

## **JOHN WESLEY: SPIRITUAL ADVISOR TO YOUNG WOMEN AS HE SPEAKS THROUGH HIS LETTERS**

This paper is divided into two parts. Part one is entitled “The Reluctant Lover or Rejected Suitor” and will, hopefully, serve as an introduction to part two.

Part two is a shortened version of a paper I presented at the 300th Anniversary Celebration of John Wesley’s Birth, at the John Rylands University, in 2003, with the title, “‘Father in the Gospel, Instructor and Interpreter’: Mary Cooke’s View of her ‘Rev’d & Dear John Wesley’ as Seen in Her Correspondence, 1785-1789.”

Since that time I have been compiling a database of letters written by John Wesley to his women friends, from 1723 until 1791. It is arranged chronologically with an index to the place of writing, recipient, and key word, and at the present contains 1,137 letters.

In a recent e-mail from Richard Heitzenrater in response to my asking him what new documents have come to light in the last 50 years that add anything new to Wesley studies, he replied, “There is a lot ‘out there’, much of which we don’t know about. Even the stuff that is listed often evades the researchers notice (by the way they are catalogued, where they are housed, who owns them, etc.). The diaries sat around for years with nobody working on them. The category [correspondence between Wesley and Mary Cooke and letters to other young women] which you are working on is even more elusive.”

### **THE RELUCTANT LOVER OR REJECTED SUITOR**

Richard Heitzenrater refers to John Wesley as the Rejected Suitor in chapter 4 of, *The Elusive Mr. Wesley; John Wesley as His Own Biographer* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984). Maldwyn Edwards, in his *My Dear Sister: the Story of John Wesley and the Women in His Life* (Manchester: Penwork Ltd., 1980) refers to him as a “shadowy figure and his women friends as far more shadowy still”; and that “they were drawn to him as a man quite apart from the fact that they knew him as a man of God ... you cannot write of Wesley’s partiality for women without dealing with him as the reluctant lover.”

Why a reluctant lover? Except in his relationship with Mary (Molly) Vazielle, whenever Wesley was involved with a woman and marriage was on the horizon, he either cast lots, went on a long trip, or hid himself in his reading and writing. But did he marry Mary for love or “because he needed a home”? He wrote in a letter to John Dickens, June 19, 1790, “I married because I needed a home, in order to recover my health; and did recover it.

But I did not seek happiness thereby, and I did not find it.”

Is there any evidence that Wesley developed intimate relationships with women? Let’s look at his early love affairs first as here he plays the role of the “reluctant lover” and “rejected suitor.”

While visiting in Stanton in the Coswold hills, Wesley frequently stayed in the home of the Kirkhams. His early diaries record many references to his visits. It is during these visits that he fell in love for the first time at the early age of 22 to their older daughter Sarah (Sally, later Varanese), and wrote in his Journal, “first saw Varanese. May it not be in Vain.”

After entertaining her for sometime, Wesley found out that she was already engaged to John Chapone, and she married him on December 28th, 1725. Wesley continued his visits, especially when Varanese was visiting. On Jan 31, 1726 his mother writes him concerning his continued friendship with Varanese:

I have many thoughts of the friendship between V[aranese] and thee, and the more I think of it, the less I approve it. The tree is known by its fruit, but not always by its blossoms; what blooms beautifully sometimes bears bitter fruit ... I am verily persuaded that the reason who so many ‘seek to enter into the kingdom of heaven,’ but are not able, is because there is some Delilah, some one beloved vice, they will not part with; hoping that by a strict observance of other duties that one fault will be dispensed with ... Believe me, my dear son, old age is the worst time we can choose to mend either our lives or our fortune.

Wesley was not only a reluctant lover, but he was a persistent one. On Oct. 17, 1726, he writes in his diary after a two hour walk with Varanese and her sister Betty, “Sat with Varanese and Betty till eleven. Leaned on Varanese’s breast and kept her hands within mine. She said very many obliging things. Betty looked tenderly. Thank God; long suffering.”

He continued to visit and when Varanese was not around, began entertaining her unmarried sister Betty, but when she became serious about him, and wrote to him that “I love you more than all mankind, except my God and my King.” It was only talk, walks, and book reading, so she married in 1730.

He continued to visit in their home and met one of their friends, Nancy Griffiths. She like Sally and Betty was immediately attracted to him, but on his visits, it was again talk, walks, and book reading, and she finally dropped out of his life. He continued to visit in

the home, and Damaris, the younger sister of Sally and Betty, entertained him when he came around. In 1733 he helped her shell the peas and played cards in the evening. They continued to see each other, but again it was talk, walks, cards, and book reading. She too gave up, and married Edward Palmer on November 25th, 1734.

Willie Snow Ethridge, in her *Strange Fires: The True Story of John Wesley's Love Affair in Georgia* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1971), writes that he had fallen passionately in love with an eighteen-year old girl, Sophey Hopkey, and “underwent cruel emotional and spiritual turmoil struggling to decide whether to marry her, an inner-agony that changed his character profoundly.”

Wesley wrote in his Journal that “I was determined to have no intimacy with any woman in America ... [several weeks later he wrote, after being alone with Sophey] “this was indeed a hour of trial. Her words, her eyes, her hair, every motion and gesture, were full of such a softness and sweetness! I know not what might have been the consequences had I then but touched her hand. And how I avoided it, I know not. Surely God is over all!”

Grace Murry was the only woman he loved with all his heart, mind, and strength. And losing her to one of his preachers, John Bennett, made him a lonesome, jealous, and wounded man, from which, I think, he never fully recovered. Wesley writes to him on Sept. 7, 1749:

My Dear Brother, The friendship between you and me has continued long. I pray God it may continue to our lives' end. But if I love you, I must deal plainly with you. And surely you desire I should. Oh that you would consider what I say, with meekness and love and with earnest continual prayer to God! As one of my helpers, I desired you three years ago to assist me at Newcastle. In my house there I had placed a servant whom I had tried several years and found faithful in all things. Therefore I trusted her in the highest degree and put her in the highest office that any woman can bear amongst us. Both by the nature and rules of your office you was engaged to do nothing of importance without consulting me. She was likewise engaged by the very nature of hers, as well as by the confidence I reposed in her, to consult me in all things; to take no step of any moment without my knowledge and consent, over and above which she was peculiarly engaged hereto by her own voluntary and express promise. Notwithstanding this, you were scarce out of my house when, without ever consulting me, you solicited her to take a step of the last importance without my consent or knowledge. You, whom I had trusted in all things, thus betrayed your trust, and moved her to do so too. You, to whom I had done no wrong wronged me, and that in an uncommon manner. You endeavored, at a time when I expected nothing less, to rob me of a most faithful

and most useful servant; the fellow to whom, for the work commuted to her care, I knew not where to find in the three kingdoms. Last autumn I observed her more narrowly, and perceived she was such a person as I had sought in vain for many years and then determined never to part with. I told her this; but told her withal, 'I could not as yet proceed any farther, because I could do nothing without consulting my brother, as he had done nothing without consulting me.' She answered, 'It was so great a blessing that she knew not how to believe it. It seemed all as a dream.' I repeated it again, and there was no shadow of objection made. I told her farther 'I am convinced it is not the will of God that you should be shut up in a corner. I am convinced you ought to labor with me in the gospel. I therefore design to take you to Ireland in spring. 'Now we must separate for a season; but if we meet again, I trust we shall part no more.' And from this time I looked upon her as my own, and resolved that nothing but death should part us. Three days after I left her without ever consulting me, you solicited her again; and in a few days more prevailed upon her to comply and promise marriage to you.. However, thus far you went: you asked her (instead of me) 'whether there was any such engagement.' Partly out of fear partly out of love blinding her eyes, she replied, 'There was not.' And 'tis true there was not so explicit an engagement as would stand good in law; but such an one there was as ought in conscience to have prevented any other till it should be dissolved. Oh that you would take Scripture and reason for your rule instead of blind and impetuous passion? I can say no more, only this -- You may tear her away by violence,. but my consent I cannot, dare not give; nor, I fear can God give you His blessing.

