

MS Address to a Friend¹

Thomas Williams (1721–87) came from a respected family in Llanishen, Glamorgan, Wales. He matriculated at Jesus College, Oxford in October 1739, but did not complete his university education. In 1741, back home in Llanishen, he was converted under the preaching of Charles Wesley. Soon after he became an itinerant preacher, often traveling with Charles. In 1743 he got involved in conflicts with Anglican clergy in Darlaston and Walsall, and was criticized by John Wesley for his “inexcusable folly” at Wednesbury. These events fostered estrangement between Williams and the Wesley brothers, leading him to seek ordination in the Church of England in 1744. This attempt was foiled by Charles Wesley, in part because Williams lacked a university degree. Resentment over this interference inclined Williams to accept and publicize some (unfounded) allegations of immoral conduct by Charles Wesley. In response, John Wesley expelled Williams from the itinerancy in August 1744.² A sense of the dynamics and pain of these events can be gained from Charles Wesley’s *MS Journal*, May–October 1744.

This painful episode is the setting of “An Address to a Friend,” which is transcribed below. The lengthy poem is addressed to Sarah Perrin. Perrin had been a confidant of Charles Wesley, but she was apparently swayed for a time by the charges Williams was making (see lines 104–113, and 165–66). Charles’s verse fluctuates between proclaiming his innocence and resigning himself to this trial, as from God’s hand. The poem is in shorthand and it is unlikely that Wesley ever shared the text with Perrin. In any case, Williams soon recanted the charges and the friendship of Wesley and Perrin was restored.

“An Address to a Friend” is a portion of MS Shorthand Letters, a notebook containing Charles Wesley’s transcripts of a number of letters in shorthand. The first section of MS Shorthand Letters, on 26 numbered pages starting from the front of the volume, contains copies of family letters from 1717 to the 1730s. The second section, on 31 numbered pages starting from the back of the volume, contains copies of letters from the 1740s. This second section is immediately followed by four unnumbered pages containing the text of “An Address to a Friend” in shorthand.

A longhand rendering of “An Address to a Friend,” done by Elijah Hoole, was published by Osborn in *Poetical Works*. The rendering below was prepared in consultation with Dr. Timothy Underhill, who is a specialist on John Byrom’s system of shorthand. It corrects Hoole’s deciphering of several words and includes some text he omitted (major changes are indicated in footnotes). As a further difference from the Osborn version, we have utilized Charles Wesley’s typical manuscript spelling, punctuation, and capitalization in our expansion of the shorthand. We have not been concerned to reproduce page breaks, since the use of shorthand allowed Wesley to condense the entire poem to only three pages in the notebook.

“An Address to a Friend” is placed in the section of this online collection devoted to controversy over lay preachers and ordination because it is one of the first instances of conflict raised by Charles Wesley’s resistance to anyone seeking ordination without a full university education.

MS Shorthand Letters is part of the collection in the Methodist Archive and Research Centre, accession number MA 1977/567 (Charles Wesley Notebooks Box 2). The transcription below is provided with permission of the Librarian and Director, The John Rylands Library, The University of Manchester.

¹This document was produced by the Duke Center for Studies in the Wesleyan Tradition under editorial direction of Randy L. Maddox, with the diligent assistance of Aileen F. Maddox. Last updated: August 1, 2010.

²By the end of 1744 Williams had recanted the charges and was reinstated, though only as a probationer. He served in both Ireland and England under John Wesley until he was expelled again in 1755 for an unknown offence. He was later ordained into the Anglican ministry, through the advocacy of Lady Huntingdon.

An Address to a Friend³
(Sarah Perrin) [...] in the Fatal Year.⁴

A captive Wretch removing to and fro,
A Man of Strife and exercis'd in Woe,
On Thee my Friend I call by Griefs opprest,
And pour my Soul into thy faithful Breast,
Its heaviest Load with ling'ring Pain impart,
And wound reluctantly thy tender Heart.

