

JOHN WESLEY'S *ARMINIAN MAGAZINE*

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A century ago, William Edward Hartpole Lecky, the Irish historian, stepped back a pace from his discussion of John Wesley and the development of eighteenth-century British Methodism to view the broader scene, as it were, and to draw forth a reasonable conclusion concerning the influence of Wesley upon the life of mid and late eighteenth-century Britain. "It is no exaggeration to say," he remarked of Wesley, "that he has had a wider constructive influence on the sphere of practical religion than any other man who has appeared since the sixteenth century."¹

The "wider constructive influence" originated, of course, from John Wesley's own discipline and energy, from his dedication to routine, and from his sense of endurance. Nevertheless, the positive direction of British Methodism also came out of a number of extremely practical vehicles through which his particular brand of evangelicalism reached into almost every village and almost every county of England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, and onto the shores of the American colonies. John Wesley relied upon field preaching, lending societies, folk medicine, electricity, lay preachers, schools, publishing houses, and the popular press to rally Britons—Anglicans, Dissenters, Roman Catholics—to the ideas and the ideals of Methodism; he identified for them the social and the spiritual means by which to endure the worldly inequities of life in the second half of the eighteenth century.

If, in assessing the success of Wesley's various constructive projects for the furtherance of Methodism, the principal criterion is longevity, the laurel would most assuredly go to *The Arminian Magazine*. It was also one of the distinctively *popular* periodicals circulated throughout the British Isles during the latter part of the eighteenth century.

¹William Edward Hartpole Lecky, *A History of England in the Eighteenth Century*, 3d ed., rev. (London, 1883-1890), 2:631.

1. *Overview of the Magazine's Origin and History*

Wesley inaugurated *The Arminian Magazine* in January 1778 (he was then but six months from his seventy-fifth birthday) and continued to supervise its total content through the January 1791 number, which his book stewards published only six weeks prior to his death on March 2. The remainder of the fourteenth volume, for 1791, came forth under the direction of George Story of Hull, Wesley's trusted Yorkshire preacher and amanuensis, who superintended the periodical through 1797. Then, Story and Joseph Benson, one of the early editors of John Wesley's collected works, changed the name to the *Methodist Magazine*. Under this title it existed from 1798 to 1821. Then, for more than a century, from 1822 through 1932, it continued as the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, after which it returned to its former title of *The Methodist Magazine*.

However, if a serious student wishes to stretch the point of chronology, the monthly *Arminian Magazine* actually began twenty-nine years prior to January 1778. This was when John Wesley issued, between 1749 and 1755, his contribution to encyclopaedic literature, the fifty-five volume series entitled *The Christian Library: Consisting of Extracts from, and Abridgements of, the Choicest Pieces of Practical Divinity which have been published in the English Tongue*. It was printed in Bristol by William Pine.

Although separated by almost three decades, the purposes of *The Arminian Magazine* and *The Christian Library* were the same. For six years, John Wesley had spent most of his spare time in the construction of his self-contained library for the enlightenment of unenlightened Methodists: He read, digested, and rewrote practically the entire range of orthodox and Puritan literature—the Apostolic Fathers, the Christian martyrs, John Smith (the Cambridge Platonist), George Fox, Samuel Clarke, William Whateley. In *The Christian Library*, he proposed to provide members of Methodist societies with samples from the noblest of Christian authors; and as usual, his method was to remove objectionable and unimportant or conflicting ideas, after which he would revise ornamental language.

When the complete set had been published, Wesley went through all of the selections and marked passages that he never should have included in the first place—sentences and paragraphs

that ran afoul of his own doctrines. Simply, he had not the time to spend in supervising the publication of every one of the volumes, nor could he always determine that printers followed his meticulous directions. However, Wesley himself never published a revision of *The Christian Library*. Thomas Jackson, the early nineteenth-century editor of Wesley's works, uncovered the corrections and issued the second edition (London: Cordeaux, 1819-1827). Its thirty volumes contained Wesley's annotated version of the original, in addition to the supplementary abridgements that the Methodist founder had prepared but had never inserted into the 1749-1755 numbers.

