

John Wesley - Evangelist: Chapter 10

A Fourth Decade of Evangelistic Toil (1771-1780)

In entering upon another decade of Wesley's evangelistic labours, it may again be said that it is impossible to chronicle the innumerable interesting incidents which occurred in the ceaseless, but gracious, monotony of hallowed toil that filled these years. Only a few of the more prominent ones, which break its even flow, as rocks the surface of a stream, can be given, and these must be told as briefly as possible.

The last hours of the previous decade had been spent in labour, praise, and thanksgiving. On Christmas Day Wesley began his work with a sermon at the Foundery, at four o'clock in the morning; held service and preached at West Street at nine; met the children in the afternoon at three; preached again at five; and then had a 'comfortable season with the Society'—truly 'a day full of work.' According to established custom, each year was 'closed with the celebration of the solemn feast-days, according to the design of their institution, a fastday, and a solemn watch-night; and the new year was consecrated by a covenant service. Each year, as it opened, found him thus refreshed with holy worship, and ready to enter upon another round of arduous labour.

In the Journal for February 1771, the following entry occurs: 'For what cause I know not to this day, — [Mrs. Wesley] set out for Newcastle, purposing "never to return." "Non eam reliqui: Non dimisi: Non revocabo.' It is not necessary to enter here into the details of Mrs. Wesley's conduct. They may be found amply illustrated in many of the Lives of Wesley. Her whole demeanour can only be explained on the ground of an overwhelming jealousy. She appears to have been unable to discern the greatness of her opportunity, or to respond to the high calling of a helper to one engaged in a supremely lofty work. Wesley was disappointed in the expectation that his usefulness would be augmented by the marriage; but, though the surface of his comfort was ruffled, he did not allow his labours to be interrupted.

In the course of this year a zealous and devoted Lady—Miss Bosanquet; of Leytonstone, afterwards Mrs. Fletcher, of Madeley—wrote to Wesley respecting her engaging in preaching services. He replied in the following letter, which illustrates his views of Methodism at the time:

Londonderry, June 13, 1771.

My Dear Sister,

'I think the strength of the cause rests there,—on your having an extraordinary call. So, I am persuaded, has every one of our lay preachers; otherwise, I could not countenance his preaching at all. It is plain to me, that the whole work of God termed Methodism is an extraordinary dispensation of His providence. Therefore, I do not wonder if several things occur therein, which do not fall under the ordinary rules of discipline. St. Paul's ordinary rule was, "I permit not a woman to speak in the congregation." Yet, in extraordinary cases, he made a few exceptions; at Corinth in particular.

'I am, my dear sister, your affectionate brother,

'John Wesley'

'At the Conference of 1770, attention was called to certain measures deemed to be needful for the reviving of the work of God. Several advices were given, one of them being, 'Take heed to your doctrine. We said in 1744, "We have leaned too much toward Calvinism. Wherein" 'The answers to this question were made the occasion of a bitter and prolonged controversy, extending through the whole of the decade. Fletcher undertook the defence of his friend, and one of the most important results of the conflict was the publication of his trenchant and invaluable Checks to Antinomianism. By these, and by many pamphlets written on his behalf, Wesley was spared the necessity of taking more than a small share in the strife, and he was enabled, therefore, to give himself unreservedly to his evangelistic work. This he did to such an extent that, notwithstanding his advancing years, he visited more towns, and preached in more places, during this decade than in any previous one, as appears from the Itinerary at the end of this chapter. In one year alone he preached in no fewer than two hundred and twenty different places, besides many others that are not named, whither he went in his visits to the country societies. He traversed the country in all weathers through the successive years, save during the time he usually spent in London, where, though he travelled less, he was habitually engrossed in other labours; and he was as scrupulous in the use of his time as in any of the earlier years of his life.