Thy tender Heart hath oft my Burden borne,
Nor e'er rejoic'd when I was call'd to mourn,
Thy tender Heart with softest Sympathy
How will it now lament and grieve for me! 10
For me, by Foes, and treacherous Friends pursu'd,
Pierc'd with the Darts of keen Ingratitude,
Mangl'd by filial Hands, and forc'd to groan
Beneath the Crimes of an apostate Son,
A Rebel thirsting for his Father's Blood,
As Moloch cruel, and as Belial lewd,
Stubborn, revengeful, fierce, implacable,
And proud and harden'd as the Prince of Hell,
My faithful Brutus, mine egregious Ham,
Nor need I add that W[illiams] is his Name.⁵ 20

Poor reckless Prodigal, by Grace Divine
Drawn from his Husks, his Harlots, and his Wine,
My Arms receiv'd him with a fond Embrace,
I kiss'd the Filth and Sorrow from his Face,
For him I join'd th' acclaiming Host above,
And lov'd him with my heavenly Father's Love,
Cared for his Soul with never-wearied Care,
Son of my Choice and Burden of my Prayer,
Rejoic'd and gloried when he did run well,
Labour'd his Faults and Follies to conceal, 30

³Published posthumously in *Poetical Works*, 13:272–80 (as rendered from shorthand by Elijah Hoole), with this shortened title. Other major differences with Hoole's rendering will be noted.

⁴Wesley identifies Perrin in a parenthetical comment. The subtitle has one further word (or phrase) in shorthand, indicated by [...], that has not been deciphered.

⁵This couplet was omitted in the transcription of Hoole.

In Toils and Tears my kind Concern exprest
And cherish'd the young Viper in my Breast,
Till by my Friendship warm'd he shot his Dart,
His Sting of subornation⁶ to my Heart.

See the bold Wretch, again for Satan bold,
By Pride to every desperate Evil sold,
Head of a Ruffian Band in malice join'd,
Scum of the Church and Scandal of Mankind,
Choice Synagogue, by dire Revenge allied, 40
Worthy of such a Cause and such a Guide,
Whose calmer Thought may moderate their Zeal,
Give each their Part and stroke them to his Will,
Whose Wisdom may in League offensive join
The tutor'd Harlot and the Sound Divine,
Their horrid Tale more plaus'bly to indite,
And teach th' infernal Frogs to croak aright.

Fit Instrument for Satan's rage t' employ,
To stop the Work he never can destroy,
His dreaded Foes to blacken and defame
And charge his Conqueror with his Church's Shame. 50
As Satan would by those⁷ himself expel,
Spoil his own Realms, and shake the Gates of Hell,
While Thousands whom from him to God we turn,
Bless the glad Day that ere these Hypocrites were born.

Yet O my Friend I feel the recent Wound,
No Medicine for a broken Heart is found,
Shall I from Thee my deepest Anguish hide?
The Rod hangs fasten'd in my bleeding Side.
No mean Abhorrence of the destin'd Cross, 60
No Fear that God should not maintain his Cause,
But sore Distress afflicts ev'n those I love,
Even those whom Satan never yet could move,
Whom all th' opposing World could never part,
Or tear them from the Fibres of my Heart.

⁶I.e., Williams' witness to the false accusations.

⁷The rendering "by those" is a bit uncertain.

But now they stand far off, nor dare draw nigh,
 Aw'd by a bold authenticated Lie,
 Shrink from the foul Reproach, th' injurious Shame,
 And leave me brand'd with a Felon's Name.
 Leave me—for O the wise Decree is past!
 Leave me into the Den of Lions cast, 70
 Give up their Friend to all th' Accuser's Power,
 And Honour's Signet seals the Dungeon Door.

Honour, the Mede's unalterable Law,
 Hath bound my Friends and kept their Love in awe,
 Struck off their promis'd Aid and far remov'd
 From one whom once in Jesus' Love they lov'd.
 Who dares in such a Wretch's Cause appear? }
 Ah tender Souls, I feel the modest Fear, }
 The Test for human Virtue too severe!⁸ }
 What Strength sufficient to support my Wrong, 80
 Or stand the Torrent of so lewd⁹ a Tongue,
 Sustain so huge a Crash, and stem the Tide
 With Fear and Blasphemy on every Side,¹⁰
 While high and low in one Design conspire,
 The shameless Parasite and Reverend Sire,
 And Men and Fiends the righteous Sentence give,
 "It is not fit for such a Wretch to live."

Drag out that Naboth! set him up on high,
 By hostile Hands let the Blasphemer die.
 Adulterer, Hypocrite! th' Fact is plain: 90
 Would Harlots take the Name of God in vain?
 Did ere Revenge so foul a Venom shed,
 Or load with Crimes so black the guiltless Head?
 Who ever heard that Renegades would lie, }
 Or Liars urg'd rise up to perjury? }
 Away with him, nor suffer his Reply.

⁸Brackets for triplets are not present in the shorthand, but they are common in Wesley's longhand manuscripts and in printed versions.

⁹Hoole rendered this word as "foul."

¹⁰Hoole rendered this line: "With Fear and Follies of my own Fireside."

