongue of angels paint  
 The vast mysterious happiness  
 Of a departing saint!"<sup>1</sup>

So, a year after the death of Vincent Perronet, Charles wrote to his grand-daughter, Miss Elizabeth Briggs:

"Sad anniversary of his translation' do you call it? and your 'loss irreparable'? The day was the most joyful and happy he ever knew; and your loss is momentary, and reparable in a happy eternity. We ought only to rejoice and give thanks for his having been lent to the world near a century. Therefore from this time, observe I can allow you to mourn no more".<sup>2</sup>

It was with the same fearlessness and confidence that the Wesley brothers faced their own deaths. Within a fortnight of his marriage Charles had been taken seriously ill in Bristol, and later he wrote to his brother:

"I did not find, so far as I can say, any unwillingness to die on account of any I should leave behind. Neither did death appear less desirable than formerly; which I own gave me great pleasure, and made me shed tears of joy".<sup>3</sup>

This does not sound very complimentary to his young bride, but it is a sincere expression of his tremendous faith and dedication. It is obvious that he is writing out of his own

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<sup>1</sup> P.W.V, 224.

<sup>2</sup> "Charles Wesley as Revealed by his Letters", (Baker) pp.123-4.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.68.

experience when he says:

"Wherefore should we droop or fear,  
When the hour of death is near?  
Death is but a ready way  
Leading to the realms of day;  
Wing'd in death our souls shall fly  
To our city in the sky,  
Find in Him that reigns above  
All we wish, and all we love".<sup>1</sup>

And he dictated the following lines on his deathbed:

"In age and feebleness extreme,  
Who shall a helpless worm redeem?  
Jesus! my only hope Thou art,  
Strength of my failing flesh and heart;  
Oh! could I catch one smile from Thee  
And drop into eternity!"<sup>2</sup>

Elizabeth Ritchie, who cared for John during the last few months of his life, has left an account of his last days. She writes:

"During the two months I passed under his roof, which proved to be the last he spent on earth, I derived much pleasure from his conversation. His spirit seemed all love; he breathed the air of paradise, adverting often to the state of separate spirits. 'Can we suppose' he would observe 'that this active mind which animates and moves the dull matter with which it is clogged, will be less active when set free? Surely no; it will be all activity. But what will be its employment? Who can tell?'"<sup>3</sup>

John remained confident, triumphant - and questioning! - to the end.

We cannot conclude this section without quoting Charles Wesley's finest funeral hymn, a hymn which is frequently sung by Methodists today. It is a hymn of rejoicing for the one who has won freedom from the

<sup>1</sup> P.W.XI, 189.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.VIII, 432.

<sup>3</sup> J.VIII, 132.

prison-house of the body, who has gained deliverance from trouble and sorrow and sin, and who has entered into the full fellowship of the saints.

"Rejoice for a brother deceased,  
 (Our loss is his infinite gain,)  
 A soul out of prison released,  
 And freed from its bodily chain;  
 With songs let us follow his flight,  
 And mount with his spirit above,  
 Escaped to the mansions of light,  
 And lodged in the Eden of love.

Our brother the haven hath gain'd,  
 Outflying the tempest and wind,  
 His rest he hath sooner obtain'd,  
 And left his companions behind;  
 Still toss'd on a sea of distress,  
 Hard toiling to make the blest shore,  
 Where all is assurance and peace,  
 And sorrow and sin are no more.

Till all the ship's company meet,  
 Who sail'd with the Saviour beneath;  
 With shouting each other they greet,  
 And triumph o'er trouble and death:  
 The voyage of life's at an end,  
 The mortal affliction is past,  
 The age that in heaven they spend  
 For ever and ever shall last".<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> P.W.VI, 189-190.

The Resurrection of the Body.

We have seen that John Wesley believed that on the death of the body the spirit goes at once to Hades. The righteous spirit goes to that part of Hades which is called Paradise, and which Wesley describes as "the antechamber of heaven"<sup>1</sup>; the unrighteous spirit goes to "the unhappy divisions". And there both righteous and unrighteous await the day of resurrection - the Last Day. On that great day the body will be resurrected, joined again to the spirit, and together they will pass, after judgment, either to heaven or hell.

John Wesley firmly believed in the resurrection of the body. He would have nothing to do with the Greek conception of the body as essentially evil, and of death as the moment when the soul is liberated once for all from its prison. He comments on II Corinthians 5,4 - "For we who are in this tabernacle groan, being burdened; not that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that what is mortal may be swallowed up of life" - is: "Not that we desire to remain without a body. Faith does not understand that philosophical contempt of what the wise Creator has given".<sup>2</sup> In his "Letter to a Roman Catholic", in which he expresses

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<sup>1</sup> W.VII,246.

<sup>2</sup> N.N.T.

what "a true Christian believes" he says: "I believe.... that, at the last day, all men shall rise again, every one with his own body".<sup>1</sup> And in his own epitaph Charles Wesley pictures the buried body waiting for the all-reviving trumpet of God, so that, united with the soul, it may rise to heaven:

"Here rests in hope, beneath this humble clod,  
A breathless temple of the living God,  
Assured the all-reviving trump to hear,  
To see the Judge on His white throne appear,  
Spring from the tomb, and meet Him in the air,  
Body and soul shall then united rise,  
The dead shall life - a life that never dies,  
And I attain my place eternal in the skies".<sup>2</sup>

The Wesleys are here, of course, in line with the main stream of Christian theology. Baillie has written:

"The Christian view has from the beginning been emphatically not that of a totally disembodied immortality, but rather of the bestowal upon us by God, after the death of our present bodies, of 'new and glorious' bodies that shall be the vehicles of a far higher life of the soul than we are now able to enjoy..... nothing, as we have seen, so much dismayed the Apostle (Paul) as the prospect of being left with a 'naked' soul - left, as we should say, a mere ghost".<sup>3</sup>

Cullmann believes that much of popular thinking about the life after death has been influenced much more by the Greek conception of the immortality of the soul than by the Christian belief in the resurrection of the dead. He says "I Corinthians 15 has been sacrificed for the Phaedo".<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> W.X, 82.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.VI, 292.

<sup>3</sup> "And the Life Everlasting", pp.92 and 152.

<sup>4</sup> "Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead?", p.8.

A careful study of the New Testament teaching on the subject leads him to a conclusion almost word-for-word with that of Baillie quoted above.

"The fact is that, according to the first Christians the full, genuine life of the resurrection is inconceivable apart from the new body, the 'spiritual body', with which the dead will be clothed when heaven and earth are re-created".<sup>1</sup>

John Wesley's teaching on the Resurrection is to be found chiefly in a sermon on the text I Corinthians 15,35, and entitled "On the Resurrection of the Dead". This sermon is dated 1732, though a footnote says:

"This Sermon was originally written by Benjamin Calamy, D.D., Vicar of St. Lawrence, Jewry, London. It occurs p.275 in a volume of Sermons which bears his name, published in 1704; and is here abridged and revised by Mr. Wesley".<sup>2</sup>

Be that as it may, the fact that John Wesley preserved the manuscript, and that it was considered worthy to be published after his death, indicates that it represents his own views on this matter. Substantially the same views are expressed in the commentary on I Corinthians 15,42-44 in his Notes on the New Testament. There he writes:

"'So also is the resurrection of the dead' - So great is the difference between the body which fell, and that which rises. 'It is sown' - a beautiful word; committed, as seed, to the ground. 'in corruption' - just ready to putrify, and, by various degrees of corruption and decay, to return to the dust from whence it came. 'It is raised in incorruption' - utterly incapable of either dissolution or decay. 'It is sown in dishonour' - shocking those who loved

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p.11.

<sup>2</sup> W.VII,474.

it best. Human nature in disgrace! 'It is raised in glory' - clothed with robes of light, fit for those whom the King of Heaven delights to honour. 'It is sown in weakness' - deprived even of that feeble strength which it once enjoyed. 'It is raised in power' - endued with vigour, strength and activity, such as we cannot now conceive. 'It is sown' in this world a merely 'animal body' - maintained by food, sleep and air, like the bodies of brutes: but 'it is raised' of a more refined contexture, needing none of these animal refreshments, and endued with qualities of a spiritual nature, like the angels of God".<sup>1</sup>

John Wesley looks with expectancy and confidence to the dawn of that great day when the saints will come forth from their tombs, thus transformed. After conducting the funeral service of one of his followers, he writes in his Journal: "Oh what a sight it will be when God saith to the grave, 'Give back', and all the dead, small and great, shall stand before Him".<sup>2</sup> How he must have approved those quaint mediaeval pictures which depict a graveyard as the scene of hectic activity as men and women and children emerge not a little astonished from the tombs!

In his sermon, "On the Resurrection of the Dead" already referred to, John Wesley maintains a quite literal and realistic interpretation of the doctrine. His basic premise is that the resurrection-body is the self-same body that was buried.

"The plain notion of a resurrection requires that the self-same body that died shall rise again. Nothing can be said to be raised again, but that very body that died. If God give to our souls at the last day a

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<sup>1</sup> N.N.T. (I.Cor.15, 42-44).

<sup>2</sup> J.II, 485.

new body, this cannot be called the resurrection of our body; because that word plainly implies the fresh production of what was before".<sup>1</sup>

In face of the objection to this literal interpretation that the body quickly decomposes after death and burial, he says:

"All the parts into which men's bodies are dissolved, however they seem to us carelessly scattered over the face of the earth, are yet carefully laid up by God's wise disposal till the day of the restoration of all things. They are preserved in the waters and fires, in the birds and beasts, till the last trumpet shall summon them to their former habitation"!<sup>2</sup>

He even goes so far as to answer a possible objection that a man may be devoured by a beast, which in turn may be eaten by another man, so that part of one man's body has become part of another's! (Shades of the old Yorkshire song, "On Ilkley Moor baht'at"! ). Wesley's answer is, to say the least, ingenious, even if it is not very convincing!

"A very small part of what is eaten turns to nourishment, the far greater part goes away according to the order of nature. So that it is not at all impossible for God, who watches over and governs all this, so to order things, that what is part of one man's body, though eaten by another, shall never turn to his nourishment; or, if it does, that it shall wear off again, and, some time before his death, be separated from him, so that it may return in a capacity of being restored at the last day to its former owner".<sup>3</sup>

The God who is able to gather together the scattered elements into the same body as it was before, is also able, says Wesley, to 'enliven it' with the same soul that it

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<sup>1</sup> W.VII, 475.

<sup>2</sup> W.VII, 477.

inhabited before. This has already been accomplished once in history, when Christ rose from the dead, returned to His disciples and convinced them that He was the same person they had seen die upon a cross. And those who would argue that such a miracle is impossible, even to God, Wesley invites to contemplate the similar miracle of the formation of the human body within the womb:

"There is no reason" he concludes, "for our doubting concerning the thing because there are some circumstances belonging to it which we cannot perfectly comprehend or give a distinct account of".<sup>1</sup>

But although Wesley maintains that the resurrection-body is the same body that died, yet it is, he says, a transformed body. He says:

"Were we to receive them again, subject to all the frailties and miseries which we are forced to wrestle with, I much doubt whether a wise man, were he left to his choice, would willingly take his again; - whether he would not choose to let his still lie rotting in the grave, rather than to be again chained to such a cumbersome clod of earth".<sup>2</sup>

Our bodies, when raised, are to be delivered from all the evils which sin brought into the world, and they will no longer be subject to pain and sickness. This freeing of all maladies is, claims Wesley, what the Scriptures mean by 'the redemption of our bodies'. So this corruptible, ruinous house of earth, with all its frailties and disorders will be utterly transformed into

<sup>1</sup> W.VII, 479.

<sup>2</sup> W.VII, 479-480.

the incorruptible and immortal.

"O when shall we arrive at that happy land where no complaints were ever heard, where we shall all enjoy uninterrupted health both of body and mind, and never more be exposed to any of those inconveniences that disturb our present pilgrimage! When we shall have once passed from death unto life, we shall be eased of all the troublesome care of our bodies, which now take up so much of our time and thoughts. We shall be set free from all those mean and tiresome labours which we must now undergo to support our lives".<sup>1</sup>

Our bodies shall be raised also in glory. It will be a glory born of our unspeakable joy, a glory which will shine through our faces. Wesley quotes the example of Moses, whose face shone when he had spoken with God on the mount, and Stephen, whose face as he died was 'as it had been the face of an angel', and our Lord Himself on the Mount of Transfiguration. These were an 'earnest' of the greater glory of the resurrection. "The unspeakable joy that we then shall feel will break through our bodies, and shine forth in our countenances".<sup>2</sup> Yet, although all the children of God will have glorious bodies, the glory will not be the same in each case. For, as St. Paul said, "As one star differeth from another star in glory, so also is the resurrection of the dead".<sup>3</sup> Those who have attained to the highest measure of purity will shine the brightest.

"It is certain that the most heavenly bodies will be

<sup>1</sup> W.VII,480-481.

<sup>2</sup> W.VII,482.

<sup>3</sup> I Corinthians 15,41.

given to the most heavenly souls; so that this is no little encouragement to us to make the greatest progress we possibly can in the knowledge and love of God, since the more we are weaned from the things of the earth now, the more glorious will our bodies be at the resurrection".<sup>1</sup>

Our bodies will be raised also in power. All the dullness, all the slowness and sluggishness of our bodies to obey the commands of our God will disappear.

"This earthly body is slow and heavy in all its motions, listless and soon tired with action. But our heavenly bodies shall be as fire; as active and nimble as our thoughts are".<sup>2</sup>

The most dangerous enemy we have in this life is the flesh. Though we deny and denounce it at our baptism, it is something with which we have to fight all our days. Its lusts and its appetites tempt us; its weakness hinders our devotions; and it diverts our minds from their noble exercises. And so the resurrection-body will be a spiritual body:

"When we have obtained the resurrection unto life, our bodies will be spiritualized, purified, and refined from their earthly grossness; then they will be fit instruments for the soul in all its divine and heavenly employment; we shall not be weary of singing praises to God through infinite ages".<sup>3</sup>

Here, again, we feel that John Wesley is in line with modern exegesis. Brunner can write: "Every man will rise again in his own likeness, his own unchangeable individuality, but not in his flesh".<sup>4</sup> While Cullmann says:

<sup>1</sup> W.VII, 484.

<sup>2</sup> W.VII, 482.

<sup>3</sup> W.VII, 483.

<sup>4</sup> "Eternal Hope", p.149.

"Concerning the nature of the body, we learn only one thing, that it will be a spiritual body, that is, that the Spirit will be not only its principle, but also its material".<sup>1</sup> But this scarcely accords with Wesley's earlier contention that it is the self-same body that died and was buried that will be resurrected. He seems now to suggest that so transformed, transfigured and spiritualized will be resurrection-body be that it will bear little relationship to the earthly body.

Wesley draws two practical conclusions from all this. First, if we really believe that one day we shall be clothed with this tireless, unwearied, glorified, spiritualized body, then we shall press on, bearing whatever inconveniences and troubles and pains that come to us, with courage and resolution. 'The time of our eternal redemption draweth nigh', and we must not forfeit it all for want of a little more patience.

And we must begin to prepare now for our resurrection.

"The best way of preparing ourselves to live in those heavenly bodies" is "by cleansing ourselves more and more from all earthly affections, and weaning ourselves from this body, and all the pleasures that are peculiar to it".<sup>2</sup>

We must begin now to loosen the ties that bind our souls to this mortal flesh. We must familiarize ourselves with

<sup>1</sup> "Christ and Time", p.241.

<sup>2</sup> W.VII, 483.

spiritual things, lest when the time comes for us to be clothed upon with our spiritual body it be "like clothing a beggar in the robes of a king".<sup>1</sup>

"But", says Wesley "when we are washed from the guilt of our sins, and cleansed from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, then we shall long to be dissolved, and to be with our exalted Saviour; we shall always be ready to take wing for the other world, where we shall at last have a body suited to our spiritual appetites".<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> W.VII, 484.

<sup>2</sup> W.VII, 484.

CHAPTER SIX. THE COMING OF CHRIST IN JUDGMENT.The Final Coming of Christ.

The Wesleys firmly believed in the Biblical doctrine of the final coming of Christ on earth. It formed the subject of a great number of Charles Wesley's hymns. In one of his "Hymns for Ascension Day" he pictures Christ pleading to the Father for mankind, showing the 'marks of His expiring love engraven on His hands', and the blood shed upon the Cross. And he concludes:

"Thankful we now the earnest take,  
The pledge Thou wilt at last come back  
And openly Thy servants own;  
To us, who long to see Thee here,  
Thou shalt a second time appear,  
And bear us to Thy glorious throne".<sup>1</sup>

Again, he expresses his absolute confidence in his Lord's return in glory:

"Quick as the darted lightning flies,  
Flashing at once throughout the skies,  
Saviour, Thou wilt on earth appear  
To 'stablish Thy dominion here:

Before the final, general doom,  
We know, Thou wilt to judgment come,  
Thy foes destroy, Thy friends maintain,  
And glorious with Thine ancients reign.

Now, even now, Thy saints attend,  
To see Thee on the clouds descend!  
Now, Lord, assert Thy right Divine,  
And challenge all the world for Thine".<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> P.W.IV, 158.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.X, 374.

In spite of the specific words of Christ confessing ignorance of the time of His return - "But of that day and of that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father"<sup>1</sup> - there have been those who have confidently predicted it. Charles Wesley will have none of this:

"Then the prophets false we hear  
Publishing, 'The time is near',  
Showing when the Judge will come  
The ungodly to consume,  
Fixing the tremendous day  
When He all His foes shall slay,  
Pointing out the hour unknown,  
Hid from all but God alone".<sup>2</sup>

It is folly even to attempt to guess. Yet, on the other hand, Christ's coming will not be for ever delayed, and woe betide those who persuade themselves and others that there is no urgency about accepting Christ's offer of grace. In his sermon, "The Righteousness of Faith" John Wesley says:

"Nor yet do thou say, I must do something more before I come to Christ. I grant, supposing thy Lord should delay His coming, it were meet and right to wait for His appearing, in doing, so far as thou hast power, whatsoever He hath commanded thee. But there is no necessity for making such a supposition. How knowest thou that He will delay? Perhaps He will appear as the dayspring from on high before the morning light. O do not set Him a time! Expect Him every hour. Now He is nigh! even at the door!"<sup>3</sup>

Wesley, as always, keeps very close to the Scriptures, and again and again in the hymns paraphrases the teaching of Jesus. For example, "Take ye heed, watch

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<sup>1</sup> Mark 13,32.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.XI, 276.

<sup>3</sup> S.S.I, 145.

and pray: for ye know not when the time is"<sup>1</sup> becomes:

"In an hour to us unknown,  
As a thief in deepest night,  
Christ shall suddenly come down  
With all His saints in light.

Happy he whom Christ shall find  
Watching to see Him come;  
Him the Judge of all mankind  
Shall bear triumphant home".<sup>2</sup>

And again:

"Happy they and truly wise  
Who for that day prepare,  
Ready at Thy call to rise,  
And meet Thee in the air.

Fools in misery they live  
Who bear the Christian name in vain,  
Seldom seek and never strive  
Eternal life to gain".<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, Charles Wesley suggests that the reason why God has kept the time secret is to keep the Christian 'on his toes', living each day as if it were his last.

"Why hath God conceal'd the day  
When He will to judgment come?  
That we every moment may  
Stand prepared to meet our doom,  
For the trumpet's sound attend,  
Watch to see our Judge descend".<sup>4</sup>

In the Synoptic Gospels there seems to be a paradox in the account of Christ's teaching on His return; for while He maintains, as we have seen, that the actual time is known only to God, at the same time He indicates signs of its approach. And this paradox is mirrored in the teaching

<sup>1</sup> Mark 13, 33.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.II, 192-3.

<sup>3</sup> P.W.X, 381-2.

<sup>4</sup> P.W.X, 376.

of the Wesleys. For they both feel that there are signs in contemporary events that Christ's coming will not long be delayed. Many of Charles Wesley's hymns were written in times of national crisis: there are "Hymns for Times of Trouble and Persecution", "Hymns for the Year 1745", the year of the second Jacobite rebellion, and "Hymns Occasioned by Earthquake". The disturbed times in which the Wesleys lived, times of rebellion, war and threats of war, persuaded them that the end must be near. Here, for example, is a hymn "For the Year 1745":

"The day, the dreadful day draws nigh,  
 When God in judgment shall appear,  
 Shall by His laws His people try,  
 And prove with scrutiny severe  
 The sinners settled on their lees,  
 And punish all that dwell in ease.

The men whose hearts deny His love,  
 His guardian love and righteous sway,  
 Who say, 'Secure He sits above,  
 And lets us each pursue our way,  
 Nor will He e'er our deeds regard,  
 Or punish mortals, or reward'.

On these the Lord His wrath shall show,  
 And give them to the waster's power,  
 Stir up the fierce invading foe,  
 Their goods and houses to devour;  
 Houses they shall for others build,  
 And sow, but never reap, the field.

For lo! the Lord's great day is near,  
 Is near, and swiftly hastens on,  
 The mighty men shall cry for fear  
 And anguish while His wrath comes down,  
 While God the sacred panic darts,  
 And speaks in thunder to their hearts".<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> P.W.IV, 61.

Charles Wesley published several volumes of hymns during the time when the invasion of England by the French army seemed imminent. Indeed one volume is entitled, "Hymns on the Expected Invasion, 1759". It seemed to Wesley that the fighting in Europe and the threat to England fulfilled at least some of the conditions of Mark 13, and foretold of the nearness of Christ's coming. Two examples are given from this volume:

"Lift your heads, ye friends of Jesus,  
Partners in His patience here,  
Christ to all believers precious,  
Lord of lords, shall soon appear:  
Mark the tokens  
Of His heavenly kingdom near!....

Close behind the tribulation  
Of these last tremendous days,  
See the flaming revelation,  
See the universal blaze!  
Earth and heaven  
Melt before the Judge's face!"<sup>1</sup>

And -

"Whatever ill the world befall,  
A pledge of endless good we call,  
A sign of Jesus near:  
His chariot will not long delay;  
We hear the rumbling wheels, and pray,  
Triumphant Lord, appear".<sup>2</sup>

In addition to these 'wars and rumours of wars' Wesley was deeply impressed by another 'sign'. There were, in February and March, 1750 a series of earthquakes felt in London and elsewhere. John Wesley describes one which happened on February 8th, and which was felt all over

<sup>1</sup> P.W.VI, 144.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.VI, 96.

London. He describes it as "three distinct shakes, or wavings to and fro, attended with an hoarse rumbling noise, like thunder"<sup>1</sup> A more violent shock was felt on March 8th, of which Charles Wesley wrote - "I was just repeating my **text**, when it shook the Foundery so violently that we all expected it to fall upon our **heads**".<sup>2</sup> Charles preached a sermon next morning at the Foundery on "The Cause and Cure of Earthquakes",<sup>3</sup> and later published a volume of "Hymns Occasioned by the Earthquake", March 8, 1750. Again, recalling Mark 13, he felt this was yet another sign of the nearness of Christ's return.

"Wars, and plagues, and great distresses,  
The tremendous day fore-run,  
Earthquakes felt in divers places  
Show the latter times begun;  
Want, and national confusion,  
Boding grief, and panic fear,  
Mark the times of restitution,  
Speak the great Restorer near".<sup>4</sup>

There was certainly evidence of 'national confusion' and 'panic fear'. A half-crazed soldier prophesied that on April 4th there would be another earthquake which would destroy half of London and Westminster. As the day approached thousands of people left their homes, and either wandered about the streets or hastened into the country. Tyerman writes:

"Multitudes ran about the streets in frantic consternation, quite certain that the final judgment was about to open; and that, before the dawn of another day, all would hear the blast of the archangel's trumpet".<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> J.III,453.

<sup>2</sup> J.III,456-7.

<sup>3</sup> Cf.W.VII,386-399.

<sup>4</sup> P.W.VI,45.

<sup>5</sup> "The Life and Times of Wesley" II,71-2.

While Wesley used the situation to emphasise the need for repentance before 'the great and terrible Day of the Lord' the Methodists, in striking contrast to the majority of the city's inhabitants, remained calm and jubilant. They sang:

"High on Thy great white throne,  
O King of saints, come down;  
In the New Jerusalem  
Now triumphantly descend;  
Let the final trump proclaim  
Joys begun which ne'er shall end".<sup>1</sup>

A greater disaster occurred five years later - the Lisbon Earthquake. Tyerman says: "In six minutes the greater part of the city was destroyed, and not less than 60,000 persons met with an untimely death".<sup>2</sup> Again John Wesley used the situation, and wrote "Serious Thoughts on the Earthquake at Lisbon". It was a great call to repentance, as were many of his brother's hymns.

"Turn then to God, ye sinners, turn,  
Let every heart at once relent,  
The whole devoted nation mourn,  
By general grief the curse prevent,  
In penitential sorrow join,  
And deprecate the wrath Divine.

Repent before the dire decree,  
Bring forth the 'irrevocable doom;  
Before the day as chaff ye see  
Pass by; before the vengeance come;  
Before the Lord let loose His ire,  
And make you fuel to the fire".<sup>3</sup>

Obviously Wesley was not above appealing to the motive of fear, but he encouraged his followers to look

<sup>1</sup> P.W.VI,44-45.

<sup>2</sup> "The Life and Times of Wesley" II,223.

<sup>3</sup> P.W.IV,62.

forward to Christ's return, not with fear, but with joy.  
And he pictured His coming in majesty and kingly power.