As may clearly be observed from its full title, *The Arminian Magazine: Consisting of Extracts and Original Treatises on Universal Redemption*, Wesley's 1778 project came forth as an attempt to continue the purpose and the work of *The Christian Library*. However, for this newest endeavor, Wesley broadened the scope of this monthly journal and took aim directly at the intellects and the morals of British Methodists. He would add biographies of his preachers, correspondence related directly to Methodist activities, poetry that met with his own and his brother Charles's approval, and minutes of Methodist conferences. In later issues, he would insert sermons—those of his and others' composition. The initial number appeared on 1 January 1778, printed in London by Frys, Couchman and Collier, who produced the first two volumes; after that, from 1780 through 1791, Wesley transferred the printing to John Paramore, who produced the journal from the Foundry in Upper Moorfields and then from the New Chapel at City Road. In all, Paramore printed vols. 3 through 14.

However, *The Arminian Magazine* existed for reasons other than a simple expansion of *The Christian Library*, for Wesley could not always easily separate the political issues of the day from the higher educational and intellectual motives. From the outset, he needed an effective means by which to counter the scurrilous and often overheated attacks of the Calvinist elements within the Church of England, specifically those from the hymnodist and editor of the *Gospel Magazine*, Augustus Montague Toplady, who reacted with extreme violence against Wesley's position on free grace and his notion that England's war with her American colonies was not really in the best interests of the nation. At one end of the rhetorical see-saw, Toplady viewed Wesleyan Methodism as "the

famous Moorfields powder, whose chief ingredients are an equal portion of gross Heathenism, Pelagianism, Mahometanism, Popery, Manichaeism, Ranterism, and Antinomianism, culled, dried, and pulverized, and mingled with as much palpable Atheism as you can scrape together."²

For his own part, Wesley responded with equal vigor and venom. Those who opposed his *Calm Address to the American Colonies* (1775), he declared, had behaved "just as I expected they would. And let them lick up Mr. Toplady's spittle still: a champion worthy of their cause."³

Nonetheless, *The Arminian Magazine* did not suffer for long from such exchanges. Once Wesley forced himself to see beyond the limits of factional backbiting, the real rationale for his monthly journal emerged—those very reasons that gave legitimacy to the popularity of his project. By underscoring his demand that Methodist preachers devote a certain part of their time to methodical reading and study, by encouraging regular reading habits within all Methodist societies, by attempting to inculcate sound theology, and by striving to cultivate both piety and a sense of taste, the founder and leader of British Methodism committed himself first to dissemination of knowledge and second to a strong vehicle for that dissemination. And as some would still claim, *The Arminian Magazine* thus served as one of the earliest popular religious periodicals circulated throughout Britain, and it stood as one obvious symbol of that "wider constructive influence" of eighteenth-century Wesleyan Methodism to which Lecky referred.

2. *General Content of the Journal*

The Arminian Magazine became, then, John Wesley's grand focal point for spreading religious knowledge and concerns. As indicated earlier, it included excerpts from the works of others, letters to and from the Methodist leadership, anecdotes to illustrate the benefits from Methodist principles and practices, biographical sketches of worthy models (exemplars of piety and morality), and

²Quoted in Robert Southey, *The Life of Wesley and the Rise and Progress of Methodism* (1820; reprint, London, 1901), p. 179.

³Nehemiah Curnock, ed., *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M.* (London, 1909-1916), 6:85. (Hereinafter cited as *Journal*.)

the best representatives from religious and moral poetry (with Isaac Watts, Philip Doddridge, and Charles Wesley heading the list).

The Journal's Goals and Rationale

Holding firmly to the tradition of the eighteenth-century British literary periodical, somewhat reminiscent of Steele's proclamation of political neutrality in *The Spectator*, John Wesley actually announced, in his proposals of 14 August 1777, that *The Arminian Magazine* "will contain no news, no politics, no personal invectives, nothing offensive either to religion, decency, good nature, or good manners."⁴ Thus, at least the *prefaces* to the first four volumes (1778-1781) tended to focus on that general character of the *Magazine*, although the discerning reader could identify the strong political and theological overtones in the various pieces (as such devices were applied in making a thorough defense of British Methodism). In the prefaces to the remaining volumes under his direction (vols. 5 through 13, 1779-1790), Wesley limited himself to rather short pronouncements on the specific works contained therein.