John Bennett had accused Wesley of having an intimate relationship with his wife before their marriage. Wesley responds on Jan. 23, 1750, quoting Bennett's letter to John Haughton that "When Mr. Wesley came to hear it [that they were married on the advice of CW and GW] and saw us, he was so enraged as if he had been mad, for he himself was inflamed with love and lust unto her ... How come you know that 'I was inflamed with lust'? Did your wife tell you that ... If she did, she made me a fair return ..."

There were many women in his life that he admired and loved. He had "networks" (members of Classes and Societies) of young, beautiful, intelligent, charming, witty, graceful, bashful, timid, withdrawn, and some not so beautiful women to whom he offered counseling, gave spiritual and physical/mental advice, and served as a guide through his correspondence, and enjoyed hearing about their weaknesses, sinful nature, their physical and mental conditions, and more than anything else, their desire for eternal life so as to be saved from burning in the everlasting fire.

Throughout his whole life his delight in a woman's company never lessened and he

responded eagerly when young women showed respect and admiration for him, and there is no doubt that in some instances, the response he made developed into genuine love.

Maldwyn Edwards, in *My Dear Sister* writes,

“He was always susceptible to good looks, and if a woman combined beauty with intellect, intellect with goodness, then he could not hold out no more ... he openly acknowledged his affection for them and treasured their friendship ... He had no home life but he lived in the society of women whom he only saw rarely but whose friendship through correspondence he kept in good repair. If they needed him, He Certainly needed them. In their womanly graces they supplied what else he would have lacked ... Women had an extra fascination for him and he wrote three times as much to them as he did to men ... if a woman had love for God and man, then for John Wesley, she was lovely.”

Wesley believed that private conversation can be carried on by letter writing. Letters are supposed to be private between the writer and the recipient. This privacy means that each writer think only of the other, and when this happens, the writer can appear in a “spiritual image” before the reader. Wesley attempts to create this kind of image. He wrote as if he was talking to the other person. The letters he wrote were intimate and revealing expressions of his love for God and his fellow human being. He said of his writing, “I never think of my style at all, but just set down the words that come first.”

The *Complete Letter Writer* of 1746, states that “a fine letter consists not in saying fine things, but in expressing ordinary ones with elegance and propriety, so as to please and charm. Wesley was very good at this--he enjoyed himself when writing allowing his pen to flow along as if talking to his readers.

He writes to Lady Maxwell, a young Scotch widow of 22, on Aug. 17, 1764, that

Since I had the pleasure of yours, I have hardly had an hour that I could call my own, otherwise I would have not delayed writing so long, as I have a tender regard for you, and an earnest desire, that you should be altogether a Christian ... I do not often write so long letters as this; but when I write to you, I am full of matter. I seem to see you just before me,--a poor, feeble, helpless creature, but just full upon the point of salvation ... full of real desires for God, and everything into light, The Lord make you whole! So prays, my Lady, your affectionate servant, John Wesley.

Wesley wrote approximately 6,600 letters, 2,300 after age 70, detailing his own struggles with faith, outlining the development of his beliefs and theology, the physical, mental and

spiritual welfare of his correspondents, and to guide, counsel, and give advice the his young men and women converts.

John Telford writes in *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley* (London: Epworth Press, 1931), that “he grew young in the company of his young women and rejoiced in their conversations.” Most of these were between 14 and 29 while Wesley was 65 and older.

Jane Barton (fl. 1764-1823),  
Ann (Nancy) Bolton (1743-1822),  
Ann (Nancy) Loxdale (1755?-1812),  
Sarah Mallet (1768-c.1845),  
Jane Cock Bisson (1768-?),  
Ellen Gretton (fl.1780-1790,  
Elizabeth Ritchie (1754-1835),  
Sarah Ryan (1724-1768), Sarah Crosby (c.1729-1804),  
Hannah Ball (1733-1792),  
Hester Ann Rogers (1756-1794, who he called “A true model of Methodist womanhood,”

just to name a few.

Where were his women friends from, and what role did they play in supporting Wesley in his ministry?

Of the 110 Methodist women mentioned by Earl Kent Brown, in his *Women of Mr. Wesley's Methodism* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1983), 45 became class & band leaders, 27 preachers, 24 callers, 17 leaders in public prayers, 16 counselors, 15 teachers in schools, and operators of service institutions, 15 preachers's wives, 8 hostess for Itinerants, 7 builders of chapels, schools, etc., and 12 various occupations.

Geographically the distribution of the “networks” were 19 in the North (Yorkshire, Durham, Westmorland area); 15 in the Midlands (Lancashire, Bedford, Cambridgeshire area); 16 in the Southwest (London, Essex, Kent, Surrey); 17 in the Southwest and West (Bristol, Bath, Oxfordshire area); 13 Outside England (Ireland, Wales, America, Scotland, Jersey): 39 unknown area of residence. Five were from noble birth & enjoyed wealthy upper class rearing, 75% were from small rural towns and rural background, where the majority of the Methodists Societies were located. The others were middle class from the larger towns and cities

When Wesley would visit the societies, or let his women friends ride in his chaise, which

was quite often, how did he greet them? With a handshake, a bow, or with an embrace? How did he treat them? What happened when a young woman was riding with him in his chaise? What did they talk about? Did he flirt and tease? How did these women respond to him? How did they interpret his actions, his talking to them? Did they flirt and tease. Did his conversations have sexual overtones?

Why were they attracted to him? They wrote to him for spiritual guidance and advice on health/mental problems. They were young women who had one thing in common—they were women of modest gentility, who could not easily break through the convention of eighteenth century society and engage in serious conversations. As I read the letters written by Wesley, it became clear that these young women wished for pastoral guidance and advice about their personal faith.

What drove him to want to be a “guide” to these young women? Was it because of the lives his sisters lived. They faced all the different kinds of frustrations, heartaches, poverty, despair, happiness, triumphs and defeats. As they matured, all the sisters engaged in love affairs. Just like John and Charles, they developed a strong independent spirit, which was their downfall. John loved his sisters, and wrote to them frequently.

Or, did he see this as part of the office of a Christian minister? He writes to Joseph Benson in 1770:

Dear Joseph,--For several years I had been deeply convinced that I had not done my duty with regard to that valuable woman (Lady Huntingdon); that I had not told her what I was thoroughly assured no one else would dare to do, and that I knew she would hear from no other person, but possibly might hear from me. But, being unwilling to give her pain, I put it off from time to time. At length I did not dare to delay any longer, least death should call one of us hence. So I at once delivered my own soul, by telling her all that was in my heart. It was my business, my proper business, so to-do, as none else either could or would do it. Neither did I take at all too much upon me; I know the office of a Christian minister. If she is not profited, it is her own fault, not mine; I have done my duty. I do not know there is one charge in that letter which was either unjust, unimportant, or aggravated, any more than that against the doggerel hymns which are equally an insult upon poetry and common sense.