"Sovereign Lord, for this we wait:  
Come in Thy sublime estate,  
Hasten the expected hour,  
Come with all Thy pomp and power,  
Come, the Father's only Son,  
Shining on Thine azure throne".<sup>1</sup>

And again:

"O might we see our Saviour shine  
With all the attributes Divine,  
Descending with His angel-train  
In everlasting pomp to reign!  
Jehovah's co-eternal Son,  
Appear triumphant on Thy throne,  
And show the bride Thy heavenly face,<sup>2</sup>  
And plunge us in the glorious blaze!"<sup>2</sup>

The faithful who have borne a good witness, and who have shared in the fellowship of His suffering, will also share in His triumph, and will receive at His hands the promised crown.

"A King of saints, come down,  
In dazzling majesty,  
Thy suffering witnesses to crown,  
Who share Thy cross with Thee;  
Thou promisest to give  
The crown at that glad day  
To all who lovingly believe  
And for Thy coming stay".<sup>3</sup>

It will be a moment of absolute triumph, a triumph in which not only the Christian, but also the Jew and Heathen and Turk will share:

"But Christ shall work at His return  
A speedier work of grace,

<sup>1</sup> P.W.XI, 278.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.X, 304.

<sup>3</sup> P.W.XIII, 111-112.

While nations by His Spirit born  
 Their Lord at once embrace;  
Heathens and Turks shall both receive  
 Whom God to both hath given,  
 And Jews themselves shall then believe  
 The glorious sign from heaven".<sup>1</sup>

The reaction of the unrepentant sinners and believers are contrasted. The sinners can contemplate Christ's return only with dread and terror:

"See the stars from heaven falling;  
 Hark on earth the doleful cry,  
 Men on rocks and mountains calling,  
 While the frowning Judge draws nigh,  
 Hide us, hide us,  
 Rocks and mountains, for His eye!"<sup>2</sup>

And -

"Sinners, attend the dreadful word,  
 ('The Judge of all, the righteous Lord,  
 Doth with His holy myriads come',)  
 And tremble at your instant doom!"<sup>3</sup>

How different is the attitude of believers. They wait longingly and impatiently for their Lord's return. For them no dread or fear, but a passionate desire to see Christ and to share in His glory.

"Come, gracious Lord, we wait Thy day,  
 We languish to be taken home;  
 No longer let Thy chariot stay;  
 Come, gracious Lord, to judgment come".<sup>4</sup>

"Come, our redeeming Lord,  
 Come quickly from above,  
 Hasten, according to Thy word,  
 The kingdom of Thy love:  
 By all the signs foretold,  
 We know that Thou art near,  
 And lift our hands, divinely bold,  
 And long to grasp Thee here..."

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<sup>1</sup> P.W.X, 373-4.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.VI, 145.

<sup>3</sup> P.W.XIII, 217.

<sup>4</sup> P.W.II, 339-340.

Beset on every side  
 With terror and distress,  
 Untroubled and unterrified,  
 We still our souls possess:  
 The coming of our Lord  
 In patient hope attend,  
 And see fulfill'd Thy faithful word,  
 And calmly wait the end".<sup>1</sup>

But not only does the believer wait for His Lord; by faith he already anticipates His return.

"Faith ascends the mountain's height,  
 Now enjoys the pompous sight,  
 Antedates the final doom,  
 Sees the Judge in glory come".<sup>2</sup>

And when Christ does return, such will be the joy of His followers that they will shout and sing.

"With glorious pomp descending  
 To crown our expectation,  
 Him we shall see,  
 And shout, 'Tis He,  
 The God of our salvation!  
 The God from everlasting,  
 Almighty to deliver,  
 Around His throne  
 Our songs shall own  
 The God that reigns for ever".<sup>3</sup>

Thus the believer longs and prays for the coming of his Lord, knowing that it will mean the end of his exile here on earth, and the return to the home prepared by Christ Himself.

"And while He ready makes our place  
 His Spirit in His members prays,  
 'Appear to take Thine exiles home,  
 Come quickly, Lord, to judgment come!"<sup>4</sup>

The greatest of Charles Wesley's Second Advent hymns

<sup>1</sup> P.W.IV, 266-7

<sup>2</sup> P.W.III, 288.

<sup>3</sup> P.W.VII, 214.

<sup>4</sup> P.W.XI, 65.

must be given in full. It contains most of the points we have already made. It describes Christ's coming in power and majesty, attended by His saints. He is seen by all, sinners and saints alike. The sinners are deeply distressed by the sight, but the believers rejoice, especially when they see the marks of His passion, the assurance of their redemption. The hymn ends with an act of adoration before the enthroned Christ, and a last appeal for Him to come quickly.

"Lo! He comes with clouds descending,  
Once for favour'd sinners slain!  
Thousand, thousand saints attending,  
Swell the triumph of His train;  
Hallelujah,  
God appears on earth to reign!

Every eye shall now behold Him  
Robed in dreadful majesty,  
Those who set at nought and sold Him,  
Pierced, and nail'd Him to the tree,  
Deeply wailing  
Shall the true Messiah see.

The dear tokens of His passion  
Still His dazzling body bears,  
Cause of endless exultation  
To His ransom'd worshippers;  
With what rapture  
Gaze we on those glorious scars!

Yea, Amen! Let all adore Thee  
High on Thine eternal throne!  
Saviour, take the power and glory,  
Claim the kingdom for Thine own,  
Jah, Jehovah,  
Everlasting God, come down".<sup>1</sup>

After generations of neglect eschatology is now in the forefront of theological controversy. The Wesleys, as we

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<sup>1</sup> P.W.VI, 143-4.

have seen, took the New Testament references to the Final Advent of Christ as literally true. For them there was no question, no argument. Today we are in a different situation. There are those who have sought to demonstrate by modern critical methods that Jesus Himself made no references in His teaching to a Final Coming. T.F.Glasson,<sup>1</sup> after a careful and critical study of the Gospels, concludes that there is little, if any, evidence of such references. And J.A.T.Robinson, in his latest book,<sup>2</sup> claims that all the references to the Parousia in Jesus' teaching really refer either to His first coming, to His visitation and ministry, and to the crisis it created, or to the vindication by God of His death, resurrection and ascension. But we are not convinced. Apart from questions of exegesis, neither of these writers give any satisfactory explanations as to why the doctrine should have sprung up so quickly, and should be found in almost every book of the New Testament, if it is not based on actual words of Jesus.

Other contemporary theologians maintain, with the Wesleys, that the doctrine is rooted and grounded in the Scriptures, and especially in Christ's own words (e.g. C.H.Dodd,<sup>3</sup> and J.E.Fison<sup>4</sup>). Brunner goes so far as to say that "faith in Jesus Christ without the expectation

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<sup>1</sup> "The Second Advent" Cf. esp. Part II, pp.63-150.

<sup>2</sup> "Jesus and His Coming" pp.36-83.

<sup>3</sup> "The Coming of Christ" pp.17ff.

<sup>4</sup> "The Christian Hope", pp.118ff.

of His Parousia is a voucher that is never redeemed, a promise that is not seriously meant".<sup>1</sup> They are by no means prepared to accept all the picturesque symbolism of the New Testament as literal fact; but they maintain that Jesus will return in glory, as King and Judge. And we believe that, after all legitimate Biblical criticism has done its work, this is a doctrine firmly rooted in the teaching of Jesus and Paul, and in the early Church. And although not accepting all Wesley's literalism, we are more convinced by his exposition than by that of some, at least, of contemporary theologians.

### The Judgment.

True to the New Testament John Wesley linked together the final coming of Christ in glory with the Last Judgment. The inescapable fact, says St. Paul, is that "we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ".<sup>2</sup> Christ will come both the nations, and every individual. Charles Wesley in his hymns, and John in his sermons and tracts, were always confronting people with the reality of judgment. Several times in his Journal John tells us he preached on the Judgment:

"At Alnwick, likewise, I stood in the market-place in the evening, and exhorted a numerous

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<sup>1</sup> "Eternal Hope", p.138.

<sup>2</sup> Romans 14,10.

congregation to be always ready for death, for judgment, for heaven".<sup>1</sup>

"There was a large congregation again, and every person therein seemed to know this was the word whereby God would judge them in the last day".<sup>2</sup>

"In the afternoon, as also at seven in the morning, I preached in the kirk at Port Glasgow. My subjects were Death and Judgment, and I spoke as home as I possibly could".<sup>3</sup>

Included in the Standard Sermons is one entitled, "The Great Assize" (which we deal with in detail below), and another, entitled "The Good Steward", is concerned mainly with judgment. Even reading these sermons in cold print, one is convinced of the truth of Cell's words:

"It was next to impossible for any auditor not to forget himself and his surroundings, while Wesley preached, and he was made to feel he was actually before the Supreme Judge of the universe".<sup>4</sup>

When we turn to Charles Wesley's hymns we find the same assurance of Christ's coming in judgment.

"Lo! He comes with clouds! He comes  
 In dreadful pomp array'd!  
 All His glorious power assumes,  
 To judge the world He made:  
 Righteous shall His sentence be:  
 Think of that tremendous bar!  
 Every eye the Judge shall see!  
 And thou shalt meet Him there!"<sup>5</sup>

As in the preaching of his brother, Charles is concerned to emphasise the personal and inescapable nature of the judgment.

<sup>1</sup> J.III, 428.      <sup>2</sup> J.IV, 75.      <sup>3</sup> J.VI, 19.

<sup>4</sup> "The Rediscovery of John Wesley", p.58.

<sup>5</sup> P.W.VIII, 184.

"Clothed with boundless power Divine  
 We know Thou wilt to judgment come,  
 Severally to each assign  
 His just, eternal doom".<sup>1</sup>

The Judge will have no mercy on the wicked; those who have consciously and deliberately rejected the offer of salvation will be doomed to hell.

"God over all and Judge supreme,  
 Thou canst absolve us or condemn;  
 Thou wilt Thy dreadful power declare,  
 And doom the wicked at Thy bar.  
 Consign to flames unquenchable,  
 And seal them up with fiends in hell".<sup>2</sup>

Charles Wesley wrote many hymns which he himself described as "For Children". But he certainly made no concession to their tender years! They, too, must be reminded of the inevitable judgment in words and pictures which must have brought many a terrible nightmare to a sensitive child.

"And am I born to die,  
 To lay this body down?  
 And must my trembling spirit fly  
 Into a world unknown?  
 A world of darkest shade;  
 Unpierced by human thought;  
 The dreary regions of the dead,  
 Where all things are forgot.

Soon as from earth I go,  
 What will become of me?  
 Eternal happiness or woe  
 Must then my portion be:  
 Waked by the trumpet's sound,  
 I from my grave shall rise,  
 And see the Judge with glory crown'd,  
 And see the flaming skies".<sup>3</sup>

And another "Children's Hymn":

<sup>1</sup> P.W.X, 276.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.X, 441.

<sup>3</sup> P.W.VI, 426-7.

"And must I be to judgment brought,  
 And answer in that day  
 For every vain or idle thought,  
 And every word I say?

Yes, every secret of my heart  
 Shall shortly be made known,  
 And I receive my just desert  
 For all that I have done.

How careful then ought I to live,  
 With what religious fear,  
 Who such a strict account must give  
 Of my behaviour here!

Thou awful Judge of quick and dead,  
 The watchful power bestow;  
 So shall I to my ways take heed,  
 To all I speak and do".<sup>1</sup>

As to the time of the Judgment, John Wesley believes that it will be, not at the moment of death, but at the final coming of Christ. He will have nothing to do with the idea of two judgments, a particular and a general. Nor will he accept for one moment the Roman Catholic teaching that immediately on death the souls of the saints go straight to heaven, the souls of the wicked to hell, and the souls of those who believe but are not made perfect to Purgatory for purification and preparation for heaven. Wesley believes that immediately after death the soul must know its final destination; but the judgment comes later. He says:

"The moment a soul drops the body, and stands naked before God, it cannot but know what its portion will be to all eternity. It will have full in its view, either everlasting joy, or everlasting torment; as it

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<sup>1</sup> P.W.VI, 401-2.

is no longer possible for us to be deceived in the judgment which we pass upon ourselves. But the Scripture gives us no reason to believe that God will then sit in judgment upon us. There is no passage in all the oracles of God which affirm any such thing.... The imagination, therefore, of one judgment at death, and another at the end of the world, can have no place with those who make the written Word of God the whole and sole standard of their faith".<sup>1</sup>

In his "Notes on the New Testament" he is just as specific: "At the moment of death every man's final state is determined. But there is not a word in Scripture of a particular judgment immediately after death".<sup>2</sup>

Modern writers on eschatology have emphasised the fact that there is a continuous process of judgment going on. Christ is continually passing judgment on our moral failures, and exposing our hypocrisy and self-righteousness. When we dare to 'test/ our lives by Christ' we are made aware of judgment.

"Thou judgest us; Thy purity  
Doth all our lusts condemn".<sup>3</sup>

And the process of judgment continues throughout history; indeed, as D.R.Davies has said, "History develops within a framework of judgment".<sup>4</sup> The thought of present judgment is expressed most clearly in the writings of St. John, though the idea of final judgment is not absent. As W.F.Howard pointed out, in John 12, 47-48 "the two conceptions are found side by side with no sense of incongruity".<sup>5</sup> ("And if any

<sup>1</sup> S.S.II, 473-4.

<sup>2</sup> N.N.T. (Hebrews 9,23)

<sup>3</sup> J.G.Whittier (M.H.B.103).

<sup>4</sup> "On to Orthodoxy" p.156.

<sup>5</sup> "Christianity according to St. John" p.113.

man hear My sayings and keep them not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world. He that rejecteth Me, and receiveth not My sayings, hath One that judgeth him; the word that I spake, the same shall judge him in the last day".) Sugden, the editor and annotator of Wesley's Standard Sermons, in his introduction to Sermon XLVIII ("The Great Assize") implies that Wesley concentrates on the Final Judgment to the exclusion of a present judgment.<sup>1</sup> Considering the emphasis we have found in Wesley's writings on what we now call 'realized eschatology' this would be surprising, if it were true. But in fact it is not so. Wesley is, of course, more concerned with the final judgment. But there is a number of references to present judgment. For example -

"In love He doth His sons chastise,  
His desolating judgments send!  
Judgments are mercies in disguise,  
And all in man's salvation end".<sup>2</sup>

An even clearer example is given in one of Wesley's "Hymns for the Year 1745". He suggests that the troubles confronting the nation at that time are God's judgment upon the nation's unrighteousness.

"Destruction from the Lord is come,  
The terrible, almighty Lord,  
To seal a guilty nation's doom:  
Lo! He hath bared the' avenging sword,  
And sent His hostile armies forth  
To plague, and waste, and shake the earth".<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> S.S.II, 400.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.VIII, 305.

<sup>3</sup> P.W.IV, 71.

In one verse Wesley combines present and final judgment, and this in a personal sense.

"Lord, my time is in Thine hand:  
 Judged in man's unrighteous day,  
 Let me in Thy judgment stand,  
 When the wicked melt away,  
 Vindicate Thy servant here,  
 Clear me at the last great bar!"<sup>1</sup>

Part of the terror - and of the hope - of the Judgment is in the fact that it is Christ who will be the Judge. In his note on Matthew 25, 31 ("When the Son of Man shall come in His glory and all the holy angels with Him...") Wesley says:

"With what majesty and grandeur does our Lord speak of Himself! giving us one of the noblest instances of the true sublime. Indeed not many descriptions in the sacred writings themselves seem to equal this. Methinks we can hardly read it, without imagining ourselves before the awful tribunal it describes".<sup>2</sup>

Wesley, like every man, has cause to fear the searching judgment of Christ. But his hope is that Christ will judge, not in strict justice, but in mercy.

"Eternal Judge of quick and dead  
 Thee, Jesus, I my Lord adore,  
 From whom my sentence must proceed,  
 And tremble at Thy boundless power!  
 Judge me not in Thy wrath severe,  
 But in the mildness of Thy grace,  
 Afflict, rebuke, and chasten here,  
 But never drive me from Thy face".<sup>3</sup>

But Christ is not merely our Judge; He is at the same time our Advocate:

<sup>1</sup> P.W.V, 196.

<sup>2</sup> N.N.T (Matthew 25, 31).

<sup>3</sup> P.W.XI, 371.

"Trembling I expect my fate,  
If Thou as my Judge appear;  
If Thou art my Advocate,  
Jesus, what have I to fear?"<sup>1</sup>

Again:

"The Judge of quick and dead,  
The God of truth and love,  
Who doth for sinners plead,  
Our Advocate above".<sup>2</sup>

So, paradoxical as it may be, He who is our Judge is also our Counsel for the Defence, and before He judges us He pleads our cause!

"Before Thou as our Judge appear  
In dreadful majesty severe,  
Appear our Advocate with God,  
And save the purchase of Thy blood".<sup>3</sup>

But even more than that, the Judge is also our Saviour; and He who tries us also pardons our offences.

"My Saviour in my Judge I meet,  
And wait a sinner at Thy feet,  
Thy pardoning voice to hear".<sup>4</sup>

Here is the One who has already acquitted us in so far as we have faith in His atoning blood. He is our loving Saviour. This same thought is expressed by a contemporary theologian. Fison writes:

"It is love which will be revealed at the parousia, and it is love which will be revealed in the last judgment. The two cannot be separated, though it matters a great deal whether we are looking with hope for the appearance of a saviour we love or expecting with despair the arrival of a judge we fear. Christ is the judge and he is the saviour, and 'we shall see him even as he is', but the sight will not be of another Christ than him, whom we now know by faith".<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> P.W.II, 147.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.IV, 192.

<sup>3</sup> P.W.IV, 226.

<sup>4</sup> P.W.XI, 417.

<sup>5</sup> "The Christian Hope", p.209.

Christ will not be alone in the act of judgment; He will be helped by the saints. John Wesley refers to the words of Jesus in Matthew 19,28 - "Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man shall sit in the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel". And his comment on I Corinthians 6,2 is -

"'The saints' - after having been judged themselves - 'shall judge the world' - shall be assessors with Christ in the judgment wherein he shall condemn all the wicked, as well angels as men".<sup>1</sup>

When we come to the actual details of the Final Judgment John Wesley says that the wicked will not be given so much as a glance at the bliss of the righteous. His comment on Matthew 25,46 is -

"The Judge will speak first to the righteous in the audience of the wicked. The wicked shall then go away into everlasting fire in the view of the righteous. Thus the damned shall see nothing of the everlasting life: but the just will see the punishment of the ungodly".<sup>2</sup>

In former ages - encouraged, perhaps, by the Revelation of St. John - Christians have believed that part of the bliss of heaven was to be found in observing the agonies of the damned. While in Wesley there is no evidence of this kind of gloating, he certainly maintained that from heaven the saints would see the punishment of the ungodly.

In his sermon on "The Good Steward" ("Give an account

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<sup>1</sup> N.N.T.

<sup>2</sup> N.N.T.

of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward", Luke 16, 2) Wesley expounds the principles upon which Christ will judge. We shall be asked first, "How didst thou employ thy soul?" God has endowed us with certain powers and faculties - understanding, imagination, memory, will, affections - and we shall be asked to what use we have put them. Christ will say:

"Didst thou fear and hate nothing but sin? Did the whole stream of thy affections flow back to the ocean from whence they came? Were thy thoughts employed according to My will - not in ranging to the ends of the earth, not on folly or sin; but on 'whatsoever things were pure, whatsoever things were holy'; on whatsoever was conducive to My glory, and to 'peace and goodwill among men'?"<sup>1</sup>

Then He will inquire as to the use we have made of our bodies, of our physical faculties. Have we used our tongues in an edifying way, or have we employed them in evil or idle speaking? To what purpose have we used our knowledge, our hearing and our sight? And have we used hands and feet in His service?

"The Lord of all will next inquire, 'How didst thou employ the worldly goods which I lodged in thy hands?'"<sup>2</sup> Wesley himself tells us how these should be used (a method which he certainly employed himself throughout his long life) -

"First supplying thy own reasonable wants, together

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<sup>1</sup> S.S.II, 475.

<sup>2</sup> S.S.II, 476.

with those of thy family; then restoring the remainder to Me, through the poor, whom I had appointed to receive it; looking upon thyself as only one of that number of poor, whose wants were to be supplied out of that part of My substance which I had placed in thy hands for this purpose; leaving thee the right of being supplied first, and the blessedness of giving rather than receiving".<sup>1</sup>

Finally, "The Lord will farther inquire, 'Hast thou been a wise and faithful steward with regard to the talents of a mixed nature which I lent thee?'<sup>2</sup>, by which Wesley means health and strength, education and personality, personal power and time and all the spiritual blessings of which we are heirs. And he concludes:

"And what will remain, either to the faithful or unfaithful steward? Nothing but the execution of that sentence which has been passed by the righteous Judge; fixing thee in a state which admits of no change through everlasting ages! It remains only that thou be rewarded, to all eternity, according to thy works".<sup>3</sup>

In contrast to the doctrine of justification by faith alone, which was absolutely central for Wesley, this seems to suggest a doctrine of justification by works - "It remains only that thou be rewarded, to all eternity, according to thy works"! So Lindstrom points out this distinction:

"In speaking of final salvation in the latter work (i.e. "A Farther Appeal") Wesley calls 'holiness or universal obedience' the 'ordinary condition'. For present salvation faith is the only condition, but for final salvation works are also necessary. St. Paul's statement that faith made perfect by love, or James' that faith made perfect by works, constitutes the condition of salvation, refer, in Wesley's view, to

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<sup>1</sup> S.S.II, 477.

<sup>2</sup> S.S.II, 477.

<sup>3</sup> S.S.II, 478.

'final salvation'. Thus man's relation to God is seen by Wesley in terms of works as well as grace. Works, particularly, in their bearing on the last judgment, are treated as a definite pre-requisite of final justification".<sup>1</sup>

But this does not mean a going back on the doctrine of justification by faith. The work of salvation - present and final alike - is all of Christ, though man must respond. And as the faith is the gift of Christ so also are the works. "Of everything that man undertakes on the path of salvation it is true to say that without God he can do nothing".<sup>2</sup>

In his tract, "Advice to a Soldier", John Wesley says that we shall be judged on our outward works, on our idle words, and on the inner disposition of our hearts. Incidentally, the following quotation reveals the use to which Wesley puts his doctrine of the Judgment in his evangelism:

"And are you to be judged? How is this to be? Why, the Son of God shall come in His glory, and all His holy angels with Him; 'and then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory. And before Him shall be gathered all nations; and He shall separate them from one another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats. Behold, He cometh with clouds! And every eye shall see Him which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty! And I saw' (wilt thou also say) 'a great white throne and Him that sat thereon, from whose face the earth and the heavens fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and they were judged, every man according to his works'. And shalt thou also be judged, according to thy works? all thy works, whether good or evil? Yea, and for every idle

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<sup>1</sup> "Wesley and Sanctification", p.208.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.212.

word which thou shalt speak, thou shalt give an account in the day of judgment. But this is not all: the Lord, the Judge, searcheth the heart, and trieth the reins. He understands all thy thoughts; and for all these likewise He shall bring thee into judgment. Supposest thou it is enough to be outwardly good? What! though thy inward parts are very wickedness? And are they not? Is not thy soul fallen short of the glory (the glorious image) of God? Look into thy breast. Art thou not a fallen spirit? Dost thou not know and feel how very far thou art gone from original righteousness? Deperperately full thou art of all evil, and naked of all good? Is there not in thee an earthly, sensual, devilish mind? a mind that is enmity against God? It is plain there is. For thou dost not love God. Thou dost not delight in Him. He is not the desire of thy eyes, or the joy of thy heart. Thou lovest the creature more than the Creator. Thou art a lover of pleasure more than a lover of God. O, how wilt thou stand in the judgment?"<sup>1</sup>

In a letter to Ann Bolton John Wesley gives a different classification. He writes:

"When the Son of Man shall come in His glory and assign every man his own reward, that reward will undoubtedly be proportioned, first, to our inward holiness, our likeness to God, secondly to our works, and thirdly to our sufferings; therefore for whatever you suffer in time, you will be an unspeakable gainer in eternity".<sup>2</sup>

But of this Charles Wesley is quite certain - it will be a searching judgment, according to the Word of God:

"The process of that dreadful day,  
Discerning truth from specious lies,  
Shall every principle display,  
Shall every doctrine scrutinise,  
If one with the unerring word,  
The standard of our heavenly Lord".<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> W.XI, 198-9.

<sup>2</sup> L.VII, 358.

<sup>3</sup> P.W.XIII, 27.

There will be no escape:

"Who then shall live, and face the throne,  
And face the Judge severe?  
When heaven and earth are fled and gone,  
O where shall I appear?"<sup>1</sup>

There is no doubt that Wesley regarded the preaching of the Judgment as necessary to create within the hearts of unbelievers a sense of moral responsibility, and even of fear. To the captains employed in the Slave Trade he writes:

"Is there a God? You know there is. Is He a just God? Then there must be a state of retribution; a state wherein the just God will reward every man according to his works. Then what reward will He render to you? O think betimes! before you drop into eternity! Think now, 'He shall have judgment without mercy that showed no mercy'".<sup>2</sup>

Nothing will guarantee escape from the condemnation and punishment of the Judge except repentance:

"Tremble, ye Christless crowd,  
Whom death and hell pursue,  
Strangers, and enemies to God,  
Alas! What will ye do?  
In vain ye change your place,  
If still unchanged your mind;  
Or fly to distant climes, unless  
Ye leave your sins behind".<sup>3</sup>

The believer dare not be complacent; he must be filled with 'watchful care', and he must prepare himself in prayer.

"Thou Judge of quick and dead,  
Before whose bar severe  
With holy joy, or guilty dread  
We all shall soon appear;  
Our caution'd souls prepare  
For that tremendous day,  
And fill us now with watchful care,  
And stir us up to pray".<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> P.W.VI, 27.

<sup>2</sup> "Thoughts upon Slavery", W.XI, 76-7.

<sup>3</sup> P.W.VI, 34.

<sup>4</sup> P.W.V, 260.

One of John Wesley's criticisms of the doctrine of Predestination is that it does away with the idea of judgment and of future rewards and punishments.