In the initial volume, we learn, not surprisingly:

Our design is, to publish some of the most remarkable tracts on the universal love of God, and His willingness to save all men from sin, which have been wrote [*sic*] in this and the last century. Some of these are now grown very scarce; some have not appeared in English before. To these will be added original pieces, wrote [*sic*] either directly upon this subject, or on those which are equally opposed by the patrons of particular redemption.⁵

Further, Wesley indicated in this preface that the organization of each number would identify four parts: (1) a defence of the doctrine that "God willeth to all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (p. 280); (2) an extract from the life of a notable Christian (for example, James Arminius, Martin Luther, Bernard Gilpin, Peter Jaco, and John Atlay [even Wesley's troublesome book steward would have his day in the court of Christian

⁴Quoted in Luke Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley, M.A.* (1870; reprint, New York, 1872), 3:281.

⁵Thomas Jackson, ed., *The Works of the Reverend John Wesley* (London, 1829-1831), 14:279. (Hereinafter cited as *Works*.)

virtue]); (3) testimonials of Christian experiences; and (4) poetry to give rhythm in support of Methodist doctrine.

Criticisms, and Wesley's Attempts to Meet Them

In the preface to the second volume (dated 1 January 1779), Wesley turned his attention to the criticisms directed to *The Arminian Magazine* during its initial year of publication. Although he expressed some surprise at hearing "so few objections to the work" (p. 282), he nevertheless considered and countered specific points. Thus:

1. *It is too short*: He has added eight pages to each issue.
2. *It lacks variety*: There is enough variety, but he will add biographical accounts of Methodist preachers.
3. *It lacks illustrations*: He has added pictures, but is generally dissatisfied with the quality of the engravings.
4. *Certain of the tracts are hard to understand*: He will make them plainer.
5. *The letters are not spiritual enough*: He believes that they are more than abundant in spirituality.
6. *The poetry is not original enough*: He has added original verse.⁶

Wesley continued to concern himself with his readers' reactions in the preface to the third volume (London, 1 January 1780). Obvious to everyone, however, he was merely being polite, for he appears to have been suffering only from an excess of editorial riches: "I have still an abundance of letters in my hands, equal to any that have yet been published." Further, "I have likewise . . . abundance of verses, many of them original" (pp. 285-286).

In fact, in the preface to the fourth volume (1781), Wesley informed his readers that there exists not the slightest danger that he will exhaust either himself as a writer or his stock of others' compositions, while the number of his correspondents is increasing daily. Once again encountering objections about the quantity and the quality of the illustrative matter (he refused to trust *country* engravers!) and the variety of poems and biographies, he concludes that preface on a tone of heavy resignation that assumes, almost, the quality of final prayer:

⁶*Works*, 14:282-283.

These things we will do, if God permit. But who knows what we may do or be tomorrow? For what is our life? Is it not a vapour that just appears and vanishes away? O let us secure a permanent life that will remain when heaven and earth fall away!⁷

If nothing else, the prefatory statements to *The Arminian Magazine* indicate both the problems and the frustrations that arose from the project, while the actual contents identify not only what John Wesley had in mind for his popular periodical, but the extent to which he yielded to his readers' comments and criticisms. For example, the twelve numbers for 1779 (vol. 2) comprise 664 pages. These include six essays, fourteen accounts of lives (or biographical sketches with obvious moral emphasis), thirty-four letters on various subjects and written at various times between 1742 and 1778 (eight by John Wesley and twenty-six by sundry disciples of British Methodism), and eighty-three poems on obvious subjects and forms—including twenty-one Latin epigrams with Wesley's English translations; twenty-six hymns (most of them by John and Charles Wesley); six epitaphs of pious (and, presumably, Methodist) persons; two paraphrases of OT Psalms; and a single paraphrase of OT narrative.

