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# John Wesley's *Primitive Physic* (1747)

G. S. Rousseau

IT IS indeed puzzling that this book, which had at least thirty-eight English editions and over twenty-four American editions,<sup>1</sup> has received so little attention. It was found in almost every English household, especially in those of the poor, usually beside the Bible. Unlike the dozens of other similar works written in the eighteenth century, it contains remedies for virtually every disease known to man, and somehow it sold more copies than any other medical handbook of the age.

Part of the secret of the book's success is attributable to its "Easy and Natural Method of Curing most Diseases." However "primitive" (and by this word Wesley meant easy to administer) its recipes, it attracted readers. Laid out alphabetically in the manner of a dictionary, it listed in simple English seven or eight — sometimes more — cures (one thousand and twelve in all) for each ailment: abortion, ague, Anthony's fire, apoplexy, appetite, asthma; preceded by a short preface giving a history of medical cures.<sup>2</sup> The poor man in Devon as well as

<sup>1</sup> See the checklist at the end of my article. *Primitive Physic* sold in July 1747 for one shilling, a cheap price even then, was printed anonymously, and Wesley's name did not appear on the title-page until the London edition of 1761.

<sup>2</sup> Wesley's preface would make an excellent study in itself. Written in eloquent English, it summarizes in typical Augustan fashion the history of medicine from the earliest times to the present. Primitive man living in his perfect creation suffered from no sickness. His blissful state was marred by original sin, which sired all diseases. In Miltonic and rhapsodic tones, Wesley describes how the scene changed when "man rebelled against the sovereign of heaven and earth. The incorruptible frame hath put on corruption, the immortal has put on mortality." Then follows a survey depicting the transmission of medicines themselves: "it is probable Physic, as well as Religion, was in the first ages chiefly traditional: every father delivering down to his sons, what he had himself in like manner received, concerning the manner of healing both outward hurts, and the diseases incident to each climate, and the medicines which were of the great efficacy for the cure of each disorder." As medicine progressed it became less empirically oriented and more chemically directed. The iatrochemical physicians of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries attempted to cure illness by chemically restoring internal harmony in the body. They depended less on trial and error than on the medical effects of specific chemicals. Medicine eventually became an abstruse science and "physicians now began to be had in admiration, as persons

the destitute woman in Northumberland could comprehend the author's simple language. There was nothing "scientific" about it. Additionally, the religious tone of the preface and the evangelical occupation of its author must have contributed to its tremendous success. For over a hundred years it was indeed a best seller and one can surmise, without being hyperbolic or enthusiastic about the book or its author, that especially among the lower and middle classes of England it must have been in the years 1747-1850 among the dozen or so most widely read books.

Not much that is factual is known about the composition of *Primitive Physic*. John Wesley as well as his brother Charles had always been interested in medicine and in dispensing remedies to the poor. Like most eighteenth-century preachers, he was maligned for practicing medicine. English pamphleteers protested repeatedly against medical practice by clergymen of all denominations and distinctions. The argument of these writers (a good example is the anonymous author of *The Dispensarians are the Patriots of Great Britain*, 1708) was that the clergy were amateurs. But John Wesley, however slow he was to quit the field of medicine, knew something about ailments and their cures and had read or heard about the medical treatises of important physicians, Boerhaave, Cadogan, Cheyne, Dover, Lind, Sydenham. Like his Irish colleague George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne, whose tar-water cure was to become one of the most popular of the Georgian age, Wesley never separated religion and medicine in his own mind, although he tried to keep religion out of his recipes. The poor were sick more often than not and they required medical as well as spiritual attention. Wesley established a dispensary in Bristol in 1746, aided by who were something more than human." Doctors took advantage of their situation by charging their patients exorbitant fees, by writing books that no layman could comprehend, and by complicating prescriptions more than was necessary. But any man with common sense (like Wesley!) would try to restore medicine to its ancient simplicity. Present "lovers of mankind," Wesley believes, "have demonstrably shewn, That neither the knowledge of Astrology, Astronomy, Natural Philosophy, nor even Anatomy itself, is absolutely necessary to the quick and effectual cure of most diseases incident to human bodies: nor yet any chymical, or exotic, or compound medicine, but a single plant or root duly applied."

Wesley added postscripts to his preface in the editions of 1755, 1760, and 1781. The additions to this preface offer valuable documentation of medical history in England in the second half of the eighteenth century. A collated edition is badly needed. All quotations in this study are from the 23rd London edition of 1791, the last edition printed in his lifetime and now reprinted in a modern edition by the Epworth Press (London, 1960). This is the first edition that includes all changes made by Wesley.

an apothecary and a surgeon.<sup>3</sup> The success of the dispensary was immediate and within six months' time more than two hundred patients had been treated. It may be this success that impelled Wesley to write out his prescriptions in order that they could become available to destitute men all over the earth. And yet it may also have been a profound interest in medicine itself that caused him to write *Primitive Physic*. "For six and twenty years," Wesley says in a letter, "I had made anatomy and physick the diversion of my leisure hours."<sup>4</sup> Wesley wrote the book in shorthand and in haste (in less than three months); it was poorly proofread and contained in its original version (the first edition of 1747) several errors.