"If then God be just" he writes in his "Predestination Calmly Considered", "There cannot, on your scheme, be any judgment to come. We may add, nor any future state, either of reward or punishment. If there be such a state, God will therein 'render to every man according to his works. To them who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life; but to them that do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doeth evil'..... Justice can have no place in rewarding or punishing mere machines, driven to and fro by an external force. So that your supposition of God's ordaining from eternity whatsoever should be done to the end of the world: as well as that of God's acting irresistibly in the elect, and Satan's acting irresistibly in the reprobates; utterly overthrows the Scripture doctrine of rewards and punishments, as well as of a judgment to come".<sup>1</sup>

So far we have not considered John Wesley's most specific writing on the Judgment, his sermon on "The Great Assize". To this we must now turn. It was preached at the Assizes in St. Paul's Church, Bedford in 1758; and Wesley's own opinion of the sermon he expressed in his Journal twenty years later: "I cannot write a better on the Great Assize than I did twenty years ago".<sup>2</sup> Suggen tells us that "the title 'The Great Assize' was a familiar name for the Last Judgment; it is found as early as 1340 in Hampole's 'Prick of Conscience'".<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> W.X, 223-4.

<sup>2</sup> J.VI, 209.

<sup>3</sup> Introduction to Sermon, S.S.II, 399.

Wesley begins by reminding his hearers of the solemnity and the seriousness of the Assizes, a Court of Justice which immediately reminds him of the greater Court of Justice, when "we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ",<sup>1</sup> the text of the sermon. He speaks of the value of the idea of a Final Judgment as a motive for ethics.

"Had all men a deep sense of this, how effectually would it secure the interests of society! For what more forcible motive can be conceived to the practice of genuine morality? to a steady pursuit of solid virtue? an uniform walking in justice, mercy and truth? What could strengthen our hands in all that is good, and deter us from all evil, like a strong conviction of this. 'The Judge standeth at the door'; and we are shortly to stand before Him?"<sup>2</sup>

The great Day of Judgment will be preceded by 'signs in the earth beneath'; they will be times of violence, of earthquake and tempest. In the heavens there will be signs in the sun, moon and stars; and the dead will be resurrected to appear before the Judge. The Judge is, of course, Christ, to whom the Father has delegated all judgment. Everyone, every generation and every nation, will be judged. "Every man, every woman, every infant of days that ever breathed the vital air, will then hear the voice of the Son of God, and start into life, and appear before Him".<sup>3</sup>

Wesley realises that this will involve millions upon

<sup>1</sup> Romans 14,10.

<sup>2</sup> S.S.II, 402.

<sup>3</sup> p.407.

millions of people, and as they are all to appear personally before their Judge, the process will involve a very long period of time. The ancient fathers, he says, thinking of II Peter 3,8, spoke of a thousand years, but he believes it may well take several thousand years. The scene of the Judgment may be the earth, where all men's deeds were performed, and their sins committed; though it might well take place in the air.

"But perhaps it is more agreeable to our Lord's own account of His coming in the clouds to suppose it will be above the earth, if not 'twice a planetary height'. And this supposition is not a little favoured by what St. Paul writes to the Thessalonians: 'The dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who remain alive shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air' (I Thess.4,16 and 17). So that it seems most probable the great white throne will be high exalted above the earth".<sup>1</sup>

Here, again, is an example of John Wesley's insatiable curiosity and his literalism where the Scriptures are concerned. Though he is greatly concerned with the spiritual significance of the whole conception of judgment, he yet thinks in terms of space and time. Such discussions as to the length of time the judgment will take, and as to the exact location of it will hardly commend Wesley's views to the modern mind.

As he has maintained elsewhere, John Wesley says in this sermon that the judgment will be a most searching one.

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<sup>1</sup> S.S.II, 406.

God will bring to light all our works, both good and bad, together with all our innermost thoughts and intentions. Even the past deeds of those who have experienced justification and forgiveness will be read out. Wesley realises that this implies a contradiction of such a text as Jeremiah 31,34: "I will forgive their iniquities, and remember their sin no more", and Hebrews 8,12: "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more". But he maintains that the recalling of such sins is necessary "for the full display of the glory of God",<sup>1</sup> in order to justify the ways of God to man, and that "the whole amazing contexture of divine providence may be manifested".<sup>2</sup>

"And then only when God hath brought to light all the hidden things of darkness, whosoever were the actors therein, will it be seen that wise and good were all His ways; that He saw through the thick cloud, and governed all things by the wise counsel of His own will; that nothing was left to chance or the caprice of men, but God disposed all strongly and sweetly, and wrought all into one connected chain of justice, mercy and truth".<sup>3</sup>

The verdict and sentence of the Judge will be unambiguous. The righteous will go straight to an eternal heaven of bliss, and the impenitent to the everlasting torments of hell. Then will come the end, when the earth will be consumed by fire. The strange arguments into which Wesley's literalism leads him - as to whether it will be

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<sup>1</sup> S.S.II, 410.

<sup>2</sup>p.410.

<sup>3</sup> p.410.

possible even for God to generate enough fire to annihilate the world, and as to the meaning of "the sea of glass" - are fantastic and fruitless.

But, as always, Wesley ends on an intensely practical note. He returns to the human Court of Justice, and speaks of the judges as the ministers of God, defending the injured and punishing the wrong-doers, reminding them of their solemn responsibilities. He compares the human trial with the judgment of Christ, pointing out that frequently the criminal may well escape a severe sentence because of lack of evidence. Not so will it be in the Final Judgment. There will be no escape, no excuse. Then comes a magnificent passage, and the concluding challenge:

"See! See! He cometh! He maketh the clouds His chariots! He rideth upon the wings of the wind! A devouring fire goeth before Him, and after Him a flame burneth! See! He sitteth upon His throne, clothed with light as with a garment, arrayed with majesty and honour! Behold, His eyes are as a flame of fire, His voice as the sound of many waters!..... He standeth in the midst! Sinner, doth He not now, even now, knock at the door of thy heart? O that thou mayest know at least in this thy day, the things that belong unto thy peace! O that ye may now give yourselves to Him who gave Himself for you, in humble faith, in holy, active, patient love! So shall ye rejoice with exceeding joy in His day, when He cometh in the clouds of heaven".<sup>1</sup>

Almost every sentence in that passage is either a direct quotation, or a reminiscence of Scripture!

Here, then, in spite of certain literalisms and

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<sup>1</sup> S.S.II, 418-9.

extravagances, is a magnificent exposition of the doctrine of Judgment, used as a theme for evangelism, confronting men with the challenge and the appeal of Christ.

CHAPTER SEVEN.THE END OF THE WORLD.

John Wesley believed that after the Final Judgment the heavens and the earth would be completely destroyed, utterly annihilated by fire. Much of his thought on this matter was based upon his exposition of II Peter 3,7f. In his sermon, "The Great Assize" he vividly describes what is to happen when Christ has finished His judgment:

"Then the heavens will be shrivelled up as a parchment scroll, and pass away with a great noise... The whole beautiful fabric will be overthrown by that raging element (i.e. fire), the connexion of all its parts destroyed, and every atom torn asunder from the others. By the same 'the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burned up' (II Peter 3,10). The enormous works of nature, the everlasting hills, mountains that have defied the rage of time, and stood unmoved so many thousand years, will sink down in fiery ruin. How much less will the works of art, though of the most durable kind, the utmost efforts of human industry - tombs, pillars, triumphal arches, castles, pyramids - be able to withstand the flaming conqueror! All, all will die, perish, vanish away, like a dream when one awaketh!"<sup>1</sup>

Charles Wesley expresses the same idea in his hymns:

"Lift up your eyes, the heavens survey,  
And look upon the earth below;  
The heavens like smoke shall pass away,  
The earth its final period know.

Vanishes hence whate'er is seen,  
The breath of life shall all expire,  
The earth, and all that dwell therein  
Shall perish in that fatal fire".<sup>2</sup>

This will mean, of course, the end of human history, and the universe will be discarded by God as a man might

<sup>1</sup> S.S. II, 412-3.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.IV, 301.

discard a coat that is no longer of any use to him:

"Vanish then the world of shadows;  
 Pass the former things away;  
 Lord, appear, appear to glad us  
 With the dawn of endless day:  
 O conclude this mortal story,  
 Throw this universe aside,  
 Come, eternal King of Glory,  
 Now descend, and take Thy bride".<sup>1</sup>

In another poem Wesley can look beyond the destruction of the world, and see the new world, the New Jerusalem, descending from the sky:

"Then let the thundering trumpet sound;  
 The latest lightning glare;  
 The mountains melt; the solid ground  
 Dissolve as liquid air;  
 The huge celestial bodies roll,  
 Amidst that general fire,  
 And shrivel as a parchment scroll,  
 And all in smoke expire...

So be it! let this system end,  
 This ruinous earth and skies;  
 The New Jerusalem descend,  
 The new creation rise,  
 Thy power omnipotent assume;  
 Thy brightest majesty!  
 And when Thou dost in glory come,  
 My Lord, remember me!"<sup>2</sup>

John, curious as ever, especially where scientific matters are concerned, inquires as to how this great consuming fire can come about. He makes three suggestions. It may happen as the result of a comet striking the earth.

"If it touch the earth in its course toward the sun, (it) must needs strike it into that abyss of fire: if in its return from the sun, when it is heated, as a great man computes, two thousand times hotter than a red-hot cannon-ball, it must destroy all vegetables and animals long before their contact, and soon after burn it up".<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> P.W.VI, 93.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.VI, 27-8.

<sup>3</sup> N.N.T. on II Peter 3,10.

Or it may happen as a result of lightning which, if commanded by the Lord of nature, could bring utter destruction. Or again, it may happen as a result of volcanic eruptions, like those of Aetna, Hecla and Vesuvius; for, says Wesley, there are vast reservoirs of liquid fire in the bowels of the earth sufficient to destroy everyone and everything. But of this one thing we may be sure, that He who created the heaven and the earth has also the power to destroy them; and "there are abundant magazines of fire ready prepared and treasured up against the day of the Lord".<sup>1</sup>

John Wesley would have nothing whatever to do with attempts to forecast the end of the world. George Bell was a member of the Methodist Society. He had been converted in 1758; and, says Tyerman, he

"pretended to be sanctified in the month of March, 1761. A few days afterwards he wrote an account of this to Wesley, in a letter tinged with a frenzy, which Wesley was too ready to regard as the breathings of a superior piety".<sup>2</sup>

But Wesley soon began to get anxious about Bell and his 'enthusiasm', and wrote in his Journal for November 24th, 1762:

"Being determined to hear for myself, I stood where I could hear and see, without being seen. George Bell prayed, in the whole, pretty near an hour. His fervour of spirit I would not but admire. I afterwards told him what I did not admire; namely (1) his screaming, every now and then, in so strange a manner that one could scarce tell what he said;

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<sup>1</sup> S.S.II, 414.

<sup>2</sup> "The Life and Times of John Wesley" II,433.

(2) his thinking he had the miraculous discerning of spirits; and (3) his sharply condemning his opposers".<sup>1</sup>

A short while afterwards Wesley forbade Bell to pray in the Foundery. Then Bell announced that the end of the world was to come about on February 28th, 1763. He left the Society on February 4th, and Wesley immediately disowned him and his prophecy. Wesley sent a letter to the "London Chronicle" on February 9th:

"Sir, I take this opportunity of informing all whom it may concern (i) that Mr. Bell is not a member of our Society; (ii) that I do not believe either the end of the world or any signal calamity will be on the 28th instant; and (iii) that not one in fifty, perhaps not one in five hundred of the people called Methodists believe any more than I do either this or any other of his prophecies".<sup>2</sup>

More than that, Wesley found it necessary to warn his people against the prophecy, and it is typical of him that he took the opportunity to urge his people to 'prepare to meet their God'. He writes:

"Observing the terror occasioned by that wonderful prophecy to spread far and wide, I endeavoured to draw some good therefrom by strongly exhorting the congregation to 'seek the Lord while He might be found'. But at the same time I thought it incumbent upon me to declare (as indeed I had done from the hour I heard it) that 'it must be false, if the Bible be true'".<sup>3</sup>

Bell and his followers ascended a mound near St. Luke's Hospital on the 27th to await events; and there he was arrested, taken before a magistrate, and committed to prison. Wesley's entry in his Journal for February 28th is significant:

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<sup>1</sup> J.IV, 539.

<sup>2</sup> L.IV, 202-3.

<sup>3</sup> J.V, 9.

"Preaching in the evening at Spitalfields on 'Prepare to meet thy God', I largely showed the utter absurdity of the supposition that the world was to end that night. But notwithstanding all I could say, many were afraid to go to bed, and some wandered about in the fields, being persuaded that, if the world did not end, at least London would be swallowed up by an earthquake. I went to bed at my usual time, and was fast asleep about ten o'clock".<sup>1</sup>

Apparently no serious damage was done to the Society, and later, in "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection" Wesley gave his considered judgment on the whole unfortunate matter:

"About the same time, five or six honest enthusiasts foretold the world was to end on the 28th of February. I immediately withstood them, by every possible means, both in public and private. I warned the Society again and again, and spoke severally to as many as I could; and I saw the fruit of my labour. They made exceeding few converts; I believe scarce thirty in our whole Society. Nevertheless they made abundance of noise, gave huge occasion of offence to those who took care to improve to the uttermost every occasion against me, and greatly increased both the number and courage of those who opposed Christian perfection".<sup>2</sup>

It is clear, then, that Wesley himself was not interested in forecasts as to the time of the end of the world. And yet, several years later, he was himself accused of prophesying the end. Apparently in May, 1788 Wesley 'explained the former part of Revelation 14' at Bradford, and he had been misunderstood as stating that the world would end in the year 1836. Obviously some of his friends wrote asking if it were true. On June 3rd, 1788 Wesley wrote to Christopher Hopper:

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<sup>1</sup> J.V, 9

<sup>2</sup> W.XI, 408.

"My Dear Brother, I said nothing, less or more, in Bradford Church concerning the end of the world, neither concerning my own opinion. What I said was that Bengelius had given it as his opinion not that the world would then end, but that the Millennial reign of Christ would begin in the year 1836. I have no opinion at all upon that head. I can determine nothing about it. These calculations are far above, out of my sight. I have only one thing to do, to save my own soul and those that hear me".<sup>1</sup>

Three weeks later he wrote to Walter Churchey on similar lines; apparently an earlier letter of explanation had been lost.

"My dear brother, I answered your last. By what means my letter miscarried, I cannot tell. Above half of that paragraph (which has travelled over most of the kingdom) is very true. The other half is a blunder. What I spoke was a citation from Bengelius, who thought, not that the world would end, but that the Millennium would begin, about the year 1836. Not that I affirm this myself, nor ever did. I do not determine any of these things: they are too high for me. I only desire to creep on in the vale of humble love".<sup>2</sup>

Wesley is not the first, nor the last, person to have **attributed** to him words quoted from another. It no doubt made him realise just how careful he must be.

Perhaps Wesley's attitude is best seen in the following quotation from his Journal:

"Monday the sixth (December, 1762) and the following days I corrected the notes upon the Revelation. Oh how little do we know of this deep book! At least, how little do I know! I can barely conjecture, not affirm any one point concerning that part of it which is yet unfulfilled".<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> L.VIII, 63.

<sup>2</sup> L.VIII, 67.

<sup>3</sup> J.IV, 540.

The Millennium.

Already we have seen that John Wesley quoted in a sermon the view of Bengelius that the millennial reign of Christ would begin in the year 1836, though he himself confessed absolute ignorance of the date. What were Wesley's own views on Millennialism?

The earliest reference we have in Wesley's writings is in his second sermon on "Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount" - on "The meek shall inherit the earth". He says:

"But there seems to be a yet farther meaning in these words, even that they shall have a more eminent part in 'the new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness'; in that inheritance, a general description of which (and the particulars we shall know hereafter) St. John hath given in the twentieth chapter of the Revelation: 'And I saw an angel come down from heaven...and he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent...and bound him a thousand years... And I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the Word of God, and of them which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until a thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years'".<sup>1</sup>

So far it seems Wesley is content to accept the doctrine as stated in Revelation 20, without delving too deeply into it.

Wesley's long and careful letter written in 1749 to

<sup>1</sup> S.S.I, 341-2.

Dr. Middleton, Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, in criticism of his book, "A Free Inquiry into the Miraculous Powers which are supposed to have subsisted in the Christian Church" makes further reference. Dr. Middleton had apparently accused both Justin Martyr and Irenaeus of heresy in their belief in the Millennium. Of Justin he had said: 'He believed the doctrine of the Millennium; or 'that all the saints should be raised in the flesh, and reign with Christ, in the enjoyment of all sensual pleasures, for a thousand years before the general resurrection''; to which Wesley replied:

"The doctrine (as you very well know) which Justin deduced from the Prophets and the Apostles, and in which he was undoubtedly followed by the Fathers of the second and third centuries, is this: The souls of them who have been martyred for the witness of Jesus and for the Word of God, and who have not worshipped the beast, neither received his mark, shall live and reign with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead shall not live again until the thousand years are finished".<sup>1</sup>

When he came to write his Notes on Revelation 20 John Wesley was prepared to go into further detail. It must be remembered that the Notes are based on Bengelius' "Gnomon Novi Testamenti", and Wesley may here be repeating Bengelius' exegesis; though one cannot imagine Wesley expressing anything contrary to his own beliefs. On verse 2 he writes: "The danger does not lie in maintaining that the thousand years are yet to come, but in interpreting them, whether past or to come, in a poor and carnal sense".<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> L.II, 340-1.

<sup>2</sup> N.N.T.

And on verse 4:

"'A thousand years'. It must be observed, that two distinct thousand years are mentioned throughout this whole passage. Each is mentioned thrice; the thousand wherein Satan is bound, verses 2,3,7: the thousand wherein the saints shall reign, verses 4-6. The former end before the end of the world; the latter reach to the general resurrection. So that the beginning and end of the former thousand is before the beginning and end of the latter... but neither the beginning of the first nor of the second thousand will be known to the men upon earth, as both the imprisonment of Satan and his loosing are transacted in the invisible world".<sup>1</sup>

Again, Wesley is prepared to accept the obvious meaning of the verses without too much thought. But Charles Perronet had claimed that Christ would not reign on earth. In a letter to Samuel Furly Wesley says:

"Charles Perronet, the author of that remark on II Peter 3,13, does not believe Christ will reign at all upon earth, nor any millennium till we come to heaven. The argument by which he endeavours to prove that St. Peter there speaks only to what will precede the Day of Judgment is this: 'If these expressions, a new heaven and a new earth, refer only to this world when they occur in Isaiah, then they refer to nothing more when they are used by St. Peter'".<sup>2</sup>

Obviously Wesley's colleagues could not accept Perronet's view, for three months later Wesley again writes to Furly:

"When we revised the notes on St. Peter, our brethren were all of the same opinion with you. So we set Charles' criticism aside, and let the note stand as it was".<sup>3</sup>

And he goes on -

"I have not read Dr. Newton on the Prophets. But the bare text of the Revelation from the time I first read it satisfied me as to the general doctrine of the Millennium. But of the particulars I am willingly ignorant since they are not revealed".<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> N.N.T.

<sup>2</sup> L.IV, 197-8. <sup>3</sup>L.IV, 204.

<sup>4</sup> L.IV, 204.

In 1764 a book was published by Thomas Hartley, a scholar and a devout Christian, and a friend of the Countess of Huntingdon. The book was entitled:

"Paradise Restored: or a Testimony to the Doctrine of the Blessed Millennium, or Christ's Glorious Reign with His Saints on Earth". John Wesley began to read it on February 5th, and on March 27th wrote to Hartley:

"Your book on the Millennium and the Mystic writers was lately put into my hands. I cannot but thank you for your strong and seasonable confirmation of that comfortable doctrine, of which I cannot entertain the least doubt as long as I believe the Bible".<sup>1</sup>

Hartley's exposition of the doctrine kept very close to Revelation 20, and avoided any excesses or exaggerated claims. This it was, no doubt, that appealed to Wesley.

Wesley steadfastly refused to prophesy or guess when the earthly reign of Christ would begin. In the Methodist Magazine, 1827 appeared Wesley's words: "I have no opinion at all upon when the millennial reign of Christ will begin; I can determine nothing at all about it; these calculations are far above, out of my sight".<sup>2</sup>

He avoided what Tyerman calls "the wild whimsies of the millenarians of the present age"<sup>3</sup>; but he did believe in the certainty of Christ's reign, on the authority of the Scriptures.

Charles, like his brother John, refused to discuss

<sup>1</sup> L.IV, 234.

<sup>2</sup> p.392. Quoted by Tyerman, "The Life and Times of John Wesley" II,524.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. II,524.

the doctrine at any length; but he assumed its truth. There are several passing references in the hymns, but no exposition.

He says that the Millennium will follow the Final Judgment:

"Judge of Thine antichristian foe,  
Appear on earth again,  
And then Thy thousand years below  
Before Thine ancients reign".<sup>1</sup>

It will mean the great victory of Christ, the assumption of His power:

"Till Jesus His great power assumes,  
And the millennial kingdom comes".<sup>2</sup>

Charles Wesley suggests, in one hymn, that Christ will reign alone:

"The Son, at God's right hand He sits,  
Expecting, in Divine repose,  
Till earth to His command submits,  
While trampling on His vanquish'd foes,  
He mounts His great millennial throne,  
And reigns o'er all His worlds alone".<sup>3</sup>

But elsewhere he says that the ransomed sons of men will share in the reign:

"O wouldst Thou bring the final scene,  
Accomplish the redeeming plan,  
Thy great millennial reign begin;  
That every ransom'd child of man,  
That every soul may bow the knee,  
And rise, to reign with God in Thee".<sup>4</sup>

Charles Wesley looks forward eagerly to the Millennium because it will be a time of great joy for

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<sup>1</sup> P.W.XI, 201.    <sup>2</sup> P.W.XI, 410.    <sup>3</sup> P.W.XIII, 142.

<sup>4</sup> P.W.IV, 191.

the Christian.

"Come, then, our heavenly Friend,  
Sorrow and death to end,  
Pure, millennial joy to give.  
Now appear on earth again,  
Now Thy people saved receive,  
Now begin Thy glorious reign".<sup>1</sup>

And after the thousand years? 'He shall reign for ever and ever'.

"Reign Thy thousand years below,  
And then for ever reign".<sup>2</sup>

Tyerman claims that not only John and Charles Wesley, but some of the most distinguished of the first Methodists, believed this doctrine; and he refers to a letter written by Fletcher to Wesley in 1755 in which -

"he expresses a conviction that the end of the world is near at hand, and adduces elaborate reasons for this opinion. He confesses his belief in the second coming of our Saviour; in His making war among His enemies; and in His personal reign on earth for a thousand years".<sup>3</sup>

Dr. Glasson, in his book, "His Appearing and His Kingdom", has shown that the doctrine of the Millennium was never a part of the universal faith. While Justin and Irenaeus were millenarians, Clement of Alexandria and Origen were not. Augustine claimed that the Church's history from the Death and Resurrection of Christ was the millennium.<sup>4</sup> The main reformers of the sixteenth century rejected it, but it was adopted by some at least of the Anabaptists.<sup>5</sup> But, most significant of all, this doctrine is to be found in the New Testament in only one

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<sup>1</sup> P.W.XIII, 142.    <sup>2</sup> P.W.X, 111.    <sup>3</sup> Tyerman, op.cit., II, 220

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter 13.    <sup>5</sup> Ibid. p.152.

passage - in Revelation 20.

Glasson shows that the doctrine was a development from Jewish Apocalyptic. He says:

"The conception of a temporary kingdom on the present earth arose in Judaism as a compromise between two conflicting views: (a) According to one, the present earth will be the site of an everlasting Messianic kingdom. (b) According to the other, the present universe will be destroyed and a new creation will provide the scene of the eternal kingdom".<sup>1</sup>

The New Testament certainly seems to hold both these conflicting views. II Peter 3 represents the annihilation of the present world, whereas there are certain passages (e.g. Romans 8, 19-22) which seem to hint at a redeemed and restored creation. Wesley shared this ambiguity. We have already seen how he maintained that the world would be utterly consumed in a great conflagration in the last day<sup>2</sup>; and we shall presently consider his exposition of "the restoration of all things".<sup>3</sup> But he certainly does not find a compromise in the millennial doctrine; indeed, he makes no attempt to relate this doctrine to his general eschatology. For example, it would seem that the doctrine of the Millennium implies two resurrections, a resurrection of the Christian martyrs who reign with Christ during the thousand years, and then the final resurrection and judgment. Yet Wesley, in his discussion of the resurrection, makes no reference to this.

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<sup>1</sup> Glasson, "The Second Advent", p.199.

<sup>2</sup> Chapter 5, pp 87f. above.      <sup>3</sup> pp. 169f. below.

In fact it seems that, confronted with Revelation 20, Wesley could not ignore the conception of the Millennium; yet he was not a systematic theologian, and he was not sufficiently interested in the idea of the Millennium to integrate it with his general eschatological beliefs.

The Restoration of all Things.

John Wesley obviously felt some hesitancy in discussing and preaching upon the details of the Last Days. But his was expository preaching, and he was concerned to expound and to work out the ideas of the relevant Scripture texts. For example, at the beginning of a sermon on Revelation 21,5 ("Behold I make all things new) he says:

"It must be allowed that, after all the researches we can make, still our knowledge of the great truth which is delivered to us in these words, is exceedingly short and imperfect. As this is a point of mere revelation, beyond the reach of all our natural faculties, we cannot penetrate far into it, nor form any adequate conception of it. But it may be an encouragement to those who have, in any degree, tasted of the powers of the world to come, to go as far as they can go; interpreting scripture by scripture, according to the analogy of faith".<sup>1</sup>

So he ventures to explain what is meant by John's vision, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth". It is clear, he says, that the reference to heaven is not to:

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<sup>1</sup> W.VI, 289.