Did Wesley take it upon himself, as his duty of a Christian minister, to counsel with these young women, “to tell it like it is,” even if it gave them pain? To be their Guide? “I have done my duty. If she is not profited, it is her own fault, not mine.” He writes to Miss Sparrow: “Do you say, ‘you need a guide?’ Why will you not accept me? Do you know

any that loves you better?"

In 1999 J. S. English published for the Lincolnshire Methodist Historical Society, Barry J. Brigg's *Ellen Gretton & Her Circle: Lincolnshire Friends of John Wesley*. His introduction begins:

Between 1781 and 1785 the octogenarian John Wesley, a national figure celebrated well beyond the Methodist movement which he had largely inspired, wrote a series of ten letters to an obscure young dressmaker ... Women from his remarkable mother onwards, were always important in Wesley's life. He befriended many and sometimes shared journeys with them ... Among the more notable of other female friends were Martha Thompson, Hannah Ball and Mary Bosanquet ... The subject of this study was a modest woman who achieved no national fame, but who illustrates the importance of Methodist women in a local scene that was part of a national movement in the Church of England.

Ellen was troubled with anxieties, which included her spiritual journey ... She decided in desperation to confide in John Wesley. She first wrote to him in the autumn of 1781. He replied on Nov. 15. "My dear Sister, -- The affection which I have felt for you ever since I had the pleasure of your company at Mr. Dodwell's will never suffer your letters to be troublesome to me any more than your conversation." As usual we do not know what she wrote back. Wesley's last letter was written July 17, 1785, two years after she and William Christian were married, February 5th, 1783.

Let's change the name to Ann Bolton. Wesley wrote her on Jan. 25, 1770:

Nancy! Nancy! I had almost said, I wish I could be angry at you: but that would not be an easy thing; I was wondering that you never wrote. I doubt your love is grown cold. Let it not be six weeks before I hear from you again. You find I can chide if you provoke me ... It was on that [exercise by riding & fresh air] as well as other accounts that I wanted you to come to London. I do not know whether the objections of 'giving offence' need to affright you from it. I wish you had a week to spare before I go out of town. If I should be called to America ... it might be a long time before we meet again. In every temptation there will be a way to escape that you may be able to bear it ... I have room or two to spare now.

And again on Nov. 26, 1775:

I was asked the other day 'whether you was as lively and as useful as in times past.' I could truly say, 'I believed you was.' And have I not good ground so to

believe? I have narrowly observed you for' several years; I have read you over with a lover's eye, with all the friendly jealousy I could; I have marked all your tempers and all your words and actions that fall under my notice; I have carefully weighed you in the balance; and, blessed be God, I have not found you wanting. Once and again I had found you (what is so rarely found) capable of taking advice in the most delicate instance. And if I have sometimes thought your affection to *me* was a little cooler than formerly, I could not blame you for this; I knew something of myself, and therefore laid the blame where it was due. And I do not desire you to love me any farther than it is a scale

Whereby to heavenly love thou may'st ascend.

But are you gaining ground with regard to inward life? Is your heart more and more acquainted with God and devoted to Him? and are you laboring to be more and more useful? How go on the little flock at Witney? How often do you visit them? How is your health? Everything that relates to you, nearly concerns, my dear Nancy, Yours affectionately. Write soon, and write freely.

What do we make of this letter? I recently asked a young woman to read this letter and tell me what she thought the writer was saying and how she interpreted it. Her response was, "Boy does he know how to prevaricate, or what? He's hedging. He kind of gets himself out of all the possible sexual, romantic connotations with the 'Heavenly' love bit. What a copout!"

Six years later on Feb. 20, 1781:

My dear Nancy, --You know I feel with you and for you. But I am almost at a loss to understand what trials can set so heavy upon you! You are with those whom you love and who love you. You had in general tolerable health. You have no husband, no children to perplex you. How can you be so weighted down with care? ... By all means accept the providential invitation to Bristol ... You will contrive to be with me where you can ...

Or to Miss Elizabeth Ritchie.

In December 1781, Joseph Benson writes to John Murlin ... "I hope they will prove false prophets who tell us Mr. Wesley will be married soon to Miss Ritchie of Otley."

Wesley writes to her on Jan. 19, 1782, concerned why he has not heard from her. Had he misinterpreted their relationship, and told some of his friends that they were getting

married—not the first or last time. “It seemed a little strange to me, my dear Betsy, that I did not hear from you so long a time [over a year]. But I imputed your silence to your bodily weakness, of which several of your friends sent me word ...”

Or to Mary Bosanquet (later Mary Fletcher):

Jan. 15, 1770: “There is little danger now of any wrong intercourse between you and me. Indeed we love one another and can trust one another; and there is good reason that we should. God seemed to mark us out for it long ago, and perhaps lately more than ever. You may now speak all that is in your heart, and with all simplicity.”

March 26, 1770: “So all is well. With regard to us, I do not at present see any danger on one side or the other. You had need of a steady hand, and one that knows you well. If my brother had not given Mrs. Gausson that fatal advice, ‘to keep from me,’ she would not have fallen into the hands of others.”

Or to Mrs. Fletcher, after her husband’s death, Dec. 31, 1785: “Indeed, I love everything that belongs to you, as I have done ever since I knew you ...”

Jan. 13, 1786: “When I receive letters from others persons, I let them lie perhaps a week or two before I answer them; but it is otherwise when I hear from you.”

Sept. 6, 1786: “Excuse me if I write just as I feel, I have not of a long season felt so tender an affection for you as I have done in reading your last ...”

Dec. 9, 1786: Wesley had just finished his book on Fletcher. “Nay, and if we live, I should rejoice if you and I can continue to be in those places [London and Yorkshire] at the same time; for I feel a great union of spirit with you. I cannot easily tell you how much. I am my very dear sister, Yours invariably”

Or to Miss Susan (Suky) Eden:

Sept. 11, 1779:

My Dear Suky, Your Affliction appeared to me perfectly whimsical. What is a young Woman troubled because She is admired? ‘O, but the man is a fool?’ And can’t You play off a fool, as well as another Woman? Especially a tame, familiar fool, as ever you saw in your life! What was you afraid of? He will neither bite nor scratch; he will only (if you please) tease you a little. Nay, if you encourage him,

He will, “as is his Duty,  
Adore the shadow of your Shoe-tye.”

But, seriously speaking, I was in great hopes, You wou’d have drawn your Wit upon him, & read him such a lesson as he wou’d have remembered, the longest day he had to live. But that there is One that has all power in Heaven & in Earth, & that by Him the Hairs of our head are all numbered, a great part of your remarkable Dream might very soon be verified. Humanly speaking, we are not able to contend with our enemies, either by Sea or Land. But we have reason to believe, He who has so often delivered us, will deliver us still. And if that is his pleasure, what can man do? ‘There is no counsel or strength against the Lord.’ If I had leisure, I shou’d not need any stronger inducement to bring me to Boardmarston, than the regard I have for You, for I really am, My Dear Suky, Yours very affectionately, JWesley.”

