JAMES HERVEY (1714-1758): A BICENTENARY APPRECIATION

by LAURENCE E. PORTER

MR. PORTER, who has frequently contributed to our pages on Christian education, turns his ready pen in this paper to an appreciation of the author of "Theron and Aspasio" on the two hundredth anniversary of his death.

ON Christmas Day, 1758, in the forty-fifth year of his age, died the Rev. James Hervey, M.A., Rector of Weston-Favell, near Northampton. He was a writer whose works of popular devotion had a tremendous vogue in his day; a pupil and early follower of John Wesley with whom he was later to be drawn into most distressing controversy; and above all a man acknowledged by those who came into contact with him to be the very exemplar of Christian character.

Hervey was born on February 26, 1714,[1] son of the incumbent of Collingtree, a village near to Northampton, to which city he went for his schooling as a day-boy at the Free Grammar-School. At the age of seventeen he went up to Lincoln College, Oxford, where his tutors were Dr. Hutchins, later Rector of the College, and John Wesley. He found himself naturally attracted to the little group of "Methodists"[2] who had been gathering round John and Charles Wesley since 1729. From John he received the encouragement to set himself to learn Hebrew without a teacher, and much other help beside, and as the months passed he developed

[1] For the biographical details see, e.g., *Memoirs of the Life and Character of the late James Hervey* by John Brown, Minister of the Gospel, Whitburn (London, 3rd edn., 1822); Rev. D. McNicoll, *Memoir,* in Liverpool edn. of the *Meditations* (n.d. but before 1837), and Canon J. H. Overton in *DNB,* vol. xxvi, pp. 282 ff.

[2] For a short account of the Methodists at Oxford, see G. R. Balleine, *A Hist. of the Evangelical Party* (London, 1908), ch. 1. For a fuller account, L. Tyerman, *The Oxford Methodists* (London, 1873).

an ever-deepening affection for his mentor. In August, 1739, he wrote:

> Nothing, I trust, in time or through eternity, shall be able to put an end to my most respectful and honourable regard, my affectionate and grateful esteem for dear Mr. Wesley, whom I love and whose I am with the greatest sincerity.[3]

And again:

> I can never forget that tender-hearted and generous Fellow of Lincoln, who condescended to take such passionate notice of a poor undergraduate, whom almost everybody contemned, and no man cared for my soul.[4]

At Oxford, his studies seem at first to have been rather desultory:

> While at the University, he was much at a loss for want of a faithful friend to direct him to proper studies; he was ordered, in a very careless manner, to read such and such books, which were altogether unsuitable to his taste, and, in a high degree, afforded matter of disgust and discouragement.[5]

But he settled down eventually to more systematic reading, and the works he studied and found profitable were such as *Le Spectacle de la Nature, or Nature Displayed*, by l'Abbé La Pluche; Dr. Denham's *Astro-Theology*, the learned Ray's *Wisdom of God in Creation*—titles which foreshadow the future author of the *Contemplation of the Starry Heavens* and the *Descant upon Creation*. If, however, Hervey's intellectual powers were finding employment, it was not so spiritually. Until he was seventeen, Brown[6] tells us, he never heard a sermon on the Person and Righteousness of Christ, and even at the University and during his early years in orders, he was not in much better case. Like Wesley himself, he found in the "Holy Club" like-minded men who were seeking for assurance of salvation, but the real experience did not come until later.

His reading veered more and more towards the Calvinistic writers; M'Nicoll says:

> About this time an important change took place in Mr. Hervey's religious sentiments. From the writings of several pious Calvinists, he began duly to see the importance of Christ's death as an atonement for sinners. He also saw the necessity of that faith which is of the operation of God's Spirit, as the only means of justification by that atonement. He now renounced his own righteousness, and fled to the mercy of God thro' Christ, without the works of the law. The

[3] *Letters of the Rev. John Wesley*, ed. J. Telford (London, 1931), vol. i, p. 334.

[4] J. Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

[5] J. Ryland, *Life of Hervey*, quoted by Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

[6] *Op. cit.*, p. 7.

consequence was, he tasted that God is gracious, and became from that time the professed advocate of evangelical holiness.[7]

An incident recorded from this period of his life shows that it was not only from books that he came to assurance of salvation. A physician had advised spending much time in the open air, following, for instance, the ploughman at his work in order to smell the beneficent smell of the fresh earth. On such an excursion Hervey engaged in conversation with the ploughman, asking him what he thought the hardest thing in religion. His companion suitably replying that it was more fitting that a minister should instruct him than *vice versa*. Hervey quoted Matt. 16: 24 and went on to tell him that the hardest thing in religion is "to deny one's sinful self". The ploughman ventured the opinion that there was something even harder, namely, to deny one's righteous self and not to lean on one's own righteousness.[8]

While these developments were taking place in his inward and spiritual views and experience, his outward life continued to follow the normal pattern of the life of the young clergyman of his day. He graduated B.A. in 1736, and on September 13 of that year he was ordained deacon by Bishop Potter of Oxford.

