

MS Tribute to John Wesley (1787)¹

On February 4, 1814 Sarah Wesley Jr. sent a letter to Joseph Benson at City Road Chapel, in regards to the impending publication of an edition of Charles Wesley's hymns. In her letter she included a transcript of a poem, titled "On the Rev'd John Wesley," that she said was found by her mother among the papers of Charles Wesley when he died. Sarah Jr. was sending it for possible inclusion in the volume. Benson did not choose to include it. Indeed, **it has not been published in any setting prior to inclusion in this online collection**. This may be because the manuscript original that Sarah Jr. copied has not survived. We are dependent upon her transcript for any knowledge of this poem.

The poem is a vibrant expression of praise for John Wesley's long life of ministry in the "British fold." This emphasis is striking, because Sarah Jr. states that the poem was written by Charles the year before his death—in 1787. It sounds a significantly different tone than most of Charles's recent verse about John, sparked by their differences over John's ordination of Methodist lay preachers. There is no evidence that Charles shared the poem with anyone prior to his death. But it eloquently displays the continuing of love and admiration that Charles held for his brother.² It can also be read as Charles's final attempt to frame and retain the fruits of John's ministry within the Church of England.

The Sarah Wesley letter and its included poem are part of the collection in the Methodist Archive and Research Centre, DDWF 14/31. 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 the editorial direction of Randy L. Maddox, with the diligent assistance of Aileen F. Maddox. Last updated: August 1, 2010.

²This shines through as well in some of his more satirical poems of the time; cf. lines 117–26 in *MS Brothers*, p. 35.

On the Rev'd John Wesley

Born in the Churches Pale, and bred;
With Knowledge and Instruction fed,
Brought up in Learning's fairest Seat
A Pupil at Gamaliel's Feet
With gracious Gifts and Talents blest
God's Servant at his Altar plac'd.
A chosen vessel of his Lord
To publish the life-giving Word
Primeval Piety restore
And preach his Gospel to the Poor.
For near a century he stood
Devoting Life to active good
In gathering the lost Sheep of old
Redeem'd into the British Fold.
In Labors of unwearied Love
Zealous his Ministry to prove
Our Zions drooping head to raise
And spread throughout the earth, his Praise.