He was not indifferent to the appeals of rest and ease; yet he never lost sight of the spiritual and eternal interests that were involved in his great work. In one of his visits to Newcastle, he wrote: 'I rested here. Lovely place and lovely company I But I believe there is another world; therefore, I must "arise and go hence.'" He allowed himself no diminution of labour, whether of travelling, preaching, reading, correspondence, writing for the Press, watching over the growing societies, or promoting philanthropic works. And his strength does not

seem to have abated; although in 1773 he made the curious observation, when crossing from Dublin: 'This was the first night I ever lay awake in my life, though I was at ease in body and mind. I believe few can say this: in seventy years I never lost a night's sleep.' In this year he preached in Moorfields to, it was supposed, the largest congregation that had ever assembled there; but his voice was sufficiently strong to enable those that were farthest off to hear perfectly well At Gwennap it was ascertained by measurement that above thirty-two thousand persons were present; yet it was found on inquiry that he could be heard 'even to the skirts of the congregation.' 'Perhaps,' he says, 'the first time that a man of seventy had been heard by thirty thousand at once.' Considering his constant recourse to field-preaching, it might readily be supposed that it was easy and welcome work to him; but it seems such was not the case, for he writes: 'To this day field-preaching' is a cross to me. But I know my commission, and see no other way of preaching the gospel to every creature.'

In this year one of those gracious spiritual revivals occurred which occasionally brightened the history of Kingswood School, and abundantly repaid him for his toils and sacrifices and painful disappointments on its behalf.

Generally during the Conferences, as he was talking from morning to night, he desired one of the preachers to take the early morning service; but, at two of the Conferences, at least, having many things to say, he preached both mornings and evenings, and he says he found no difference at all; he was no more tired than with his 'usual labour; that is, no more than if I had been sitting still in my study from morning to night.' During his residence in London he frequently visited all the members of the Society at their homes, even though the number ranged between two thousand four hundred and two thousand five hundred.

Few men, if any, ever preached in so many peculiar circumstances. The following case, which occurred about this time, added to many already related, may illustrate this fact. He had promised to preach at six o'clock in the morning to the prisoners at Whiteley. 'Though the ground was covered with snow, so many people flocked together,' he says, 'that I was constrained to Preach the court of the prison. The snow continued to fall, and the north wind to whistle round us; but I trust God warmed many hearts.' His days were as full, As at labour and adventure, of deliverances as at any time, of labour and adventure, of deliverances from danger, and of instances of his great endurance. Many remarkable feats of travelling are also recorded, As on May 9, 1777, when he says he 'went to Malton; and on the 10th, after travelling between ninety and a hundred miles, I came back to Malton, and, having rested an hour, went on to Scarborough, and preached in the evening. But the flux which I had had for a few days so increased that at first I found it difficult to speak. Yet the longer I spoke the stronger I grew. Is not God a present help' He preached on and on, until the evening of the 14th, when he arrived in York. He might well say, 'I would gladly have rested the next day, feeling in my breast much out of order. But notice having been given of my preaching at Tadcaster, I set out at nine in the morning. About ten the chaise broke down. I borrowed a horse, but he was none of the easiest. In riding three miles I was so thoroughly electrified, that the pain in my breast was quite cured. I preached in the evening at York; on Friday took the diligence; and on Saturday afternoon came to London.'

Being in Congieton, he was suddenly called to Bristol on important business. He set out, remained in Bristol two hours, and returned to fulfil his preaching engagements; accomplishing a distance of two hundred and eighty miles in about forty-eight hours, yet no more tired at the end than at the beginning. This was extraordinary, considering his age, and the condition of the roads at the time. These incidents show the resolute spirit of the man, and some of his difficulties. He still continued to extend the area of his evangelistic tours. In 1777 he paid a first visit to the Isle of Man; and, as was usual on his first visits, he carefully recorded his close observations on the appearance of the country.

The nation was now in a very unsettled state, and travelling was dangerous. About this time the post-chaise drivers on one of the public roads combined to deliver their passengers into each other's hands, so that many were robbed and maltreated. Wesley, ever ready to recognize the good providence of God over him, records, 'I have travelled all roads by day and night for these forty years, and never was interrupted yet.'