The contents lend themselves to more accurate discussion than the circumstances of publication. Even the non-medical expert of today can see that Wesley was no mere collector of recipes, that he had his own ideas about medical topics as evidenced in many instances by the methods of treatment. One of these ideas was a crusade to return to "simple medicines" of the past: Wesley writes in his preface, "as theories increased, simple medicines were more and more disregarded and disused: till in a course of years the greater part of them were forgotten, at least in the politer nations." Another salient point of his preface is the corruption of contemporary eighteenth-century doctors, particularly their exploitation of the poor, and still another, the lack of a cheap and easily accessible book containing "safe and easy" (the words are Wesley's) medicines. Wesley's ideas, however, are not limited to the social history of medicine. Although he was concerned with the economic aspects of medicine in his age, he was also concerned with medical theory in his own time and with the general development and progress of medical science. He had the good sense in *Primitive Physic* to promote the best medical advice of the day, that of Dr. George Cheyne, author of *The English Malady* and *An Essay of Health and Long Life*: (1) breathe pure *Air*; (2) *eat* and drink temperately; (3) *sleep* plentifully; (4) *exercise* abundantly; (5) non-obstructed *evacuation* and excretion; (6) temperate *emotions* or passions of mind and body. Historians of eighteenth-century medicine will of course recognize these rules as the six "non-naturals." It is important that Wesley,

<sup>3</sup> See Maldwyn Edwards, *John Wesley and the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1933), pp. 151-152; L. Tyerman, *The Life and Times of the Rev. John Wesley* (London, 1870, 3 vols.), I, 525-526, 563.

<sup>4</sup> Tyerman, *Wesley*, I, 563.



# Primitive Phylsick :

O R, A N

EASY and NATURAL

# M E T H O D

O F

# CURING moſt Diſeaſes.



L O N D O N

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Gray's-Inn Gate, Holborn.

MDCCLVII.

TITLE-PAGE OF THE EDITION OF 1747



like the best medical thinkers of the period (Cheyne, Gaub, La Mettrie), attributed most ailments to a violation of the six non-naturals.<sup>5</sup> In so doing he also seems to have understood the psychosomatic aspect of illness. He warns that "*The passions* have a greater influence on health, than most people are aware of" and that "the slow and lasting passions, such as grief and hopeless love, bring on chronical diseases," while concluding that "the love of God, as it is the sovereign remedy of all miseries, so in particular it effectually prevents all the bodily disorders the passions introduce, by keeping the passions themselves within due bounds." Worship of God is thus the true secret to health and long life.

The religious dimension of Wesley's book has not in itself prevented nineteenth and twentieth century historians from appreciating it. *Primitive Physic* is a difficult book for anyone other than a medical historian to evaluate.<sup>6</sup> Whatever its virtues and vices, its quixotic remedies and quackery, *Primitive Physic* must be viewed within the context of other similar works of eighteenth-century medicine: works such as Berkeley's *Siris: A Chain of Philosophical Reflexions and Inquiries concerning the Virtues of Tar Water* (1744) and Smollett's *Essay on the External Use of Water* (1752); and within the context of contemporary pills and potions such as Dr. John Arbuthnot's diet of "asses' milk," Dr. Joshua Ward's "pill and drop," Dr. Thomas Dover's "mercury powders," and Dr. Robert James's "fever powders." When discussed in this context, Wesley's treatise does not suffer.

For example, he recommends "warm treacle," a standard remedy

<sup>5</sup> These were described in every book on health. The authoritative treatise on the subject was Cheyne's *An Essay of Health and Long Life* (London, 1724), in which each of the six chapters is devoted to one of the non-naturals. Comparison of Wesley's and Cheyne's preface shows how very much the former was influenced by the latter. Cheyne's theories remained gospel for more than three decades. See Henry Viets, "George Cheyne: 1673-1743," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, XXIII, No. 5 (1949), 435-452 and L. J. Rather, *Mind and Body in Eighteenth Century Medicine* (London: The Wellcome Historical Library, 1965), pp. 81-82.

<sup>6</sup> Not many medical historians have tried. The best, although unfortunately brief, treatment is George Dock, M.D., in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, LXIV (1915), 629-638. I have intentionally refrained from treading on the ground covered by Dock. Other comments (usually abortive) are found in: B. G. Thomas, "John Wesley and the Art of Healing," *American Physician*, XXXII (1906), 295-298; W. R. Riddell, "Wesley's System of Medicine," *New York Medical Journal*, XCIX (1914), 64-68; R. E. Schofield, "John Wesley and Science in 18th century England," *Isis*, XLIV (1953), 331-340; A. Wesley Hill, *John Wesley Among the Physicians* (London, 1958).