"the more immediate residence of God, so far as any residence can be ascribed to His omnipresent Spirit, who pervades and fills the whole universe. It is here (if we speak after the manner of men) that the Lord sitteth upon His throne, surrounded by angels and archangels, and by all His flaming ministers. We cannot think that this heaven will undergo any change, any more than its Great Inhabitant. Surely this palace of the Most High was the same from eternity, and will be, world without end".<sup>1</sup>

No, the reference must be to 'the starry heavens'. These, with the world, will be utterly destroyed by fire, and then re-created in perfection.

"This is the introduction to a far nobler state of things, such as it has not yet entered into the heart of men to conceive - the universal restoration which is to succeed the universal destruction".<sup>2</sup>

The starry heavens will be remade, and all will be 'exact order and harmony'. Apparently Wesley believed that comets were 'horrid, eccentric orbs', 'half-formed planets', lacking the precision of other heavenly bodies, and therefore there will be no place for them in the perfection of the 'new heaven'.

The elements, too, will be changed. Fire will lose its power to burn and destroy. The air will be no more disturbed by storms and tempests. "There will be no more meteors, with their horrid glare, affrighting the poor children of men".<sup>3</sup> There will be no more rain, and "the sea will then retire within its primitive bounds, and appear on the surface of the earth no more"<sup>4</sup>.

There will be no longer extremes of temperature

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<sup>1</sup> W.VI, 290.

<sup>2</sup> W.VI, 290.

<sup>3</sup> W.VI, 292.

<sup>4</sup> W.VI, 292

anywhere upon the face of the earth, nor will there be any volcanoes or earthquakes.

"And what will the general produce of the earth be? Not thorns, briars or thistles; not any useless or fetid weed; not any poisonous, hurtful or unpleasant plant; but every one that can be conducive, in any wise, either to our use or pleasure".<sup>1</sup>

The animals, too, will be transformed, and the vision of Isaiah 65,25 will be fulfilled:

"On the new earth, no creature will kill or hurt or give pain to any other. The scorpion will have no poisonous sting; the adder no venomous teeth. The lion will have no claws to tear the lamb; no teeth to grind his flesh and bones. Nay, no creature, no beast, bird or fish will have any inclination to hurt any other; for cruelty will be far away, and savageness and fierceness be forgotten. So that violence shall be heard no more, neither wasting or destruction seen on the face of the earth. 'The wolf shall dwell with the lamb', (the words may be literally as well as figuratively understood), 'and the leopard shall lie down with the kid: They shall not hurt nor destroy' from the rising of the sun, to the going down of the same".<sup>2</sup>

Wesley had pondered long on what he called 'the brute creation', and upon the mystery of the cruelty and destructiveness of nature. His thinking was governed by the passage in Romans 8, 19-22, and this formed the text of a sermon which he entitled, "The General Deliverance". The Genesis story of creation, he says, implies that before the Fall of Man all the beasts were with Adam in paradise. Peace and harmony, happiness and

<sup>1</sup> W.VI, 294.

<sup>2</sup> W.VI, 295.

perfect freedom existed between them. And

"man was God's vicegerent upon earth, the prince and governor of this lower world; and all the blessings of God flowed through him to the inferior creatures. Man was the channel of conveyance between his Creator and the whole brute creation".<sup>1</sup>

But when Adam sinned against God, the whole creation was involved in his fall.

"As all the blessings of God in paradise flowed through man to the inferior creatures; as man was the great channel of communication between the Creator and the whole brute creation; so when man made himself incapable of transmitting those blessings, that communication was necessarily cut off. The intercourse between God and the inferior creatures being stopped, those blessings could no longer flow in upon them. And then it was that 'the creature', every creature, 'was subjected to vanity', to sorrow, to pain of every kind, to all manner of evils: Not, indeed, 'willingly', not by its own choice, not by any act or deed of its own; 'but by reason of Him that subjected it', by the wise permission of God, determining to draw eternal good out of this temporary evil".<sup>2</sup>

Thus, as a direct result of the rebellion of Adam, the animal kingdom lost much of its vigour and strength and speed; it lost much of its understanding and intelligence.

("perhaps insects and worms had then as much understanding as the most intelligent brutes have now: Whereas millions of creatures have, at present, little more understanding than the earth on which they crawl, or the rock to which they adhere"!)<sup>3</sup>

The animals lost their freedom and became slaves to appetites. They became, for the most part, the enemies of

<sup>1</sup> W.VI, 244.

<sup>2</sup> W.VI, 245.

<sup>3</sup> W.VI, 245-6.

man, and preyed cruelly and savagely upon one another. Even their outward appearance altered, and they became ugly, grisly and terrifying. And pain, disease and death overtook them. This is the state of the world today, and this is the sole reason for 'Nature red in tooth and claw'.

"But will 'the creature', will even the brute creation, always remain in this deplorable condition? God forbid that we should affirm this; yea, or even entertain such a thought! While 'the whole creation groaneth together' (whether men attend or not) their groans are not dispersed in idle air, but enter into the ears of Him that made them. While His creatures 'travail together in pain', He knoweth all their pain, and is bringing them nearer and nearer to the birth, which shall be accomplished in its season. He seeth 'the earnest expectation' wherewith the whole animated creation 'waiteth for' that final 'manifestation of the sons of God'; in which 'they themselves shall also be delivered' (not by annihilation; annihilation is not deliverance) 'from the' present 'bondage of corruption into' a measure of 'the glorious liberty of the children of God'".<sup>1</sup>

So that flow of blessings through man to the brute creation, which was blocked and dried up by man's sin and rebellion begins again through redeemed mankind, and the whole creation is restored to that beauty and harmony and perfection which it had from the beginning.

Here, then, is an important element in John Wesley's conception of "The Last Things". It reveals, not only his faithfulness to the Scriptures, but also the depth and breadth of his thinking. It shows not only his interest in the whole animal kingdom, but his attempt to

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<sup>1</sup> W.VI, 248.

solve the whole problem of evil in the world of nature.

So W. R. Cannon has written:

"The notion of the redemption of animals and of all the lower forms of life was a conviction which Wesley consistently held and constantly refused to surrender. It did not arise from any sentimental attachments, such as his fondness for his horse, which he said he expected to find in heaven. Rather, it emerged as a necessary consequence of God's eternal loyalty to the things which he made and his absolute justice and righteousness and mercy which do not limit themselves to the level of human life. It was likewise an integral factor in his solution of the problem of evil. He maintained that physical evil emerged as a consequence of moral evil; and, if physical evil caused the innocent to suffer, it at the same time worked for their benefit in the long run and added blessings to the state of their final redemption".<sup>1</sup>

### The Final Victory.

Wesley looked forward with confidence to the final triumph of Christ. There are times when he seems to embrace universalism, and suggest that in the end Christ's victory will be complete. In the last sermon he preached before the University of Oxford, "Scriptural Christianity", he criticised both the university and the nation as unchristian. Yet he looked forward to the day when the whole world would be truly Christian.

"But shall we not see greater things than these? Yea, greater than have been yet from the beginning of the world. Can Satan cause the truth of God to fail, or His promises to be of none effect? If not, the time will come when Christianity will prevail over all, and cover the earth".<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "The Theology of John Wesley," p.212 note 53. <sup>2</sup> S.S.I.,102.

The same thought is expressed in the concluding words of another sermon, "The General Spread of the Gospel":

"All unprejudiced persons may see with their eyes, that He is already renewing the face of the earth: And we have strong reason to hope that the work He hath begun, He will carry on unto the day of the Lord Jesus; that He will never intermit this blessed work of His Spirit, until He has fulfilled all His promises, until He hath put a period to sin and misery and infirmity and death, and re-established universal holiness and happiness, and caused all the inhabitants of the earth to sing together, 'Hallelujah, the Lord God omnipotent reigneth!' 'Blessing and glory and wisdom and honour and power and might be unto our God for ever and ever' (Rev. 7,12)".<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Rattenbury has pointed out that in none of Charles Wesley's hymns is there any hope held out for the finally impenitent. Hell is a place of everlasting torment, and it will not want for inhabitants.

"Yet" he says "his belief in the boundlessness of God's love to every man was so unqualified as to make one wonder if he could have believed that even a future hell could overcome or withstand it... In one of his best-loved hymns he sings -  
 'Stronger His love than death or hell;  
 His riches are unsearchable'.  
 Underneath always in heaven or earth or hell are the everlasting arms".<sup>2</sup>

That John Wesley believed that the Scriptures themselves hint at such a complete and universal victory of Christ is seen from the number of Biblical quotations he includes in the following passage, taken from an exposition of that part of the Sermon on the Mount which includes the Lord's Prayer. It will also be seen that it

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<sup>1</sup> W.VI, 288.

<sup>2</sup> "The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley's Hymns" p.133

includes the thought of the final renovation of all things.

"When therefore God shall 'give His Son the heathen for His inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession'; when 'all kingdoms shall bow before Him, and all nations shall do Him service'; when 'the mountain of the Lord's house', the church of Christ, 'shall be established in the top of the mountains'; when 'the fullness of the Gentiles shall come in, and all Israel shall be saved'; then shall it be seen, that 'the Lord is King, and hath put on glorious apparel', appearing to every soul of man as King of kings and Lord of lords. And it is meet for all those who love His appearing, to pray that He would hasten the time; that this His kingdom, the kingdom of grace, may come quickly, and swallow up all the kingdoms of the earth; that all mankind, receiving Him for their King, truly believing in His name, may be filled with righteousness and peace and joy, with holiness and happiness; till they are removed hence into His heavenly kingdom, there to reign with Him for ever and ever.

For this also we pray in those words, 'Thy kingdom come'; we pray for the coming of His everlasting kingdom, the kingdom of glory in heaven, which is the continuation and perfection of the kingdom of grace on earth. Consequently this, as well as the preceding petition, is offered up for the whole intelligent creation, who are all interested in this grand event, the final renovation of all things, by God's putting an end to misery and sin, to infirmity and death, taking all things into His own hands, and setting up the kingdom which endureth throughout all ages".<sup>1</sup>

Yet Wesley consciously rejected universalism. It was one of the doctrines of the Moravians that he opposed. "Those three great errors run through almost all those (i.e. Moravian) books, viz. Universal Salvation, Antinomianism, and a kind of new-reformed Quietism".<sup>2</sup>

His controversy with the Calvinists made him consider carefully the concept of irresistible grace, and,

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<sup>1</sup> S.S.I, 437.

<sup>2</sup> J.II, 498.

in the end, to reject it. What may well appear to be irresistible grace in one's own experience is, says Wesley, a grace which assists, but does not force.

"You know how God wrought in your own soul, when he first enabled you to say, 'The life I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me'. He did not take away your understanding; but enlightened and strengthened it. He did not destroy any of your affections; rather they were more vigorous than before. Least of all did he take away your liberty, your power of choosing good or evil: He did not force you; but, being assisted by his grace, you, like Mary, chose the better part".<sup>1</sup>

True, there are special cases where "the o'erwhelming power of saving grace" does seem to work irresistibly. But it is only for a time, and only occasionally. Yet the conclusion Wesley draws from this is that, even without 'irresistible grace', even without destroying or overriding man's liberty, God has converted many to Himself, and He "can undoubtedly convert whole nations, or the whole world".<sup>2</sup>

Yet, as we shall see, Wesley concluded that the great majority of mankind would resist God's grace, and would remain everlastingly in hell. And he was convinced that this in no way lessened or made incomplete the triumph of Christ, but rather vindicated it.

So, in the words of Scripture John Wesley portrays that final victory:

"'Then' - after the resurrection and the general judgment 'cometh the end' - of the world; the grand period of all those wonderful scenes that have appeared for so many succeeding generations. 'When He

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<sup>1</sup> W.VI, 280.

<sup>2</sup> W.VI, 281.

shall have delivered up the Kingdom to the Father and he (the Father) shall have abolished all 'adverse 'rule, authority and power' - not that the Father will then begin to reign without the Son, nor will the Son then cease to reign. For the divine reign both of the Father and the Son is from everlasting to everlasting. But this is spoken of the Son's mediatorial kingdom which will then be delivered up, and of the immediate kingdom or reign of the Father, which will then commence. Till then the Son transacts the business which the Father hath given him, for those who are his, and by them as well as by the angels, with the Father and against their enemies. So far as the Father gave the kingdom to the Son, the Son shall deliver it up to the Father. (John 13,3). Nor does the Father cease to reign, when he gives it to the Son; neither the Son, when he delivers it to the Father: but the glory which he had before the world began (John 17,5; Hebrews 1,8) will remain even after this is delivered up. Nor will he cease to be a king even in his human nature. (Luke 1,33). If the citizens of the 'new Jerusalem' shall 'reign for ever' (Rev. 22,5) how much more shall he?"<sup>1</sup>

Charles Wesley expresses the same thought of ultimate victory and consummation in a hymn:

"The end of sin and death is near:  
 The Man shall then to God resign  
 His kingdom and dominion here,  
 His exercise of grace Divine,  
 The Kingdom which His Father gave,  
 The delegated power to save.

When all His friends are saved at last,  
 And all His enemies destroy'd,  
 The Mediator's sway is past,  
 His office and commission void,  
 The Man's authority is o'er,  
 And Christ for sinners pleads no more.

But Christ the God maintains His throne,  
 No period shall His kingdom see,

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<sup>1</sup> N.N.T. on I. Corinthians 15,24.

By nature with His Father one,  
A king from all eternity.  
The same Jehovah He remains,  
And o'er His saints for ever reigns".<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> P.W.VII, 222-223.

CHAPTER EIGHT.HELL.

It has sometimes been claimed that the success of John Wesley's evangelistic preaching was due in large measure to his preaching on Hell, to his using the motive of fear, and to his vivid, literal and terrifying descriptions of the tortures of the damned. Marjorie Bowen, in her biography, "Wrestling Jacob", seems certainly to be much more preoccupied with Hell than ever Wesley himself was! One cannot imagine a greater travesty of Wesley's teaching than that contained in the introduction to her book.

"Whether it was for good or evil that John Wesley so drugged and stunned the illiterate poor with his preaching of Hell fire, a sentimental 'love of God' and his doctrine of a life lived according to rigid rules as the only means of salvation, may be a matter of dispute".<sup>1</sup>

Miss Bowen says:

"John Wesley took advantage of that religious emotion he was able to rouse in the wretched and ignorant, to implant some terrible falsehoods in their shivering hearts; the most dreadful of these was Hell".<sup>2</sup>

Even she, however, has to admit that Wesley "did not often use eternal punishment as his central theme".<sup>3</sup>

Among the one hundred and forty one sermons printed in his collected works only one is specifically on Hell.

<sup>1</sup> "Wrestling Jacob", Bowen (1937) p.viii.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.316.

<sup>3</sup> p.316.

When we remember the whole theological climate of the eighteenth century, and the generally accepted literal interpretation of the Bible, the marvel is, not that Wesley preached so often about Hell, but that he did not do so more frequently. The verdict of Vulliamy, a professional writer, and not himself a Methodist, in his excellent biography of "John Wesley", is as follows:

"It seems necessary, at this point, to refute the idea that Wesley produced his conversions by invoking the terrors of divine wrath, and thus working upon the fears of the feeble-minded. Ignorant people still believe that Wesley habitually preached against a lurid background of eternal conflagration. No idea of the man or his method could be more villainously false. It was only in extremely rare cases that Wesley appealed to the 'terror of the Lord' - indeed that phrase hardly ever occurs in his Journal... Faith and salvation were his principal themes. He spoke always in the plainest manner, with measure, deliberation and gravity; but never with the intention of frightening people into repentance".<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Rattenbury, one of the greatest living authorities on the Wesleys, has written:

"It has been generally held that the Methodist Revival was based on the fear of hell, but in point of fact, though the wrath of God was always in the background, the Wesleys themselves appealed very little to this fear, and warned their preachers against doing so. For instance, in the Minutes of Conference, 1744 we read:

Q. Do not some of our assistants preach too much of the wrath and too little of the love of God?

A. We fear that they have leaned to that extreme".<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "John Wesley", Vulliamy (1931) p.129.

<sup>2</sup> "The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley's Hymns", p.79.

And, writing specifically of Charles Wesley's hymns, Rattenbury says: "It is extraordinary how relatively little the terrors of hell are dealt with in these hymns of evangelistic appeal".<sup>1</sup> It was the Wesleys' very compassion for their hearers that made them warn them of the dangers, in this life and the next, of impenitence and unbelief.

Charles Wesley was concerned to remind his hearers that Hell could always be a present experience. He can say -

"I have my hell within".<sup>2</sup>

And he can speak of the sinner

"Who bears about him his own hell".<sup>3</sup>

This experience of present Hell comes as a consequence of not loving Christ:

"I do not love my bleeding Lord;  
No other hell I need".<sup>4</sup>

To be separated from Him means Hell:

"Heaven is hell without my Lord,  
Hell is heaven if Thou art there".<sup>5</sup>

Again:

"O, 'tis hell from Thee to part".<sup>6</sup>

And:

"O sovereign love, to Thee I cry;  
Give me Thyself, or else I die.  
Save me from death, from hell set free,  
Death, hell, are but the want of Thee".<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p.78.    <sup>2</sup> P.W.IV, 462.    <sup>3</sup> P.W.X, 495.

<sup>4</sup> P.W.IV, 335.    <sup>5</sup> P.W.V, 357.    <sup>6</sup> P.W.II, 98.    <sup>7</sup> P.W.I, 88.

There is a Hell of sin, bringing its stings of conscience, its dreadful sense of guilt, and its remorse:

"What shall I do to 'scape the hell  
That burns me up within?  
Satan, and all his hosts, I feel  
In this indwelling sin".<sup>1</sup>

And:

"O who can pity me!  
The sin-avenging rod  
I every moment feel,  
The arrows of Almighty God,  
The antepast of hell".<sup>2</sup>

Before a man can know deliverance and forgiveness he must be aware of his need. And so Wesley sings:

"Still let me groan beneath  
A nature all unclean,  
And drag the body of this death,  
And feel this hell of sin".<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, the sinner's hope lies only in a realisation of

"Late remorse and present hell".<sup>4</sup>

Of course, this present Hell is not the true Hell, the place of everlasting torment and complete separation from God. But it is certainly a foretaste - a real foretaste - of it.

"Here the restless sinner gains  
An antepast of Hell".<sup>5</sup>

Though the sinner may not be fully aware of the Hell in which he dwells, when he has been saved by grace he knows the Hell from which he has been delivered, as the

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<sup>1</sup> P.W.II, 101.    <sup>2</sup> P.W.IV, 394.    <sup>3</sup> P.W.IV, 403.

<sup>4</sup> P.W.X, 4.    <sup>5</sup> P.W.XI, 355.

following quotations show:

"O the miracle of grace!  
Tell it out to sinners, tell;  
Fiends, and men and angels gaze,  
I am, I am out of hell!"<sup>1</sup>

"Saviour, for this I thank Thee now,  
My Saviour to the utmost, Thou  
Hast snatch'd me from the gates of hell".<sup>2</sup>

"'Twas grace from hell that brought us up".<sup>3</sup>

"Was I not caught up from hell,  
And strangely raised to heaven?"<sup>4</sup>

John Wesley's belief was not by any means confined to this present, 'realized' experience of Hell. He firmly believed in everlasting Hell as a punishment for unbelievers. Scattered throughout his Journal are one or two references to his preaching specifically on Hell.

"I preached at eight on 'The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people that forget God'. The whole congregation was earnestly attentive; but not above one or two cried out, and I did not observe any that fainted away, either then or in the morning".<sup>5</sup>

"I preached at Pensford and Shepton Mallet on my way to Wincanton, one of the dullest places in all the county. I preached on Death in the evening and Hell in the morning. It seemed these were the very subjects they wanted. I never saw this careless people so much affected".<sup>6</sup>

"I preached at Pill on the 'worm' that 'dieth not, and the fire' that 'is not quenched': if haply some of these drowsy ones might awake, and escape from everlasting burnings".<sup>7</sup>

"Returning from Bedford I tried another way to

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<sup>1</sup> P.W.II, 213.    <sup>2</sup> P.W.II, 232.    <sup>3</sup> P.W.III, 95.

<sup>4</sup> P.W.II, 111.    <sup>5</sup> J.IV, 347.    <sup>6</sup> J.V, 392.    <sup>7</sup> J.VI, 40.

reach them. I preached on 'Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched': and set before them the terrors of the Lord, in the strongest manner I was able. It seemed to be the very thing they wanted. They not only listened with the deepest attention, but appeared to be more affected than I had ever seen them by any discourse before".<sup>1</sup>

It seems, from this last quotation, that Wesley did at times use the motive of fear. And yet always his dominant motive was one of compassion and concern for those to whom he preached. In a letter to a certain 'John Smith'<sup>2</sup>, who had written to Wesley, apparently criticising him for his excessive zeal, Wesley writes:

"But may not love itself constrain us to lay before men 'the terrors of the Lord'? And is it not better that sinners 'should be terrified now than that they should sleep on and awake in hell'? I have known exceeding happy effects of this, even upon men of strong understanding; yet I agree with you that there is little good to be done by 'the profuse throwing about hell and damnation'".<sup>3</sup>

Tyerman made a distinction which John Wesley might well have made himself: "It may be unreasonable to think of frightening a man to heaven; but it is not unreasonable to endeavour to frighten him away from hell".<sup>4</sup>

Wesley believed that the motive of fear, "the terror of the Lord", could serve to awaken those who were morally and spiritually asleep, and make them aware of their danger. Charles Wesley expresses it perhaps even more

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<sup>1</sup> J.V, 45.      <sup>2</sup> It is believed that 'John Smith' was the pseudonym of Thomas Secker, Bishop of Bristol, and Oxford and later Archbishop of Canterbury.      <sup>3</sup> L.II, 69.

<sup>4</sup> "The Life and Times of John Wesley", I,468.

forcibly than John would have done:

"Trouble the souls who know not God,  
 Their careless, Christless spirits wound,  
 O'erwhelm with their own sinful load,  
 And all their virtuous pride confound,  
 Their depth of wickedness reveal,  
 And shake them o'er the mouth of hell".<sup>1</sup>

John Wesley believed that the motive of fear could also lead to necessary repentance.

"When men feel in themselves the heavy burthen of sin, see damnation to be the reward of it, behold with the eye of their mind the horror of hell, they tremble, they quake, and are inwardly touched with sorrowfulness of heart, and cannot but accuse themselves, and open their grief to Almighty God, and call unto Him for mercy".<sup>2</sup>

And this, says Wesley, is the gateway to the experience of justification. In a further letter to 'John Smith' he stresses the importance, to himself and to his hearers, of keeping ever before them the thought of heaven and hell.

"Sir, - I. You put me in mind of an eminent man who, preaching at St. James's said, 'If you do not repent, you will go to a place which I shall not name before this audience'. I cannot promise so much, either in preaching or writing, before any audience or to any person whatever. Yet I am not conscious of doing this very often - of 'profusely flinging about everlasting fire'; though it is true I mentioned it in my last letter to you, as I have done now a second time; and perhaps I may mention it yet again. For, to say the truth, I desire to have both heaven and hell ever in my eye, while I stand on this isthmus of life, between these two boundless oceans; and I verily think the daily consideration of both highly becomes all men of reason and religion".<sup>3</sup>

Yet surely Curnock is right when he says:

<sup>1</sup> P.W.IV, 186.

<sup>2</sup> L.II, 268.

<sup>3</sup> L.II, 97.

"He (John Wesley) was sparing in his use of fear as a motive...Atlantic storms and their evanescent effect on himself and his godless fellow passengers cured him of any faith he may hitherto have cherished in the sovereign, saving grace of fear".<sup>1</sup>

For, after the storms at sea, had he not written: "But for the future I will never believe them to obey from fear who are dead to the motives of love".<sup>2</sup>

Of Wesley's preaching on Hell it could be said, I believe, what has recently been said of Jesus:

"That Jesus did teach the reality of future condemnation seems inescapable. Using the thought-forms of His day He was not, however, tied to it. His words leave us with a firm impression of His belief in hell, and a constant reminder that His chief concern was not to tell people they were going there, but to warn them of its dangers so that they might escape them".<sup>3</sup>

Charles Wesley expresses his deep concern in the lines:

"I want an even, strong desire  
I want a calmly fervent zeal,  
To save poor souls out of the fire,  
To snatch them from the verge of hell,  
To turn them to the pardoning God,  
And quench the brands in Jesu's blood".<sup>4</sup>

Though Wesley did not neglect to preach Hell, he was more concerned to preach the positive love and grace of God. We have already referred to the question asked at the Conference of 1744 concerning a too great emphasis upon the wrath of God.<sup>5</sup> A similar question was asked at the Conference two years later:

<sup>1</sup> J.I, 139, note.      <sup>2</sup> J.I, 139.

<sup>3</sup> "Jesus and the Future Life", Strawson, p.150.

<sup>4</sup> P.W.V, 105.

<sup>5</sup> p.181 above.

"What inconvenience is there in speaking much of the wrath and little of the love of God? - It generally hardens them that believe not, and discourages them that do".<sup>1</sup>

Wesley was impressed with the way in which Jesus preached His Sermon on the Mount in this regard. It was no Hell-fire preaching, and yet how challenging and effective the words were.