For two or three years he had suffered from the effects of being thrown upon the pommel of his saddle by a stumbling horse. The matter having become somewhat serious, he underwent a surgical operation, and in a few days was effectually cured. But he suffered a more serious interruption of his work a year later, during one of his visits to Ireland. He was staying at Castle Caulfield, where, he says, 'in the night the rain came plentifully through the thatch, into my lodging-room. But I found no present inconvenience, and was not careful for the morrow.' A week later, however, he wrote: 'I was not very well this morning, but supposed it would soon go off. In the afternoon, the weather being extremely hot, I lay down on the grass, in Mr. Lark's orchard, at Cock Hill. This I had been accustomed to do for forty years, and never remember to have been hurt by it; only I never lay before on my face, in which posture I fell asleep. I waked a little, and but a little, out of order, and preached with ease to a multitude of people. Afterwards I was a good deal worse.' However, the next day he went on a few miles, and preached standing on a table, and with a strong, sharp wind blowing in his face. He became exceedingly ill, and the symptoms were so serious that the gravest fears were entertained he would not recover. Strength, memory, and mind utterly failed; and for three days he lay more dead than alive. His travelling companion said that his tongue was much swollen, and as black as a coal; that he was convulsed all over; and that for some time his heart did not beat perceptibly, neither was any pulse discernible. As the news of this spread, the anxiety of his friends, and the sorrow of his people, became extremely great, as may very readily be supposed, and prayer was made for him in all parts. Tyerman, who mentions some remarkable circumstances relating to this illness, quotes several letters written at the time, from which the following, addressed by his brother to Joseph Bradford, Wesley's travelling

companion, is taken:

Bristol, June 29, 1775.

Dear Joseph,

'Be of good cheer. The Lord liveth, and all live to Him. Your last is just arrived, and has cut off all hope, of my brother's recovery.' If he could hold out till now, that is, ten days longer, he might recover; but I dare not allow myself to hope it, till I hear from you again. The people here, and in London, and every place, are swallowed up in sorrow. But sorrow and death will soon be swallowed up in life everlasting. You will be careful of my brother's papers, etc., till you see his executors; God Shall reward your fidelity and love: I seem scarce separated from him whom I shall so very soon overtake. We were united in our lives, and in our death not divided. Brethren, pray a very little longer for your loving servant,

'Charles Wesley.'

'Thursday evening

'Yours of the 20th, I have this moment received. It only confirms my fears. My brother, soon' after you wrote, in all probability, entered into the joy of the 'Lord. Yet write again, and send me the particulars. I have not' and never more shall have, strength for such a journey. The Lord prepare us for a speedy removal to our heavenly country !.

'Charles Wesley.'

But the fears and sorrows of his friends were soon dissipated. With surprising suddenness his illness began to abate, and in less than a week he started for Dublin, where within another week he, preached once, and in six days more began his regular: course of preaching morning and evening. After preaching at Finstock in the autumn, he wrote, as he had done at several other attractive places in his travels, 'How many days should I spend here if I was to do my own will Not so: I am "to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work." Therefore this is the first day I ever spent here; and Perhaps' it may be the last.' Wesley, now fully alive to his advancing years, was not without reasonable fear that his removal would be attended by serious consequences to his societies, for several of the preachers were much disaffected on account of their not being permitted to administer the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and many of the congregations were equally displeased because they were not allowed to receive it from the preachers to whom they Owed so much and to whom they Were much attached, while the clergy, whose ministrations! Wesley required his people to attend, often treated them with rudeness and unworthy rebuke. He therefore suggested that, in the event of his death, Fletcher should become his successor, and strenuously urged upon him to comply. This Fletcher resolutely declined; but, as he was much out of health, he consented to travel with Wesley for a few months. They set out in the spring, and returned at the latter end of the year much improved in health. He was, however, persuaded to remain in London, and his old symptoms returned.

Wesley had already addressed to him the following very remarkable letter:

'January, 1773.