(usually "Venice treacle" but sometimes from other Mediterranean cities), for the cure of piles, a recommendation made by many medical dictionaries and prescribed also in the *London Pharmacopœia* (1742). For asthma, a disease that was little understood in 1747, he prescribes some standard cures: "a pint of *cold water* every morning washing the head therein immediately after," or "half a pint of *Tar-Water*, twice a day," or "an ounce of *Quicksilver* every morning, and a spoonful of *Aqua Sulphurata*, or fifteen drops of Elixir of Vitriol."<sup>7</sup> Cold water, tar-water, and quicksilver were common cures for many diseases in addition to asthma, and Wesley was not alone in prescribing their use. Occasionally Wesley borrowed cures from medical authorities and printed them verbatim. One of his cures for "costiveness" (constipation) is an example. "Boil an ounce and a half of *tamarinds* in three pints of water to a quart. In this strained, when cold, infuse all night two drachms of *sena*, and one drachm of *red rose-leaves*, drink a cup every morning. — See Dr. *Tissot*." The author of several respected medical treatises and the discoverer of many cures, Tissot<sup>8</sup> is often cited in *Primitive Physic*. Over and over again, Wesley incorporated into his book accepted cures of his era. When recommending the "Use [of] the *cold bath*" for cancer of the breast, he was following physicians like Boerhaave, Friedrich Hoffman, and Peter Shaw, who praised the results of balneological therapy.<sup>9</sup> And yet, Wesley was also a thorough-going empiricist. In the same entry (no. 106) he noted that "this has

<sup>7</sup> Asthma was a baffling disease for Wesley's generation. Every conceivable remedy was grasped at. John Floyer, an Oxford physician, had set forth many cures in *A Treatise of the Asthma* (London, 1717), but few were successful. Alexander Pope's last illness in 1744 was diagnosed as a "dropsical asthma" and his various physicians (Cheselden, Thomson, Burton) in desperation evacuated and bled him to death. Berkeley in *Siris* recommended tar-water as a cure for all types of asthma. See Ralph H. Major, "A Note on the History of Asthma," in *Science, History, and Medicine: Essays Presented to George Sarton*, ed. E. A. Underwood (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), pp. 518-530.

<sup>8</sup> Simon-André Tissot (1728-1797), the famed practitioner of Lausanne and widely known for his works on popular medicine: *Avis au peuple sur la santé, ou traité des maladies les plus fréquentes* (Lausanne, 1763), translated into English as *Advice to People in General . . .* in 1765. Tissot's medicines are first mentioned in Wesley's "corrected and much enlarged" Bristol edition (Pine) of 1765.

<sup>9</sup> Boerhaave, *A New Method of Chemistry: Including the History, Theory, and Practice of the Art . . .* (London, 1741); Hoffman, *New Experiments and Observations upon Mineral Waters* (London, 1738) and *Opera omnia physico-medica* (Geneva, 1748, 6 vols.); Shaw, *An Enquiry into the Contents, Virtues, and Uses of . . . Spaw-Waters* (London, 1734).



cured many" and supports his contention by referring to a woman he himself had known. "This [the cold bath] cured Mrs. *Bates*, of *Leicestershire*, of a cancer in her breast, a consumption, a sciatica, and rheumatism, which she had had near twenty years. She bathed daily for a month, and drank only water." Wesley was convinced of the benefits of cold (as opposed to warm) water bathing and added an appendix to the fifth Bristol edition (1755), listing the diseases common to young children, hereditary diseases, nervous disorders, and what we today would call psychosomatic illnesses. He may have exaggerated somewhat the effects of cold water bathing, but in so doing he was in distinguished company; the most celebrated scientists of England, France, and Germany extolled the efficacy of cold water bathing in the period 1720–1770.

Electricity is recommended as a cure for over twenty illnesses in *Primitive Physic*. Discovered in 1745, only two years before the publication of Wesley's book (although there had been for over a decade much talk about it in scientific circles), electricity was one of his favorite forms of cure. Wesley had read and heard about the "electrical machine" in 1745, and in 1746 began to treat the poor of his parish and elsewhere with its sparks.<sup>10</sup> "Electrifying, in a proper manner," he writes in an appendix, "cures St. Anthony's fire, Blindness, Blood extravasated," and many other diseases including "Sore throat, Tooth-ach, Ulcers, and Wens." Wesley's belief in the value of electric shocks was unshakable. He insists that he has not "known one single instance, wherein it has done harm; so that I cannot but doubt the veracity of those who have affirmed the contrary." Wesley's opponents in this