I am convinced that the “tame, familiar fool,” is none other than John Wesley himself.

Or to Sarah Crosby:

May 11, 1780: “Before you mentioned it, that was my purpose not to let any one know of your writing. Therefore I do transcribe what I choose to keep and burn the originals ... I found what you said in your last helpful. It is of great use to have minds stirred up by way of remembrance, even of the things we know already ...”

Or to Hannah Ball:

Aug. 4, 1782: “I almost wondered that I did not receive a line from you for so long a season. I could not easily believe that your love was grown cold: and I am glad to hear it is not ...

Or to Mary Cooke & Her Circle: Trowbridge Friends of John Wesley, the subject of the second part of this paper.

**Father in the Gospel, Instructor and Interpreter:  
Mary Cook's View of Her Revd & Dear John Wesley  
as Seen in her Correspondence, 1785-1789**

We will examine the relationship between Mary, her sisters and John Wesley. The importance here is that their relationship illustrates the importance of Methodist/Anglican families in a local scene which was part of a national movement in the Church of England.

I think sometimes that we forget “the conventional regulations” of social obligations to the Church and of these strict well to do Anglicans and that of the humble pious manufacturing poor that formed many of Methodist bands in the small communities. Rich, well instructed young women of the Established Church were not allowed to mix with their less religious and poorer neighbors, Mrs. Cooke recognized Mr. Wesley as one of the apostolic divines, but did not want her daughters to join the Methodists societies— She gave money, but felt that the only way to support herself and her family, was to be a part of the large social Anglican Society.

The story of Mary Cooke Clarke, her sisters, Elizabeth (Eliza), Francis, and Ann comes to a close on March 16, 1791, 14 days after John Wesley's death. On this date, Eliza, writes from Trowbridge, her home town, to Mary Clarke in Dublin.

In 2001 Bridwell Library, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas purchased, at auction, a collection of 95 manuscript letters written by Mary, Eliza, and Frances Cooke, and Adam Clarke.

The most important for this presentation is Mary Cooke's *Letterbook*, marked “Mr. Wesley”, written in her own hand and containing 21 letters written to John Wesley from Sept. 15, 1785 to Feb. 5, 1789. At the top of 16 of the letters, Mary wrote, “Answer to Mr. Wesley 1<sup>st</sup> letter”, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, etc.; 5 are marked, “Copies of a letter to Mr. Wesley.”

There are 10 response letters from John Wesley to Mary Cooke, printed in Telford's *Letters*.<sup>1</sup> Excerpts from a 11th letter from Wesley to Mary are preserved in a letter to Eliza, dated Jan. 24, 1786, and in a letter of Feb. 20, 1786 in which she quotes from Wesley's letter.

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<sup>1</sup> Telford. John, editor. *The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.* London: Epworth Press, 1931. The original 10 letters from John to Mary are in the archives at Wesley College Bristol.

What is the importance of these letters? Wesley believed that letters were supposed to be private, between the writer and the recipient. He visualized the person he was writing to by creating a “spiritual image” of that person. We now have invaded the privacy of Wesley and Mary, and can listen in as they carry on a private conversation through their correspondence.

Mary was the eldest child of John and Mary Cooke, born at Trowbridge, in Wiltshire, Jan. 18, 1760, baptized, Feb. 27, 1760. Her father died when she was fourteen, leaving five daughters and one son. He was a strict member of the Established church, and was universally esteemed in his religious, civil, and social connections. Mary the eldest, became the friend and companion of her widowed mother. Elizabeth (Eliza), baptized, Dec. 1761; Frances (no information); Sarah, April 1769; Ann, Jan. 1771; and her brother Samuel Bright, June 26, 1765. Mary married Adam Clarke on April 17, 1788.

Mary remained devoted to Wesley, even after her marriage to Adam Clarke. She wrote to Miss Cottle, Sept. 13, 1789 ... I went on Friday afternoon with him [Wesley] to Kingswood and did not return till Saturday afternoon. He is going again to-day, and my sisters are preparing to accompany him ... class to meet at half-past two, set tea for Mr. Wesley and his company at 4; preaching at 5; Society-meeting at 6; see all things in order to set as mistress at the supper-table at 8; Tomorrow, prepare early breakfast, to drive out with Mr. Wesley; he dines out; tea at 5, preaching at half-past 6, and lead a class afterwards.<sup>2</sup>

Two examples will suffice to show Wesley’s attention to and continued interest in Mary after her engagement and marriage to Adam Clarke.

1) She writes to Miss Cottle in Aug. 1789:

He told us yesterday at dinner, that he had a little self-interest in our appointment to Bristol this year, for said he kindly: ‘I have sent Adam Clarke and his wife among you because I want to have their company myself.’ A little later he came in, Mr. Clarke met him, searching about for me, with a fine large print of himself in his hand, that he might present it to me. I value it much, as the gift of my revered father, but I cannot esteem it bearing a strong resemblance to himself; it is by no means a striking likeness.<sup>3</sup>

2) After hearing Wesley preach at Bath in March 1787, Mary wrote to Adam,

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<sup>2</sup> Paraphrased from a letter written by Mary Clarke to Miss Cottle, Sept. 13. In *Mrs. Adam Clarke*, p. 76-77.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p, 76.

I had promised to breakfast with him the next morning. The lady of the house watched for me at the window, and ushered me into a large dining-room, full of company. Our reverend father appeared most affectionately glad to see me, and led me to an arm-chair, which he had reserved for me, next to himself ... He wishes me to remain in Bristol while he is here. As soon as breakfast was over, he led me into his sitting-room, where he kindly encouraged me to open my mind to him, and freely to speak its state. He encouraged me, and went to prayer with me ...<sup>4</sup>

The Cooke letters, along with Mary's biography, tell a story of a fairly wealthy, well-to-do widow, with strict allegiance to the Established church, but favorable to the Evangelical Methodist's Ministers who came to preach in and around Trowbridge. Mrs. Cooke saw Wesley as one of the great Apostolic Divines, but did not want her daughters to join the Methodist Society. Mrs. Cooke welcomed John Wesley and other ministers and preachers into her home, fed them, provided money to help build a meeting-house while still keeping true to her religious, civil and social connections. Finally Eliza and Frances joined the Methodist Society, and Wesley appointed Eliza class leader in 1782. Mary refused to join, for as the oldest child (22 at the time) had to maintain the social status of the family. She finally joined the society in 1784, but continued her social obligations, her late night hours, and her studies in the evenings, so she had no time to attend the meetings. She was satisfied with her obligations to the Established church and society. But as she later writes, "my faith was only in my head."

Mary wrote to a Mr. Perkins, of Freshford<sup>5</sup> on March 23, 1785:

I heard Wesley preach on Galatians 4:4-7, and after supper, as was the custom, the conversation turned to the sermon. An enquiry was made as to the state of the soul in a person without faith, and all were unanimous in declaring that the soul was not safe in this state. The thought of death and an Eternity of Torment was such I could not ill support. It only spoiled a meal, which I could do very well without. I retired as soon as possible, & gave free vent to the feelings of my soul. Sleep fled from me: & I don't know that I ever passed a more uncomfortable night. Who! O who can endure the thought of dwelling with everlasting burnings! I am sure I cannot; & and yet if this be the case, what shall I do? ... I cannot at present point you out a more charitable act than that of visiting your already, Unworthily obliged, M.C.