Dear Sir,

'What' an amazing work has God wrought in these kingdoms, in less than forty years I And it not only Continues, but increases, throughout England, Scotland, and Ireland; nay, it has lately Spread into New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Maryland, and Carolina. But the wise men of the world say," .When Mr. Wesley drops, then all this is at an end!" And so it surely will, unless, before God calls him hence, one is found to stand in his place. For, sucagaqon polukoiranih. Ei" koipano" estw. I see more and more, unless there be one proeotw", the work can never be carried on. The body of the Preachers are not united: nor will any part of them submit to the rest; so that either there must be one to preside over all, or the work will indeed come to an end.

'But who is sufficient for these things qualified to preside both over the Preachers and people He must be a man of faith and love, and one that has a single eye to the advancement of the kingdom of God. He must have a clear understanding; a knowledge of men and things, particularly of the Methodist doctrine and discipline; a ready utterance; diligence and activity, with a tolerable share of health. There must be added to these, favour with the people, with the Methodists in general. For unless God turn their eyes and their hearts towards him, he will be quite incapable of the work. He must likewise have some degree of learning; because there are many adversaries, learned as well as unlearned, whose mouths must be stopped. But this cannot be done, unless he be able to meet them on their own ground.

'But has God provided one so qualified Who is he Thou art the man! God has given you a measure of loving faith; and a single eye to His glory. He has given you some knowledge of men and things; particularly of the old plan of Methodism. You are blessed with some

health, activity, and diligence; together with a degree of learning. And to all these he has lately added, by a way none could have foreseen, favour both with the Preachers and the whole people. Come out in the name of God! Come to the help of the Lord against the mighty! Come while I am alive and capable of labour!

Dum superest Lachesi quod torqueat, et pedibus me

Porto meis, nullo dextram subeunte bacillo.

'Come while I am able, God assisting, to build you up in faith, to ripen your gifts, and to introduce you to the people. Nil tanti. What possible employment can you have, which is of so great importance

'But you will naturally say, "I am not equal to the task; I have neither grace nor gifts for such an employment" You say true; it is certain you have not. And who has But do you not know Him who is able to give them perhaps not at once, but rather day by day: as each is, so shall your strength be. "But this implies," you may say, "a thousand crosses, such as I feel I am not able to bear." You are not able to bear them now; and they are not now come. Whenever they do come, will He not send them in due number, weight, and measure And will they not all be for your profit, that you may be a partaker of his holiness

'Without conferring, therefore, with flesh and blood, come and strengthen the hands, comfort the heart, and share the labour, of

'Your affectionate friend and brother,

'J. Wesley.'

During this decade Wesley's work seems to have attained its culmination. His health, notwithstanding the brief interruptions just described, was vigorous, and his labours extraordinary, of which the pages of his Journal abound in interesting details. He had outlived violent opposition from the mob, and his influence in the kingdom had become very great, so that his periodical visits were seasons of great interest, and created no little excitement in many parts of the country. The churches, too, were gradually recognizing the greatness of his service in the interests of religion throughout the land. Not only had antagonism to a great degree died down, but even honours were being conferred upon him. He was made a Burgess of Perth, and the Freedom of Arbroath was granted to him. But what he prized more was the opening of the churches to him, which was not merely a token of respect, but a sign of a great change in the spirit of the clergy, and the first indication of that gracious revival of religion within the Church as a whole which the last century was permitted to witness.

In reviewing a section of his Journal just then published, Lloyd's Evening Post of January 20, 1772, makes the following reference to his work:

'In this interval, between May 27, 1765, and May 5, 1768 [the period embraced by the Journal], this zealous anti truly labourous missionary of the Methodists, who seems to consider the three kingdoms as his parochial cure, twice traverses the greater part of Ireland and Scotland, from Londonderry to Cork, from Aberdeen to Dumfries, visiting and confirming the Churches, besides making a progress, chiefly on horseback (in many places more than once), through great part of Wales, and almost all the counties in England, from Newcastle to Southampton, from Dover to Penzance. Those who expect to find in this Journal only the peculiar tenets of Methodism will be agreeably disappointed, as they are intermixed with such occasional reflections on men and manners, on polite literature, and even on polite places, as prove that the writer is endued with a taste well cultivated both by reading and observation; and above all with such a benevolence and sweetness of temper, such an enlarged, liberal, and truly Protestant way of thinking towards those who differ from him, as clearly show that his heart, at least, is right, and justly entitle him to that candour and forbearance, which, for the honour of our common religion, we are glad to find he now generally receives.'

