

BY WARREN THOMAS SMITH*

The Wesleys In Georgia: An Evaluation

How are we to assess the Georgia sojourn of the Wesleys? Lamentably, it has become commonplace to dismiss 1736-1737 as failure. But was it? Was it the ill-starred venture we customarily assume? Or is it to be regarded as a major milestone—a necessary seasoning—for the brothers soon to lead the evangelical revival? Has the propitious moment not come to sound a new and positive note regarding Georgia, and should that word not emanate from Georgia? In Georgia the Wesleys painfully burned their fingers in the fire of reality, yet in the torturing experience, they learned and matured.

Rarely do we find young men so highly motivated, so naïve, so guileless. The Wesleys came to Georgia fresh from their Holy Club background, their chief impetus the quest for holiness. By preaching to the Indians, John Wesley would be able to share the unsearchable riches of Christ with the pure, unspoiled Noble Savage—so vividly characterized by Rousseau.

It was Dr. John Burton of Corpus Christi, Oxford, Trustee for Georgia and patron of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, who wrote John, September 8, 1735, "Your short conference with Mr. Oglethorpe has raised the hopes of many good persons that you and yours would join in an undertaking which cannot be better executed than by such instruments."¹

Wesley's reply, October 10, 1735, clearly enunciated his basic inducement, "My chief motive, to which all the rest are subordinate, is the hope of saving my own soul." He insisted, "I hope to learn the true sense of the gospel of Christ by preaching it to the heathen . . ." He continued, "But you will perhaps ask: 'Cannot you save your own soul in England as well as in Georgia?' I answer,—No; neither can I hope to attain the same degree of holiness here which I may there."²

It was settled. Accompanying the Wesleys were Benjamin Ingham and Charles Delamotte. The Earl of Egmont perceived, "I take the sudden resolution of the four gentlemen now mentioned of going over to help the

¹ John Telford, ed., *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.* (London: The Epworth Press, 1931), I:187.

² *Ibid.*, I:188-190.

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cause of religion as a particular providence and mark of God's favour to our designs."³ All were convinced the mission was of God and had God's blessing.

The Voyage

About 9:00 A.M. on Tuesday, October 14, 1735 the party "took boat for Gravesend, in order to embark for Georgia."⁴ John commented:

Our end in leaving our native country was not to avoid want, God having given us plenty of temporal blessings, nor to gain riches or honour, [which we trust He will ever enable us to look on as no other than dung and dross;] but singly this—to save our souls, to live wholly to the glory of God.⁵

No sooner had the *Simmonds* gotten under way than strict—yea tyrannical—Holy Club procedure made its way into life aboard ship:

We now began to be a little regular. Our common way of living was this: From four in the morning till five each of us used private prayer. From five to seven we read the Bible together, carefully comparing it (that we might not lean to our own understandings) with the writings of the earliest ages. At seven we breakfasted. At eight were the public prayers, at which were present usually between thirty or forty of our eighty passengers.

The spiritual pace accelerated hour by hour throughout the day until finally, "Between nine and ten we went to bed, where neither the roaring of the sea nor the motion of the ship could take away the refreshing sleep which God gave us."⁶ And this was to be their life style in pioneer Georgia!

A series of frightful storms overtook the vessel, and Wesley candidly delineated the state of his soul, his haunting fear of death, "At night I was awakened by the tossing of the ship and roaring of the wind, and plainly showed I was unfit, for I was unwilling, to die."⁷ During this traumatic, extended turbulence he later acknowledged, "The Germans . . . calmly sang on." After inquiry, he was told, "No; our women and children are not afraid to die."⁸ The indelible impression made by these Moravians became increasingly evident throughout the Georgia experience.

Arrival

At last the protracted voyage ended. On Wednesday, February 4, 1736, "About noon the trees [of Georgia] were visible from the mast, and in the afternoon from the main deck." That evening Wesley read the lesson, "A great door and effectual is opened [1 Corinthians 16:9]." The following day, "Between two and three in the afternoon God brought us all safe into the Savannah river. We cast anchor near Tybee Island." Then on Friday, February 6, 1736 "About eight in the morning I first set my

³ *The Diary of Viscount Perceval afterwards First Earl of Egmont* (London: 1920, 1923), II:196, cited in V. H. H. Green, *The Young Mr. Wesley* (London: Edward Arnold, 1961), p. 254.