"Above all, with what amazing love does the Son of God here reveal His Father's will to man! He does not bring us again 'to the mount that burned with fire, nor unto blackness and darkness and tempest'. He does not speak as when He 'thundered out of heaven': when the Highest 'gave His thunder, hailstones and coals of fire'. He now addresses us with His still, small voice - 'Blessed', or happy 'are the poor in spirit'".<sup>2</sup>

It is also important to notice that salvation, for the Wesleys, is not salvation from a future Hell, but salvation from sin. In one of his hymns, "After a Recovery", Charles prays:

"Give me, Lord, a holy fear,  
And fix it in my heart,  
That I may from evil near  
With timely care depart:  
Sin be more than hell abhorr'd,  
Till Thou destroy the tyrant foe:  
Keep me, keep me, dearest Lord,  
And never let me go".<sup>3</sup>

There is the fervent prayer - "Sin be more than hell abhorr'd". Sugden, the editor of the Standard Sermons, says, with reference to the great sermon on "Salvation by Faith": "It is noticeable that not one word is said in this

<sup>1</sup> J.III, 242, note 1.    <sup>2</sup> S.S.I, 319.    <sup>3</sup> P.W.II, 125-6.

sermon about salvation from hell".<sup>1</sup> The worst consequence of sin is separation from God - and that is Hell, a Hell that is tragically possible in this life. And when Wesley offers salvation in the name of Christ he offers salvation from sin, and a reconciliation to God here and now, and not merely salvation from a future Hell. So Rattenbury says:

"When John (Wesley) defines salvation, he says almost invariably nothing whatever about hell, but repeatedly describes it as loving God with all the heart, mind, soul and strength. And careful reading of the penitential hymns of his brother shows at once that what supremely mattered to him was salvation from sin; and that sin, even in this life, is hell".<sup>2</sup>

We have shown that John Wesley believed the soul did not go straight to Heaven or Hell on the death of the body, but departed to one or other of the regions of Hades, there to await the resurrection of the body, and the Final Judgment at the Last Day. The soul may well be aware of its ultimate destiny, and this in itself is a punishment for those who realise they will eventually go to Hell.

When we ask who will go to Hell, the obvious answer is - the wicked, the unbelievers, those who have refused God's offer of pardon in Jesus Christ. John Wesley speaks of those who "in spite of all the warnings of God, resolve to have their portion with the devil and his

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<sup>1</sup> S.S.I, 41, note.

<sup>2</sup> "The Evangelical Doctrines of Charles Wesley's Hymns"  
p.130.

angels".<sup>1</sup> But these are not the only ones. There are those who have led a life of strict morality, who have been faithful in their worship and in partaking of the Sacrament, and yet have not availed themselves of God's grace.

"Men may indeed flatter themselves (so desperately wicked and so deceitful is the heart of man!) that they may live in their sins until they come to the last gasp, and yet afterwards live with God; and thousands do really believe that they have found a broad way which leadeth not to destruction. 'What danger', say they, 'can a woman be in that is so harmless and so virtuous? What fear is there that so honest a man, one of so strict morality, should miss of heaven; especially if, over and above all this, they constantly attend on church and sacrament?' One of these will ask with all assurance, 'What! Shall not I do as well as my neighbours?' Yes, as well as your unholy neighbours; as well as your neighbours that die in their sins! For you will all drop into the pit together, into the nethermost hell! You will all lie together in the lake of fire; 'the lake of fire, burning with brimstone'. Then, at length, you will see (but God grant you may see it before!) the necessity of holiness in order to glory; and, consequently, of the new birth, since none can be holy, except he be born again".<sup>2</sup>

Even Christ's disciples, 'His friends', those who fear and love God must "consider what is revealed in the oracles of God concerning the future state of punishment".<sup>3</sup>

"And let it not be thought that the consideration of these terrible truths is proper only for enormous sinners. How is this superstition consistent with what our Lord speaks to those who were then, doubtless, the holiest men upon earth?... Fear not them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I say unto you, Fear him who, after he hath killed hath power to

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<sup>1</sup> W.VI, 382.

<sup>2</sup> S.S.II, 235-6.

<sup>3</sup> W.VI, 382.

cast into hell... fear lest he should cast you into the place of torment. And this very fear, even in the children of God, is one excellent means of preserving them from it".<sup>1</sup>

Thus, like his Lord before him, Wesley reserves his sternest words about the dangers of Hell, not for the 'enormous sinners', the 'publicans', but for the 'Pharisees', the 'righteous', the nominal Christians.

John Wesley maintained that the duration of Hell was nothing less than eternity. He says that "the unjust shall, after the resurrection, be tormented in Hell for ever":<sup>2</sup> and "the wicked are tormented day and night without any intermission of their misery".<sup>3</sup> Of the awakened sinner he says,

"He feels that 'the wages', the just reward 'of sin', of his sin above all, 'is death'; even the second death, the death which dieth not, the destruction of body and soul in hell".<sup>4</sup>

On three occasions Charles speaks of "the death that never dies".<sup>5</sup> He describes the sinner as "sinking into everlasting night",<sup>6</sup> "damned to all eternity".<sup>7</sup>

There is no respite from their pains, and no end to their misery: "And that misery will never end".<sup>8</sup>

John writes:

"They have no respite from pain; but 'the smoke of their torment ascendeth up day and night... although the damned have uninterrupted night, it brings no interruption of their pain. No sleep

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<sup>1</sup> W.VI, 381-2.    <sup>2</sup> W.X, 82.    <sup>3</sup> W.VI, 210.

<sup>4</sup> S.S.I, 187.    <sup>5</sup> P.W.VII, 30: XI, 192: XI, 280.

<sup>6</sup> P.W.XI, 211.    <sup>7</sup> P.W.VI, 378.    <sup>8</sup> W.VI, 195.

accompanies that darkness; Whatever ancient or modern poets, either Homer or Milton, dream, there is no sleep either in earth or heaven. And be their suffering ever so extreme, be their pain ever so intense, there is no possibility of their fainting away; no, not for a moment".<sup>1</sup>

There is no possibility of the mercy of God ever reaching them - "No mercy can enter within the shades of hell".<sup>2</sup> Nor is there any hope; Wesley might well have quoted Dante's famous words: "All hope abandon, ye who enter here".<sup>3</sup> In his sermon on Hell John Wesley says:

"And of this duration there is no end! What a thought is this! Nothing but eternity is the term of their torment! And who can count the drops of pain, or the sands of the sea, or the days of eternity? Every suffering is softened if there is any hope, though distant, of deliverance from it. But here,

Hope never comes, that comes to all the inhabitants of the upper air! What! sufferings never to end?

NEVER! - Where sinks the soul at that dread sound?

Into a gulf how dark, and how profound! Suppose millions of days, of years, of ages elapsed, still we are only on the threshold of eternity! Neither the pain of body or of soul is any nearer an end than it was millions of ages ago. When they are cast into *τὸ πῦρ, τὸ ἀσβεστόν* (How emphatical! 'the fire, the unquenchable',) all is concluded, 'Their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched!'.<sup>4</sup>

Wesley's interpretation of this text is that the 'worm' refers to the torments of the soul, whereas the 'fire' refers to the torments of the body.

"Where their worm" - that gnaweth the soul (pride, self-will, desire, malice, envy, shame, sorrow,

<sup>1</sup> W.VI, 389.

<sup>2</sup> W.VII, 248.

<sup>3</sup> "Divine Comedy", Hell, Canto III, line 9. <sup>4</sup> W.VI, 389-90.

despair) - 'dieth not' - no more than the soul itself. 'And the fire' (either material or infinitely worse) that tormenteth the body is not quenched 'for ever'.<sup>1</sup>

In the sermon on "Hell" (Sermon LXXIII) John Wesley speaks of "the punishment of loss" (poena damni) as one of the sources of torment. He says:

"This commences in that very moment wherein the soul is separated from the body; in that instant, the soul loses all those pleasures, the enjoyment of which depends on the outward senses. The smell, the taste, the touch, delight no more: the organs that ministered to them are spoiled, and the objects that used to gratify them are removed far away. In the dreary regions of the dead all these things are forgotten; or, if remembered, are only remembered with pain; seeing they are gone for ever. All the pleasures of the imagination are at an end. There is no grandeur in the infernal regions; there is nothing beautiful in those dark abodes; no light but that of livid flames. And nothing new, but one unvaried scene of horror upon horror! There is no music but that of groans and shrieks; of weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth; of curses and blasphemies against God, or cutting reproaches of one another. Nor is there anything to gratify the sense of honour: No, they are heirs of shame and everlasting contempt".<sup>2</sup>

Here, surely, is an imagination and an eloquence, which, though grim, is of a high order. One can understand the profound effect this would have upon a congregation!

So the damned lose all the things they were fond of in the present world. But worse, they are completely separated from all the persons whom they have loved. They are torn away from their nearest and dearest, from their friends who were as their own souls. "For there is no

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<sup>1</sup> N.N.T. on Mark 9,44.

<sup>2</sup> W.VI, 383.

friendship in hell".<sup>1</sup> All such personal relationships are broken, and vanish for ever to those who are condemned to eternal punishment. Their greatest loss will be the loss of fellowship with God, the loss of "their place in Abraham's bosom, in the paradise of God".<sup>2</sup> But more of that later.

There is no doubt that John Wesley interpreted the Biblical references to Hell in the most literal sense. He will have nothing to do with those who suggest that the fire mentioned in the New Testament is a non-material, a 'spiritual' fire.

"But it has been questioned by some, whether there be any fire in hell; that is, any material fire. Nay, if there be any fire, it is unquestionably material. For what is immaterial fire? The same as immaterial water or earth! Both the one and the other is absolute nonsense, a contradiction in terms. Either, therefore, we must affirm it to be material, or we deny its existence".<sup>3</sup>

And to the objection to the idea of unquenchable fires on the grounds that fire usually consumes completely and quickly anything consigned to its flames, Wesley has his answer!

"Has it not pleased God to give us already some proof of what will be hereafter? Is not the *Linum Asbestum*, the incombustible flax, known in most parts of Europe? If you take a towel or handkerchief made of this, (one of which may now be seen in the British Museum) you may throw it into the hottest fire, and when it is taken out

<sup>1</sup> W.VI, 383.

<sup>2</sup> W.VI, 383.

<sup>3</sup> W.VI, 387.

again, it will be observed, upon the nicest experiment, not to have lost one grain of its weight. Here, therefore, is a substance before our eyes, which, even in the present constitution of things, (as if it were an emblem of things to come) may remain in fire without being consumed"!<sup>1</sup>

But Wesley confines himself to the Scriptural descriptions. He mentions that many writers have spoken of other bodily torments besides the lake of fire, and quotes Kempis' words that misers will have melted gold poured down their throats. To this he says: "Surely this is too awful a subject to admit of such play of imagination. Let us keep to the written word. It is torment enough to dwell with everlasting burnings".<sup>2</sup>

Charles, too, thinks in terms of a literal lake of fire. He writes:

"But Thou, O Lord, shall vengeance take,  
And cast into the burning lake  
The vessels of Thine ire;  
Who Thee and all Thy people hate  
Shall feel Thy righteous anger's weight  
In everlasting fire".<sup>3</sup>

And again -

"Exposed to Thy vindictive ire  
The workers of iniquity,  
As fuel for the quenchless fire,  
As stubble, all burn'd up shall be,  
(So doth Thy righteous will ordain,)  
And neither root nor branch remain".<sup>4</sup>

But perhaps the most literal and grimmest picture of all is given in the poem which bears the title, "The Cry of a Reprobate", part of which is as follows:

<sup>1</sup> W.VI, 387.    <sup>2</sup> W.VI, 387.    <sup>3</sup> P.W.VIII, 126.

<sup>4</sup> P.W.VIII, 321.

"I hasten where the deepest hell  
 Is moved to meet me from beneath,  
 Where damn'd apostate spirits yell,  
 And gnaw their tongues, and gnash their teeth.

Torphet is for the king prepared;  
 But I must have the hottest place;  
 I claim it as my just reward  
 For such an endless waste of grace.

Dives, and I, and Judas there,  
 With galling chains of darkness bound,  
 Shall howl in blasphemous despair:  
 And fiends return the doleful sound.

A real, fiery sulphurous hell  
 Shall prey upon our outward frame;  
 But sorer pangs the soul shall feel,  
 Tormented in a fiercer flame.

The dreadful sin-consuming fire  
 God shall into our spirits breathe,  
 A brimstone stream of vengeful ire,  
 And slay them with a living death...

No ray of light, no gleam of hope  
 The dismal regions can allow;  
 'Tis here I must my eyes lift up,  
 The pains of hell surround me now,

Hopeless, my damn'd estate I mourn;  
 God's wrath is dropt into my soul;  
 His fiery wrath in me shall burn  
 Long as eternal ages roll.

Hear, sinners, hear an human fiend,  
 And shudder at my horrid tale;  
 Consign'd to woes that never end,  
 Before my time I weep and wail".<sup>1</sup>

But Wesley maintains that, in addition to the punishment of the material lake of fire, the wicked will also suffer from more spiritual pains. They will be conscious throughout all eternity of the gnawing pangs of

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<sup>1</sup> P.W.III, 25-26.

conscience. They will be devoured with remorse, and they will feel the shame and anguish of knowing that they are under the wrath of God. Wesley interprets the 'worm' as the anguish of an awakened conscience. We have already quoted his words : "'Where their worm' - that gnaweth the soul (pride, self-will, desire, malice, envy, shame, sorrow, despair) - 'dieth not' - no more than the soul itself".<sup>1</sup>

In another place he says:

"The first thing intended by the worm that never dieth, seems to be a guilty conscience; including self-condemnation, sorrow, shame, remorse, and a sense of the wrath of God... Who can bear the anguish of an awakened conscience, penetrated with a sense of guilt, and the arrows of the Almighty sticking in the soul, and drinking up the spirit? How many of the stout-hearted have sunk under it, and chose strangling rather than life! And yet what are these wounds, what is all this anguish of a soul while in this present world, in comparison of those they must suffer when their souls are wholly awakened to feel the wrath of an offending God!"<sup>2</sup>

Charles Wesley expresses a similar idea:

"Conscience, the worm that never dies,  
 Shall gnaw and tear us day and night,  
 For ever banish'd from the skies,  
 And cast out of the Saviour's sight".<sup>3</sup>

Further, these condemned souls will be made aware of the bliss of the souls in heaven; and part of their punishment will be to realise to the full what they have rejected. John Wesley writes:

"Hitherto, indeed, it hath not entered into their hearts to conceive what holy souls enjoy in the

<sup>1</sup> N.N.T. on Mark 9,44.

<sup>2</sup> W.VI, 385.

<sup>3</sup> P.W.III, 25.

garden of God, in the society of angels, and of the wisest and best men that have lived from the beginning of the world: (not to mention the immense increase of knowledge which they will then undoubtedly receive:) but they will then fully understand the value of what they have vilely cast away".<sup>1</sup>

But the worst punishment of all will be the inevitable separation from Christ, and banishment from the presence of God. So Charles Wesley says:

"Back to the presence of the Lord  
O'er the vast gulf we cannot pass;  
We cannot, cannot be restored  
To see the glories of His face.

Horror of horrors! hell of hell!  
This makes the cup of wrath run o'er;  
Far from my Lord with fiends to dwell,  
And never, never see Him more".<sup>2</sup>

John writes:

"But as happy as the souls in paradise are they are preparing for far greater happiness. For paradise is only the porch of heaven; and it is there the spirits of just men are made perfect. It is in heaven only that there is the fullness of joy; the pleasures that are at God's right hand for evermore. The loss of this, by those unhappy spirits, will be the completion of their misery. They will then know and feel that God alone is the centre of all created spirits; and, consequently, that a spirit made for God can have no rest out of him. It seems that the Apostle had this in view when he spoke of those 'who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord'. Banishment from the presence of the Lord is the very essence of destruction to a spirit that was made for God. And if that banishment last for ever, it is 'everlasting destruction'".<sup>3</sup>

It must be admitted that the most vivid, crude and

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<sup>1</sup> W.VI, 384-5.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.III, 25-26.

W.VI, 384.

terrifying pictures of Hell are to be found, not in John Wesley's sermon on Hell, nor in Charles' poem from which we have quoted, "The Cry of a Reprobate", but in his "Hymns for Children". Fortunately there are not many on the subject of Hell, but what there are are repulsive in the extreme. He can ask the rhetorical question - "For, O, wilt Thou send little children to hell?"<sup>1</sup> - and yet, in certain moods, he himself seems to feel the answer is 'Yes'. That he could write a good children's hymn is seen in his well-loved "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild".<sup>2</sup> But what can we say of such a hymns, entitled, "Of Hell"?

"Wretched souls, who live in sin,  
 Who their Lord by deeds deny!  
 Tophet yawns to take them in;  
 Soon as their frail bodies die,  
 They their due reward shall feel,  
 Dreadfully thrust down to hell.

Dark and bottomless the pit  
 Which on them its mouth shall close;  
 Never shall they 'scape from it;  
 There they shall in endless woes  
 Weep, and wail, and gnash their teeth,  
 Die an everlasting death.

There their tortured bodies lie,  
 Scorch'd by the consuming fire;  
 There their souls in torments cry,  
 Rack'd with pride and fierce desire:  
 Fear and grief their spirits tear,  
 Rage, and envy, and despair.

Every part its curse sustains,  
 Every faculty of soul,  
 All the power# of hellish pains

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<sup>1</sup> P.W.VI, 406.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.VI, 441.

Joins to make their measure full;  
 Fiends, themselves, and conscience join  
 Heighten'd all by wrath Divine.

There they lie, alas, how long!  
 Never can they hope release;  
 Not a drop to cool their tongue,  
 Not an hour, a moment's ease;  
 Damn'd they are, and still shall be,  
 Damn'd to all eternity!"<sup>1</sup>

What permanent and deep psychological harm could be done  
 by teaching a child to sing:

"But if we live in vice, and sin,  
 And make Him no return,  
 Far better it for us had been  
 That we had ne'er been born.

We shall with many stripes be beat,  
 The sorest judgment feel,  
 And of all wicked children meet  
 The hottest place in hell".<sup>2</sup>

Equally horrible is the hymn from the same section, "For  
 Children", entitled, "A Thought on Hell":

Terrible thought! shall I alone  
 Who may be saved - shall I -  
 Of all, alas! whom I have known,  
 Through sin, for ever die?

Shall I - amidst a ghastly band -  
 Dragg'd to the judgment-seat,  
 Far on the left with horror stand,  
 My fearful doom to meet?

Abandon'd to extreme despair,  
 Eternally undone;  
 My Father would not own me there,  
 His hell-devoted son.

But must I from His glorious face,  
 From all His saints retire?  
 But must I go to my own place  
 In everlasting fire?

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<sup>1</sup> P.W.VI, 377-8.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.VI, 418.

"While they enjoy His heavenly love,  
 Must I in torments dwell?  
 And howl (while they sing hymns above)  
 And blow the flames of hell?"<sup>1</sup>

It is difficult to understand how a father, so obviously concerned and tender-hearted and devoted as Charles Wesley was towards his own children, should express such terrifying and revolting thoughts. These hymns are surely best forgotten. In any case, they have little chance of ever being sung again, even by adults!

It remains only to discuss briefly John Wesley's criticisms of the doctrine of Hell as expounded by others. As one would expect, he attacked the Calvinists for their doctrine that some men are predestined to Hell. On Matthew 20,15 he comments:

"Is it lawful for me to do what I will with my own?' - Yea, doubtless, to give either to Jew or Gentile a reward infinitely greater than he deserves. But can it be inferred from hence that it is lawful or possible for the merciful Father of spirits to -

'Consign an unborn soul to hell?  
 Or damn him from his mother's womb?'"<sup>2</sup>

In his brief work, "A Thought on Necessity", he writes:

"Ah, poor predestinarian! If you are true to your doctrine, this is no comfort to you! For perhaps you are not of the elect number: If so, you are in the whirlpool, too. For what is your hope? Where is your help? There is no help for you in your God. Your God! No; he is not yours; he never was; he never will be. He that made you, He that called you into being, has no pity upon you! He made you for this very end - to

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<sup>1</sup> P.W.VI, 428-9.

<sup>2</sup> N.N.T.

damn you: to cast you headlong into a lake of fire burning with brimstone! This was prepared for you, or ever the world began! And for this you are now reserved in chains of darkness, till the decree brings forth; till, according to his eternal, unchangeable, irresistible will,

You groan, you howl, you writhe in waves of fire,  
And pour forth blasphemies at his desire!  
O God, how long shall this doctrine stand!"<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand Wesley refutes those who would banish the doctrine of Hell and the wrath of God altogether, or who would mitigate its worst punishments. In a careful critique of the writings of Swedenborg Wesley writes:

"But the most dangerous part of all his writings I take to be the account which he gives of hell. It directly tends to familiarize it to unholy men, to remove all their terror, and to make them consider it, not as a place of torment, but a very tolerable habitation".<sup>2</sup>

Wesley had also read a book popular in his day - "Visions of Hell", by Villegas Quevedo, a Spanish writer, and translated in English by Sir Roger L'Estrange. Wesley regarded the work, as he did that of Swedenborg, as 'the dreams of a disordered imagination'. In his Journal he wrote:

"Of this work in particular I must observe that the doctrine contained therein is not only quite unproved, quite precarious from beginning to end, as depending entirely on the assertions of a single brain-sick man; but that, in many instances, it is contrary to Scripture, to reason and to itself. But over and above this, it contains many sentiments that are essentially and dangerously wrong... And his account of hell leaves nothing terrible in it;

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<sup>1</sup> W.X, 480.

<sup>2</sup> W.XIII, 404.

for, first, he quenches the unquenchable fire. He assures us there is no fire there; only he allows that the governor of it, the devil, sometimes orders the spirits that behave ill to be 'laid on a bed of hot ashes'. And, secondly, he informs you that all the damned enjoy their favourite pleasures. He that delights in filth is to have his filth; yea, and his harlot, too!"<sup>1</sup>

In 1756 Wesley wrote a long and carefully argued letter<sup>2</sup> to William Law, criticising his two later works, "The Spirit of Prayer" and "The Spirit of Love". Law had claimed, according to Wesley, three things with which he (Wesley) fundamentally disagreed; (i) There is no vindictive, avenging or punitive justice in God; (ii) There is no wrath or anger in God; and (iii) God inflicts no punishment on any creature, neither in this world, nor that to come. Wesley carefully deals with each of Law's arguments one by one. As always, he tests them against the words of Holy Scripture - and finds them wanting. The Scriptures and Law differ in these points, says Wesley, and therefore Law's contentions must be rejected, root and branch.

Thus Wesley's doctrine of Hell is firmly rooted in the Scriptures. Again, we must make allowances for his literalism, the only attitude to Scripture known in his day. We may feel that at times he seems to have a morbid fascination for 'the furniture of Hell', and for the conception of the terrible, interminable physical

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<sup>1</sup> J.VI, 231.

<sup>2</sup> L.III, 350.

sufferings of the damned. And we are certainly revolted by brother Charles' children's hymns about Hell. But on the authority of Scripture Wesley firmly believed that after the Final Judgment those who were condemned would suffer torments of body, mind and spirit, and that their 'spiritual' suffering - their sense of separation and banishment from the presence of God - would be the hardest to bear. He believed, therefore, that it was his solemn duty to warn the sons of men of the dreadful dangers that threatened them. His motive, however, was not merely that of duty, but of compassion. He expressed it himself in his translation of a hymn by J.J.Winkler:

"The love of Christ doth me constrain  
To seek the wandering souls of men;  
With cries, entreaties, tears, to save,  
To snatch them from the gaping grave".<sup>1</sup>

He believed that those who refused to confront men with the challenge and to make them aware of the unspeakable misery and anguish and eternal suffering of the unredeemed stood themselves under the judgment of Christ. As for him, he would continue to proclaim that divine grace which can deliver from Hell and 'the death that never dies', and can see men safe to heaven.

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<sup>1</sup> P.W.I., 178.

Satan and his Evil Angels.

Before leaving the subject of Hell we must consider Wesley's teaching on Satan and his kingdom of evil spirits. John has a sermon on "Evil Angels", the text for which is Ephesians 6,12: "We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against wicked spirits in heavenly places". Wesley maintains that God created angels, a group of beings of a higher order than men. They were 'the highest order of created beings', 'spirits, pure, ethereal creatures, simple and incorruptible', with an infinitely higher degree of understanding and power than human beings. They were all created good, but a large number of them, under their chief, Satan (whom Charles describes as "the tempter with his angel face".<sup>1</sup>) became apostate, and rebelled against God. Scripture, our only basis of knowledge of the angels, has little to tell us about this apostacy, says Wesley; but it might well have been that "

"when God published 'the decree' (mentioned in Psalm 2, 6 & 7) concerning the kingdom of his only-begotten Son to be over all creatures, these first-born creatures gave place to pride, comparing themselves to him... It may be, Satan

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<sup>1</sup> P.W.V, 244 (Cf.V, 241, 245, 254).

then first giving way to temptation, said in his heart, 'I too will have my throne'".<sup>1</sup>

These rebellious angels are united under the leadership of Satan, and are pledged to harass and tempt and torment and destroy the children of men. They are envious of God and of their fellow-creatures, the good angels, who still enjoy the heaven from which they fell. But it is against human beings that they wage their war. "They are full of cruelty, of rage against all the children of men, whom they long to inspire with the same wickedness with themselves, and to involve in the same misery".<sup>2</sup> They are given their different stations and their tasks by Satan, and they bring to bear their great intelligence and power upon mankind. But God has set them bounds beyond which they cannot pass. He has said, 'Hitherto shalt thou come, and no farther'.

But their power, though limited, is great. They are the 'governors of this world'. During this present time 'the whole world lieth in the wicked one'.

The main work of Satan and his evil angels is, of course, the destruction of the souls of men. Wesley commences his sermon on "Satan's Devices" with the words -

"The devices whereby the subtle god of this world labours to destroy the children of God - or at least

<sup>1</sup> W.VI, 372.

<sup>2</sup> W.VI, 373.

to torment whom he cannot destroy, to perplex and hinder them in running the race which is set before them - are numberless as the stars of heaven, or the sand upon the seashore".<sup>1</sup>

He and his host will turn any circumstance against us.