True to his original organizational plan, Wesley inserted into this second volume of *The Arminian Magazine* essays in defense of Christian and Methodist doctrine—most of which he himself had written, or for which he had prepared extracts. Topics covered were "An Appeal to the Gospel for the True Doctrine of Divine Predestination," "God's Love to Mankind," "The Scripture Doctrine concerning Predestination, Election, and Reprobation," "Thoughts on Salvation by Faith," "A Treatise concerning Election and Reprobation," and "Predestination Calmly Considered."

The biographical sketches in this same volume, all written by John Wesley, obviously served as models of virtue and piety in their various forms and shapes. Wesley further determined that the achievements of those persons (who represented both the present and the past) would serve to establish a proper sense of direction for his followers and his readers. Therefore, the poet John Donne appeared within the pages of *The Arminian Magazine*, alongside

⁷*Works*, 14:289.

of James Ussher, Archbishop of Armagh and Primate of Ireland, and William Bedell, Bishop of Kilmore and Ardagh, who were two eminent scholars of the Established Church.

However, the true substance of the biographical sketches—to support Wesley's intent to reach out to all social and theological levels within his societies—can be found in the descriptions of those persons who roamed the island-kingdom in behalf of Wesleyan Methodism: Thomas Rankin, superintendent of the societies in America; Thomas Olivers, the sub-editor of *The Arminian Magazine* and an energetic participant in Wesley's paper war with Augustus Toplady and the Anglican Calvinists; and Sarah Ryan, an early female Methodist itinerant preacher and Wesley's housekeeper at Bristol and Kingswood School. In addition, Wesley introduced his readers to a close-knit cadre of circuit riders whose names, even among the current scholars of Methodist history, mean little: John Pawson, Alexander M'Nab of Perth, Benjamin Rhodes, John Oliver, Thomas Tennant, William Hunter, John Allen, and John Merlin (known, popularly, as "The Weeping Prophet of High Wycomb"). Wesley saw them all as true symbols of integrity, sincerity, and simplicity; in turn, all of them responded to what he asked of them and ordered them to do. From the pages of *The Arminian Magazine*, Methodism's founder and leader hoped that the records of such individuals might reach forth and affect others with the zeal and dedication of the eighteenth-century evangelical revival.

Examples of Organization and Content of the Journal

A fairly close look at one number from the second volume, September 1779, reveals how Wesley, rather early in his editorship, organized the material at hand. To begin, he spread the longer pieces over a number of issues. Thus, "A Treatise concerning Election and Reprobation" (an extract from Robert Barclay's *Apology for the True Christian Divinity* [1678]) appeared serially in *The Arminian Magazine* from April through October 1779. Also in the September issue of 1779, he inserted the second of the three installments of his "Life of Dr. Donne,"⁸ followed by a fairly recent

⁸Tyerman, 3:316-317, claims that the Donne biographical sketch was "mentioned by Wesley's own pen, though never included in his collected Works." It does not exist in Jackson's 1829-1831 edition.

(dated 1 July 1779) biographical essay, "An Account of Mr. Thomas Tennant. Written by Himself. In a Letter to the Rev. Mr. John Wesley." The final prose piece was a letter (again, more of an essay than a simple epistle) written by Wesley from Kingswood on 12 March 1756 to William Dodd, the popular preacher of Magdalen Hospital, tutor to Lord Chesterfield's son, and best known because of Johnson's literary efforts on his behalf. This letter was in response to that Anglican cleric's attack upon the doctrine of Christian perfection.

Wesley concluded his September 1779 number with two poetic pieces: Matthew Prior's lengthy "Henry and Emma"; and an unidentified Latin epigram, with Wesley's translation. A number of the faithful objected to Prior's poem because it was not strictly religious (or, perhaps like Johnson, they thought it dull and tedious), and therefore they considered it out of place in *The Arminian Magazine*. Nonetheless, the editor termed it "one of the finest poems in the English language; and whoever can read it without tears, must have a stupid, unfeeling heart." But Wesley also added, "I do not know that anything of the same kind will appear in any other following Magazines."⁹