<sup>10</sup> Richard Lovett (1692–1780) was also treating diseases with electricity and wrote *The Subtil Medium Prov'd, or that . . . Powder . . . call'd sometimes Aether but oftener elementary Fire, verifest . . . electrical Fire and so forth* (London, 1756) and *The Electrical Philosopher* (Worcester, 1774). Wesley's treatments, however, were earlier. See Richard A. Hunter, "A Brief Review of the Use of Electricity in psychiatry with special reference to John Wesley," *British Journal of Physical Medicine*, XX (1957), 98–100. Eight years after the publication of *Primitive Physic*, John Winthrop, Professor of Mathematics and Philosophy at Cambridge University, debunked Wesley's use of electricity. He told undergraduates in a lecture in the Harvard College Chapel that "it is not too long, since we were amused with pompous accounts of the wonderful effects of electricity in the practice of physic." See John Winthrop, *A Lecture on Earthquakes; Read in the Chapel of Harvard College in Cambridge, N[ew] E[ngland] November 26th 1755. On Occasion of the great Earthquake which shook New-England the Week Before* (London, 1755), which is contained in a collection of eighteenth-century sermons in the Houghton Library.

method of treatment were many and they included scientists of learned societies like the Royal College of Physicians and the Royal Society of London, but he nevertheless persisted in the belief that electrical shocks could do no harm unless the voltage was immoderately strong. It is difficult to conjecture about the number of persons Wesley "electrifyd" (to use his term). If the well-worn machine still at Epworth House (Wesley's residence in London) is any indication, there must have been many ailing souls knocking at his door who came daily in search of a cure. Mrs. Elizabeth Carter, the bluestocking who seems to have read every book published in England as soon as it came off the press, noted in a letter to her friend Miss Talbot that electrical treatment was extremely popular in the year 1747.<sup>11</sup>

Some of Wesley's cures may seem to us today absurd and nonsensical. They may appear to be nothing more than disgusting concoctions of exotic substances and the strange stuff of Hecate's brews in *Macbeth*. Yet Wesley was no witch and if his recipes appear to be incantatory or talismanic it is usually because their contents were commonplace. For "hard breasts" he recommends "*turnips roasted till soft, then mashed and mixed with a little oil of roses*" (no. 89); for the prevention of nose bleeding, "keep a little roll of *white paper* under the tongue" (no. 63); for "cancer in the mouth," "blow the *ashes of scarlet cloth* into the mouth or throat" (no. 120); and for "consumption," "take a *cow-beel* from the tripe-house ready drest, two quarts of *new milk*, two ounces of *hartshorn shavings*, two ounces of *isinglass*, a quarter of a pound of *sugar-candy*, and a race of *ginger*. Put all these in a pot: and set them in an oven after the bread is drawn. Let it continue there till the oven is near cold; and let the patient live on this" (no. 183). Wesley adds, "I have known this [to] cure a deep consumption more than once," and we may reasonably believe he is telling the truth. However occult or charmed these methods seem to us, they were no more varied or superstitious than those of the best of his contemporaries, as one may see by comparing these recipes with those prescribed for similar illnesses in Robert James's *A Medicinal Dictionary* (1743-45) and in Dr. John Hill's numerous "primitive Physics."<sup>12</sup> Even in cases in which Wesley

<sup>11</sup> *A Series of Letters between Mrs. Elizabeth Carter and Miss Catherine Talbot, from the year 1741 to 1770 . . . in Two Volumes* (London, 1809), I, 193.

<sup>12</sup> *The Family Practice of Physic* (London, 1769); *The Management of the Gout in Diet, Exercise, and Temper* (London, 1771); *The Old Man's Guide to Health* (London 1764); *Plain and Useful Directions for those who are afflicted with Cancers* (London, 1773); *The Virtues of Honey in Preventing the Worst Disorders* (London,

appears to over-prescribe herbs, he is usually following the trends and "research" of his contemporaries. He suggests, for example, "an ounce of the powder of *Valerian root* infused in hot water" (no. 502) as a cure for nervous disorders beginning only in the "corrected and enlarged" London edition of 1761, aware apparently of Dr. Hill's newest theories presented in *The Virtues of Wild Valerian in Nervous Disorders* (1758). For numerous ailments he recommends *white hellebore*, *cream of tartar*, and the originally Chinese *ginseng*. All these were as common in the period as aspirins and antacids are today. His supreme panacea for the cough is "chewing immediately after you cough, the quantity of a pepper-corn of *Peruvian bark*" (no. 211). And yet when one recalls the popularity of chewing Peruvian bark for all sorts of illness — many in addition to the common cough — there is nothing unusual about Wesley's recipe. Peruvian bark was listed as a general remedy in the domestic handbooks of Tissot, Huxham, Mead, Hill, James, and Cheyne, among others, and was considered by all these doctors to have prevented diseases ranging from scorbutic gums to the strangury (see *Primitive Physic*, nos. 605 and 696). Even Wesley's exotic remedies were for the most part harmless nauseants, cathartics, aromatics, and demulcents. If they failed to cure, they did so in the same way all eighteenth-century medicine failed: through a lack of knowledge of chemistry, anatomy, and physiology.