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid, p. 37.

<sup>5</sup> An unknown Methodist preacher, traveling in the Bradford (Wilts) circuit in and around Trowbridge.

She wrote again to him on the 26 March, “expecting to go to Hell” and again on May 22, 1786, “do you not see the only way to help me lies with yourself?”<sup>6</sup>

She wrote in her diary:

I am in doubt and sorrow of soul, for I cannot by faith lay hold upon my Saviour ... Alas! my faith seems only to dwell in my head—my understanding is convinced but my heart is unbelieving; ... [praying to God] Thou hast wisdom and strength, and canst impart them to me; Thou canst reveal the deep things of Thy word: be Thou my instructor, my counselor, my guide, my upholder, and my defense! Give me Thyself, Thy kingdom in my heart.<sup>7</sup>

NOW THE STAGE IS SET FOR MR. WESLEY TO RIDE INTO TOWN IN HIS TRUSTY CHAISE AND SAVE THIS DAMSEL IN DISTRESS.

Wesley (age 82) preached at Trowbridge on Thursday, Sept, 8, 1785. Mary (age 25) rode with him to Bradford to hear him preach on Friday. He went on to Bath and preached there on Saturday evening, while Mary returned to Trowbridge. Wesley wrote a letter to Mary, dated Bradford-on Avon, Sept. 10, 1785, and had it hand delivered, before he left for Bath. And so begins the affectionate relationship and correspondence between Mary Cooke and John Wesley that lasted until his death.

EXTRACTS AND PARAPHRASES FROM SELECTED CORRESPONDENCE

BETWEEN MARY COOKE AND JOHN WESLEY, SEPT. 10, 1785 – Feb. 5, 1789.<sup>8</sup>

*Bradford-on Avon, Sept. 10, 1785*

*My Dear Sister,--While I had the pleasure of sitting by you I quite forgot [what] I intended before we set out. Considering the bent of your mind, I cannot doubt but you have many copies of verses by you. Probably you have some (beside those on Mrs. Turner) wrote upon affecting subjects. Will you favour me with two or three of them? Do, if you have any desire to oblige, my dead friend, Yours*

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<sup>6</sup> Paraphrased and extracted from original “Letters to Mr Perkins” in a wrapper marked “Miss Peacock.”

<sup>7</sup> *Mrs. Adam Clarke*, p. 17. Mary Ann comments that “There can be no doubt that it was from contemplations such as these, that Miss Cooke framed her correspondence with Mr. Wesley; she laid before him the state of her spirit.”

<sup>8</sup> Mary’s letters were transcribed by Wanda Smith of Bridwell Library, and run in length from one-half page to three pages single spaced. Wesley letters were taken from Telford and printed here in *italics*.

*affectionately, JWesley.*<sup>9</sup>

Mary responded to John's letter, noted at the top, "Answer to Mr. Wesley's 1st letter", on Sept. 15, 1785, written from Trowbridge, and addressed him as "Revd & Dear Sir. In the first half of the letter she apologizes for the verses, blaming Miss Perry for given it to him, and that it was written "Before Religion (save that of outward shew) had any influence over me ... oblige me, my Dear Sir, by Burning this unlucky paper ..."

Continuing:

Permit me a few moments longer to trespass on your time, just to tell you that my soul has been abundantly blessed by your visit to Trowbridge. Whilst here, & since you left us, I have felt a degree of happiness which before I never experienced. In riding from Bradford on Friday Evening, I began to reflect on the particular occurrences of the two past days, & became a wonder to myself while I remembered the greater freedom I had felt in conversation, which used to be a sore burthen to me. I feel much strengthened & encouraged since Thursday last. My drooping hopes are cheered, & my fainting spirit greatly revived through the instrumentality of your coming -----One favour conferred, emboldens me to ask a second: which is, will you repeat your visit in the spring ... consider what I have received, & what I farther want: & then say, can I ask too much? With a Father's tenderest love, forget whatever I have said amiss: & if any part I have been too free. O impute it not to a want of reverence: for there my heart would bleed! But rather think it proceeds from that amazing freedom with which you kindly treated me; whilst by encouraging me to be unreserved, you condescendingly listened to, advised, & set me forward. Your obliged & ever grateful, M. C----

P.S. My sisters desire to be respectfully remembered to Mr. Wesley."

Mary did not receive a reply to this letter, evidently sent to the wrong person. Her next letter is dated Friday Morng., Sep. 23, 1785, noted at the top, "Copy of a letter to Mr Wesley."

Last Tuesday [Mary wrote John on the 15, but had not heard from him when she met him on the 20th] when I had the pleasure of seeing you in Bristol, you was so obliging as to desire if I did not receive your answer to my former letter, that I

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<sup>9</sup> Mary Ann transcribes the first line as: "When I had the pleasure of seeing you, I quite forgot to speak to you about versification," and comments, that Mr. Wesley wrote this letter to express the love she had to her love of the Muse. In *Mrs. Adam Clarke*, p. 116. Photo copy of the original supports Telford.

would acquaint you therewith, & you would repeat the substance of the same. I have now waited two post-days [21st and 22nd], but in vain, for no answer is yet arrived ... Therefore to prevent all possible post-errors, will beg you to direct for me in Duke-Street, Trowbridge, Wilts.---All confused as I am, I feel it absolutely necessary to be brief at the present time. Forget not, my Dear Sir, in your prayers to bear in mind , Yours, Unworthy, M. C----.

The above letter, written on the Sept. 23, is received by Wesley on the same day or the next, as he answers her's from Bristol on Sept. 24.

*My Dear Sister,---- I beg, when you write to me hereafter, do not write as to a stranger, but a friend. Be not afraid of me because I have lived so much longer [60 years] than you. I assume nothing upon that account, but wish to stand upon even ground with you and to converse without either disguise or reserve<sup>10</sup> ... You are an amiable woman, it is true; but still you are a sinner, born to die! You are an immortal spirit come forth from God and speedily returning to Him ... If you are simple of heart, without reasoning, why may you not receive it [grace] now? He is nigh that sanctifieth; he is with you; He is knocking at the door of your heart! Yours in tender affection. I pray be not so brief in your next.*

Wesley was traveling the next month and did not reach London until Thursday, Oct. 27. He had a letter waiting for him from Mary, dated Oct. 24, 1785, addressed to The Revd J. Wesley, New Chapel City Road, London, as he answered this letter from London on Oct. 30, 1785. Noted at top of letter, "Answer to Mr. Wesley's 2d letter"

You bid me, my Dear Sir, be free 'to converse without disguise, or reserve' ...\_And now, my Dear Sir, will you candidly & simply tell me what you think of my case? explain me to myself; & plainly speak your sentiments: My inexperience needs an interpreter: I want, & wish for one, to tell me truly what my feelings mean. Kindly undertake this office & assist me also with your advice & prayer & teach me how to live, & how to die! May you, ever revered, & Dear Sir, one day rejoice to see admitted,

Yours Unworthy, M. C----.

John was in Bristol when this letter was written, returned to London on Thursday, Sept. 27, and found it waiting for him, as he responds on Oct. 30, 1785.

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<sup>10</sup> Works or phrases underlined are quoted by each other.