But, although his work was more and more appreciated by the better: class of the people; yet he was never subjected to grosser treatment by the ribald press, the climax of which was the publication in 1778 of seven illustrated pamphlets of the filthiest character, in which satire reached its utmost limits of coarseness, indecency, foulness, and falsehood. Of course all this class of literature he passed by as he would filth on the wayside.

As throwing a sidelight upon part of his work, the following may be quoted: Musing on what he had heard a good man say, 'Once in seven years I burn all my sermons; for it is a shame if I cannot write better sermons now than I could seven years ago,' he affirms:

'Whatever others can do, I really cannot. I cannot write a better sermon on the Good Steward than I did seven years ago; I cannot write a better on this Great Assize than I did twenty years ago; I cannot write a better on the Use of Money than I did near thirty years ago; nay, I know not that I can write a better on the Circumcision of the Heart than I did five and forty years ago. Perhaps indeed, I may have read five or six hundred books more than, I had then, and may know a little more history, or natural philosophy, than I did; but I am not sensible that this has made any essential addition to my knowledge in Divinity. Forty years ago I knew and preached every Christian

doctrine which I preach now.'

On November 1, 1778, he opened the new Chapel in City Road, in and around which so many pleasing memories have gathered from that day to this. He describes it as perfectly neat, but not fine, and says it contained far more people than the Foundery.

The building of City Road Chapel was another step in the consolidation of Methodism, and a direct provision by Wesley for its future permanence. It cannot be denied that he desired his Societies to be connected with the Church; or that he strove to the utmost of his power to bring them into alliance with it. But, to how great an extent he failed in his endeavour! He was driven to the alternative of 'varying' from the Church order, or entrusting his rescued sheep to the custody of the legally appointed shepherds. Can it be said that their care for the flock warranted him in doing the latter? Were the clergy, beyond a small number, willing or able to take spiritual oversight of them, the history of the century is the answer. All Wesley's societies might have been 'Vestry Societies' had the clergy so willed it. He saw the necessity for making provision for the safety of his people. Their preservation was of far higher consideration to him than the maintenance of Church order. Therefore he erected his buildings, and left them on trusts which ensured, as far as human foresight could ensure it, that only his doctrines, which he believed were the true Church doctrines, should be taught in them.

On Christmas Day in this year he preached at four in the morning, in the new chapel, and read prayers, preached, and administered the Sacrament 'to several hundreds of people,' at West Street, at the usual morning service. In the afternoon he preached again in the new chapel, 'filled in every corner;' and in the evening at St. Sepulchre's, one of the largest parish churches in London, but was stronger, he says, after his fourth sermon, than after his first; yet he was in his seventy-sixth year. A similar record is given the following year.

In 1778 Wesley issued the first number of a magazine, which, he says, he had been desired to do for more than forty years. It was entitled *The Arminian Magazine: Consisting of Extracts and Original Treatises on Universal Redemption*. The title sufficiently declares its character and purpose. Its publication was occasioned by the attacks mainly of the *Gospel Magazine*. It afforded Wesley an opportunity of defending the doctrines and work of Methodism. 'If it once begin, I incline to think it will not end but with my life,' said Wesley. It has continued to the present day, but in 1895 and 1904 'was much changed in form and character.'