Though thousands of sick and healthy laymen bought Wesley's book, few scientists took notice of it. It was not debated among learned physicians as was, for example, Berkeley's treatise on tar water.<sup>18</sup> One of Wesley's early biographers wrote: "It is a remarkable incident that the medical profession, so generally impatient of medical empirics, allowed Wesley's work to circulate for nearly thirty years before any of their honourable fraternity deigned to notice or denounce it."<sup>14</sup> Considering the wars of truth that had taken place over Berkeley's tar remedy, Ward's pill and drop, and James's fever powders, Tyerman's comment is well taken. Yet the reasons are sufficiently clear. No other similar work of the century was so popular or had sold so many copies,

1760); *On the Virtues of Sage in Lengthening Human Life* (London, 1763); *The Virtues of Wild Honey* (London, 1759). Hill wrote more than fifty similar treatises. See G. S. Rousseau, *The Literary Quack: A Life of Sir John Hill of London* (forthcoming).

<sup>18</sup> For the history of this controversy see Marjorie Hope Nicolson and G. S. Rousseau, "Bishop Berkeley and Tar Water," *Augustan Essays* (Oxford, forthcoming).

<sup>14</sup> Tyerman, *Wesley*, I, 564.



and once poor folk brought it into their homes (as they did from the start) there was no getting it out. Moreover, Wesley offered his readers many alternative cures (an average of six or seven) for each disease. If one failed, another might succeed. No physician could therefore justifiably charge him with suggesting too few remedies. As I have indicated, his prescriptions were standard and generally harmless, and there was nothing inherently objectionable about the book, unless one wished to quibble, except the religious tone of the baroque cadences of its preface, and the fact that its author was a methodist preacher and not a *bona fide* member of the medical profession.

The first discussion of Wesley's book was an octavo pamphlet by William Hawes,<sup>15</sup> M.D., which appeared in 1776 and was entitled *An Examination of the Rev. Mr. John Wesley's Primitive Physic*. Hawes's subtitle best describes the contents: "*Shewing That a great Number of the Prescriptions therein contained, are founded on Ignorance of the Medical Art, and of the Power and Operation of Medicines; and that it is a Publication calculated to do essential Injury to the Health of those Persons who may place Confidence in it.*" Hawes professes to have "no personal animosity against Mr. Wesley, to whom I am totally unknown" (p. 83). He attacks *Primitive Physic* on allegedly medical grounds, asserting that "if it was as easy for Mr. Wesley to perform cures as it is to write recipes, he would be universally allowed to be superior to a Huxham; a Mead, or a Boerhaave." Hawes's animosity is professional. Wesley's cloth and not his medicine is the target of Hawes's invective. He attributes to Wesley motives for publication (financial, egotistical, pretentious) that have no basis in fact. He misreads Wesley's preface and accuses him of statements the clergyman never made. "However uncandid, unfair, or unjust, Mr. Wesley's representation of the gentlemen of the faculty may be, it seemed necessary to promote the sale of his *Primitive Physic*" (p. iv). Wesley was deferential to "the doctors" in his book and in his life. The majority of Hawes's indictments are unfair and stated in hyperbolic language. "It is not easy to meet with any quack, even the most assuming, who professes to cure diseases with more facility than Mr. Wesley. If his directions are followed, disorders, of the most dangerous kind, disappear, as [at] the touch of the magician's wand . . . what were *Hippoc-*

<sup>15</sup> Hawes (1736-1808) founded the Royal Inhuman Society, London in 1774, edited its *Transactions*, and wrote *An Account of the Late Dr. Oliver Goldsmith's Illness* (London, 1774). His *Examination* sold for 1/6.



rates or Galen, compared to John Wesley!" (p. 83). He charges Wesley with violation of the eighth commandment, proclaiming his own desire to be useful to mankind at large.

Hawes's attacks on specific cures in *Primitive Physic* are not persuasive to the objective historian. He fails to recognize that medical prescriptions had changed considerably from Wesley's time (1747) and that Wesley was the child of his age, religiously following recipes then in vogue. For example, Hawes objects to Wesley's cure (no. 505) for "old age:"

*Tar-water* is a tried remedy; or if that *tried* prescription should be found not sufficiently efficacious, *decoction of nettles* . . . or if the patient still feels old age an unconquerable disorder, he recommends being *electrified daily*. This hint is worthy the attention of the ingenious Dr. Priestly; as when the arcana of electricity are compleatly laid open, an electrical shock judiciously administered, and repeated sufficient frequency, might peradventure extend a man's life to a thousand years; or if it were only *five hundred*, it might be as advantageous to the public as Dr. Priestly's discoveries respecting fixed air.<sup>16</sup>