Down the swift Stream of popular Rancour borne,
 Away with him! the Witnesses have sworn
 O'rerule his idle Athanasian¹¹ Plea
 'Gainst Treason, Murder, and Adultery: 100
 Stand forth ye Witnesses, your Charge repeat,
 Stone the vile Hypocrite, his Doom complete,
 And lay your Garments down at his Assailants' Feet. }

Rejoice ye Philistines, the Way is found
 T' afflict my Soul with a perpetual Wound,
 Securely arm'd in every other Part,
 This only Avenue could reach my Heart;
 This only dire Device had power to rend
 That constant Spirit from its injur'd Friend: 110
 Not all the Rage of Fiends and Men could move,
 Nor Chains nor Dungeons rob me of her Love;
 Nor Racks nor Fires could force her to disown
 A Man of God and Preacher of his Son:
 But O can purest Light with Darkness dwell,
 A Man of God uphold a Child of Hell?
 No, Ruffians, no, if your Report were true,
 Devils alone are fit for such as you.
 Nor will your Lord who set your Tongues on Fire,
 Defraud his faithful Labourers of their Hire. 120
 Open to meet you with its muster'd Bands,
 Not Potiphar's but Satan's Prison stands.
 Who love or make a Lie shall there appear,
 And ye who scorn or God or Man to fear
 Shall gnaw the Tongue ye used so vilely here. }

Till then, if sworn to perish in your Crime,
 Fill up your Measure and sin out your Time.
 Poor dying Worms enjoy your short-liv'd Boast,
 And vex a Captain¹² of the Lord of Hosts.
 Vex him ye cannot hurt, with Lies molest,
 Defame, swear on, and drive me to my Rest. 130
 Fulfil my Wish and seem your own to have,
 Haste, and bring down my Hairs with Sorrow to the Grave.

¹¹Hoole rendered this word as "Euthanasian."

¹²Hoole rendered this word as "Soldier."

Thou faithful Partner of my bleeding Heart,
 Whom Hell could never from thy Pastor part,
 Will Thou not join my long-continu'd Prayer,
 And ask a Period to my hapless Care?
 O what is Life to one undone like me?
 Bitterness all, and [Grief¹³], and Agony!
 For what, while Angels beckon me away,
 For what should I on Earth imprison'd stay? 140
 Perchance to see the swift Destruction come,
 Our Nation's Downfall and our Country's Doom,¹⁴
 The wasting Fire, the desolating Sword,
 And all the Plagues of Heaven's avenging Lord.
 To see the general Wreck I cannot share,
 Safe in the Gulf of temporal Despair;
 Kingdoms may rise or fall, my Change is ore,
 Sceptres depart, but I can lose no more.

O what a Loss¹⁵ is mine, where no Relief
 Can ever ease me of a Moment's Grief! 150
 Commensurate with Life the Sorrow flows,
 Wave after Wave, and Woes succeeding Woes;
 My Brethren's Sympathy, my Church's Fears,
 And fond Concern, and unavailing Tears;
 The Triumph of the proud Philistines' Host,
 As all were with one useless Shepherd lost,
 As God's whole Work would in my Ruin end,
 And Christ had left his Flock with my departed Friend.

Nay, but the mighty Loss is all my own,
 I fall by Ruffian Hands, and fall alone. 160
 Their Rage is emptied on my single Head,
 Their Charge against my only Soul is laid:
 A Charge so horrible my Soul defies,
 Though strengthen'd by ten thousand Perjuries:
 And can my Friend the hellish Tale receive?
 She seems alas! t' assent—and yet I live!

¹³This looks like “Life” or “Love” in the shorthand; Hoole rendered “Grief,” which fits the context.

¹⁴Wesley is referring to the threatened French invasion of early 1744; see his related *Hymns for Times of Trouble* (1744), and *Hymns for Times of Trouble and Persecution* (1744), elsewhere on this website.

¹⁵Hoole rendered this word as “Life.”

O God for what am I reserved? or why
 Held on the Rack of Life? Forbad to die,
 Constrain'd¹⁶ beneath thy heaviest Plague to stand, 170
 And feel the Bruisings of thy vengeful Hand?
 Why hath thy Wrath let loose these Dogs of Hell?
 Thy Ways and Judgments are unsearchable!
 Yet suffer me to ask why didst Thou give
 That fatal Gift, and let th' Abortive live,
 Rear'd by a Miracle (of Wrath or Grace?)
 Why hast Thou kept me all my youthful Days?
 In Deaths so oft, ah, wherefore wouldst Thou save
 From the kind Fever, and the watery Grave,
 In sorer Ills exert thy guardian Care,
 Save me from Sin and break the Fowler's Snare, 180
 Preserve from every great Transgression free,
 And shew forth all thy saving Power in me.