In the August of 1776 he was introduced to the curate of South Petherton, who had some time before been under deep religious conviction, which showed itself in a marked change in his pulpit ministrations. Thomas Maxfield, an early lay-preacher, to whom frequent reference has been made, and who was now in orders, when visiting South Petherton, made his acquaintance, and was instrumental in leading him to the happy possession of the Gospel salvation. Having had his attention drawn to Wesley's Sermons and Journals, and to Fletcher's Checks, the curate copied Wesley's methods, preaching in the surrounding villages, thus giving offence to some of his parishioners, who procured his dismissal from his curacy. He determined to join Wesley, who thus describes their meeting: 'I preached at Taunton, and afterwards went to Kingston. Here I found a clergyman, Dr. Coke [he had recently been elected Doctor of Civil Law], late Gentleman Commoner of Jesus College in Oxford, who came twenty miles on purpose. I had much conversation with him, and an union then began, which I trust shall never end.' The coming of Dr. Coke at this time was most providential, for the health of Fletcher began to show signs of serious failure, and Wesley would soon be in need of the help of a vigorous man. This help Dr. Coke rendered; and he became, if not the founder, certainly the organizer of the Methodist Foreign Missions, to which he devoted his strength and fortune, and finally his life. He died at sea on a missionary voyage, when on his way to India.

An order having been made in the House of Lords in May, 1776, 'That the Commissioners of his Majesty's Excise do write circular letters to all Such persons as they have reason to suspect to have plate, as also to those who have not paid regularly the duty on the same,' etc, a copy of the order was sent to Wesley in the following September, together with a letter stating that 'the Commissioners cannot doubt but you have plate for which you have hitherto neglected to make an entry,' etc., and desiring an 'immediate answer. To which he at once replied:

'Sir,

'I have two silver tea-spoons at London, and two at Bristol. This is all the plate I have at present and I shall not buy any more while so many around me want bread.

'I am, Sir, your most humble servant,

'John Wesley.'

It was within the limits of this decade that he had a very remarkable Preservation from death; which he thus describes:

'Monday June 20 [1774].—About nine I set out for Horsley, with Mr. Hopper and Mr. Smith. I took Mrs. Smith, and two little girls, in the chaise with me. About two miles from the town, just on the brow of the hill, on a sudden both the horses set out, without any visible cause, and flew down the hill, like an arrow out of a bow. In a minute, John fell off the coach-box. The horses then went on full speed, sometimes to the edge of the ditch on the right, sometimes on the left. A cart came up against them; they avoided it as exactly as if the

man had been on the box. A narrow bridge was at the foot of the hill. They went directly over the middle of it. They ran up the next hill with the same speed; many persons meeting us, but getting out of the way. Near the top of the hill was a gate, which led into a farmer's yard. 'It stood open. They turned short, and ran through it; Without touching the gate on one side, or the post on the other. I thought, "However, the gate which is on the other side of the yard, and is shut, will stop them." But they rushed through it, as if it had been a cobweb, and galloped on through the corn-field. The little girls cried out, "Grandpapa, save us!" I told them, "Nothing will hurt you: do not be afraid;" feeling no more fear or care (blessed be God!) than if I had been sitting in my study. The horses ran on, till they came to the edge of a steep precipice. Just then Mr. Smith, who could not overtake us before, galloped in between. They stopped, in a moment. Had they gone on ever so little, he and we must have gone down together! 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.'

The following is from the pen of Joseph Benson, for some time head-master of Kingswood School, afterwards of Trevecca College, from which he was dismissed for defending the Arminian views embodied in the minutes of the Conference of 1770, and who was now the senior 'Helper' at Edinburgh—one of Methodism's most distinguished sons. Writing from Scotland, he says:

'I was constantly with him [Wesley] for a week. I had an opportunity of examining narrowly his spirit and conduct; and, I assure you, I am more than ever persuaded, he is a none such. I know not his fellow, first, for abilities, natural and acquired; and, secondly, for his 'incomparable diligence in the application of those abilities to the best of employments. His lively fancy, tenacious memory, clear understanding, ready elocution, manly courage, indefatigable industry, really amaze me. I admire, but wish in vain to imitate, his diligent improvement of every moment of time; his wonderful exactness even in little things; the order and regularity wherewith he does and treats everything he takes in hand; together with his quick dispatch of business, and calm, cheerful serenity of soul. I ought not to omit to mention, what is very manifest to all who know him, his resolution, which no shocks of opposition can shake; his patience, which no length of trials can weary; his zeal for the glory of God and the good of man, which no waters of persecution or tribulation have yet been able to quench. Happy man I long hast thou borne the burden and heat of the day, amidst the insults of foes, and the base treachery of seeming friends; but thou shalt rest from thy labours and thy works shall follow thee!'