Drinking tar water for the prevention of senility was commonplace in the 1740's; Horace Walpole the letter-writer wrote Sir Horace Mann on May 29, 1744, "We are now mad about tar-water . . . a man came into an apothecary's shop t'other day, 'Do you sell tar-water?' 'Tar-water!' replied the apothecary, 'why I sell nothing else!'"<sup>17</sup> Edmund Burke, a student at Trinity College, Dublin, wrote to Richard Shackleton in July 1744, "I am sure tar is the universal Medicine here."<sup>18</sup> "Decoction of nettles" was recommended by Huxham and Mead, and George Cheyne had been in the 1730's a proponent of its virtues. And if Wesley's daily "electric shocks" administered to the aged helped them, why should he not have suggested this as a panacea in his handbook? Hawes's objections to Wesley's cures in each case derive from his (Hawes's) own unfamiliarity with medical trends of the 1740's. He is ignorant of popular medicine in that decade and unaware that almost all Wesley's recipes can be traced to authoritative medical sources. He cites irrelevant materials to show that *Primitive Physic* had been attacked from the day of publication. Yet all these attacks were made for reasons *other* than medical ones; all were contingent on the

<sup>16</sup> *An Examination*, p. 62.

<sup>17</sup> *Correspondence with Sir Horace Mann*, edited Lewis, Smith and Lam (Yale University Press, 1954), p. 452.

<sup>18</sup> *The Correspondence of Edmund Burke*, ed. Thomas W. Copeland (Chicago University Press, 1958), I, 26.

supposition that a practicing preacher had no right to dip into medicine.<sup>19</sup> Even if Hawes's objections had been valid (but they were not), they could not and did not affect the sales of Wesley's book. Between 1776 and 1791 (the year Wesley died) at least five new editions were printed in London and two in the American colonies.

Wesley's later critics were less severe. Never again after 1776 was an entire treatise devoted to an attack on *Primitive Physic*. Men of all walks of life found aspects of it revolting, but expressed their discontent in a sentence of a letter or in a passage of a book. Robert Southey, the poetic-critic and friend of the poet Coleridge, thought *Primitive Physic* a great work although "most dangerous" in its influence: "the book itself must have done great mischief and probably may still continue to do so; for it has been most extensively circulated, and it evinces throughout a lamentable want of judgment, and a perilous rashness, advising sometimes means of ridiculous inefficacy in the most dangerous cases, and sometimes remedies so rude that it would be marvelous if they did not destroy the patient."<sup>20</sup> Almost a century after its publication Dr. John Plummer, an American physician, criticized Wesley's remedies, especially the seemingly superstitious ones.<sup>21</sup> Another criticism appeared in 1906 in the *British Medical Journal* as an unsigned article and was again published pseudonymously under the name of Burton G. Thomas, M.D., in the *American Physician*.<sup>22</sup> But these were faint cries, few and far apart. Serious historians of the English eighteenth-century — like Sir Leslie Stephen in *History of English Thought in the Eighteenth Century* (1876) — devoted long chapters to Wesley's religion but were silent about his medicine; overlooked the startling fact that *Primitive Physic* was more widely read and bought than any of Wesley's religious works. Even today, historians of Wesley's age give his popular handbook short shrift. Sir George Clark devotes to it a single sentence: "John Wesley not only wrote a very influential

<sup>19</sup> Hawes argues (*An Examination*, p. 62) that Wesley's remedy for poisoned persons (nos. 549-554) was disputed by a writer "who signed himself ANTIDOTE, in the [London] *Gazeteer* of Dec. 25, 1775, and it was this gentleman's observations which first led me [Hawes] to peruse Mr. W.'s *Primitive Physic*; and which accordingly gave rise to these remarks upon that publication." Wesley and "Antidote" had exchanged sharp remarks in the *London Gazeteer* in January and February, 1776. My reading of their correspondence makes it evident that Antidote's attack was directed against methodism and not medicine.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Southey, *Life of Wesley* (London, 1820, 2 vols.) II, 186.

<sup>21</sup> *Nashville Journal of Medicine and Surgery*, XV (1858, October 4), 282.

<sup>22</sup> I, 987, and *American Physician* (1906, November), 295.

manual of home medicine, in which other men's precepts are mixed with very ill-founded advice of his own, but also set up a dispensary."<sup>23</sup> Similarly, histories of eighteenth-century medicine like Professor Lester S. King's *The Medical World of the Eighteenth Century* (Chicago, 1958) omit Wesley's name altogether. That John Wesley was a medical amateur as well as a celebrated minister of religion is clear beyond a shadow of doubt. That his home manual *Primitive Physic* was the most popular medical handbook of the so-called enlightened century has not been so clear.

Harvard's Countway Library of Medicine contains one of the world's largest collections of *Primitive Physic* and the largest collection of any university library in the western hemisphere. In addition to the now very rare first edition of 1747, Harvard possesses over fifteen English and American editions. Only the Wellcome Historical Medical Library, the Methodist Archives and Research Library (Epworth House), and the British Museum, all in London, have larger collections. Harvard's collection has been gathered over a long period of time and will, it is hoped, continue to grow. In compiling the checklist printed below I have limited myself to noting one location per edition. To have listed numerous locations (all locations would be impossible) would have swelled the checklist to Brobdingnagian proportions.