Indeed, Wesley proved so sensitive to his readers' reactions that he constantly shifted emphasis and form. Again, as but a single representative sample, we may notice the differences between this second volume, from 1779, and the ninth one, from 1786. Although the latter contains only twenty-four additional pages (688 as opposed to 664 for vol. 2), it holds a total of 189 items—fifty-two more than the earlier volume. But Wesley had gone beyond simply adding to the size of his issues. Its twenty-three essays were considerably shorter; and in addition to these, the readers could find the following: three moral dialogues; seven of Wesley's sermons; fourteen biographical sketches; four letters from noted persons of the past (Christopher Columbus and Mary Queen of Scots being two); twenty-six letters written to Wesley; seventy-four short narrative-descriptive accounts of death, extraordinary occurrences, journeys, locales, and moral anecdotes; thirty-four poems (no hymns or psalm paraphrases, but including selected passages from Pope's *Messiah* and Gray's *Elegy*); and, as appropriate conclusions, three copies of the wills of prominent Methodists.

⁹*Works*, 14:285.

The 1786 volume of *The Arminian Magazine* truly reflects an aspect of John Wesley's leadership and control over British Methodism. Although he remained alert to his followers' legitimate intellectual and spiritual requirements, he ignored their whims and fancies. Once he had decided upon the specific contributors to their moral well being, he sought to provide these in abundance.

Although the authorship of the pieces in *The Arminian Magazine* cannot always be quickly determined, Wesley did provide a loose index of names, titles, and subjects for each bound volume. In terms of identification, the prose pieces prove no serious problem, for Wesley himself wrote the largest portion at one time or another, while he revised, altered, and extracted the remainder (even though at times the original authorship may not be easily identified).

The same general observation may be made regarding the poetry. Determining its authorship is not overly difficult. Although most of the passages themselves contain no reference to the author (i.e., no "byline"), and recognizing that Wesley tended toward slight textual changes, we can nevertheless ascertain authorship by means of the names in the index, by the poetic forms used, and by the titles themselves. Thus, the reader could observe such titles as "A Translation of a Latin Epitaph, Written by Sir Richard Blackmore, On His Lady" (vol. 5, August 1782, p. 445); "Hymn to Adversity: by Gray" (vol. 10, July 1787, pp. 391-392); "A Contemplation on Night (By Mr. Gay)" (vol. 10, March 1787, p. 167); "The Second Satyr of Persius (Translated by Mr. Dryden)" (vol. 10, December 1787, p. 664); "The Miser and Plutus (A Fable by Mr. Gay)" (vol. 10, November 1787, p. 613); and "Edwin and Angelina (by Dr. Goldsmith)" (vol. 10, p. 500).

The textual changes themselves tended to reflect either a particular edition consulted by Wesley, or his own linguistic or rhythmical whims. For example, line 212 from James Thomson's *Winter* reads "Where are you now? and what is your amount?" In *The Arminian Magazine* (vol. 11, December 1788, p. 669), Wesley retitles a passage from *Winter* as "A Night-Piece on a Sick Bed" and changes the foregoing line to read, "Where ye now? and what is your amount?" In quoting from Dryden's translation of Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*—particularly from the prologue to the Parson's Tale (which Wesley in vol. 11, March 1788, p. 165, entitled "The Character of a Good Parson: Imitated from Chaucer"),

Wesley makes modification: The late seventeenth-century poet wrote, "Refined himself to soul, to curb the sense,/And made almost a sin of abstinence"; Wesley changed the lines to read, "Denyed himself so far, to curb his sense,/He made almost a sin of abstinence." As a final instance of Wesley's editorial hand, we may note a passage from John Gay's "A Contemplation on Night." The original reads, "The blooming flowers with opening beauty glow," which Wesley changed to "The blooming flowers with opening beauty flow" (vol. 10, March 1787, p. 167). However, such revisions remain minor, since the largest portion of verse in *The Arminian Magazine* represents what John Wesley wanted his readers to read and to assimilate—hymns written by Charles Wesley, Isaac Watts, and Philip Doddridge; and carefully extracted fragments from works by Abraham Cowley, Matthew Prior, John Byron, James Macpherson, Phillis Wheatley, and Alexander Pope.