His Crewe Exhibition of £20 a year would have enabled him to take a curacy in or near Oxford and remain in residence, but scruples of conscience forbade him to retain what another might want far more than he. After a short time, first with his father and then in London, he became curate at Dummer in Hampshire to Charles Kinchin,[9] one of the early Oxford methodists. But already the physical weakness that was to dog his steps throughout his short life was beginning to manifest itself. In the letter of August, 1739, to John Wesley already quoted, he speaks of himself as "under the infirmities of a crazy constitution", and mainly, it seems, on this account he went to Stoke Abbey in Devonshire as chaplain to Mr. Paul Orchard whom he had known at Oxford. Here he passed two restful and happy years (1738-40), during which his friendship with his patron ripened (he stood godfather to Orchard's son, to whom later he dedicated the second volume of his *Meditations*), his first literary works began to take shape, and perhaps most important of all, the genial climate of North Devon

[7] *Op. cit.*, p. 7.

[8] Brown, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9.

[9] Charles Kinchin (1711-41), Fellow (1731-39) and Dean (from 1736) of C.C.C., Oxford. J. S. Reynolds, *The Evangelicals at Oxford*, 1735-1871 (1953), p. 173.

so benefited his health that he was able to return to parish work as curate of Bideford.

His three years at Bideford[10] were important for the development of Hervey's outlook. First, the conversion outlined above became definite at this time:

> This remarkable change appeared in his sermons. Empty legal harangues no longer disgraced his pulpit. He now discoursed on Grace, reigning through righteousness, unto an eternal life of holiness and happiness.[11]

Sad to say, it was these very doctrines which brought him peace of soul that were to lead him eventually into his unhappy controversies with John Wesley, who saw in his insistence on Imputed Righteousness something dangerously akin to antinomianism. Secondly, his literary compositions flourished amidst the natural beauty of landscape and sea, the *Reflexions on a Flower Garden*, for instance, "were chiefly composed in the summer-house of a pleasant garden belonging to the family with whom he resided".[12] Thirdly, one consideration which had led to his leaving Stoke Abbey had been his unrequited affection for the daughter of a neighbouring clergyman, Thompson, and the disappointment which he nursed at Bideford must, to a sensitive nature like Hervey's, have been deeply distressing. But letters he wrote to the lady's father,[13] and his dedication of the first volume of the *Meditations* to Miss R—— T—— herself, show that his disappointment took the form not of bitterness but of that gentle melancholy that permeates his writings.

In 1742 Mr. Nicholls, his Rector at Bideford, died, and was succeeded by a clergyman of a very different type. A former Professor of Poetry at Oxford, he seems to have been jealous of the popularity of his curate, and despite the earnest efforts of the parishioners on his behalf, Hervey's dismissal was insisted on. In the following year he returned to Northamptonshire, where he took charge of Weston Favell, which his father held in plurality with Collingtree. Here he spent the remaining sixteen years of his all too short life, dividing his attention between pastoral work and literature, though even his literary work he regarded as part of his Christian ministry. Of his first volume of *Meditations* he wrote:

[10] Thus Overton in *DNB*. M'Nicoll (p. 7) says: "Mr. Hervey remained in Bideford *five* years". This is certainly an error. He was at Stoke Abbey until 1740 and in 1743 returned to Northants.

[11] Brown, p. 18.

[12] M'Nicoll, p. 7.

[13] See, e.g., letter to Thompson dated 1746, quoted M'Nicoll, pp. 25 ff.

> Oh may they tend in some degree to awaken my readers into a serious concern for their eternal state, and lead their minds unto the Rock of Ages, the hope of all the ends of the earth, Jesus Christ! May they, under the propitious influence of Grace, answer this desirable end; or let them share the fate of literary rubbish, and be swept away into utter oblivion.[14]

Some ten years after his return home, Hervey lost his father,[15] but so tender was his conscience on the subject of pluralism that the living of Collingtree might well have lapsed to the Bishop had not his friends insisted on his application for institution to his father's living (which together with his own brought in no more than £180 a year) in order to support his sister and widowed mother. A Cambridge Master's degree was a necessary qualification for the institution, and his friends, without his knowledge, procured and paid for the necessary certificates from Oxford and Cambridge that he might be entered on the books of Clare Hall, where he took his M.A. in 1752.