#### *Abbreviations*

- BM = The British Museum
- CTY = Yale University
- DNLM = National Library of Medicine, Washington, D.C.
- LC = Library of Congress
- MARC = Methodist Archives and Research Center
- MHI = Massachusetts Historical Society
- MH-M = Countway Library of Medicine (Harvard)
- NJMD = Drew University
- NN = New York Public Library
- WEL = Wellcome Historical Medical Library

#### *Checklist of Editions of PRIMITIVE PHYSIC*

1. London: [Strahan], sold by Thomas Trye, 1747, pp. xxiv, 25-119. MH-M.
2. Bristol: [Farley], sold by G. Woodfall, n.d., pp. xxiv, 25-136, "inlarged." WEL.

<sup>23</sup> *A History of the Royal College of Physicians of London* (Clarendon Press, 1966), II, 541.



- Dublin: for Oli. Nelson, 1752, pp. xxiv, 25-136. WEL.  
 Dublin: for Oli. Nelson, 1754. Not yet found. [Advertised in Peter Murray Hill, Catalogue 98, no. 378, Winter 1966-67.]
3. Not yet found.
  4. Not yet found.
  5. Bristol: [Farley], sold by J. Palmer, 1755, pp. xxiv, 25-122, "corrected and enlarged," dated "Bristol, 16 Oct. 1755." BM.
  6. Not yet found.
  7. Not yet found.
  8. Bristol: Grabham, 1759, pp. xxvii, [1], 29-129. MARC.
  9. London: Strahan, 1761, pp. xxviii, 29-124, "corrected and enlarged," dated "London, 10 Nov. 1760." WEL. [This is the first edition I find in which "John Wesley" appears on the titlepage.]
  10. Bristol: Pine, 1762, pp. xxviii, 29-124, "corrected and enlarged." WEL.
  11. Not yet found.
  12. Philadelphia: Steuart, 1764, pp. 80. DNLM [Evans 9867].
  12. Bristol: Pine, 1765, pp. xxviii, 29-140, "corrected and much enlarged." WEL.
  13. Bristol: Pine, 1768, pp. xxviii, 29-140, "corrected and much enlarged." MARC.
  14. Bristol: Pine, 1770, pp. xxviii, 29-156, "corrected and much enlarged." BM.
  14. Philadelphia: Cruikshank, 1770, pp. xviii, 19-83. DNLM.
  15. London: [Hawes], sold by Keith, 1772, pp. xxvii, 28-160, "Corrected and much Enlarged." WEL.  
 French translation: Lyons: Bruyset, 1772, pp. xl, 300. DNLM.
  16. London: Hawes, 1774, pp. 160. MH-M.
  17. London: [Hawes], sold at the Foundry, 1776, pp. ii, xxiv, 25-141. MH-M.
  18. Not yet found.
  19. Not yet found.
  20. London: [Paramore], sold at New Chapel, 1781, pp. xx, 21-124. BM.
  21. London: Paramore, 1785, pp. 120. MARC.
  22. London: New Chapel, 1788, pp. xix, 20-119. MH-M.
  16. Trenton, N.J.: Quequelle and Wilson, 1788, pp. xviii, 19-125. LC.
  21. Philadelphia: Pritchard and Hall, 1789, pp. 196. NN.
  23. London: New Chapel, 1791, pp. xviii, 19-118. WEL.
  22. Philadelphia: [Hall], sold by Dickins, 1791, pp. xx, 21-191. NJMD.
  24. London: [Paramore], sold by Whitfield, 1792, pp. xviii, 19-120. MH-M.
  23. Philadelphia: [Hall], sold by Dickins, 1792, pp. x, xi-xii, 13-103. MEH.
  23. Philadelphia: [Hall], sold by Dickins, 1793, pp. x, xi-xii, 13-103. LC.
  24. Philadelphia: [Tuckniss], sold by Dickins, 1795, pp. 103.  
 London: Hawes, Clarke, and Collins, 1796, pp. 120. WEL.
  25. London: [Story], sold by Whitfield, 1801, pp. xii, 13-108. BM.
  25. Philadelphia: [Conrad], sold by Cooper, 1801, pp. xii, 13-103. CTY.
  25. Dublin: for Methodist Book Room, 1802, pp. 132.
  26. New York: [Totten], sold by Cooper and Wilson, 1804, pp. 104. MH-M.