Noted prose writers who were represented in Wesley's periodical include the theologian Richard Baxter, the humanist Desiderius Erasmus, the philosopher Emanuel Swedenborg, and the physician George Cheyne. However, the reader must search for those writers. *The Arminian Magazine*, under Wesley's firm direction, remained a *Methodist* miscellany. Its editor never solicited material from the literati of the day, nor did he appear particularly inclined to include works from those writers whose definition of, and purposes for, literature differed radically from his own. His definition, although never formulated as such, may nonetheless be found in a number of his tracts. For instance, in *A Plain Account of Kingswood School* (1781), the Methodist leader announced that "particular care is taken that nothing immodest or profane be found in any of our authors. . . . We take care that our books be not only inoffensive, but useful, too; that they contain as much strong, sterling sense, and as much genuine morality, as possible; yea, and Christian morality."¹⁰

Within the prefaces to various volumes of *The Arminian Magazine*, he further defined literature simply by setting forth, and thereby establishing, his critical criteria. Thus, in the introductory remarks to the fourth volume (1781, p. 3), he determined not to "fill up any publication of mine with bits and scraps, to humour any one living." He stated further that "I am not fond of verbose

¹⁰*Works*, 13:295.

writers, neither of very long treatises. I conceive, the size of a book is not always the measure of the writer's understanding. Nay, I believe if angels were to write books, we should have very few folios." As one further clue to Wesley's definition of literature we may note that in the third volume of *The Arminian Magazine* he included Matthew Prior's "Henry and Emma." Although this was not a religious poem, the piece attracted Wesley because it contained "nothing that can offend the chastest ears." Further, he considered it "one of the finest poems in the English tongue, both for sentiment and language; and whoever can read it without tears, must have a stupid, unfeeling heart" (vol. 3, 1780, p. 3).

The prose in *The Arminian Magazine* also certainly reflects the sentiments of the foregoing statements about the meaning, function, and form of literature. Of course, most of that prose came from Wesley's own pen. Even so, his editorial methods seem, today, as interesting as the actual content of the works themselves. Essentially, Wesley knew the benefits to be derived from serializing. He not only could control and even reduce the length of works (his own, as well as that of others), but he could just as easily hold on to his readers, retaining them from one number to the next.

As an illustration of his serializing, we may notice how he managed a prose tract entitled *The Calvinist-Cabinet Unlocked: in an Apology for Tilenus against a Vindication of the Synod of Dort*. Wesley first inserted the piece into the January 1783 number, on pp. 3-6. Then he carried it forth—four to five pages at a time—through the next *twenty-three* numbers!¹¹ For two years, he literally spoon-fed this highly charged dialogue to his audience in small doses; for the same length of time, he kept his Methodist followers tuned to the arguments surrounding the Arminianism-Calvinism

¹¹Exactly how Wesley distributed *The Calvinist-Cabinet Unlocked* may be seen as follows:

Volume 6 (1783)—January, pp. 3-6; February, pp. 57-61; March, pp. 113-117; April, pp. 169-172; May, pp. 225-229; June, pp. 281-284; July, pp. 337-341; August, pp. 393-397; September, pp. 449-452; October, pp. 505-508; November, pp. 561-566; December, pp. 625-628.

Volume 7 (1784)—January, pp. 307; February, pp. 61-66; March, pp. 117-120; April, pp. 173-178; May, pp. 229-233; June, pp. 285-289; July, pp. 341-346; August, pp. 397-402; September, pp. 453-457; October, pp. 509-513; November, pp. 565-569; December, pp. 621-626.

controversy that had existed since the seventeenth century and had taken so much of his own time and energy.

Wesley's Own Prose Contributions

However, the heart of the prose found in *The Arminian Magazine* remains those works written by John Wesley himself—sermons, letters, tracts, and extracts from earlier moments in his long life. The monthly journal gave the aged Wesley one additional opportunity to contact his followers, even though a number of them had heard the message before. Through *The Arminian Magazine*, he could provide readers with a sense of person, a sense of life, and a thread of unity behind the seeming variety of his periodic miscellany of Methodism. Thus, he exhorted his readers by reprinting a number of his earlier sermons; and those who gazed upon the language of his message received, at the same time, the animated force that declared the source of his authority.