⁴ Nehemiah Curnock, ed., *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.* (London: The Epworth Press, 1938), I:109.

⁵ *Ibid.*, dated Tuesday, October 14, 1735.

⁶ *Ibid.*, I:112-113, dated Tuesday, October 21, 1735.

⁷ *Ibid.*, I:122-123, dated Sunday, November 23, 1735.

⁸ *Ibid.*, I:142-143, dated January 25, 1736. Wesley then "went to their crying, trembling neighbours" and spoke "in boldness." He continued, "At twelve the wind fell. This was the most glorious day which I have hitherto seen."

foot on American ground. It was a small uninhabited island, . . . over against Tybee." The English called it Peeper—now known as Cockspur—Island. Oglethorpe led the party to "a rising ground" where they knelt to give thanks to God. When the other people came on shore, in an open place, "surrounded with myrtles, bays, and cedars" a prayer service was held, and Wesley read from Mark 6, passages "wonderfully suited to the occasion" telling of John the Baptist and "our Lord's directions to the first preachers of His gospel." Wesley commented, "God grant that, through patience and comfort of His Holy Word, we may ever hold fast the blessed hope of our calling!"⁹

Georgia in 1736 was the youngest of the English colonies with a small population, half of whom—"some 700 souls"¹⁰ lived in Savannah. It was a community beginning to take shape: houses were under construction, streets being laid out. The first group of Georgia settlers—120—had come with Oglethorpe aboard the *Anne*, arriving on February 12, 1733 (Gregorian Calendar). The Wesleys came to a fledgling English colony. When did Blacks first come to Georgia? In terms of English governance, the answer is undoubtedly linked to the ordinance forbidding slaves—not on moral but economic grounds—"His Majesty thought fit to pass some laws since the Charter, whereby the Inhabitants are restrained from the use of Negroes, from the use of Rum, and from Trading with the Indians without Lycence."¹¹ There soon followed "An Act for rendering the Colony of Georgia more defensible by Prohibiting the Importation and use of Black Slaves or Negroes into the same." It was assumed the Georgia colonists "could ill afford the purchase"¹² of Africans. White indentured servants "did not appear to offer the disadvantages" that were assumed attendant upon use of slaves. Slavery flourished, however, in neighboring South Carolina. Blacks probably came from that colony, either in flight to escape bondage or they were brought covertly as slaves—public notice carefully avoided.¹³ Even so, "Col. Bull brought with him 4 of his Negroes, who were Sawyers, to assist the Colony; and also, brought provision for them, being resolved to put the Trust to no expense."¹⁴ Possibly these are the first recorded Black people in the Georgia venture.

The pervading fear in Georgia was not so much from native Indians, but the Spanish in St. Augustine who might at any time launch an attack.

⁹ *Ibid.*, I:145-149.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, I:371. Charles Wesley estimated "about 200 houses . . . and 700 souls," in *Egmont Diary*, II:313. John's approximation is 518 people, as of 1737.

¹¹ Patrick Tailfer and others, *A True and Historical Narrative of the Colony of Georgia. With Comments by the Earl of Egmont*, Clarence L. Ver Steeg, ed., (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1960), p. 39, see note 18.

¹² See B. H. Fant, "The Labor Policy of the Trustees for Establishing the Colony of Georgia in America," *The Georgia Historical Quarterly*, XVI:1-3, March, 1932.

¹³ See Ralph Betts Flanders, *Plantation Slavery in Georgia* (Cos Cob, Connecticut: John E. Edwards, 1967), pp. 3-22.

¹⁴ From *A Brief Account of the Establishment of a Colony of Georgia under General James Oglethorpe, February 1, 1733*, quoted in Spencer B. King, Jr., *Georgia Voices: A Documentary History to 1872* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1966), p. 12. Blacks may have accompanied the Spanish to Georgia as early as 1540.