*My dear Miss Cooke leans to the right-hand error. It is safer to think too little than too much of yourself. Many years ago when one was describing the glorious privilege of a believer, I cried out, If this be so, I have no faith. He replied, You have faith but it is weak.” The very same thing I say to you my dear friend ... Hold fast what you have, and ask for what you want.*

*I commit you and your dear sisters to His tender care: and am, my dear friend,  
Most affectionately yours, JWesley*

Mary’s next letter is written from Devizes, Dec. 5, 1785, and addressed to The. Rev. J. Wesley, New-Chapel, City Road, London. She advises him “Please to address your next letter to me, at Thos Locke’s Esqr, Devizes.”

“Answer to Mr Wesley’s 3d letter”

Revd & Dear Sir, Can you, my Dear Sir, tell me how to conquer, or check the vain reasonings of my heart, & the workings of my own spirit? ... Your last letter raises me as from the dust ... guide me into all truth, & teach me all things necessary to salvation. & as my Reverend Father, advise & instruct me: strengthen me with your counsel, & show me how to walk, & act, & live to God. Your gratefully obliged, M. C----.

John was traveling in and out of London in November and December, and did not respond to Mary’s letter until Dec. 14, 1785. What do you think went through Mary’s mind as she read the opening words of this letter?

*I love to see the handwriting of my dear Miss Cooke, even before I open the letter. The thinking of you gives me very sensible pleasure ever since you spoke so freely to me. There is a remedy for the evil of which you complain-unprofitable [Mary wrote vain] reasonings; [the only remedy] is the peace of God. This will not only keep your heart, your affections, and passions as a garrison keeps a city, but your mind likewise, all the workings and all the wanderings of your imagination. Yours in tender affection. JWesley.*

Mary’s “Answer to Mr. Wesley’s 4th letter” in dated Jan. 24, 1786.

Revd & Dear Sir, On the evening of that day on which I received your highly-esteemed letter, I had such a delightful view of divine things as brought an inexpressible calm into my mind. I saw myself as deserving the vengeance of divine justice: yet as a saved soul, for Christ’s sake ... The time now draws ... near

when I hope we shall be favored with your company in Duke Street. My heart looks forward with glad expectation and pleasingly anticipates the day of your arrival. We can say, we love the dear Preachers of the truth as it is in Jesus: we love to see them all: But above all, we love to see their Father in the Gospel, who sends them forth ... We have one young woman who wishes much that you should baptize her; Need there a stronger incentive than your love for us? If I knew a more prevailing argument, I would urge it: but surely this is sufficient ... Yours, M. C----

There is no known response to this letter, but Mary's next letter of Feb. 20, 1786, was written in response to it. Part of John's letter survives in a her letterbook with "Miss Peacock" written on the front cover. It was written as an "Answer to my sister's [Eliza] 22d and 23rd letters."

Last Wednesday I was favoured with a letter from Mr. Wesley, I will transcribe a part, wherein he answers me when soliciting for a visit from him. *'I do not usually visit any of the smaller societies in the Spring: my time will not permit. Accordingly I had designed, after spending a day or two at Bath (about the first of March) to go on strait to Bristol. But it is hard for me to deny you, any thing, I do not know that I can. If it is possible I will contrive to visit you at Trowbridge, & when we meet, I pray let there be no reserve between us.'* &c,

This next letter, dated Duke Street, Feb. 20. 1786, was written in response to John's letter referred to (and quoted) by Mary in her letter to her sister, Eliza. John's letter that Mary received was written in response to Mary's letter of Jan. 24, 1786.

"Answer to Mr Wesley's 5th letter"

Once more, my Dear Sir, I am returned to Trowbridge: & from thence have the pleasure of paying my thankful acknowledgements for your last kind letter. The language of gratitude becomes one so highly favored by your notice, esteem, & love. Your condescending command ('when we meet let there be no reserve between us') is too pleasing to be forgotten: therein is included a precious privilege for which, as for every other, I only want an heart to make a suitable improvement. [She requests two favors, and] "neither of which I think will be rejected. The first favor I ask, is an explanation of the thirtieth verse of the third Chapr of Romans ... ----- My second request respects a friend, Miss Martin, one of the earliest in our Society ... if I have asked too many things, pardon me, & kindly consider, you invite all this trouble by your encouraging condescension, & goodness; for which I thank you. But if I abuse it, reprove me; & I will be corrected, & endeavor to

amend. ---- My sisters desire their respectful love; & are as anxious to see dear Mr Wesley as is, his hoping, expecting,  
Obliged, M. C-----

John responds to Mary's letter of Feb. 20, probably the same day he received it, as it is dated, London, Feb. 23, 1786.

In the response, he refers to Mary's letter and to her quote to her sister in the lost letter.

*By your manner of writing you make me even more desirous of seeing you my dear friend than I was before. I hope to have the pleasure next week. On Tuesday evening I expect to be at Bath (probably I shall preach about six o'clock), and on Wednesday noon at Trowbridge. And remember what I told you before! You are not to have a jot of reserve about you. I have frequently observed the passage to which you refer in the 3rd chapter of Romans ... I shall be glad if it should be in my power to do any service to Miss Martins. If it was convenient for you to be at Bath on Tuesday, I could take you with me to Trowbridge on Wednesday. Peace be with you spirits. Adieu!*

The next letter from Mary, dated March 10, 1786, is not a response to one of John's letters but of her disappointment in his not visiting Trowbridge as promised. The visit was cut short because of the weather. See Wesley's *Journal*, March 27, 1786. "Mon. 27."

Copy of a letter to Mr Wesley

Ever Revered, & Dear Sir, So lately in your company, can I have much to say by letter? ... Your being here (so short was the time) served only to increase my inclination for conversing, freely with you, but gave me no opportunity for so doing. The desire thus increased, without being satisfied, is it any wonder if I should at present pass the bounds of moderation? Methinks my soul is full, & would pour out its feelings unto you ... My heart grew heavy as you left us ... ---- If your design of going to Scotland is fixed, may I ask how long will be your stay? During this distant visit, a cessation of your correspondence must be patiently, but will not be agreeably borne ... Your weak & foolish, but, Gratefully Affectionate, and Sincere, M. C-----.

Her next letter, dated March 25<sup>th</sup>, and addressed to the Rev. J. Wesley, To be left at the Preaching-House, Macclesefield, Cheshire, is in "Answer to Mr Wesley's 7th letter", another unknown letter, written in response to her letter of March 10, 1786, probably on

Tuesday, March 21, 1786.

I gladly avail myself of the allowed liberty of an uninterrupted correspondence; & evidence the pleasure it gives me, by addressing you, Dear Sir, at the first place I have any certain knowledge of your visiting. Accept grateful thanks for the help already afforded: ... My one desire is, to know only Jesus, & Him crucified ... Bear one ever near your heart to a throne of mercy; & when you supplicate for choicest blessings, forget not, Your Poor, M. C----

P. S. My Sisters desire I would convey their best Respects; with an assurance of their esteem: & thanks for your kind remembrance of them.

Mary had not heard from Wesley for over a month, and was getting desperate to hear from him. Evidently he responded to her earlier letter, on Mon. May 1<sup>st</sup>, or Tuesday, 2<sup>nd</sup>, as her next letter is dated May 8, 1786, and is in “Answer to Mr. Wesley’s 8<sup>th</sup> letter”, also an unknown letter.