In his sermon "On Divine Providence" (vol. 9, March 1786, pp. 125-131), for instance, he explicated the omnipresence of God, "who sees and knows all the properties of the beings that He hath made. He knows all the connections, dependencies and relations, and all the ways wherein one of them can affect another." In "The More Excellent Way," a sermon carried over into two numbers (vol. 10, July and August, 1787, pp. 341-346, 398-406), he includes a purely autobiographical incident to illustrate how the Christian must spend his money. Recounting his own days as a Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford, living on £28 per year, he states:

He lived on twenty-eight, and gave away forty shillings. The next year receiving sixty pounds, he still lived on twenty-eight, and gave away two and thirty. The third year he received ninety pounds, and gave away sixty-two. The fourth year he received a hundred and twenty pounds. Still he lived as before on twenty-eight; and gave to the poor ninety-two. Was not this a more excellent way?

Indeed, the practicality of John Wesley was such that it became an essential element of his theological and personal composition; it proved to be a major reason for the success of British Methodism in the eighteenth century. *The Arminian Magazine* served as a means whereby Wesley could, with expedition, disseminate that practicality among the lower classes.

Two Major "Key Documents" on Methodism

In addition to containing reprints of Wesley's sermons, the monthly journal housed major documents by Wesley that underscored the problems surrounding British Methodism. Two of these may serve as examples. On 4 August 1786, immediately following the annual Conference, the Methodist patriarch remained in London to write his "Thoughts upon Methodism," which he inserted into *The Arminian Magazine* for February 1787 (vol. 10, pp. 100-102). The eleven-paragraph essay exists as a summary of John Wesley's fears for the future of Methodism. Simply, he viewed his evangelical organization as "plain, scriptural religion, guarded by a few prudential regulations. The essence of it is holiness of heart and life. . . ." However, he saw, from one perspective, the very *virtue* of Methodism becoming the cause of its downfall: "For religion must necessarily produce both industry and frugality; and these cannot but produce riches. But as riches increase, so will pride, anger, and love of the world. . . ." The solution? Simply this: Methodists, to continue as Christians, must "save all they can" so as to "give all they can; then, the more they gain, the more they will grow in grace, and the more treasure they will lay up in Heaven."

The force of the essay comes not only from Wesley's clear prose style, but from his balance of emotion with logic and common sense. He wrote the piece out of a sense of deep concern, but he never abandoned reason. In the excerpt quoted above, he identified a possible consequence, of "holiness of heart and life," but he never totally gave in to it: "As long as they [holiness of heart and life] are joined together in the people called Methodists, no weapon formed against them shall prosper. But if even the circumstantial parts are despised, the essential will soon be lost. And if ever the essential parts should evaporate, what remains will be dung and dross."

Finally, Wesley generated clarity in his essay from his organization of the material and his attention to conciseness and brevity. The opening paragraph contains the reason for writing the essay, paragraphs 2 through 7 set forth a brief sketch of Methodism, paragraphs 8 through 10 outline the dilemma, and the final paragraph announces the simple solution.

The second example of a key document on Methodism appearing in *The Arminian Magazine* takes the form of a letter—one of the most important letters that Wesley composed. He wrote it from London on 20 December 1751 and sent it to one of his preachers, Ebenezer Blackwell; and he inserted it into *The Arminian Magazine* for June 1779 (vol. 2, pp. 310-317) under the title “A Letter on Preaching Christ.” In this epistle, Wesley outlines the results of his experiences as a preacher of the gospel, describing the specific methods of preaching that he had found to be effective. He begins with simple definitions of his principal terms:

I mean by “preaching the gospel” preaching the love of God to sinners, preaching the life, death, resurrection, and intercession of Christ, with all the blessings which in consequence thereof are freely given to true believers. By “preaching the law” I mean explaining and enforcing the commands of Christ briefly comprised in the Sermon on the Mount.

Then, directing his attention to the Apostles and the NT epistles, Wesley singles out Paul, James, Peter, and John as having “built up believers.” He, his brother Charles, and several of the early Methodist preachers followed these Apostolic models, and they thus succeeded in establishing, maintaining, and increasing the Methodist societies throughout Britain. However, he continues, there then came along a “new manner” of preaching—“speaking much of the promises, little of the commands (even to unbelievers, and still less to believers). . . .” Thus, Wesley intended his letter as a directive to his preachers, as a strict warning for them to follow only the “scriptural way, the *Methodist* way, the true way.”