It was the frontier milieu which in large measure explains many of the blunders of the Wesleys. No longer was there the supportive Epworth household. Samuel, Sr. had died April 25, 1735 and Susanna was living with her children. Letters were exchanged, but the Atlantic now separated the family. There was no Holy Club—albeit Burton's suggestion to transfer it in toto to Georgia. Stability and comfort of the University of Oxford were gone. Likewise there were no refreshing, delightful visits to the Kirkham rectory at Stanton Harcourt. The Wesleys were confronting an altogether new environment.

Charles

Charles Wesley, "Secretary for Indian Affairs"—also secretary to General Oglethorpe—had a doleful ministry lasting but five months. On Tuesday, March 9, 1736, "about three in the afternoon, I first set foot on St. Simon's island," he recorded. "I spent the afternoon in conference with my parishioners. (With what trembling ought I to call them mine!) At seven we had evening prayers, in the open air, at which Mr. Oglethorpe was present."¹⁵ The following day, "Between five and six in the morning I read short prayers to a few at the fire, before Mr. Oglethorpe's tent, in a hard shower of rain."¹⁶

Charles' astonishing naïveté was soon apparent, on the 11th he "heard the first harsh word from Mr. Oglethorpe, when I asked for something for a poor woman . . . I know not how to account for his increasing coldness."¹⁷ Neither did Charles comprehend malicious gossip which was being harranged in the General's ear. From the beginning Charles was at cross purposes with his people. Even his attempt to befriend a serving girl resulted in a humiliating scene, "while I was talking in the street with poor Catherine, her mistress came up to us, and fell upon me with the utmost bitterness and scurrility;" he went on melancholically, she "said she would blow me up, and my brother . . . she would be revenged, and expose my d—d hypocrisy, my prayers four times a day by beat of drum, and abundance more," at which point it is almost possible to see the downcast Charles take a long breath and continue, "which I cannot write, and thought no woman, though taken from Drurylane, could have spoken."¹⁸

Brother John was hastily summonsed from Savannah to bring peace between Charles and the General. Later Charles took flight to Savannah, seeking a respite, only to return to Frederica to face a rapidly worsening situation. It was July 21st that Charles learned the happy news he was to return to England. Oglethorpe's parting advise, "I should recommend to you marriage, rather than celibacy." Charles read the lesson for July 26, "Arise, let us go hence," and noted, "Accordingly at twelve I took my

¹⁵ *The Journal of the Rev. Charles Wesley, M.A.* (London: Wesleyan Methodist Book-Room, [1849] n.d.), I:1 (Note printer's error, p. 4.)

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, I:2, dated Wednesday, March 10, 1736.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, I:3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, I:5, dated Sunday, March 21, 1736.

final leave of Savannah. When the boat put off I was surprised that I felt no more joy in leaving such a scene of sorrows."¹⁹

John accompanied his brother to Charleston, where Charles confirmed their suspicions regarding the treatment of slaves in South Carolina:

I had observed much, and heard more, of the cruelty of masters toward their negroes [*sic*]; but now I received an authentic account of some horrid instances thereof. The giving a child a slave of its own age to tyrannize over, to beat and abuse out of sport, was, I myself saw, a common practice. . . .²⁰

Once back in London, Charles sang a somewhat different tune to the Trustees of Georgia, reporting in less grim fashion of his ministry in the colony and that of his brother John. Earlier lamentations about Georgia are noticeably lacking:

That when he arrived at Savannah he found the people had been miserably neglected by our late minister, Mr. Quincey; that but three persons partook of the communion, and the people diverted themselves with shooting on Sundays; but before he came away his brother, who is minister now there, had forty communicants every Sunday and on great holy days; that he preaches by heart and has a full assembly; that prayers are said twice every day, in the morning and at night, by reason the day is spent at labour in the fields.²¹

As Charles was giving his account, John was in Georgia demonstrating a relentless earnestness.