"They are ever watching to see whose outward or inward circumstances, whose prosperity or adversity, whose health or sickness, whose friends or enemies, whose youth or age, whose knowledge or ignorance, whose blindness or idleness, whose joy or sorrow, may lay them open to temptation. And they are perpetually ready to make the utmost advance of every circumstance".<sup>2</sup>

They will instil evil thoughts and evil desires; for

"As no good is done or spoken or thought by any man without the assistance of God, working together in and with those that believe in him; so there is no evil done or spoke or thought without the assistance of the devil, 'who worketh with energy', with strong though secret power, 'in the children of unbelief'".<sup>3</sup>

It is not only the unbeliever who is attacked, but also those who know and love God. None are left without temptation. "Indeed, the holiest of men, as long as they remain upon earth, are not exempt from his temptations".<sup>4</sup> And "if he cannot prevail upon us to do evil, he (Satan) will, if possible, prevent our doing good".<sup>5</sup>

One device which the devil and his angels use is to darken and blind our hearts:

"The god of this world knows how to blind our hearts, to spread a cloud over our understanding, and to obscure the light of those truths which, at other times, shine as bright as the noon-day sun.

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<sup>1</sup> S.S.II, 192.      <sup>2</sup> W.VI, 375.      <sup>3</sup> W.VI, 377.

<sup>4</sup> W.VI, 377.

<sup>5</sup> W.VI, 376.

By this means he assaults our faith, our evidence of things unseen. He endeavours to weaken that hope full of immortality to which God had begotten us; and thereby to lessen, if he cannot destroy, our joy in God our Saviour. But, above all, he strives to damp our love of God, as he knows this is the spring of all our religion, and that, as this rises or falls, the work of God flourishes or decays in the soul".<sup>1</sup>

Then there is "the grand device of Satan, to destroy the first work of God in the soul, or at least to hinder its increase, by our expectation of that greater work".<sup>2</sup> Wesley was aware that many of those who had been converted under his preaching had been discouraged from pressing on to perfection. The devil and his angels were doing their work! This they did by 'damping the believer's joy in the Lord by the consideration of their own vileness, sinfulness, unworthiness', by persuading them that they would never be fit to see God, by reminding them of what little spiritual progress they had made, and by undermining what holiness was already theirs. So, says Wesley,

"when they see, in a strong and clear light, on the one hand the depth of their own corruption, of their total alienation from God, on the other the height of the glory of God, that image of the Holy One wherein they are to be renewed; there is, many times, no spirit left in them: they could almost cry out, With God this is impossible! They are ready to give up both faith and hope: to cast away that very confidence whereby they are to overcome all things, through Christ strengthening

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<sup>1</sup> W.VI, 375-6.

<sup>2</sup> S.S.II, 193.

them; whereby after they have done the will of God they are to receive the promise".<sup>1</sup>

But perhaps the worst device of the devil is that of lulling the believer into a false sense of security.

"But 'there is no temptation' says one 'greater than the being without temptation'. When, therefore, this is the case, when Satan seems to be withdrawn, then beware lest he hurt you more as a crooked serpent, than he could do as a roaring lion. Then take care you are not lulled into a pleasing slumber; lest he should beguile you as he did Eve, even in innocence, and insensibly draw you from your simplicity toward Christ, from seeking all your happiness in Him".<sup>2</sup>

We may feel that Wesley is on very dangerous ground when he attributes many diseases and accidents to the activity of the evil angels. The mental atmosphere of this aspect of Wesley's teaching is much more akin to that of New Testament times than of our modern age.

He says:

"For such is the malice of the wicked one, that he will torment whom he cannot destroy. If he cannot entice men to sin, he will, so far as he is permitted, put them to pain. There is no doubt but he is the occasion, directly or indirectly, of many of the pains of mankind, which those who can no otherwise account for them lightly pass over as nervous. And innumerable accidents, as they are called, are undoubtedly owing to his agency: such as the unaccountable fright or falling of horses; the overturning of carriages; the breaking or dislocating of bones; the hurt done by the falling or burning of houses, - by storms of wind, snow, rain or hail - by lightning or earthquakes. But to all these, and a thousand more, this subtle spirit can give the appearance of accidents; for fear the sufferers, if they knew the real agents, should call for help on One that is stronger than him".<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> S.S.II, 197.

<sup>2</sup> W.VI, 380.

<sup>3</sup> W.VI, 378.

John Wesley was deeply interested in medicine and healing, and he stressed - what modern medical science also stresses - that the cause (and the treatment) of many physical symptoms is really mental and spiritual.<sup>1</sup> There are some modern psychiatrists who would not scornfully dismiss Wesley's judgment:

"There is little room to doubt but many diseases likewise, both of the acute and chronical kind, are either occasioned or increased by diabolical agency; particularly those that begin in an instant, without any discernible cause; as well as those that continue, and perhaps gradually increase, in spite of all the power of medicine".<sup>2</sup>

But Wesley was a credulous as well as a curious man. He believed firmly in ghosts and witches. And so he must attribute, not only diseases, but also accidents and inconveniences to the activity of the devil and his angels.

"But that malice blinds the eyes of the wise, one would imagine so intelligent a being would not stoop so low, as it seems the devil sometimes does, to torment the poor children of men! For to him we may reasonably impute many little inconveniences which we suffer. 'I believe' (said that excellent man, the Marquis de Renty, when the bench on which he sat snapped in sunder without any visible cause) 'that Satan had a hand in it, making me to fall untowardly'. I know not whether he may not have a hand in that unaccountable horror with which many have been seized in the dead of night, even to such a degree that all their bones have shook. Perhaps he has a hand also in those terrifying dreams which many have, even while they are in perfect health".<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Article in London Quarterly, Jan. 1959 - "John Wesley's Philosophy of Suffering".

<sup>2</sup> W.VI, 378.

<sup>3</sup> W.VI, 379.

In his Journal entry for June 20th, 1774 John Wesley describes a dramatic incident. He was travelling by chaise with Mrs. Smith, his stepdaughter, and her two children, and Mr. Hopper and Mr. Smith accompanied on horseback. Suddenly the horses bolted. The coachman was thrown from the chaise, and the horses went on at full speed, avoiding all obstacles, rushing through gates and across fields, and being finally stopped by Mr. Smith on the edge of a steep precipice. Wesley's comment is: "I am persuaded both evil and good angels had a large share in this transaction; how large we do not know now, but we shall know hereafter".<sup>1</sup>

In 1787, during one of his many visits to Ireland, he writes:

"The old murderer is restrained from hurting me; but, it seems, he has power over my horses. One of them I was obliged to leave in Dublin, and afterwards another, having bought two to supply their places; the third soon got an ugly swelling on his shoulder, so that we doubted whether we could go on; and a boy at Clones, riding (I suppose galloping) the fourth over stones, the horse fell and nearly lamed himself".<sup>2</sup>

But one appreciates the sly comment of Luke Tyerman - "Perhaps Wesley blamed the devil when he ought to have blamed his own long journeys"!<sup>3</sup>

One further phenomenon Wesley attributed to the activity of Satan. During the early days in Bristol, and later at Everton and Weardale, the Methodist preaching had

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<sup>1</sup> J.VI, 27.    <sup>2</sup> J.VII, 282.    <sup>3</sup> "Life & Times of John Wesley"  
III, 494.

resulted in strange scenes and sounds. Men, women and children had cried out and groaned; they had collapsed writhing on the ground; they had remained for a while as if dead. But they had quickly recovered, and testified to their conversion. Wesley was deeply interested, and as usual, closely questioned many who had suffered in this way. Marjorie Bowen has said that the disturbances were due entirely to the fact that Wesley had terrified his hearers with his vivid pictures of hell-fire. Others have claimed that similar disturbances have taken place at other evangelistic campaigns, and have spoken of mass-hysteria and religious mania. Charles Wesley believed that much of it was faked (as, no doubt, some was), and records a visit to Newcastle:

"Some very 'un-still' sisters who always took care to stand near me and tried which could cry the loudest, since I had them removed out of my sight, have been as quiet as lambs"!<sup>1</sup>

But there are certain puzzling features about the phenomena. They were much more pronounced in certain places --(Bristol, and to a lesser extent Newcastle). After a little while they seemed to cease altogether, except for recurrences at Everton and Weardale years later. And, as Southey pointed out, they took place, not under the emotional and overwhelmingly eloquent preaching of Whitfield, but

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. J.III, 59, note 3.

under the logical, expository and eminently theological discourses of John Wesley.<sup>1</sup> Wesley himself was not certain of the explanation. In 1743 he had said quite categorically:

"These symptoms I can no more impute to any natural cause than to the Spirit of God. I can make no doubt but it was Satan tearing them, as they were coming to Christ".<sup>2</sup>

But by 1759 he believes that God was behind it, though Satan was still doing his work.

"The truth is: (1) God suddenly and strongly convinced many that they were lost sinners, the natural consequence whereof were sudden outcries and strong bodily convulsions; (2) to strengthen and encourage them that believed, and to make His work more apparent, He favoured several of them with divine dreams, others with trances and visions; (3) in some of these instances, after a time, nature mixed with grace; (4) Satan likewise mimicked this work of God, in order to discredit the whole work".<sup>3</sup>

Of one thing the Wesleys were sure, the spiritual warfare which had to be waged was a warfare against a great host of enemies. Charles writes:

"Only have faith in God,  
In faith your foes assail,  
Not wrestling against flesh and blood,  
But all the powers of hell:  
From thrones of glory driven,  
By flaming vengeance hurl'd.  
They throng the air, and darken heaven,  
And rule the lower world.

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. J.II, 168, note.

<sup>2</sup> J.III, 69.

<sup>3</sup> J.IV, 359

Angels your march oppose,  
 Who still in strength excel,  
 Your secret, sworn, eternal foes,  
 Countless, invisible;  
 With rage that never ends,  
 Their hellish arts they try,  
 Legions of dire, malicious fiends,  
 And spirits enthroned on high.

On earth the 'usurpers reign,  
 Exert their baleful power,  
 O'er the poor fallen sons of men  
 They tyrannize their hour.  
 But shall believers fear?  
 But shall believers fly?  
 Or see the bloody cross appear  
 And all their powers defy?"<sup>1</sup>

But neither John nor Charles Wesley was in any doubt as to the ultimate outcome of this war. Satan and his hosts were doomed. Subtle and cunning and powerful though they were, they were already defeated.

"How hath the proud oppressor ceased!  
 Fallen the height of Babel's towers,  
 Fallen the king who long oppress'd  
 The earth with all its struggling powers.

The world's fierce ruler, and their god  
 Who bow'd the nations to his yoke,  
 And bruised them with an iron rod,  
 And smote with a continual stroke.

How hath the Lord destroy'd his power,  
 O'erturn'd his kingdom from within,  
 Ended the dark, oppressive hour,  
 And broke his staff of inbred sin!.....

O Lucifer, bright morning star,  
 Brighter than all with thee who fell,  
 How art thou fallen from glory far,  
 From glory to profoundest hell!

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<sup>1</sup> P.W.V, 272-3.

Reserved, in dark, substantial chains,  
To the tremendous judgment day,  
Our God shall then fill up thy pains,  
They bruiser shall for ever slay.

He now thy nature hath expell'd,  
And forced thy malive to submit;  
Our sin is gone, our soul is heal'd,  
And thou art bruised beneath our feet".<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> P.W.III, 146-7.

CHAPTER NINE.HEAVEN.

In 1746 John Wesley published his first volume of sermons, in the preface to which he wrote:

"To candid, reasonable men, I am not afraid to lay open what have been the inmost thoughts of my heart. I have thought, I am a creature of a day, passing through life as an arrow through the air. I am a spirit come from God, and returning to God: just hovering over the great gulf; till, a few moments hence, I am no more seen; I drop into an unchangeable eternity! I want to know one thing - the way to heaven; how to land safe on that happy shore".<sup>1</sup>

This is not meant to imply, of course, that Wesley's sole preoccupation was with the life after death. We have already seen that he was concerned to emphasise the here-and-now nature of religious experience, and the possibility of sharing to a large extent in the blessings of heaven in this present life - the assurance of God's pardon, the deliverance from the guilt and the power of sin, and the richness of fellowship with God. Nor would Wesley have ever suggested that his only concern was the salvation of his own soul, his own safe arrival on 'that happy shore'. His evangelical preaching and his pastoral concern are proof enough that his passionate longing was to help others to arrive in heaven. He might well have echoed St.

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<sup>1</sup> S.S.I, 31.

Paul's words:

"Before Christ and my own conscience I assure you that I am speaking the plain truth when I say that there is something that makes me feel very depressed like a pain that never leaves me. It is the condition of my brothers and fellow-Israelites, and I have actually reached the pitch of wishing myself cut off from Christ if it meant that they could be won for God".<sup>1</sup>

Yes, Wesley, too, would gladly have sacrificed his own place in heaven if that had been the only way to insure the safe arrival of those to whom he preached. And yet he looked with glad anticipation to his life in heaven, and he was concerned, by God's grace, to guard his soul against that day.

Wesley does not seem to have preached as often on heaven as he did on hell. He has no published sermon on the subject, and when he did preach on it it seems that it was part of the whole subject of death and its consequences. For example, he writes in his Journal:

"At Alnwick likewise I stood in the market-place in the evening, and exhorted a numerous congregation to be always ready for death, for judgment, for heaven. I felt what I spoke; as I believe did most that were present".<sup>2</sup>

But again Wesley is concerned to emphasise that it is possible to share here and now in the life of heaven. In a letter to Mrs. Bennis, who had written to him, "I have found my soul much quickened by your late visit; but am

<sup>1</sup> I. Corinthians 9, 1-3 (Phillips).

<sup>2</sup> J. III, 428.

not satisfied till I feel restored all that I have lost", Wesley says:

"Forget yourself. Worthy is the Lamb; and He has prevailed for you. You shall not die, but live - live all the life of heaven on earth. You need nothing in order to this but faith. And who gives this? He that standeth at the door".<sup>1</sup>

Charles stresses this aspect even more than John. In his sermon, "Awake, thou that Sleepest", he says:

"Dost thou know what religion is? - that it is a participation of the divine nature; the life of God in the soul of man; Christ formed in the heart; 'Christ in thee the hope of glory'; happiness and holiness; heaven begun upon earth".<sup>2</sup>

The hymns teem with examples, of which we give but a few:

"Heaven and Christ and all is mine,  
All the plenitude of God".<sup>3</sup>

"An heaven begun on earth we feel".<sup>4</sup>

"With Thee even now in heaven we live".<sup>5</sup>

"The Holy Ghost, whom we partake,  
To all that ask is freely given;  
And lo! on this great truth we stake  
Our present and eternal heaven".<sup>6</sup>

"Even now we taste the heavenly powers,  
The glorious joys of angels prove,  
A whole eternity is ours,  
A whole eternity of love".<sup>7</sup>

Sometimes Wesley is concerned to emphasise both aspects, the present and the future heaven; for the heaven enjoyed on earth, wonderful as it is, is but a foretaste of the fullness of heaven.

<sup>1</sup> L.V, 137-8.    <sup>2</sup> S.S.I, 77-8.    <sup>3</sup> P.W.I, 101.

<sup>4</sup> P.W.II, 362.    <sup>5</sup> P.W.XII, 49.    <sup>6</sup> P.W.IV, 175.

<sup>7</sup> P.W.VI, 200.

"Surely we are possess'd  
 Of Thee our recompence,  
 Ecstasy fills our panting breast,  
 And pains our aching sense;  
 What hath the world like this!  
 The joy which now we know -  
 'Tis more than joy, or life, or bliss,  
 'Tis heaven begun below.

Yet O! we look for more  
 And mightier joys above,  
 The fulness of Thy heavenly store,  
 Of Thine eternal love;  
 Glory shall end the strife,  
 And in these bodies shine;  
 Jesu, our everlasting Life,  
 Our flesh shall be like Thine".<sup>1</sup>

It is because the Christian has been given a foretaste  
 of heaven that he longs for the fullness.

"Nver shipwreck'd mariner wanted  
 More to reach the distant shore,  
 Never wandering exile panted  
 For his native country more:  
 Hear my earnest supplication,  
 Thou who only canst release,  
 Show me now Thy full salvation,  
 Let me now depart in peace".<sup>2</sup>

This longing is not unconnected with the struggles, the  
 trials, the temptations and the persecutions of this life.  
 It is a longing for release.

"Come on, my partners in distress,  
 My comrades through the wilderness,  
 Who still your bodies feel;  
 A while forget your griefs and fears,  
 And look beyond the vale of tears  
 To that celestial hill.

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<sup>1</sup> P.W.IV, 49.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.V, 212.

Beyond the bounds of time and space,  
 Look forward to that happy place,  
     The saints' secure abode;  
 On faith's strong eagle pinions rise,  
 And force your passage to the skies,  
     And scale the mount of God.

See, where the Lamb in glory stands,  
 Encircled with His radiant bands,  
     And join the' angelic powers.  
 For all that height of glorious bliss  
 Our everlasting portion is,  
     And all that heaven is ours".<sup>1</sup>

Or again:

"Away with our sorrow and fear!  
     We soon shall recover our home;  
 The city of saints shall appear,  
     The day of eternity come:  
 From earth we shall quickly remove,  
     And mount to our native abode,  
 The house of our Father above,  
     The palace of angels and God".<sup>2</sup>

In this last quotation we find the thought that our going to heaven is, in fact, a return. It is the 'recovering of our home'. The same idea is expressed by John Wesley:

"The sea is an excellent figure of the fulness of God, and that of the blessed Spirit. For as the rivers all return into the sea; so the bodies, the souls, and the good works of the righteous, return into God, to live there in His eternal repose".<sup>3</sup>

We turn now to the Wesleys' descriptions of heaven. The present foretaste we have of heaven consists in the depth and richness and intimacy of our fellowship with Christ. And heaven is simply to be with Christ. Indeed

<sup>1</sup> P.W.V, 168.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.VI, 197.

<sup>3</sup> "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection", W.XI, 435.

Charles Wesley can identify the two: "And Christ and heaven are one".<sup>1</sup>

In his descriptions of heaven John Wesley, as always, keeps close to the Scriptures, and he uses the Biblical imagery. There will be no pain in heaven, not even the remedial pain of a purgatory. His comment on Revelation 14,3 - "For they rest from their labours" is simple and straightforward: "No pain, no purgatory follows; but pure, unmixed happiness".<sup>2</sup>

The same thought is expressed in Charles' hymn:

"Then every saint of His  
Shall lean upon His breast;  
The wicked there from troubling cease,  
And there the weary rest:  
Our sufferings all are o'er,  
Our tears are wiped away,  
We only love, rejoice, adore,  
Through one eternal day".<sup>3</sup>

It is described even more completely in the following:

"No mournful complaints  
In a city of saints,  
No evil, or sin,  
No want, or temptation can ever break in.  
  
No curse to annoy,  
No death to destroy,  
No trouble or care,  
No anguish, or sorrow, or crying is there.  
  
The King of the place  
Shall show me His face;  
The rapturous sight  
Shall fill me with pure and unfading delight.

<sup>1</sup> P.W.XI, 322.    <sup>2</sup> N.N.T.    <sup>3</sup> P.W.IV, 50.

O thrice-blessed hope!  
 Even now it lifts up  
 My soul to the skies,  
 And wipes for a moment the tears from my eyes.

The vale I look through  
 To the glory in view,  
 That eternal reward  
 For all, who endure to the end with their Lord.

For that heavenly prize  
 The cross I despise,  
 Till with life I lay down  
 The burden, through which I inherit the crown".<sup>1</sup>

We will retain all our faculties in heaven, though they will be made perfect.

"But still our souls, being incorruptible and immortal, of a nature 'little lower than the angels' (even if we are to understand that phrase of our original nature which may well admit of a doubt), when our bodies are mouldered into earth, will remain with all their faculties. Our memory, our understanding, will be so far from being destroyed, yea, or impaired by the dissolution of the body, that, on the contrary, we have reason to believe, they will be inconceivably strengthened. Have we not the clearest reason to believe, that they will then be wholly freed from those defects which now naturally result from the union of the soul with the corruptible body? It is highly probable that, from the time these are disunited, our memory will let nothing slip; yea, that it will faithfully exhibit everything to our view which was ever committed to it".<sup>2</sup>

Heaven will provide us with further opportunities for progress. We have said that Wesley made it quite clear that the Christian Perfection attainable in this life is not absolute perfection. Further stages will be made

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<sup>1</sup> P.W.V, 201.

<sup>2</sup> S.S.II, 417.

possible to us in heaven. His comment on Philippians 1,6 is - "That He who having justified, hath begun to sanctify you, will carry on this work, till it issue in glory".<sup>1</sup> In his sermon on "Faith" he has a longer passage:

"But, be this as it may, it is certain, human spirits increase in knowledge, in holiness, and in happiness: conversing with all the wise and holy souls that lived in all ages and nations from the beginning of the world; with angels and archangels, to whom the children of men are no more than infants; and, above all, with the eternal Son of God, 'in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge'. And let it be especially considered, whatever they learn they will retain for ever. For they forget nothing. To forget is only incident to spirits that are clothed with flesh and blood".<sup>2</sup>

And his comment on Revelation 7,9 is:

"There is an inconceivable variety in the degrees of reward in the other world. Let not any slothful one say, 'If I get to heaven at all, I will be content'. Such an one may let heaven go altogether. In worldly things men are ambitious to get as high as they can. Christians have a far more noble ambition. The difference between the very highest and the lowest state in the world is nothing to the smallest difference between the degrees of glory".<sup>3</sup>

There will also be recognition in heaven. In a letter written in 1748 Charles Wesley describes the last conversation he had with young Alexander White. Charles asked him, "Do you think we shall know one another in Paradise?" - to which White replied, "I can make no doubt of it. I go a few moments before to tell our elder

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<sup>1</sup> N.N.T.

<sup>2</sup> W.VII, 328.

<sup>3</sup> N.N.T.

brethren you are coming after".<sup>1</sup> In his sermon on "Faith" John Wesley says:

"Indeed sceptics may ask, 'How do disembodied spirits know each other?' I answer plainly, I cannot tell: But I am certain that they do".<sup>2</sup>

He bases his belief, he says, on Scripture and on reason. The Scriptural authority he finds in the parable of Dives and Lazarus.

"Is any of you in doubt whether we shall know one another in the other world? Here your doubts may receive a full solution. If a soul in hell knew Lazarus in paradise, as far off as he was, certainly those that are together in paradise will perfectly know each other".<sup>3</sup>

The argument from reason is not greatly convincing:

"We know every holy temper which we carry with us into paradise will remain in us for ever. But such is gratitude to our benefactors. This, therefore, will remain for ever. And this implies that the knowledge of our benefactors will remain, without which it cannot exist".<sup>4</sup>

Shades of the Oxford teacher of logic! He is on safer grounds when he says that all the affections which God Himself implants within us for relatives and friends, all the relationships of love and friendship formed during this life, will survive death, and grow richer and deeper in heaven.

The chief occupation of the saints in heaven will be the praise and adoration of God. To those who have never

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<sup>1</sup> "Charles Wesley as Revealed by his Letters", (Baker) p.121.

<sup>2</sup> W.VII, 332.      <sup>3</sup> W.VII, 252.      <sup>4</sup> W.VII, 332.

learnt the joy and rapture of worship, this may well seem a boring and tiresome way of spending eternity.

There is a touch of humour in the following quotation:

"How strange are the employments of those spirits with which you are now surrounded! How bitter are they to the taste of those that are still dreaming upon earth! 'I have no relish' said one of these, (a much-applauded wit, who has lately left the body) 'for sitting upon a cloud all day long, and singing praise to God'. We may easily believe him; and there is no danger of his being put to that trouble. Nevertheless, this is no trouble to them who cease not day and night but continually sing, 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth!'"<sup>1</sup>

Charles tells us that the saints delight in worshipping God,

"And all eternity employ  
In praise of all-redeeming love".<sup>2</sup>

Linked with this eternity of praise is the great reward which heaven brings - the beatific vision.

"And then, with all Thy saints in light,  
To gain the beatific sight  
Which makes our heaven above".<sup>3</sup>

How better could the joys of heaven be expressed than in these lines? -

"The rivers of delight  
That there our souls embrace,  
The glorious beatific sight  
That veils the angels' face,  
The joys ineffable  
That from Thy presence flow,  
The fulness here we cannot tell,  
But, Lord, we die to know".<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> W.VII, 321.    <sup>2</sup> P.W.VII, 400.    <sup>3</sup> P.W.XI, 320.

<sup>4</sup> P.W.IV, 50.

It is the promise of the vision of God that makes heaven so utterly desirable:

"Thou only by Thy prayer and blood  
 Canst bring me to the smiling God,  
 Reveal my sins forgiven,  
 And bless me with that rapturous sight  
 Which makes the saints' supreme delight,  
 Which makes a heaven of heaven".<sup>1</sup>

And it is this vision which fills the soul with endless praise:

"When shall the happy moment come,  
 Which calls our dust out of the tomb  
 To see Thy glories shine?  
 Which doth our slumbering eyes unseal,  
 And all the mysteries reveal,  
 And all the truths Divine.

The world, and all we valued here  
 Shall then an empty tomb appear,  
 And vanish from our view,  
 While Thee triumphant on Thy throne,  
 We see surrounded with Thine own  
 Creating all things new.

The fulness of the deity  
 Even I shall then adore in Thee,  
 And on Thy beauties gaze,  
 Enjoy the pure, eternal light,  
 And fall transported at the sight,  
 In ecstasy of praise".<sup>2</sup>

In a letter to Mary Bishop, written in 1776, John Wesley has a long and important passage about heaven. And here again it will be seen that for him the essential element of heaven is being with God, seeing and knowing and loving Him to perfection.