My Sister & I join in opinion, that when my letter is wrote, it will not in worth pay its postage to Edinburgh. Yet you will bear with me ... Your last letter came in a time of need: on a day when I wanted much, & more than human aid. Surely, Dear Sir, could sympathy have told your heart what I felt in those moments of distress, it would have dropped a tear for me. I was under the power of temptation: to my own apprehension sinking in deep waters, not espying the arm of my Deliver stretched out to same me ... My sisters desire their Respectful Love: beg, with me, a continued interest in your prayers. At Edinburgh my list of the places visiting ends: nor do I after this, know where to find you again till the latter part of July in Bristol ... Your Ever Grateful, M. C----

It has become pretty obvious that Mary has become so dependent on Wesley’s letters that when she did not receive a response to her letter of May 8, she wrote to Mr. Perkins, her earlier counselor from Freshford, after hearing him preach at Trowbridge, on May 22, 1786, still in the same desperate state, “do you not see the only way to help me lies with yourself.” Where, O where, has her Mr. Wesley gone? Her next letter, dated June 23, 1786, gushing with enthusiasm, is written in “Answer to Mr. Wesley’s 9<sup>th</sup> letter”, also an unknown letter.

Revd & Dear Sir,

On the receipt of your letter, I again experienced the truth of an observation I have often made, “Hope deferred maketh the heart sick: but when the desire cometh” --- -- Is it not sweet to the soul? I waited a long time (long it seemed to me) expecting

every post to hear from you, but in vain: disappointment succeeded disappointment, every day adding to the score. When your letter came; & even in the bare act of taking it, I felt a pleasure compensating for all the pain your long silence occasioned. These words (immediately distinguished, as noted in red) “Missent to Witney,” convinced me the delay was accidental: which quieted both the apprehensions & perverse reasonings of my mind; ----- As Conference draws near, will you, Dear Sir, give me leave to remind you of your conditional promise of sending Mr Adam Clarke into our Circuit ... He has been made a blessing to this people: they love him; & I believe he loves them ... Once more I look forward to the expected time of your being at Trowbridge; & trust the usual blessing shall not be wanting. It is a long anticipation: but I have some hope of seeing you before. If it is possible, & my mother consents, I promise myself to be in Bristol for a few days during Conference. I feel a very strong desire to be there, & a little thing will not keep me away: But if I am disappointed, it will be an heavy heavy cross in deed ... M. C----

Mary’s next letter, dated Aug. 30, 1786, is in “Answer to Mr. Wesley 10<sup>th</sup> letter”, another unknown letter.

She makes reference to her stay in Bristol at Conference and writes

It was a time of humiliation ... When you was describing the preparatives for a full salvation, my heart cried, these are what I want; Lord give them now to me! ... There is a revival of life of much power at Trowbridge ... people go away for want of room, so they want a larger preaching house ... [What is of interest here is that it is not because of Wesley, but because of Adam Clarke. He called them to have a prayer-meeting at 5:00 am—they objected but finally gave in and now they have reason to rejoice that they did]. We would not now give them up: they are best of all: & even our other meetings are much more comfortable, lively, & powerful, since we have met in the mornings ... On your return to Bristol, I wait not for a renewed permission to write; still looking on the former one as sufficient warrant ... [She reminds him that his usual visit draws near, and of the pleasing recollection, that last September he spent the greater part of two days with them, and now asks for three] ... Your, Grateful Expectant M. C-----My Sisters join in kind Respects, & with full consent, in earnest hope of its acceptance, unite in my above petition.

The tone of Mary’s letters are beginning to change, and John notices it. In his reply to her letter of Aug. 30, 1786 He writes, “you are happier than when you wrote last.”

*Bath, September 9, 1786. It gives me much satisfaction, my dear Friend, to observe you are happier than when you wrote last ... Two weeks I give to Bristol: after that time I return to London. I cannot, therefore, have the happiness of seeing Trowbridge this autumn. But might I not see you or your sisters at Bristol? If I am invisible to others, I would not be so to you. You may always command everything that is in my power of, my very dear friend, Yours in life and in death, JWesley.*

Mary responds to his letter, dated Oct. 24, 1786. Note that she addressed him as “My Dear, & ever Dear Sir.” More than half of this long letter is in praising Adam Clarke “who got us into bands, proposed them, & strongly insisted on their great utility. Our Classes grow unwieldy: are obliged to be divided, & new Leaders sought out. Since I wrote last [Aug. 30, 1786], I have a Band & a Class appointed me ... Love, & concord reign! In short: we are ‘as a City at unity with itself’ blessed with Harmony, Increase, & Prosperity ... I have room for no more, than to present my Sisters respectful Love: & to ask your prayers for a continuance, & increase of our present bliss. Farewell, Dear Sir. I am indeed, Your Happy, M. C----.” Is this her “Dear John” letter? Has she finally found a man that is replacing her “Reved & dear Sir”?

Mary’s next letter, dated Dec. 4, 1786, is in “Answer to Mr. Wesley’s 12<sup>th</sup> letter”, another unknown letter. She confesses that,

I am by nature a poor blind Child of sin & error, & that it is only by his grace, ‘I am what I am.’ Here I want your especial prayers ... [She had heard about his poor state of health, and wishes to hear from him], whether there is any just foundation for such report? [She asks] the Giver of every good & perfect gift ... to grant unto him soundness of health, but for ‘the sake, & advantage of Your Most unfeignedly Grateful, M. C----. My Sisters desire to be Respectfully remembered: and beg a share in your Affection & Prayers.

John responds to Mary’s letter from London on Dec. 12, 1786.

*My dear Sister.---- You oblige me much (and so your very dear sisters) by being so solicitous about my health: I take it as a mark of your sincere affection. Meantime I wonder at you! I am almost ashamed that you should love me so well. It is plain how little you know me ... I cannot tell you how much I am, Yours affectionately, JWesley.*

Mary’s next letter, dated Feb. 1, 1787, is an “Answer to Mr. Wesley’s 13<sup>th</sup> letter.” It is written one and one half months later as John is traveling in and out of London. She uses the trade riots in and around Trowbridge as her excuse for not writing. She writes:

I trouble you with these complaints [trade riots] as an apology for ever thing, of every kind that is amiss. Nor should I in such a state have attempted to write, but I remember it is long since received your kind letter; & I fear that my silence will either give uneasiness, or be attributed to some wrong cause. [But the real reason is] I have a still more prevailing motive, viz: a recollection that the usual time for your visit to Bath & Bristol approaches ... If you will, if you can thus oblige us, we shall be very very happy to see you. Shall I have a letter, naming your time? ... I feel myself to be yours, Affectionate, & Grateful obliged, M. C----

Her next letter, dated July 14 1787, is in “Answer to Mr. Wesley’s 15th letter,” and addressed to the Revd J. Wesley, Manchester. In previous letters, Mary has mentioned the name of Adam Clarke, as the person that is reviving the people in and around Trowbridge. For two years Mary has depended upon Wesley and Wesley upon Mary. He left for Ireland on Thursday, April 15, and was gone during the months of April, May, and June. Now in his absence she turns to Adam Clarke, a young handsome 27 year old, preacher and guide.