A Clergyman at Work

John Wesley's ministrations in Georgia, from the outset, had a practical note; which accentuated as time passed:

I began taking a more exact account of my parishioners by going from house to house. By the best computation I can make, there are now in the town of Savannah five hundred and eighteen souls, one hundred and forty-nine of whom are under sixteen years of age. About one hundred and eighty of the adults are, or are called, of the Church of England.²²

Wesley's visitation pattern warrants attention, "I set apart the time when they cannot work, because of the heat, viz. from twelve till three in the afternoon."²³ What a picture! Wesley walked about Savannah under a blazing sun, interrupting the noonday nap of the sweltering citizens. Maladroit though he may have been, Wesley labored assiduously. His people were not neglected. He wrote George Whitefield, "I had long since begun to visit my parishioners in order from house to house. But I could not go on two days longer;" he paused, "the sick were increasing so fast as to require all the time I had to spare, from one to five in the afternoon."²⁴

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, I:35-36. In England, on Tuesday, February 15, 1737, Charles noted, "I told Mr. Oglethorpe of my desire of returning with him to Georgia, . . . as a Clergyman; but as to my Secretary's place, I begged . . . where, when, and how I should resign it." I:68-69.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, I:36, dated Monday, August 2, 1736.

²¹ Quoted in Egmont *Diary*, II:313-314, cited in Frank Baker, *John Wesley and the Church of England* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970), pp. 43, 355.

²² J. Wesley *Journal* I:371, dated Saturday, July 30, 1737.

²³ *Ibid.*, I:213-214, dated Monday, May 10, 1736.

²⁴ J. Wesley *Letters* I:204-205, dated September 10, 1736, from Savannah.

As a pastor, Wesley depicted burying "the only child of a fond parent" the child having fallen into a well "being stifled there before those with whom he had been just playing could help him."²⁵ He described in detail a conversation with a young Black woman in Carolina, originally from Barbados who "had lived there in a minister's family from a child." When asked "whether she went to church" she answered, "Yes." When asked if she learned anything, she replied, "Nothing." The conversation continued a second day.²⁶ He also told of meeting a young Black man, ". . . I found [him] both very desirous and very capable of instruction." Wesley suggested:

. . . perhaps one of the easiest and shortest ways to instruct the American negroes [*sic*] in Christianity would be, first, to inquire after and find out some of the most serious of their planters. Then, having inquired of them which of their slaves were best inclined and understood English, to go to them from plantation to plantation, staying as long as appeared necessary at each.²⁷

Wesley spoke critically of Dr. Tailfer, the unscrupulous malcontent who wanted to bring slaves into Georgia and establish a system similar to that in South Carolina. Wesley likewise pointed out Tailfer's blatant promiscuity.²⁸

John Wesley delighted in the schools he and Ingham established.²⁹ A full report was rendered:

Our general method is this: A young gentleman, who came with me, teaches between thirty and forty children to read, write, and cast accounts. Before school in the morning, and after school in the afternoon, he catechizes the lowest class, and endeavours to fix something of what was said in their understandings as well as their memories. In the evening he instructs the larger children. On Saturday, in the afternoon, I catechize them all.³⁰

Some of the boys in Delamotte's school wore shoes and stockings, the others did not and there was considerable ridicule. When Delamotte failed to put an end to this rudeness, Wesley made a suggestion, "I think I can cure it. If you will take charge of my school next week I will take charge of yours, and will try." On Monday morning Wesley appeared at school—barefoot. It was only a week before the entire matter appeared "effectually cured."³¹

Wesley's concern for the Indians was expressed repeatedly, "Mr. Ingham has made some progress in the Creek language, but a short conversation I had with the chief of the Chickasaws . . . moves me to desire rather to learn their language, if God shall give me opportunity . . ." He went on, "What will become of this poor people, a few of whom

²⁵ J. Wesley *Journal* I:361-362, dated Friday, June 10, 1737.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, I:350-351, dated Saturday, April 23, 1737.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, I:352-353, dated Wednesday, April 27, 1737. Earlier, August 20, 1736, Wesley spent two hours of that Friday reading *The Negro's Advocate*, I:260.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, I:185, 244, 296.

²⁹ J. Wesley *Letters* I:211, probably to John Hutchings, February 16, 1737, from "Savannah, America."

³⁰ *Ibid.*, I:214, to Dr. Bray's Associates, from Savannah, February 26, 1737.