<sup>1</sup> P.W.XI, 183.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.XI, 184.

"Some writers make a distinction which seems not improper. They speak of the essential part of heaven and the accessory parts. A man without any learning is naturally led into the same distinction. So the poor dying peasant in Frederica: 'To be sure heaven is a fine place, a very fine place; but I do not care for that: I want to see God and to be with Him'. I do not know whether the usual question be well stated, 'Is heaven a state or a place?' There is no opposition between these two; it is both the one and the other. It is the place wherein God more immediately dwells with those saints who are in a glorified state. Homer could only conceive of the place that it was paved with brass. Milton in one place makes heaven's pavement beaten gold: in another he defines it more sublimely 'the house of God, star-paved! As full an account of this house of God as it can yet enter into our hearts to conceive is given us in various parts of the Revelation. There we have a fair prospect into the holiest, where are, first, He that sitteth upon the throne; then the four living creatures; next, the twenty-four elders; afterwards the great multitude which no man can number; and, surrounding them all, the various myriads of angels, whom God hath constituted in a wonderful order.

'But what is the essential part of heaven?' Undoubtedly it is to see God, to know God, to love God. We shall then know both His nature, and His works of creation, of providence and of redemption. Even in paradise, in the intermediate state between death and the resurrection, we shall learn more concerning these in an hour than we could in an age during our stay in the body. We cannot tell, indeed, how we shall then exist or what kind of organs we shall have: the soul will not be encumbered with flesh and blood; but probably it will have some sort of ethereal vehicle, even before God clothes us 'with our nobler house of empyrean light'<sup>1</sup>.

Only occasionally do the Wesleys use the more materialistic, Scriptural descriptions of heaven, as in

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<sup>1</sup> L.VI, 213-4.

the lines:

"Lift your eyes of faith, and see  
 Saints and angels join'd in one,  
 What a countless company  
 Stands before yon dazzling throne!  
 Each before his Saviour stands,  
 All in milk-white robes array'd;  
 Palms they carry in their hands,  
 Crowns of glory on their heads".<sup>1</sup>

More frequently they use the less familiar metaphors, such as that of eternal day: "So it is all day in heaven, as it is all night in hell! On earth we have a mixture of both".<sup>2</sup>

Heaven is a place of light and love and joy:

- "Dazzled with the glorious sight,  
 Lost in an abyss of light".<sup>3</sup>
- "Love only makes a heaven of heaven".<sup>4</sup>
- "Not all the archangels can tell  
 The joys of that holiest place,  
 When Jesus is pleased to reveal  
 The light of His heavenly face".<sup>5</sup>

The heavenly banqueting feast is also a recurring theme, as for example:

"The saints shall at Thy table sit,  
 Drink the pure crystal streams above,  
 The tree of life immortal eat,  
 And banquet on Thy richest love:  
 The treasures of eternity  
 Shall make our ravish'd souls run o'er,  
 And when Thy open face we see,  
 The heaven of heavens can give no more".<sup>6</sup>

Wesley maintains that there will be no place in the

<sup>1</sup> P.W.III, 293.    <sup>2</sup> W.VI, 210.    <sup>3</sup> P.W.VII, 342.  
<sup>4</sup> P.W.XIII, 36.    <sup>5</sup> P.W.VI, 196.    <sup>6</sup> P.W.XI, 287.

heavenly life for faith; for then faith will be 'lost in sight'. In the second of his sermons on "The Law Established through Faith" John Wesley draws out the distinction between love and faith. While 'love never faileth',

"faith will totally fail; it will be swallowed up in sight, in the everlasting vision of God... The angels who, from the moment of their creation, beheld the face of their Father that is in heaven, had no occasion for faith, in its general notion, as it is the evidence of things not seen. Neither had they need of faith, in its more particular acceptation, faith in the blood of Jesus: for He took not upon Him the nature of angels; but only the seed of Abraham... Nor is it certain (as ingeniously and plausibly as many have descanted upon this) that faith, even in the general sense of the word, had any place in paradise... So shall you daily increase in holy love, till faith is swallowed up in sight, and the law of love is established to all eternity".<sup>1</sup>

Charles puts the same thought into verse:

"Pray we, in the realms of light  
Till we behold His face;  
Faith shall there be lost in sight,  
And prayer in endless praise,  
Blest through one eternal day,  
Possess'd of all that God can grant;  
There we need not, cannot pray,  
For heaven is all we want".<sup>2</sup>

There remain two matters of interest. The first is an account John Wesley gives in his Journal of his attempt to teach a young negress in Carolina, during his time in Georgia, something about heaven. Perhaps it tells us more

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<sup>1</sup> S.S.II, 77-83.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.V, 179.

about Wesley than it does about heaven. It reveals his deep concern to instruct the child in the Christian faith, his patience with her, and his attempt to express himself simply and clearly.

"Finding a young negro there, who seemed more sensible than the rest, I asked her how long she had been in Carolina. She said two or three years; but that she was born in Barbados, and had lived there in a minister's family from a child. I asked whether she went to Church there. She said, 'Yes, every Sunday, to carry my mistress's children'. I asked her what she had learnt at Church. She said, 'Nothing: I heard a deal, but did not understand it'. 'But what did your master teach you at home?' 'Nothing'. 'Nor your mistress?' 'No'. I asked, 'But there is something in you that will not turn to dust, and this is what they call your soul. Indeed, you cannot see your soul, though it is within you; as you cannot see the wind, though it is all about you. But if you had not a soul in you, you could no more see, or hear, or feel, than this table can. What do you think will become of your soul when your body turns to dust?' 'I don't know'. 'Why, it will go out of your body, and go up there, above the sky, and live always. God lives there. Do you know who God is?' 'No'. 'You cannot see Him any more than you can see your own soul. It is He that made you and me, and all men and women, and all beasts and birds, and all the world. It is He that makes the sun shine, and rain fall, and corn and fruits to grow out of the ground. He makes all these for us. But why do you think He made us? What did He make you and me for?' 'I can't tell'. 'He made you to live with Himself above the sky. And so you will in a little time, if you are good. If you are good, when your body dies your soul will go up, and want nothing, and have whatever you can desire. No one will beat or hurt you there. You will never be sick. You will never be sorry any more nor afraid of anything. I can't tell you, I don't know how

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happy you will be; for you will be with God'. The attention with which this poor creature listened to instruction is inexpressible. The next day she remembered all, readily answered every question, and said she would ask Him that made her to show her how to be good".<sup>1</sup>

As we have seen, John Wesley had an insatiable curiosity, especially where what we should call psychical phenomena were concerned. If he heard of any who had had strange and unusual experiences he would visit them and subject them to long and careful examination. In the Journal accounts are given of two children, one who fell into a trance, and the other who suffered convulsions (which Wesley himself described as demon possession). On recovery both said they had been conducted to heaven and had had divine secrets revealed to them. In each case the child claimed to have been shown the terrors of hell before being taken to heaven. The one who had suffered convulsions was the daughter of a weaver. Wesley records her own account, as given to him the following day.

"In the afternoon I talked with her again. 'When did you know your sins were forgiven?' 'Yesterday, between three and four in the afternoon, while Mr. Manners was at prayer'. 'When was you so filled with the love of God?' 'About eight in the evening. I was then taken away by the angels and carried where I saw a great lake of fire, and I saw abundance of people chained down in it, and I heard their groans. Then they took me into heaven; and I saw all the holy angels round the throne of God. And I heard them all singing praise

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<sup>1</sup> J.I, 350-1.

to God; and I sung with them. And I saw God. I did not see Him like a man, but as a glorious brightness. I cannot tell you how it was: but it was three and one. And Jesus Christ told me of the trouble to come; but the angels told me not to reveal what He said. I stayed there till between two and three in the morning; but I am as in heaven still".<sup>1</sup>

The other account is in greater detail.<sup>2</sup> This time it was a girl, 'then about ten years and three quarters old'. This account Wesley heard at second-hand from Sarah Farley. The child, she said, in losing her senses, found herself in a dark, dismal place, 'full of briars and pits and ditches'. Soon she was in tears, but a man dressed in white came to her, and conducted her first to hell, where she could 'scarce bear the stench and smoke of brimstone'. She was shown a vast number of people suffering torment ('the man told me the sins they delighted in once they are tormented with now'). Then she was led through the gate of heaven, through hosts of saints and angels praying and singing together, into the presence of God. The description bears a close resemblance to that of the other girl mentioned above.

"There I saw God sitting upon His throne. It was a throne of light, brighter than the sun. I could not fix my eyes upon it. I saw three, but all as one. Our Saviour held a pen in His hand. A great book lay at His right side... I saw that He discerns the whole earth at a glance... It seemed

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<sup>1</sup> J.IV, 251.

<sup>2</sup> J.III, 254-6.

to me that I stayed here several months; but I never slept all the while. And there was no night; and I saw no sky or sun, but clear light everywhere".<sup>1</sup>

When she asked to see her dead brother she was told that it would not be possible until she herself had died. She was led through two pleasant gardens, and told secrets she dared not reveal. But the time came for her heavenly guide to leave her.

"While we were walking he said, 'Sing'. I said, 'What shall I sing?' And he said, 'Sing praises unto the King of this place'. I sung several verses. Then he said, 'I must go'. I would have fain gone with him; but he said, 'Your time is not yet: you have more work to do upon the earth'. Immediately he was gone; and I came to myself, and began to speak".<sup>2</sup>

The accounts are remarkable, as much in their agreement as in their insight, and especially when it is remembered that they were given by two young children. Wesley obviously took them seriously. They were, for him, further confirmation of the teaching of the Scriptures. No doubt it was because of their closeness to the Bible descriptions that Wesley himself was so deeply impressed by them.

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<sup>1</sup> J.III, 255.

<sup>2</sup> J.III, 256.

The Communion of Saints:

The Wesleys believed that the closest ties existed between the Christians on earth and the saints in heaven. They and their followers discovered in their common experience of the redeeming and sanctifying grace of Christ, in their abiding and intimate relationship with Him, and in the sharing of their spiritual experiences within the class and band meetings, a deep and rich fellowship. And it was this fellowship here and now which guaranteed the even richer fellowship hereafter. So they sang:

"And if our fellowship below  
 In Jesus be so sweet,  
 What heights of rapture shall we know  
 When round His throne we meet".<sup>1</sup>

The Methodists had found that their fellowship with each other was not in any sense disrupted, even when they were separated by great distances, for they were still one in Christ. And so they were confident that death, too, could not destroy their fellowship.

"And let our bodies part,  
 To different climes repair,  
 Inseparably join'd in heart  
 The friends of Jesus are;  
 Jesus the Corner Stone,  
 Did first our souls unite;  
 And still He holds and keeps us one,  
 Who walk with Him in white...."

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<sup>1</sup> P.W.IV, 253.

O happy, happy place,  
 Where saints and angels meet!  
 There we shall see each other's face,  
 And all our brethren greet.  
 The church of the first-born,  
 We shall with them be blest,  
 And crown'd with endless joy return  
 To our eternal rest.

With joy we shall behold  
 In yonder blest abode  
 The patriarchs and prophets old,  
 And all the saints of God;  
 Abraham and Isaac there,  
 And Jacob shall receive  
 The followers of their faith and prayer,  
 Who now in bodies live".<sup>1</sup>

We who are members of the Church already share the joy of communion with the saints. For the Church Militant here upon earth, and the Church Triumphant in heaven is one Church.

"Come let us join our friends above  
 That have obtain'd the prize,  
 And on the eagle wings of love  
 To joy celestial rise:  
 Let all the saints terrestrial sing  
 With those to glory gone,  
 For all the servants of our King  
 In earth and heaven are one.

One family we dwell in Him,  
 One Church above, beneath,  
 Though now divided by the stream,  
 The narrow stream of death:  
 One army of the living God,  
 To His command we bow;  
 Part of His host hath cross'd the flood,  
 And part is crossing now...

Even now by faith we join our hands  
 With those that went before,  
 And greet the blood-besprinkled bands  
 On the eternal shore".<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> P.W.V, 462-3.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.VI, 215-6.

In letters to friends who had been bereaved John Wesley reminded them of the reality of the communion of saints, though concerning the manner of the communion he was not dogmatic. Writing to Mary Bishop on the death of Mr. Hadden Wesley says:

"My Dear Sister,- So he is in peace. It has in all ages been allowed that the communion of saints extends to those in paradise as well as those upon earth as they are all one body united under one Head. And

Can death's interposing tide

Spirits one in Christ divide?

But it is difficult to say either what kind or what degree of union may be between them. It is not improbable their fellowship with us is far more sensible than ours with them. Suppose any of them are present, they are hid from our eyes, but we are not hid from their sight. They no doubt clearly discern all our words and actions, if not all our thoughts too; for it is hard to think these walls of flesh and blood can intercept the view of an angelic being. But we have in general only a faint and indistinct perception of their presence, unless in some peculiar instances, where it may answer some gracious ends of Divine Providence. Then it may please God to permit that they should be perceptible, either by some of our outward senses or by an internal sense for which human language has not any name. But I suppose this is not a common blessing. I have known but few instances of it. To keep up constant and close communion with God is the most likely means to obtain this also".<sup>1</sup>

In another letter, to Hannah Ball, who had lost her old friend Samuel Wells, Wesley speaks of his own experience in this connection, and that of his mother.

"There is nothing strange in a particular union of spirit between two persons who truly fear God.

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<sup>1</sup> L.VI, 26.

It is not at all uncommon: within few years I have known many instances of the kind. And I see not any reason why this union should be destroyed by death: I cannot conceive it is. I have myself, since her death, found a wonderful union of spirit with Fanny Cooper; and have sometimes suddenly looked on one or the other side, not knowing whether I should not see her. So you may remember Mr. De Renty says to his friends, 'To die is not to be lost; our union with each other shall hereafter be more complete than it can be here'. And I have heard my mother say that she had many times been 'as sensible of the presence of the spirit of my grandfather as she could have been if she had seen him standing before her face'.<sup>1</sup>

We have already seen that the souls in paradise have the opportunity and privilege of ministering to those who are on earth, and especially to those whom they knew and loved when they themselves were still 'in the flesh'. They cooperate with the good angels in guarding and protecting them.

"And in how many ways they 'minister to the heirs of salvation': Sometimes by counteracting wicked spirits whom we cannot resist, because we cannot see them; sometimes by preventing our being hurt by men, or beasts, or inanimate creatures".<sup>2</sup>

They are deeply interested in our welfare, and share in our triumphs. Hohn Wesley wrote in his Journal, after a particularly successful visit to Epworth - "If those in paradise know what passes on earth, I doubt not but my father is rejoicing and praising God, who has, in His own manner, accomplished what he had so often attempted in vain".<sup>3</sup>

In his sermon on "Human Life a Dream" Wesley sees

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<sup>1</sup> L.VI, 380-1.

<sup>2</sup> W.VII, 333.

<sup>3</sup> J.IV, 67.

part of the duty of the saints in heaven as guiding the Christians safely home to heaven.

"But how do you relish the company that surrounds you? Your old companions are gone; a great part of them probably separated from you never to return. Are your present companions angels of light? ministering spirits, that but now whisper, 'Sister spirit, come away! We are sent to conduct thee over that gulf into Abraham's bosom'? And what are those? Some of the souls of the righteous, whom thou didst formerly relieve with 'the mammon of unrighteousness'; and who are now commissioned by your common Lord to receive, to welcome you 'into the everlasting habitations'. Then the angels of darkness will quickly discern they have no part in you. So they must either hover at a distance, or flee away in despair. Are some of these happy spirits that take acquaintance with you the same that travelled with you below, and bore a part in your temptations; that, together with you, fought the good fight of faith, and laid hold on eternal life? As you then wept together, you may rejoice together, you and your guardian angels perhaps, in order to increase your thankfulness for being 'delivered from so great a death'. They may give you a view of the realms below; those

Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace  
And rest can never dwell.

See, on the other hand, the mansions which were 'prepared for you from the foundation of the world!' O what a difference between the dream that is past, and the real scene that is now present with thee!"<sup>1</sup>

It is in the great act of worship and adoration, however, that the communion of saints is most fully realized. Our offering and sacrifice of praise must inevitably be inadequate and unworthy; but when it is joined - as it always is joined - with the songs of the

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<sup>1</sup> W.VII, 322-3.

celestial choir, then the Church, militant upon earth and triumphant in heaven, is really one, and the saints are in blessed and perfect communion with themselves and with their common Lord. So Charles Wesley sings:

"Come, ye kindred souls above,  
 Man provokes you unto love;  
 Saints and angels, hear the call,  
 Praise the common Lord of all:  
 Him let earth and heaven proclaim,  
 Earth and heaven record His name;  
 Let us both in this agree,  
 Both His one great family.

Hosts of heaven, begin the song,  
 Praise Him with a tuneful tongue;  
 (Sounds like yours we cannot raise,  
 We can only lisp His praise):  
 Us repenting sinners see,  
 Jesus died to set us free;  
 Sing ye over us forgiven;  
 Shout for joy, ye hosts of heaven...

Ministerial spirits, know,  
 Execute your charge below,  
 You our Father hath prepared,  
 Fenced us with a flaming guard:  
 Bid you all our ways attend,  
 Safe convoy us to the end,  
 On your wings our souls remove,<sup>1</sup>  
 Waft us to the realms of love".<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> P.W.I, 364-5.

Good Angels:

As we have seen, Wesley believed in the existence and in the activity of angels, the vast army of fallen angels, under the control of Satan, and bent upon the destruction of men, and an even vaster army of good angels, whose task it was to minister to the spiritual and bodily needs of mankind. The good angels are spirits with a high degree of 'understanding, will and liberty'; they are supreme in wisdom and strength and holiness; and they "know not only the words and actions, but also the thoughts of those to whom they minister".<sup>1</sup> They serve all mankind, even the evil and the unthankful, in the mercy of God. But their special concern is for 'the heirs of salvation'. As Charles Wesley says -

"Angels our servants are,  
 And keep in all our ways,  
 And in their hands they bear  
 The sacred sons of grace;  
 Our guardians to that heavenly bliss  
 They all our steps attend".<sup>2</sup>

Their first care is to minister to our souls. They are ever active, though their working can not always be clearly distinguished from the workings of our own minds. Indeed, they work through our own thoughts and will.

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<sup>1</sup> Sermon: "Of Good Angels", W.VI, 363.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.IV, 231.

"They may assist us in our search after truth, remove many doubts and difficulties, throw light on what was before dark and obscure, and confirm us in the truth that is after godliness. They may warn us of evil in disguise; and place what is good in a clear, strong light. They may gently move our will to embrace what is good, and fly from that which is evil. They may, many times, quicken our dull affections, increase our holy hope or filial fear, and assist us more ardently to love Him who has first loved us. Yea, they may be sent of God to answer that whole prayer, put into our mouths by pious Bishop Ken:

'O may thy angels while I sleep,  
 Around my bed their vigils keep:  
 Their love angelical instil,  
 Stop every avenue of ill!  
 May they celestial joys rehearse,  
 And thought to thought with me converse!'
   
 Although the manner of this we shall not be able to explain while we dwell in the body".<sup>1</sup>

But they also minister to the needs and the protection of our bodies. They have power to heal diseases - "when a violent disease, supposed incurable, is totally and suddenly removed, it is by no means improbable that this is effected by the ministry of an angel".<sup>2</sup> They can also save and protect us from physical dangers, and deliver us from the evil intentions of men. They can watch over us while sleeping:

"Thy angels shall around their beds  
 Their constant stations keep;  
 Thy faith and truth shall shield their heads,  
 For Thou dost never sleep".<sup>3</sup>

And they can guard us when travelling. The following

<sup>1</sup> W.VI, 366-7.

<sup>2</sup> W.VI, 367.

<sup>3</sup> P.W.II, 28.

verses are entitled, "Before a Journey":

"Angels, attend ('tis God commands)  
And make me now your care;  
Hover around, and in your hands  
My soul securely bear.

With outstretch'd wings my temples shade:  
To you the charge is given:  
Are ye not all sent forth to aid  
The 'ancointed heirs of heaven?

Servants of God, both yours and mine,  
Your fellow-servant guard;  
Sweet is the task, if He enjoin,  
His service your reward".<sup>1</sup>

The angels also inspire those divine dreams whereby God's will is made known to us. And they counteract the work of the evil angels, flying to our rescue in the hour of peril. Faith enables us to see that 'they are more that are for us than they that are against us'. Charles Wesley wrote a hymn, "To be Sung in a Tumult", part of which is still frequently sung by Methodist congregations.

"Angels and archangels join,  
All triumphantly combine,  
All in Jesu's praise agree,  
Carrying on His victory.

Though the sons of night blaspheme,  
More there are with us than them;  
God with us we cannot fear: -  
Fear, ye fiends, for Christ is here.

Lo! to faith's enlightened sight  
All the mountains flame with light!  
Hell is nigh, but God is nigher,  
Circling us with hosts of fire".<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> P.W.I., 303.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.I., 297.

But why does God use the angels as His ministers? Why does He give them charge over us? "That He may endear us and them to each other; that by the increase of our love and gratitude to them, we may find a proportionable increase of happiness, when we meet in our Father's kingdom".<sup>1</sup> Indeed, John Wesley sees the fellowship of the Church of Christ as embracing not only all living Christians and all the saints in heaven, but also the good angels.

"I believe that Christ by His Apostles gathered unto Himself a Church, to which He has continually added such as shall be saved; that this catholic, that is, universal, Church, extending to all nations and all ages, is holy in all its members, who have fellowship with God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost; that they have fellowship with the holy angels, who constantly minister to these heirs of salvation; and with all the living members of Christ on earth, as well as all who are departed in His faith and fear".<sup>2</sup>

And so the Christian honours these ministers of God, but he does not worship them. "The angels are fellow-servants with the saints, not mediators for them".<sup>3</sup>

"We honour the angels, as they are God's Ministers; but we dare not worship or pray to them; it is what they themselves refuse and abhor. So, when St. John 'fell down at the feet of the angel to worship him, he said, See thou do it not; I am thy fellow-servant: worship God' (Rev. 19,10)".<sup>4</sup>

Indeed, there is a sense in which we humans are as favoured, if not more so, than the angels of heaven. For

<sup>1</sup> W.VI, 369.

<sup>2</sup> W.X, 82.

<sup>3</sup> N.N.T. on Rev. 8,3.

<sup>4</sup> W.X, 104.

when Christ was incarnate, "verily He took not on Him the nature of angels; but He took on Him the seed of Abraham".<sup>1</sup> And though the good angels have never fallen, yet it was for fallen men that Christ died, and to them 'the nobler grace is given'. So Charles Wesley writes, in his "Dialogue of Angels and Men" -

- "A. Ye worms of earth, our God admire,  
The God of angels praise:  
M. Praise Him for us, ye heavenly choir,  
His earth-born sons of grace.  
A. His image view in us display'd,  
His nobler creatures view:  
M. Lower than you our souls He made,  
But He redeem'd us too.  
A. As gods we did in glory shine,  
Before your world began:  
M. Our nature, too, becomes Divine,  
And God Himself is Man.  
A. He clothed us in these robes of light,  
The shadow of His Son;  
M. We, with transcendent glory bright,  
Have Christ Himself put on.  
A. Spirits like Him He made us be,  
A pure, ethereal flame:  
M. Join'd to the Lord, one spirit we  
With Jesus are the same.  
A. We see Him on His dazzling throne,  
Crowns He to us imparts:  
M. To us the King of kings comes down,  
And reigns within our hearts.  
A. Pure as He did at first create,  
We angels never fell:  
M. He saves us from our lost estate,  
He rescues man from hell.  
A. When others fell we faithful proved,  
His love preserved us true:  
M. Yet own that we are more beloved,  
He never died for you.  
A. Worms of the earth, to you, we own,  
The nobler grace is given:  
M. Then praise with us the great Three-One,  
Till we all meet in heaven." <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hebrews 2, 16.

<sup>2</sup> P.W.II, 234-5.

Eternity:

Wesley's main concern was with eternity. This for him was the great reality, of which time was but a fragment.

"But what is time?... But is it not, in some sense, a fragment of eternity, broken off at both ends? - that portion of duration which commenced when the world began, which will continue as long as this world endures, and then expire for ever".<sup>1</sup>

It is God's intended destiny for every man that he should enjoy eternity, and the very hope of it is "the grand motive and encouragement of every apostle and every servant of God".<sup>2</sup> There was no greater sorrow to Wesley than that of seeing a man throwing away his destiny.

"Is this silly, laughing, trifling animal born for eternity? Is this he that was made an incorruptible picture of the God of glory? he that was born to live with angels and archangels and all the company of heaven? And is it thus that he is preparing to meet Him that is coming in the clouds of heaven? What a fool, what a blockhead, what a madman is he that forgets the very end of his creation! Look upon such in this and no other view, however lively, good-natured, well-bred, and choose you your better part! Be a reasonable creature! Be a Christian! Be wise now and happy for ever!"<sup>3</sup>

But how can one awaken men to the call and promise of eternity? They are so preoccupied with this world, and

<sup>1</sup> W.VI, 190.

<sup>2</sup> N.N.T. on Titus 1,2.

<sup>3</sup> L.V, 336-7.

eternity seems so far away. "For the same reason the mind does not see either the beauties or the terrors of eternity. We are not at all affected by them, because they are so distant from us".<sup>1</sup> Such is the problem of the preacher. But he will, he must, continue to try and awaken men to their condition and to their destiny. He will continue to confront them with the challenge and the promise. He will cry: "Make haste. Eternity is at hand. Eternity depends on this moment. An eternity of happiness, or an eternity of misery!"<sup>2</sup>

True to the New Testament, Wesley believed and taught that for the Christian eternity began here and now.