26. Nottingham: Sutton, 1805, pp. xviii, 19-118. BM.  
26. London: [Story], sold by Lomas, 1807, pp. 108. MARC.  
26. Dublin: [Wilkinson and Courtney], sold by the Methodist Book Room, 1809, pp. 132. BM.  
Burslem: Tregortha, 1810, pp. 103.  
Carmarthen: Evans, in Welsh, 1810, pp. 76.  
London: [Cordeux], sold by Blanshard, 1810, pp. 108, "The Eighth Edition Corrected." BM.  
Leeds: Wilson, 1813, pp. 108, "A New Edition." MH-M.  
27. London: [Cordeux], sold by Blanshard, 1814, pp. 108. MARC.  
27. New York: [Totten], sold by Hitt and Ware, 1814, pp. 142.  
28. London: [Cordeux], sold by Blanshard, 1815, pp. 108. MH-M.  
Manchester: 1817, pp. 86. Title, "A Collection of Eight Hundred Recipes. Primitive Physic . . . ."  
28. New York: [Totten], sold by Soule and Mason, 1818, pp. 142.  
29. London: [Cordeux], sold by Blanshard, 1820, pp. 108. WEL.  
Bemersley: Bourne, c. 1820, pp. 96, "A New Edition, Revised and Improved." WEL.  
Carnarvon: Evans, 1828 (?), pp. 88, in Welsh.  
30. London: Kershaw, 1824, pp. xxiii, 24-162. WEL.  
31. Not yet found.  
32. London: [Nichols], sold by Mason, 1828, pp. xxiii, 25-162. CTY.  
33. London: [Roche], sold by Mason, 1830, pp. 144. MARC.  
London: Smith, 1832, "A New Edition, Revised and Improved." BM.  
34. London: [Roche], sold by Mason, 1836, pp. 144.  
Bemersley: Bourne; (c. 1833-43?), pp. 96. WEL.  
Allegheny, Pa.: Carpenter, 1839, pp. xv, 16-120.  
27. Salem, N.J.: Prior, 1839, pp. x, 11-96. Copyright 1839, Thomas E. Ware and Samuel Prior, N.J. Title, "Wesley's Family Physician, revised; and Ware's Medical Adviser . . . ." (From 1814 edn. edited by Ware's father, T. E. Ware). NJMD.  
35. London: Mason, 1842, pp. 142. WEL.  
London: Bass and Co., 1843, pp. xvii, 143.  
Alibon-Wasg: Jones, 1845, pp. ii, 194, in Welsh. MH-M.  
London: for the Booksellers, 1845, pp. 126, 157, "TO WHICH IS ADDED, THE GENERAL RECEIPT BOOK CONTAINING UPWARDS OF FOUR HUNDRED OF THE MOST USEFUL AND VALUABLE RECEIPTS." MH-M.  
Leeds: Webb and Millington, 1846, pp. x, 62, "A New Edition, revised and improved." BM.  
Edinburgh: for Thornton and Collie, 1846, pp. xviii, 19-119, new.  
London: for the Booksellers, 1847, pp. 126, 156, "TO WHICH IS ADDED, THE GENERAL RECEIPT BOOK ETC." MH-M.  
36. London: [Needham], sold by Mason, 1849, pp. 144.

- London: for the Booksellers, 1850, pp. 126, 156, "TO WHICH IS ADDED, THE GENERAL RECEIPT BOOK ETC."
- London: [Thoms], sold by Hodgson, c. 1850, pp. x, 62, "A New Edition, revised and improved," new.
- London: for the Booksellers, 1854, pp. 126, 157, "TO WHICH IS ADDED, THE GENERAL RECEIPT BOOK ETC."
- London: Milner and Sowerby, c. 1854, pp. xviii, 19-156, "TO WHICH IS ADDED, THE GENERAL RECEIPT BOOK ETC." WEL.
- London and Halifax: Milner and Company (c. 185-?), pp. xx, 158+, "TO WHICH IS ADDED, ETC." WEL.
- London: Milner and Company 185[?], pp. xviii, 19-126, "TO WHICH IS ADDED, ETC." MH-M.
- London: Milner, n.d., pp. xx, 21-158.
24. Boston: Stone, 1858, pp. 151, "Revised and Enlarged," ed. William M. Cornell, A.M., M.D. MH-M.
- Leeds: Johnson (c. 1860?), pp. 29, in "Cheap Penny Books," title "Household Receipt Book, or Primitive Physic . . ." MARC.
37. London: for Mason, 1859, pp. xxii, 144. MH-M.
38. London: Mason (c. 1860?), pp. 144. CTY.
- Bangor: Davies, 1861, pp. 166, in Welsh.
- London: Milner and Sowerby (c. 1870?).
- Chicago: Ford, 1880, title, "Rev. John Wesley's Valuable Primitive Remedies," ed. O. W. Gordon, M.D. MH-M.
- Plymouth, England: 1958, pp. 80, title, "Primitive Physic. John Wesley's Book of Old Fashioned Cures and Remedies. Edited by William H. Paynter." MARC.
- London: Epworth Press, 1960, pp. 127; reproduced from 23rd edn. 1791, "with an introduction by A. Wesley Hill." BM.
- Ipswich: J. Scoggins, n.d., pp. 26(?). CTY.