³¹ From the *Methodist Magazine*, 1808, p. 490, cited in L. Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A.* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1825), I:140-141.

now see the light and bless God for it." He sighed wearily, "the work is too weighty for me. A parish of above two hundred miles in length laughs at the labours of one man."³² Wesley faithfully recorded his lengthy conversation with "Five of the Chicasaw [*sic*] Indians" with Mr. Andrews acting as interpreter.³³

Life also was made up of trivia. During a trip to Frederica, Wesley was "Tormented by flies" and next day delighted in dining on "oysters."³⁴ He reported placing his books in the parsonage, unpacking, "cleaning, sorting, and business in the house."³⁵ He studied Italian, and for relaxation played the flute.

Hours were spent in concentrated study as Wesley pored over Bishop William Beveridge's *Synodikon; sive Pandectae Canonum Apostolorum et Conciliorum ab Ecclesia Graeca Receptorum*³⁶—a ponderous work; Archbishop Potter's *On Church Government*. He carefully studied the Moravian orders. He was intrigued by the Early Church Fathers. He read Bishop Hall's *Meditation on Heaven*³⁷ and Milton's *Paradise Regained*.³⁸ He raised a number of questions regarding devotional treatises, "I think the rock on which I had the nearest made shipwreck of the faith," he wrote his brother Samuel, "was the writings of the Mystics."³⁹ Always there was the Bible—in Hebrew and Greek.

Miss Sophy

John Wesley's well known—but oft little understood—love affair⁴⁰ with Sophia Christiana Hopkey, eighteen year old niece of Thomas Causton, chief magistrate of Savannah, must be seen in proper perspective. It holds a prominent place in the Georgia saga, but it must not overshadow all other events. Neither can it be dismissed. Miss Sophy played a stellar role in the drama of the innocent Wesley who seemed unable to comprehend her—neither could he fathom the gossip-mongering Mrs. Hawkins or Mrs. Welch. He even went so far as to write "An Account of Miss Sophy"—for personal and family use.

Why did Wesley not take the charming Miss Sophy as his bride? Part of the answer is the avowed celibate aim in his life, his "towering vocational consciousness"⁴¹ as Dr. George Croft Cell described it. Whatever his reason, Wesley best expressed it in one letter:

³² J. Wesley *Letters* I:228, to James Vernon, dated September 11, 1736, Savannah.

³³ J. Wesley *Journal* I:248-250, dated Tuesday, July 20, 1736.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, I:195-196, from the *Diary* for Saturday, April 17, 1736.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, I:183-184, from the *Diary* for Monday, March 15, 1736.

³⁶ See Baker, p. 49, also see Albert C. Outler, *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 10-13.

³⁷ J. Wesley *Journal* I:336, also see Robert C. Monk, *John Wesley: His Puritan Heritage* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), p. 45.

³⁸ J. Wesley *Journal* I:351, from the *Diary*, dated Monday, April 25, 1737.

³⁹ J. Wesley *Letters* I:207, dated November 23, 1736, from Savannah.

⁴⁰ A number of attempts have been made to tell this appealing story. One of the latest is Willie Snow Ethridge, *Strange Fires: The True Story of John Wesley's Love Affair in Georgia* (New York: The Vanguard Press, Inc., 1971).

⁴¹ See Richard M. Cameron, *The Rise of Methodism* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1954), p. 110.

I find, Miss Sophy, I can't take fire into my bosom, and not be burnt. I am therefore retiring for a while to desire the direction of God. Join with me, my friend, in fervent prayer that He would show me what is best to be done.⁴²

Not many weeks later Wesley hit upon the perfect solution to a matter of the heart—thanks to the Moravians:

I accordingly made three lots. In one was writ 'Marry'; in the second, 'Think not of it this year.' After we had prayed to God to 'give a perfect lot,' Mr. Delamotte drew the third, in which were these words, 'Think of it no more.' Instead of the agony I had reason to expect, I was enabled to say cheerfully, 'Thy will be done.' We cast lots once again to know whether I ought to converse with her any more; and the direction I received from God was, 'Only in presence of Mr. Delamotte.'⁴³

If ever a match was advocated, pushed, espoused by outsiders, Wesley's was. Oglethorpe once commanded Wesley to escort Sophy personally from Frederica to Savannah, a trip of five days. Her aunt, Mrs. Causton, pleaded, "Mr. Wesley, I wish you would take her; take her away with ye." To which he lamely replied, "Miss Sophy is welcome to my house, or anything that I have," and then added—to himself—"About ten I went home, though with such an unwillingness and heaviness as I had scarce ever felt before."⁴⁴