Surely Thou didst as at my Birth instil
 A sacred¹⁷ Horror of external Ill.
 I durst not tread the Path by Sinners trod,
 Do this great Crime and Sin against my God.
 Thou know'st, for all our Hearts to Thee are seen,
 Thou know'st I am not here like other Men,
 Though born in Sin, the Seeds of every Vice,
 Anger, Desire, and Pride, and Avarice, 190
 My Soul hath oft with deep Abhorrence found,
 Yet still thy Grace did above Sin abound,
 Thy Grace restrain'd my every mean Desire,
 And kept the Bush unburnt amidst the Fire,
 Thy Grace hedg'd up my Way on every Side,
 And held me from the Paths of Vice and Pride.
 Thou know'st, for Thou hast wrought the Work alone,
 For Thou my Soul hast in Temptation known,
 Nor can I from thy Sight a Thought conceal,
 Searcher of Hearts I dare to Thee appeal, 200
 Thou knowest I am not wicked —

¹⁶Hoole rendered this word as "Compell'd."

¹⁷Hoole rendered this word as "secret."

Have I not then misspent my useless Fears,
 And lost an Ocean of unwonted¹⁸ Tears,
 Have I not toil'd with unavailing Pain,
 And wash'd my Hands in Innocence in vain,
 While Devils in the Dust mine Honour tread,
 And human Fiends ride ore my guiltless Head,
 Fill all my Entrails and my Soul with Gall,
 While innocent beneath their Rage I fall,
 And perish by the Hand of this infernal Saul?

Father of Mercies and Compassions hear
 The broken Accents of my dying Prayer,
 God of unbounded Love my Sorrow see,
 My Shame, and let thy Bowels answer me!
 Dost Thou take pleasure in thy Creature's Pain,
 Or willingly afflict the Sons of Man?
 O no, thy Nature is to save and bless,
 Thy Pleasure is our Life and Happiness.
 Tho' what thy Wisdom doth I know not now,
 To thy permissive Will my Soul I bow,
 Thy secret Mercy in the Judgment own,
 And sink into the Depths of Love unknown.
 Could Thou have won me with my Sin to part,
 And cast the Idol Honour from my Heart,
 Thy tender Hand would never have applied
 This burning Caustic to consume my Pride.

Whom then have I t' accuse? A sinful Man,
 Why should I of my Punishment complain?
 If chasten'd less than my Desserts I am,
 Worthy of Death and everlasting Shame,
 Shall I not wisely kiss th' afflicting Rod,
 And stoop beneath the mighty Hand of God?
 With Patience to my penal Cure submit,
 The bitter Herbs with meek Submission eat,
 And sing the Paschal Psalm, my God adore,
 And never faint and never murmur more.

¹⁸The shorthand for this word is unclear.

Down stubborn Heart with that rebellious Sigh,
 Thou art not suffer'd yet to break and die!
 Alas how fruitless all my Strife and Pain,
 My best Resolves how impotent and vain! 240
 I would submit, but Lord I want the Power,
 And all I am cries Save me from this Hour!
 Father if possible this Cup remove,
 The Cup of Life embitter'd, from above
 Send down thy Hand, and take my Spirit up.
 Out of the mighty Waters feed my Hope,
 Wondrous Impossibility to see,
 A Blessing in mine End reserv'd for me.

Till then my agonising Strength repair,
 And let the Loss torment, the Vultures tear 250
 Mine growing¹⁹ Heart, but Thou my Soul sustain
 Or quell or stem my Pain.²⁰
 But give me Eyes of vital Faith to see
 Thy Hand as reaching out the Cup; of Thee
 May I receive the Draught, of Thee alone,
 The cursing Shimei and the rebel Son.
 No Respite of my Punishment I crave,
 No Joy, no Place of Refuge but the Grave.
 Here only let me spend my Life in Sighs,²¹
 But wipe at last the Sorrow from my Eyes, } 260
 And save my Soul from Death, the Death that never dies.

¹⁹Perhaps Wesley intended “groaning heart,” but the letter “n” is not present in the shorthand.

²⁰This is all that appears in the shorthand. Hoole apparently considered it an incomplete line and provided an alternative rendering: “Or quite release, or ease me of my Pain.”

²¹This word is spelled “sithes” in the shorthand.