Writing on his birthday, in 1776, he says, 'I am seventy-three years old, and am far abler to preach than I was at three and twenty;' and he inquires into the natural means which God had used to produce so wonderful an effect. He found them in the continual exercise and change of air, and his travelling above four thousand miles a year; in his constantly rising at four o'clock; his ability to sleep immediately, whenever he needed; his never losing a night's sleep in his life; and in what seem to be rough medicines—two violent fevers and two deep consumptions. He judged them to be of admirable service as causing his flesh to come again, as the flesh of a little child. And he adds, 'lastly, evenness of temper;' 'I feel, and grieve, but by the grace of God I fret at nothing. But still "the help that is done upon earth, He doeth it Himself." And this He doeth in answer to many prayers.'

Some little time after, his friend and faithful 'Helper,' Mr. Thomas Olivers, author of the well-known hymn, 'The God of Abraham praise'—wrote as follows:—' Mr. Wesley is now an old man, and yet has such a variety and multiplicity of business as few men could manage, even in the prime of life. There are few weeks in which he does not travel two or three hundred miles; preach and exhort in public between twenty and thirty times, and often more; answer thirty or forty letters; speak with as many persons in private, concerning things of deep importance; and prepare, either in whole or in part, something for the press. Add to all this, that often, in that short space of time, a variety of tracts on different subjects pass through his hands, particularly as he travels.'

At this time the country was in a state of unrest. The nation was steeped in guilt and misery. War was raging on almost every side. Trade was paralysed; and taxes intolerable.' Great excitement was caused by the Catholic Disabilities Bill. Wesley's patriotic and Protestant spirit moved him to write A Letter to the Printer of the 'Public Advertiser.' Occasioned by the late Act passed in favour of Popery. He says, 'Receiving more and more accounts of the increase of popery, I believed it my duty to write a letter concerning it, which was afterwards inserted in the public papers. [It was afterwards published as a broad sheet.] Many were grievously offended; but I cannot help it: I must follow my own conscience.' By others it was much applauded. Even his bitter antagonist, the Gospel Magazine, said it had 'been almost universally approved, and was a production of real merit.'

This decade was further signalized by the publication in 1780 of Wesley's well-known 'large' hymnbook, entitled A Collection of Hymns for the Use of the People called Methodists. This book, with some slight variations, has been in use until the present year [1904]. It was a Wesley hymn-book; all the hymns but ten were from the pens of the Wesley family. Much care and labour were expended in the collection and revision of its contents.

This, the fourth, and most active, decade of Wesley evangelistic toil, now drew near to a close. The work had advanced with steady steps, so that while at the beginning of it there were 28,963 members in the Societies, and 121 preachers in Great Britain, at the close there were 170 preachers and 43,830 members. In 1769, the first preachers, Boardman and Pilmoor, went to America, where Methodism had been already introduced by a few zealous emigrants. In 1780, there were 42 preachers, and the number of enrolled members was 8504. The total number of members in this country and America had therefore reached to 52,334, and of preachers to 212.

This is a record of astonishing devotion and toil on the part of England's great Evangelist, a record of unflinching fidelity and of concentrated effort to fulfil what he had for many years seen to be his great, his supreme calling. He was diligently sowing the seed from which the Churches have ever since gathered the most fruitful harvests. He strove faithfully to serve his God, while he served his race; and all unconsciously wove for himself a chaplet of unfading honour.