After several months silence, occasioned by your visit to Ireland, will you, Dear Sir, permit your unworthy correspondent once more to resume her pen? ----- Do I flatter myself? or do you in reality tenderly enquire for my welfare? Ah! My reverend Father: had you been near, it is more than probable you would have been troubled with many grievous tales, with many sorrowful epistles. I have indeed endured ----- more than I can express! But still the God of Jacob has been with me; & by his grace I have been upholden. ----- Mr C[larke] I know (if no one else) has informed you of a connection between him & me ... So far as I am acquainted with myself, I am pure from every wrong principle herein. I know I sought the will of the Lord; & that with earnestness, & in simplicity: & that I am now in it I cannot doubt ...I write only to ask a continuance of your Love. When I saw you last, you said, ‘I thought I could never love you better than I did before; but I do now feel an increase of affection.’ When I remember these kind expressions: when I recollect that I was then unworthy, & have not since done any thing to render myself more undeserving of them, I cannot fear that you will be shaken by reports sent with intent to prejudice ... Yet, another thing I designed mentioning is to ask when will you be in Bristol or Bath? At one of these places I propose meeting you if permitted: & there if you give me leave, I will repeat exactly as my treacherous memory allows, the whole affair from its beginning to this present time. Of that which I am not ashamed before heaven, I am not ashamed before you ... Pardon the intrusion! It shall not be much longer: only while I ask, shall I not hope that when I see you, it will be as on mine so on your part, with an unabated esteem? & that

when you meet me, it will be with all that strength of affection, which since you have been “

This next letter, dated Aug. 6, 1787, is an “Answer to Mr. Wesley’s 16<sup>th</sup> letter” another unknown letter. John’s letter must have been very critical of Adam’s and Mary’s “affair” and Adam not informing John about it. Wesley had made a mistake and she is not afraid to let him know about it..

Dear Sir,----This morning I read your favour of the 1<sup>st</sup> inst. ...I think it is my indispensable duty to remind you of a small mistake: which tho’ trifling in itself, yet if not rectified, may be productive of much evil. You say, ‘Mr. C[larke] never spoke one word to me, of what you now mention’ True he never spoke, because he had not an opportunity ... he wrote an account thereof to you ... his letter was dated Kingswood ... To this letter, he has recd an answer from you, dated ‘Clones, May ye 17<sup>th</sup> ... I would not have troubled you now: but thought if you should say to others, ‘Mr. C[larke] never spoke one word to me of the affair,’ and Mr. C[larke] should assert that you did know something of it, from him; it might give fresh handle to his enemies for spreading reports to his disadvantage. I remain, Dear Sir, Your Affectionate, M. C----

Wesley did not respond to this letter. Mary’s next letter, dated Sept. 12, 1787, is a “Copy of a letter to Mr. Wesley.”

Dear Sir, I remember by conditional promise ... I said, ‘I promise if permitted, to meet you in Bath:’ But I am not permitted; nay farther, I am absolutely forbidden going to Bath ... I am yet allowed to see my reverend Father himself, at home ... Glory! eternal glory be ascribed unto Him! He is my hope, my portion, & my sure defense! With the wish that you come & tell us somewhat more of his goodness, I subscribe myself, Your, Obliged & Affectionate, M. C----

Wesley responded to this letter from Bath, dated Sept. 15, 1787.

*My Dear Sister,----On Monday, the 24<sup>th</sup> instant, I shall (with God’s assistant) be at Bradford; and on Tuesday morning I hope to have the pleasure of waiting upon you at Trowbridge. Adieu! On second thought I purpose preaching at Trowbridge on Monday noon and in Bradford in the evening.*

Mary is engaged to Adam Clarke, so if she met Wesley at Trowbridge, it was probably under watchful eyes. She did not respond to his short letter of Sept. 15 and did not write to him again until Dec. 11, 1787. She is kind and praises him as before, but implies that

she does not need him any more, as God is working in her, thanks to Dr. Coke's Journals  
What a blow this must have been to the old man.

Copy of a letter to Mr. Wesley.”

What, my Dear Sir, shall I say for my excellent God? ... New mercies rise with every fresh moment, ‘O to grace how great a debtor!’ is your unworthy correspondent ... Now my meditations were sweet: my spirit abstracted from earth, held divine communion, & herein possessed heavenly enjoyment ... One day taking a ride with three friends, in returning, one was reading, ‘Baxter’s Saints everlasting rest,’ two were listening, I was sewing: What I had been thinking of in the preceding moment I know not: But in the same instant I forgot the subject. Then in reading, my soul, as tho’ no creature was present was wholly lost in God: my hands dropped their work, tears of joy filled my eyes, & my spirit was satisfied with a something undescribable! I felt no rapture; but a soul-subduing peace, with calm, pure love; & God, & Christ, & all was mine! ... The blessed tidings which Dr. Coke’s Journals contain, caused my spirit to triumph, & my soul to sing ...When you appeared so poorly, my faith began to fail: instead of believing for a prolonged life, I feared a sudden departure. If prayers called you back the same seek a long continuance of you below ... That you may long, long be spared to the militant church, to see, & be made the honoured instrument of a large increase of the adorable Redeemer’s kingdom on earth; and at last be gathered with those who having turned many to righteousness, shine as the stars for ever & ever, to the Church Triumphant, to his kingdom of Glory, is the fervent prayer of your, Most obliged & affectionate M.C-----”

Wesley’s last letter to Mary Cooke , dated Dec. 21, 1787, was written in response to the above letter.

*My Dear Sister, ----You have unspeakable reason to praise God for His late manifestations to you. And you will generally observe that large consolations are preceded by deep exercises of soul ... If two or three of you continue instant in prayer, the work will revive at Trowbridge also. When you are met together, badly lay hold on the promise: His word will speak, and will not lie. Peace be with all your spirits! I am, my dear sister, Yours most affectionately, JWesley.*

There is a 14-month hiatus in Mary’s letters to Wesley. Her next letter is dated Feb. 5, 1789, and is signed “M. Clarke”.

Copy of a letter to Mr. Wesley

Revd & Dear Sir,----Long, long as it is since I embraced my privilege of writing to you, I have not forgot to be grateful for many, many past favours ... I remember the kind condescensions with which you used to receive my letters, & I still hope you had not yet forgot your unworthy M. C---- ... Many, & strange things, my dear Sir, have happened since last I enjoyed the satisfaction of your company. Then I was single, & an inhabitant of T[rowbrid]ge: now I am married, & became a sojourner in St. Hellier's. Seas divide me from my native land; but they cannot separate betwixt me & my heavenly Father! Blessed be his holy name ... He has added another blessing by giving me a son! Yes, Yes, 'I have gotten a man-child from the Lord!' ... Without leave, we have presumed to call him after our revered Father & Friend; fondly hoping he will never disgrace the name of John Wesley ... His Wisdom to discern that which is best, his power to effect that which is best, & his Love to bestow that which is best, All join to satisfy me with good, & to make me blest ... I hope for myself to see my honoured spiritual Father in England; there to testify, as far as in my power, how much I am his, Obliged & Affectionate, M. Clarke.

This is the last letter that Mary wrote to Wesley. There are two surviving letters, printed in Telford, from Wesley to Mary, concerning Adam's health, but no known reply. Wesley carried on a regular correspondence with Adam Clarke after his marriage to Mary Cooke, closing, "Peace be with you and yours!"

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