In reprinting his epistle to Ebenezer Blackwell in *The Arminian Magazine*, John Wesley sought to broaden the range of his recipients, to include both Methodist preachers *and* their listeners. The essential metaphor of the piece may appear to have been severely overworked (even for Wesley’s day), but again, the Methodist patriarch sought the quickest road to clarity and simplicity:

The “gospel preachers” so called corrupt their hearers; they vitiate their taste, so that they cannot relish sound doctrine; and spoil their appetite, so that they cannot turn it into nourishment; they . . . feed them with sweetmeats, till the genuine wine of the kingdom seems quite insipid to them. They give them cordial

upon cordial, which makes them all life and spirit for the present; but meantime their appetite is destroyed, so that they can neither retain nor digest the pure milk of the Word.

Once again, Wesley could prove to the world that those who did not understand the essence of British Methodism simply did not want to understand. By virtue of his being a writer and being an editor of a *popular* religious journal, there existed little else that he could do to explicate and to clarify his own position.

3. *Conclusion: The Arminian Magazine in Retrospect*

Viewed from the distance of two centuries, *The Arminian Magazine* may appear dull and undistinguished—marked, at best, by a rehash of what had been written forty or fifty years earlier. However, when placed within the context of the significance of eighteenth-century British Methodism—alongside its conventions of chapel service, class and band and society meetings, love feasts, and annual conferences—, this journal assumed significance in and for the specialized world of Methodist activity. *The Arminian Magazine* symbolized John Wesley's own method of gathering and disseminating knowledge. Throughout his life, the founder and leader of Methodism probably possessed as much general knowledge as any among his contemporaries; yet, he really never bothered to focus upon a single aspect of learning. Thus, by choice and by the nature of his mission to serve mankind, he applied what he knew to the advancement of what may be termed *popular enlightenment*; his *Arminian Magazine* became his own receptacle to house what he considered essential knowledge—information that he could easily deposit and then regularly distribute to his societies throughout the island-kingdom. John Wesley, according to the editor of his "Journals," existed as "the best gatherer and scatterer of useful knowledge that Georgian England knew."¹²

As long as Wesley remained alive to direct and control *The Arminian Magazine*, it served as the best possible means for spreading and imposing culture upon his followers. Further, it did well to serve his own socio-political interests at opportune moments—such as the support for William Wilberforce's anti-slave trade

¹²*Journal*, 1:21.

crusade, and the appeal for Sunday schools. But when John Wesley died on 2 March 1791, the magazine that was the real force and spirit of Wesleyan Methodism, as the eighteenth century knew it, expired with him.

The same may be said, of course, of its rivals, too. Toplady had passed from the scene thirteen years earlier, within the same year that saw the birth of *The Arminian Magazine*; and his *Gospel Magazine* lasted but another six years before it gave way to *The Spiritual Magazine*. By 1793, the *Evangelical Magazine* had assumed responsibility for Toplady's brand of Calvinism, but its editors determined that their pages would be "devoid of personality and acrimonious reflections on any sect of professing Christians."

In 1798, *The Arminian Magazine* became, simply, *The Methodist Magazine*. With the name change came also the declaration that "Calvinists and Wesleyans have ceased to irritate each other."¹³ Nevertheless, John Wesley's venture into the area of popular periodical literature had come forth as more than a mere irritant; in the truest sense, *The Arminian Magazine* had transmitted to his followers his notion that they must maintain the highest levels of religious and intellectual commitment, and it had enabled him to exercise a cultural and even educational influence over those who were, in the vast majority of instances, morally and intellectually inferior to him. *The Arminian Magazine* was, then, as Wesley himself envisioned it, still another beacon of warm light by which the founder and leader of British Methodism might turn his membership away from the cold, material inducements of late eighteenth-century industrialization and guide them toward a better life in a better world.

¹³John Walsh, "Methodism in the End of the Eighteenth Century," in *A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain*, ed. Rupert Davies and Gordon Rupp (London, 1965), 1:298.