It is in the rejection of Sophy from Holy Communion that Wesley is seen as the jilted lover, who, as a High Churchman was technically correct—she had been repeatedly warned—but profoundly insensitive to a woman's feelings. It was "Saturday, March 12, 1737" that she was married in South Carolina, and not until Sunday, August 7, 1737 that "I repelled Mrs. Williamson from the Holy Communion."⁴⁵ Some days later the unhappy Mrs. Williamson suffered a miscarriage, and this only added to public resentment against Wesley. In his zeal to do good, Wesley here presents an almost comical figure of the spiritual busybody, incessantly dashing to and fro, frustrating himself, stirring up increased animosity, incurring resentment.

Departure

Georgia was crucial in Wesley's personal spiritual development. His frustrations, his sense of failure, his disappointment in love, his personal controversies, and his constant tripping over his own feet—all contributed significantly to his later awakening. Georgia had a powerful impact on the nascent revival. Of his Georgia years, Wesley wrote, "I cannot but observe that these were the first rudiments of the Methodist societies. But who could then have even formed a conjecture whereto they would grow?" He continued, "On Friday, December 2, finding there was no possibility of preaching to the Indians, I left Savannah."⁴⁶

⁴² J. Wesley *Letters* I:211, dated February 6, 1737.

⁴³ J. Wesley *Journal* I:325-326, entry for Friday, March 4, 1737. Casting lots had been engaged in by the Moravians, Saturday, February 5, 1737.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, I:329, entry for Tuesday, March 8, 1737.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, I:376, dated Sunday, August 7, 1737.

⁴⁶ From *A Short History of the People Called Methodists in The Works of John Wesley* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1872), XIII:306-307.

Reflection

Much of the Georgia interpretation comes from reminiscence by Wesley himself, in which he takes a dim view of his ministry—all in retrospect. As he sadly made ready to leave Georgia he wrote, “I went to America, to convert the Indians; but oh, who shall convert me? who, what is he that will deliver me from this evil heart of unbelief? I have a fair summer religion.”⁴⁷ Writing amid gloom, he was as near the brink of despondency as at any point in his life. A few days passed, his dispirited theme continued:

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.⁴⁸

In late May, 1738, now back in England, Wesley calmly and quietly reviewed his life, “All the time I was at Savannah I was thus beating the air.”⁴⁹ Was he? Or was he just coming to understand himself? Was he coming to see that even the best one has to offer, when seen in the light of Christ, is inadequate? “I shook off the dust of my feet, and left Georgia, after having preached the gospel there [with much weakness indeed and many infirmities,] not as I ought, but as I was able,”⁵⁰ he had written in December of 1737. Then on May 24, 1738 he was able to record, “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.”⁵¹

With the passing of time, a healing hand rested on the Georgia memories. Not all the citizens of the colony had rejected Wesley. In September, 1749 he noted, “I was refreshed with a friendly letter from an excellent man, whom I had not heard from for several years. Part of it was as follows:

Ebenezer, In Georgia, July 25, 1749

Rev. and Dear Sir,

The sincere love to your worthy person and faithful performance of your holy office, which the Lord kindled in my heart during your presence at Savannah, hath not been abated, but rather increased, since the providence of God called you from us, and showed you another field for the labour of your ministry . . . Yours most affectionately, John Martin Boltzius.

“What a truly Christian piety and simplicity breathe in these lines!” Wesley thoughtfully noted, “And yet this very man, when I was at Savannah, did I refuse to admit to the Lord’s Table,” he continued, “because he was not baptized—that is, not baptized by a minister who had been episcopally ordained. Can any one carry High Church zeal

⁴⁷ J. Wesley *Journal* I:418, entry for Tuesday, January 24, 1738.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, I:421-422, entry for Sunday, January 29, 1738. There is question regarding Wesley’s intention of ever publishing this entry, see Cameron, p. 372.

⁴⁹ J. Wesley *Journal* I:470, dated May 23, 24, 25, 1738, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, I:400, entry for Friday, December 2, 1737.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, I:476, entry for Wednesday, May 24, 1738.

higher than this? And how well have I been since beaten with mine own staff!"⁵² Yes, Wesley seems to have learned a great deal.