"Accordingly a believer, in the scriptural sense, lives in eternity, and walks in eternity. His prospect is enlarged; his view is not any longer bounded by present things... faith places the unseen, the eternal world continually before his face".<sup>3</sup>

"This eternal life, then, commences when it pleases the Father to reveal the Son in our hearts; when we first know Christ, being enabled to 'call Him Lord by the Holy Ghost'; when we can testify, our conscience bearing witness in the Holy Ghost, 'The life which I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me'. And then it is that happiness begins; happiness real, solid, substantial. Then it is that heaven is opened in the soul, that the proper, heavenly state commences, while the love of God, as loving us, is shed abroad in the heart, instantly producing

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<sup>1</sup> W.VI, 195.

<sup>2</sup> S.S.I, 76.

<sup>3</sup> W.VI, 196.

love to all mankind: general, pure benevolence, together with its genuine fruits, lowliness, meekness, patience, contentedness in every state; an entire, clear, full acquiescence in the whole will of God; enabling us to 'rejoice evermore, and in every thing to give thanks'.<sup>1</sup>

So, then, by faith we live and walk in eternity, and the light of eternity is shed on our path. In a letter to Dr. Conyers Middleton, Wesley wrote:

"Does not every thinking man want a window, not so much in his neighbour's as in his own breast? He wants an opening there, of whatever kind, that might let in light from eternity. He is pained to be thus feeling after God so darkly, so uncertainly; to know so little of God, and indeed so little of any beside material objects. He is concerned that he must see even that little, not directly, but in the dim, sullied glass of sense; and consequently so imperfectly and obscurely that it is all a mere enigma still.

Now, these very desiderata faith supplies. It gives a more extensive knowledge of things invisible, showing what eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither could it before enter into our heart to conceive. And all these it shows in the clearest light, with the fullest certainty and evidence. For it does not leave us to receive our notices of them by mere reflection from the dull glass of sense; but resolves a thousand enigmas of the highest concern by giving faculties suited to things invisible. Oh, who would not wish for such a faith, were it only on these accounts! How much more, if by this I may receive the promise, I may attain all that holiness and happiness!"<sup>2</sup>

So by faith we walk in the light of eternity until 'faith is lost in sight', and we share for ever the life of heaven.

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<sup>1</sup> W.VI, 430.

<sup>2</sup> L.II, 383.

The Place of the Eschatological Doctrines in Wesley'sTheology:

In a paper read at the first Institute of Methodist Theological Studies, at Lincoln College, Oxford, in July, 1958, and entitled "Wesley's Doctrine of the Last Things"<sup>1</sup> William Strawson said:

"Two dangers connected with any consideration of the doctrine of the Last Things are isolation and exaggeration. On the one hand, it is fatally easy to isolate this doctrine from the whole Christian belief, which results in a wrong emphasis; on the other hand, by extracting references to the belief from the whole thought of a writer, one can easily give the impression that this belief was overwhelmingly significant, to the exclusion of all else".<sup>2</sup>

In order to avoid these twin dangers of isolation and exaggeration, we must now briefly consider Wesley's eschatological doctrines in relation to his whole theological thought. For eschatology was certainly not Wesley's sole, or even main, concern.

We have seen that Wesley laid great stress upon what we have come to call 'realized eschatology'. For him the great moments and experiences of the Christian life are available here and now. Justification, Entire

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<sup>1</sup> Published in "The London Quarterly and Holborn Review", July, 1959. pp.240-249.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.240.

Sanctification or Christian Perfection, and Eternal Life can, and should, be present experiences. One does not have to wait until the moment of death to be assured of God's pardon, or to be freed from sin, or to enjoy that quality of life which Jesus described as 'eternal'. Again and again there are granted to the Christian experiences of fellowship and communion, of peace and ecstasy, of assurance and adoration which Wesley can only describe as 'foretastes of the life of heaven'. And we have seen, too, that the salvation Wesley preached with such passion and constraint was for him primarily salvation from sin, not from Hell.

Yet of course Wesley was concerned with eschatology. He can sum up the whole purpose of his life in the words: "I want to know one thing - the way to heaven; how to land safe on that happy shore". And Strawson has pointed out<sup>1</sup> that Hymns on Death, Judgment, Heaven and Hell are put almost at the very beginning of the Hymn Book which Wesley published in 1780. After an opening section on "Exhorting Sinners to Return to God" - the primary message of the Evangelical Revival - there are hymns describing "The Pleasantness of Religion" and "The Goodness of God". Then comes a section of forty hymns on the eschatological subjects. It is significant,

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p.240.

however, that while there are thirteen hymns on each of the three subjects, Death, Judgment and Heaven, there is only one hymn on Hell.

In 1763 John Wesley prepared a Model Deed for his preaching-houses

"in which it was provided that persons appointed by the Conference should 'have and enjoy the premises' only on condition 'that the said persons preach on other doctrine than is contained in Mr. Wesley's Notes upon the New Testament, and four volumes of sermons'".<sup>1</sup>

There was much discussion as to whether the 'four volumes' included forty-four or fifty three sermons. The opinion of counsel was sought, and given as follows:

"The total number of Sermons constituting the standard of Methodist doctrine and practice is forty-four".<sup>2</sup>

Now in these forty-four sermons, known as the Standard Sermons, there is not one on any specific eschatological subject. Even in the additional nine which make up the "fifty-three" there is only one - "The Great Assize".

This, again, is surely significant. It helps us to realise the relative importance Wesley himself gave to the Last Things in his standard theology, and enables us to maintain a true perspective. In all Wesley published a hundred and forty one sermons. They do contain six on

<sup>1</sup> Sugden, Introduction to the Standard Sermons, p.13.

<sup>2</sup> S.S.II, 340.

specific eschatological subjects - "On Eternity", "The General Deliverance", "Of Good Angels", "Of Evil Angels", "Of Hell" and "Of the Resurrection of the Dead". Many of the sermons, as we have seen, have references to these doctrines; but, even so, the proportion is remarkably small. Nor did Wesley ever publish any books, tracts or articles on these subjects.

We have seen that the fear of judgment and the punishment of hell, or the reward and bliss of heaven, are not the main motives of Wesley's preaching. He was concerned that men and women should enter here and now into an experience of pardon and deliverance from sin through the merits of Christ, into an experience of holiness made possible through the Holy Spirit, and into a life of uninterrupted fellowship with the Father. Because of this foretaste of the life of heaven he knew that one day, sooner or later, the full and eternal life of heaven would be his.

In a sense all Wesley's theology - like that of the New Testament - is eschatological. That does not mean that he must always be thinking and preaching about the life after death and the day of judgment. Nor does he feel he must always be preoccupied with thoughts about the end of the world and the return of Christ in glory. But he must warn men of the consequences of their actions. He

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must seek to prepare them for the coming judgment. And when he offers them Christ he must remind them that their eternal destiny depends on their acceptance or rejection of his offer. He knows that the future - of the individual and of the world - is in the hands of God, and that history will end with the complete triumph of Christ. This world, this life is real enough, and Wesley will 'serve the present age' with absolute devotion. He will therefore involve himself in politics, in education, in medicine, in philanthropy. But he will not forget that man's destiny is eternal, that here he is but 'a stranger and a pilgrim', and that heaven is his true home. The words which we have already quoted were not merely the expression of a passing mood:<sup>1</sup>

"I have thought, I am a creature of a day,  
passing through life as an arrow through the air.  
I am a spirit come from God, and returning to God:  
just hovering over the great gulf; till, a few  
moments hence, I am no more seen; I drop into an  
unchangeable eternity!"

So Wesley's eschatology is the ground of his sense of urgency. It is this which drove him on relentlessly - riding, preaching, writing. It is this which compelled him to 'offer Christ' to men whenever and wherever he could. For him the moment of decision, the eschatological moment was not the moment of death but the moment of rebirth. When he offered men Christ he offered them

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<sup>1</sup> See p.216 above.

'pardon and holiness and heaven'; he offered them the saving and keeping and sanctifying power of Christ for this present life and for the life to come.

Wesley and Modern Theology:

We have seen that Wesley derived his eschatological doctrines from the New Testament. They were part of the authentic Word of God which he was commissioned to proclaim. They gave to his preaching a sense of desperate urgency and constraint, and a strong note of confidence.

In the nineteenth century questions of eschatology almost disappeared from theological discussion. This was due, in part, to the prominence of the idea of progress. The biological theory of evolution was applied, not only to science, but also to ethics and theology. It was widely held that history was moving inevitably towards its goal, and that this goal might well be realizable within the present world of space and time. It was not so much that the eschatological descriptions of the New Testament were spiritualized, but that they were quietly brushed aside as irrelevant. Further, the

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emergence of the 'Higher Criticism' suggested to some minds that the difficult and seemingly extravagant eschatological passages in the New Testament need no longer be taken seriously.

The publication of Albert Schweitzer's book, "The Quest of the Historical Jesus" (English translation, 1910) brought the whole question of eschatology into the forefront of theological discussion. As Fison has said, it is

"to Schweitzer that at least so far as Great Britain is concerned we owe the revival of the study of eschatology as a living issue, vitally concerned with the permanent relevance of the Christian gospel".<sup>1</sup>

The next landmark was the publication of C.H.Dodd's books - "Parables of the Kingdom" (1935) and "The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments" (1936), in which he expounded his theory of 'realized eschatology'. From that time eschatology has held a central place in theology. A further stimulus was given to the discussion when the World Council of Churches took as its main theme for the Second Assembly at Evanston in 1954, "Christ the Hope of the World".

Many writers have pointed out that the temper of our present age is much more conducive to eschatological

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<sup>1</sup> "The Christian Hope" p.53.

thinking than that of the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> The possibility of the total destruction of the world through an atomic explosion, the tragedy of two world wars, and the consequent abandonment of belief in inevitable progress, the challenge of such apocalyptic ideologies as fascism and marxism, the violence and the insecurity of our times, all make this an 'apocalyptic age'.

Modern discussion seems to have centred round two fundamental questions. First, what does the New Testament say about eschatology? - and to this question has been brought all the tools of textual and higher criticism. And second, what does the New Testament mean by its eschatological statements; what significance does it have for our twentieth century thought and preaching?

To the first question a number of answers have been given. Schweitzer maintained that Jesus proclaimed and expected an almost immediate return in glory, that this coloured all His teaching, and that it dominated the thought and action of the Early Church. In this Jesus was mistaken, and the Church had to adapt itself to its disappointment. C.H.Dodd, on the other hand, found the clue to the eschatological references in the parables of Jesus and in the

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<sup>1</sup> e.g. J.A.T.Robinson, "In the End, God..." pp.16-24  
Fison, "The Christian Hope", pp.1-28.

apostolic preaching in the crisis of Jesus' life, ministry, death and resurrection. J.A.T. Robinson, in his book, "Jesus and His Coming" (1957), seems to take a similar line. T.F.Glasson is even more radical; in his book, "The Second Advent" (1945), he seeks to show that in the teaching of Jesus there is no specific reference to His coming again in judgment, and what references there are (in the Gospels and the rest of the New Testament) are the product of the Early Church, which, finding many of the Old Testament prophecies regarding the Day of the Lord and the coming Messiah unfulfilled by Christ's first coming, looked forward to a fulfilment in a Second Advent.

But none of these answers to the question - What does the New Testament say about eschatology - has received general acceptance. The great majority of New Testament scholars, including C.H.Dodd, would maintain the view that such doctrines as the Final Coming of Christ in Judgment, and the Final Consummation of God's purpose are to be found in every stratum of the Gospels and every book of the New Testament. In other words, no results of textual or higher criticism, we believe, have in any way undermined the Scriptural basis on which John Wesley built his eschatological doctrines.

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But when we turn to the second question - what exactly do the New Testament passages mean, and what significance do they have for us today - the position is different. We have seen that Wesley interprets the New Testament descriptions quite literally. For example, he believes in a visible return of Christ in glory, visible, that is, to the normal vision of mankind. He interprets the 'resurrection of the body' as a re-assembling of the constituent parts of the material body. He maintains that the blessings of heaven and the pains of hell are 'bodily' as well as spiritual.

Few people today would be prepared to take the New Testament doctrines so literally. Brunner has said:

"The demand of the fundamentalists that we should understand every apocalyptic statement of the New Testament literally as referring to a future happening, and thus accept it as a Word of God binding for us, is impossible, if only because the greatest differences, indeed contradictions, exist between these apocalyptic schemes... A simple acceptance of the New Testament apocalyptic eschatological schemes is no longer possible for us men of today. We no longer live in a world in which the stars can fall from heaven".<sup>1</sup>

I can remember, when speaking at an Open Air Meeting, becoming involved in a discussion on the Second Advent of Christ; having pointed out the impossibility of taking quite literally the text, "and every eye shall see Him", I was told that the advent of television had made such a

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"Eternal Hope", p.118.

contention wonderfully possible! But such literalism does violence to the whole spirit of the New Testament. We must surely speak in terms of 'mythology', and, to some extent, at least, engage in 'demythologising'. In Bultmann's own definition:

"Mythology is the use of imagery to express the otherworldly in terms of this world and the divine in terms of human life, the other side in terms of this side".<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps J. Schniewind's definition is even better:

"By 'mythological' we mean the presentation of unobservable realities in terms of observable phenomena".<sup>2</sup>

The eschatological doctrines are concerned, either with the winding up of the whole historical process, or with 'events' and 'experiences' beyond history. These are completely beyond our human experience, and therefore they must be described in mythological terms. J.A.T. Robinson, in the book which he entitled, "In the End, God..." has urged that what we have done for the early stories of Genesis must be done for the 'myths' of the Last Things:

"It is not always sufficiently recognised that the eschatological statements of the Bible are of this 'mythical' nature, in precisely the same way as its narratives of the Creation and Fall. They are neither inerrant prophecies of the future, nor

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<sup>1</sup> In the essay, "New Testament and Mythology" in "Kerygma and Myth" ed. Bartsch. (S.P.C.K. 1953) p.10, note 2.

<sup>2</sup> "Kerygma and Myth", p.48.

pious guess-work. They are necessary transpositions into the key of the hereafter of sure knowledge of God and His relation to men given in the revelatory encounter of present historical event. The form of the myth is governed by the current presuppositions of a particular age and place, and is not integral to its truth. But the truth itself is not speculative; it is scientific."<sup>1</sup>

Difficult though it is, modern theology has succeeded in a great degree in separating the truth from the myth in respect of the Genesis stories; but it has not really made an attempt to do the same for the myths of "The End". Robinson goes so far as to give us a standard by which we can attempt this separation.

"Every statement of Christian eschatology, whether of the end of the person or of the world, is an inference from some basic truth in its doctrine of God, and must be judged and tested accordingly. False ideas of the last things are direct reflections of inadequate views of the nature of God".<sup>2</sup>

John Wesley, with his more conservative view of the Bible, saw no need for this separation. For him the Scripture pictures and statements must be taken literally. This is not a criticism of Wesley; being a man of his age, what else could he be expected to do? If we ask more of him we ask too much. But while discountenancing much of his literalism, we can recognise in his writings the authentic note of the New Testament eschatology. Man is confronted here and

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<sup>1</sup> "In the End, God..." p.35.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p.31

now with decision. He is made aware of the vital sense of urgency. He is reminded of his accountability to God. He is offered in this life such forgiveness, such holiness, such a deep and rich sense of fellowship with God in Christ, that he feels it to be a real foretaste of heaven. And he looks with confidence to the life everlasting, to the final victory of Christ, to the completion of God's great plan of redemption. These great truths of judgment and of hope were part of the Gospel John, and his brother Charles, had been called to preach. Faithfully they proclaimed them in sermon and in hymn. For this very purpose, John believed, in the providence of God, he himself, the brand, had been plucked from the burning.

APPENDIX.Wesley's View of the Scriptures.

So important is the part played by the Bible in the writings of John and Charles Wesley that we feel it necessary to add a note on Wesley's view of the Scriptures.

Referring to the Wesleys Henry Bett has said:

"Both the brothers must have had a most profound, exact and extensive acquaintance with the Scriptures. Indeed, it is only a close study of the Bible on our own part that can reveal to us the extent of their intimacy with it. There can hardly be a single paragraph anywhere in the Scriptures that is not somewhere reflected in the writings of the Wesleys".<sup>1</sup>

John Wesley's attitude is stated clearly in a well-known passage in his Preface to the Standard Sermons.

"I want to know one thing - the way to heaven; how to land safe on that happy shore. God Himself has condescended to teach the way; for this very end He came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! At any price, give me the book of God! I have it: here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be homo unius libri".<sup>2</sup>

All his life John was a student of the Scriptures. When he was a little boy in the Epworth Rectory his mother had taught him to love the Word of God. At Charterhouse School,

<sup>1</sup> "The Hymns of Methodism", p.71.

<sup>2</sup> S.S.I., 31-2.

he tells us, he read the Scriptures and said his prayers morning and evening.<sup>1</sup> And "in the year 1729" he says, "I began not only to read, but to study the Bible, as the one, the only standard of truth, and the only model of pure religion".<sup>2</sup> His knowledge of Hebrew and Greek enabled him to read the Scriptures in the original tongues, to make his own translations, and to engage in textual criticism. His writings are full of apt and striking quotations, and his style is again and again reminiscent of the Authorised Version.

Sangster has pointed out that in his "Plain Account of Christian Perfection," John Wesley quotes the Bible a hundred and ninety five times.<sup>3</sup> Nor was brother Charles' knowledge any the less. Bett has said, "The hymns, in many cases, are a mere mosaic of Biblical allusions",<sup>4</sup> and he gives as an example the verse:

"Behold the servant of the Lord!  
I wait Thy guiding eye to feel,  
To hear and keep Thy every word,  
To prove and do Thy perfect will,  
Joyful from my own works to cease,  
Glad to fulfil all righteousness".<sup>5</sup>

Each line recalls a passage of Scripture - Luke, 1, 38; Psalm 32, 8; John 14, 23; Romans 12, 2; Hebrews 4, 10; and Matthew 3, 15.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> J.I, 466.    <sup>2</sup> W.XI, 367.    <sup>3</sup> "The Path to Perfection", p.36.

<sup>4</sup> "The Hymns of Methodism", p.71.    <sup>5</sup> P.W.V, 10-11.

<sup>6</sup> See also "The Bible in Charles Wesley's Hymns" (Waterhouse).

Neither John nor Charles were prepared to quote texts or passages without first seeking to understand their true meaning. In continuation of the passage already quoted from the Preface to the Standard Sermons John explains his own method.

"Here, then, I am, far from the busy ways of men. I sit down alone: only God is here. In His presence I open, I read His book; for this end, to find the way to heaven. Is there a doubt concerning the meaning of what I read? Does anything appear dark or intricate? I lift up my heart to the Father of Lights: 'Lord, is it not Thy word, "If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God"? Thou "givest liberally, and upbraidest not". Thou hast said, "If any be willing to do Thy will, he shall know". I am willing to do, let me know, Thy will'. I then search after and consider parallel passages of Scripture, 'comparing spiritual things with spiritual'. I meditate thereon with all the attention and earnestness of which my mind is capable. If any doubt still remains, I consult those who are experienced in the things of God; and then the writings whereby, being dead, they yet speak. And what I thus learn, that I teach".<sup>1</sup>

Here, then, was the foundation of all Wesley's faith and doctrine, a careful and prayerful study of all the relevant Scripture passages. But the conclusions must be interpreted in the light of experience, of his own personal experience, and that of his devout followers.

Sugden, the editor and annotator of the Standard Sermons, says:

"He first worked out his theology by strict logical deduction from the Scriptures; and then he corrected his conclusions by the test of actual experience. His class-meetings were a laboratory in which he verified or modified his hypotheses".<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> S.S.I., 32.

<sup>2</sup> S.S.I., 196, note.

It was this reference to the experience of the Christian fellowship which ensured that Wesley's doctrine should be intensely practical, and at the same time delivered it from the charge of individualism. This is seen, for example, in his doctrine of Christian Perfection. John Wesley maintained that this was certainly no invention of his own, but that it was to be found in the Scriptures. He quoted passages from both the Old and New Testaments; and when he was accused of heresy in respect of the doctrine, he replied, "If I am a heretic, I became such by reading the Bible".<sup>1</sup> Now Wesley could not interpret this doctrine in the light of his own experience; for, as we have seen, he never seems to have had the experience himself. But he received plenty of confirmation from his followers. Having carefully examined and questioned many who claimed the experience, he said, "of whose testimony I could see no reason to doubt".<sup>2</sup>

Rattenbury gives another example of Wesley's interpreting Scripture in the light of experience - this time his own experience. He quotes from Wesley's sermon on "Free Grace", a trenchant attack on Predestination.

"This is the blasphemy clearly contained in the horrible decree of predestination!.... You represent God as worse than the devil; more

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<sup>1</sup> L.IV, 216, quoted by Sangster, "The Path to Perfection", p.52.

<sup>2</sup> W.VI, 464.

false, more cruel, more unjust. But you say you will prove it by Scripture. Hold! What will you prove by Scripture? That God is worse than the Devil? It cannot be. Whatever that Scripture proves it can never prove this: whatever its true meaning be, it cannot be this meaning. No Scripture can mean that God is not love, or that His mercy is not over all His works; that is, whatever it prove beside, no Scripture can prove predestination".<sup>1</sup>

And Rattenbury's comment is -

"Now this is interesting, not only for what it declares, but for what it implies as to Wesley's feeling about Scripture. It implies in the last analysis that Scripture itself must be interpreted by the central fact of his experience - the love of God which he knew to be true, for he had discovered it for himself".<sup>2</sup>

Incidentally the quotation from Wesley's sermon also illustrates the part he believed reason must also play in the interpretation of Scripture.

Finally, John Wesley always compared his interpretations of Scripture with what others had written. In his Preface to his "Explanatory Notes on the New Testament" he says:

"I once designed to write down barely what occurred to my own mind, consulting none but the inspired writers. But no sooner was I acquainted with that great light of the Christian world, (lately gone to his reward) Bengelius, than I entirely changed my design, being throughly convinced it might be of more service to the cause of religion, were I barely to translate his Gnomon Novi Testamenti, than to write many volumes upon it.

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<sup>1</sup> W.VII, 383.

<sup>2</sup> "Wesley's Legacy to the World", pp.94-5.

Many of his excellent notes I have therefore translated; many more I have abridged; omitting that part which was purely critical, and giving the substance of the rest".<sup>1</sup>

He also says that he has referred to the writings of Dr. Heylyn, Dr. Guyse and Dr. Doddridge. And it is clear from all his writings that Wesley had a profound knowledge of the writings of the Christian Fathers.

It is therefore with truth that Wesley can describe his Standard Sermons (and indeed the description fits all his writings) in the following words:

"I have endeavoured to describe the true, the scriptural, experimental religion, so as to omit nothing which is a real part thereof, and to add nothing thereto which is not".<sup>2</sup>

Wesley's approach to the Bible was by no means entirely uncritical. Sangster has pointed out that Wesley, while regarding the Old Testament as part of the Word of God, does not give to it the same authority as the New Testament.<sup>3</sup> In his "Plain Account of Christian Perfection" he says:

"The privileges of Christians are in no wise to be measured by what the Old Testament records concerning those who were under the Jewish dispensation; seeing the fulness of time is now come, the Holy Ghost is now given, the great salvation of God is now brought to men by the revelation of Jesus Christ".<sup>4</sup>

And, in a letter to Elizabeth Hardy, written in 1758, he speaks similarly:

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<sup>1</sup> Para.7.    <sup>2</sup> S.S.I, 32.    <sup>3</sup> "The Path to Perfection", p.36

<sup>4</sup> W.XI, 375.

"I do by no means exclude the Old Testament from bearing witness to any truths of God. Nothing less. But I say the experience of the Jews is not the standard of Christian experience".<sup>1</sup>

When he came to revise the Book of Common Prayer for the use of the Methodists in the United States of America he omitted some of the imprecatory Psalms in part, and some altogether, "as being highly improper for the mouths of a Christian congregation".<sup>2</sup> Nor was Wesley above spiritualising or allegorising Scriptural texts and passages.

But he lived before the days of Higher Criticism. His attitude to the Bible is best summed up in his own words, again from his Preface to his Notes on the New Testament:

"Concerning the Scriptures in general, it may be observed, the word of the living God, which directed the first Patriarchs also, was, in the time of Moses, committed to writing. To this were added, in several succeeding generations, the inspired writings of the other Prophets. Afterwards, what the Son of God preached, and the Holy Ghost spake by the Apostles, the Apostles and Evangelists wrote. This is what we now style the Holy Scripture: This is that 'word of God which remaineth for ever'; of which, thought 'heaven and earth pass away, one jot or tittle shall not pass away'. The Scripture, therefore, of the Old and New Testament is a most solid and precious system of divine truth. Every part thereof is worthy of God; and all together are one entire body, wherein is no defect, no excess. It is the fountain of

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<sup>1</sup> L.IV, 11.

<sup>2</sup> Preface to "The Sunday Service of the Methodists in the United States of America. With Other Occasional Services" W.XIV, 317.

heavenly wisdom, which they who are able to taste, prefer to all writings of men, however wise, or learned, or holy".<sup>1</sup>

As can be seen especially in his exposition of the eschatological doctrines John Wesley seems to give the same authority to the Book of Revelation as to the Gospels and Pauline Epistles. Nor, apart from the 'realized' elements, was he able to verify them from experience.

We have seen how, again and again, Wesley has taken Scriptural details of the Last Things as literal fact; and, on occasion, this has led him into excesses which are not acceptable to most modern theologians. One feels that his eschatological doctrines might have been more convincing had Wesley been prepared to confess ignorance on many points and not seek to penetrate the essential mystery. But he possessed that insatiable curiosity which must be for ever seeking explanations.

Yet, bearing in mind that Wesley was a scholar of the eighteenth century and not the twentieth, one is deeply impressed with his faithfulness to the Scriptures. Here, surely, is true Biblical theology.

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<sup>1</sup> Para.10.

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