As John Wesley prepared to write his *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* he remembered a quatrain he had composed in Savannah:

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!

He also recalled lines written at the beginning of 1738, upon returning from Georgia, as his heart cried out:

O grant that nothing in my soul
May dwell, but thy pure love alone!
O may thy love possess me whole,
My joy, my treasure, and my crown!
Strange fires far from my heart remove;
My every act, word, thought, be love!⁵³

Contributions

As the years progressed the nexus between Georgia and the Wesleys became increasingly evident. The colony had provided a particular environment for maturation—emotional and spiritual.⁵⁴ Both brothers began to acquire a new understanding of people, an empathy, which in turn, helped them see themselves. In their encounters with blunt, forthright Georgia colonists, the two Oxonians had faced reality. The American Indians, for the Wesleys, were no longer the stylized figures imagined by writers of the Age of Reason, and Tomochichi and Mary Musgrove had become part of their personal experience. The brothers were introduced to the hardy, soul-searching piety of the Moravians, as John learned German in order to engage in those never-to-be-forgotten conversations with David Nitschmann and August Gottlieb Spangenberg. The Wesley eyes had been opened to the horrors of "that execrable villany"—the slave trade—with John's subsequent publication in 1774 of *Thoughts Upon Slavery* and his prophetic letter to William Wilberforce in 1791.

John had come to know the Scottish Highlanders at Darien, and the Salzburgers at Ebenezer. He had likewise begun learning Spanish "in order to converse with my Jewish parishioners."⁵⁵ He also undertook writing a German Dictionary and a French Grammar.

In Georgia, John Wesley had even been willing to unbend sufficiently

⁵² *Ibid.*, III:433-434, entry for Tuesday, September 26, 1749.

⁵³ From *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* in *Works* XI:369. Also see G. Osborn, *The Poetical Works of John and Charles Wesley* (London: Wesleyan-Methodist Conference Office, 1868), I:138-141. Also see John Telford, *The Methodist Hymn-Book Illustrated* (London: The Epworth Press, 1934-1952), pp. 223-224.

⁵⁴ See Frank Baker, *From Wesley To Asbury: Studies In Early American Methodism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1976), "The Wesleys In Georgia" pp. 3-13; also "American Methodism: Beginnings and Ends" pp. 184-205.

⁵⁵ *J. Wesley Journal* I:345-346, entry for Monday, April 4, 1737.

to preach, occasionally, without a manuscript, and he had experimented in forming prayer cells:

And we agreed (1) to advise the more serious among them to form themselves into a sort of little society, and to meet once or twice a week, in order to reprove, instruct, and exhort one another. (2) To select out of these a smaller number for a more intimate union with each other, which might be forwarded, partly by our conversing singly with each, and partly by inviting them all together to our house; and this, accordingly, we determined to do every Sunday in the afternoon.⁵⁶

As Wesley later contemplated the origins of Methodism, he said that first there was Oxford, then "the second was in Savannah, in April 1736, when twenty or thirty persons met at my house; . . ." ⁵⁷ For his Georgians he prepared a hymn book, *A Collection of Psalms and Hymns*, published in 1737.

At the time of John Wesley's death, March 2, 1791, Thomas Coke was in America. Coke displayed embarrassing candor in his *Sermon* as he described frontier Georgia "a country just laid out for colonization" contrasting it with the glories of Oxford's "varieties and luxuries" as opposed to the colony's "vast simplicity," thus illustrating "the sacrifices made by Mr. Wesley."⁵⁸ The Wesleys had made sacrifices in coming to Georgia; likewise they had gained much. The Wesleys cannot be disassociated from Georgia and Georgia cannot be separated from the Wesley pilgrimage. Furthermore, Georgia's history is all the brighter and richer because two brothers named Wesley came this way.

⁵⁶ Ibid., I:197-205.

⁵⁷ John Wesley, *Concise Ecclesiastical History* IV:175, cited in *Journal* I:198, note 1.

⁵⁸ Thomas Coke, *The Substance of a Sermon Preached in Baltimore and Philadelphia, on the First and Eighth of May, 1791, on the Death of the Rev. John Wesley* (London: G. Paramore, 1791), p. 9.