His final years were marked by conscientious and unremitting toil both pastoral and literary which proved far beyond the physical resources of his already undermined constitution. A number of Sermons and short treatises were issued by Hervey during this period, but his two main works were his *Remarks on Lord Bolingbroke's Letters on the Study and Use of History* (1752), and in 1755 the three volumes of *Theron and Aspasio*. The ravages of consumption, together with the grief brought to such a sensitive nature by his quarrel with his revered friend and former teacher John Wesley, darkened his later days and Hervey was not yet forty-five when, upon his lips the words: "The great conflict is over. . . . Now all is done. . . . Precious Salvation!" his gentle spirit passed into the presence of his Lord.

Such in brief outline was the uneventful life of James Hervey—uneventful, and yet not without value or significance. In three directions especially he left his stamp upon his generation. First, as a man of letters, his popularity during his lifetime was immense.

[14] M'Nicoll, p. 9. The mention of "Rock of Ages" naturally recalls A. M. Toplady's great hymn, and it is not without interest that in 1769 Toplady published a sixpenny pamphlet: *"Many made righteous by the Obedience of One.* Two sermons on Rom. v. 19 preached at Bideford in 1743 by the late Rev. James Hervey; with a Preface by Augustus Toplady" (Tyerman, *Life of Wesley*, iii, p. 56).

[15] In May, 1752. Hervey senr. died six months after perhaps the best known citizen of Northampton, the Nonconformist divine, Philip Doddridge, for an account of whom see article by A. G. Secrett in THE EVANGELICAL QUARTERLY, xxiii (1951), pp. 242-259.

Then, as a theologian, he entered upon controversy—and how distasteful it must have been to one of his disposition—with his friend Wesley, in the early history of whose Methodist movement he had himself played a not inconsiderable part. And finally, he seems to have given to all who knew him the impression of a man whose Christian life and character were altogether out of the ordinary.

I

First, then, the man of letters. For one whose adult life lasted barely more than a score of years, and at that years burdened with physical infirmity and disability, the extent of Hervey's writings is impressive. In 1746 appeared his first volume, containing *Meditations Among the Tombs, Reflexions on a Flower Garden,* and a *Descant upon Creation;* to be followed a year later by a second volume including *Contemplations on the Starry Heavens,* and *A Winter Piece.* In 1755 followed his most considerable publication, the three volumes of *Theron and Aspasio.* Together with lesser works and selections from his *Correspondences,* the Collected Works run into six volumes, in both the Edinburgh edition of 1769 and the English edition published at Pontefract in 1805.

The most remarkable thing about these works is their amazing popularity in their own day. "His *Meditations*", says Lecky (who, to be sure, cannot be suspected of bias in favour of an evangelical!), "was one of the most popular books of the eighteenth century".[16] Seventeen authorized editions, and not a few pirated editions also, of the *Meditations* appeared during Hervey's lifetime (that is, more than one every year), while *Theron and Aspasio,* despite its three volumes, sold at the rate of nearly 10,000 copies in nine months.[17] Nor was this popularity confined to this country. "I must inform you", says no less an authority than Coleridge, "or at least call to your recollection, that about that time, and for some years before it, three of the most popular books in the German language were the translations of Young's *Night Thoughts,* Hervey's *Meditations,* and Richardson's *Clarissa Harlow*".[18] "Tous ceux", says M. Daniel Mornet of the influence of Young and Hervey in France, "tous ceux qui ont l'âme sensible et qui sont déjà des romantiques, s'enivrent de ces clairs de lune tragiques et de ces méditations que la mort emplit".[19]

[16] W. E. H. Lecky, *History of England in the Eighteenth Century,* vol. iii, p. 39.

[17] *Ibid.,* p. 39 n.

[18] S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (Everyman edn.), p. 305.

[19] Daniel Mornet, *Le Romantisme en France au xviii^e siècle* (3rd edn., Paris, 1932), p. 76.

Few modern readers to be sure would have patience with any of Hervey's writings; the question naturally arises wherein lay their great appeal for his contemporaries. To attempt to answer this question, we must consider their contents, their style and their purpose.

It would be quite impossible to give an analysis or summary of the various works, for they are indeed just what they claim to be, *Meditations*. The setting is first described. In the *Meditations among the Tombs* a solitary traveller passes a spare hour in a Cornish Church; in the *Reflexions on a Flower Garden* it is an early morning walk in the cool bedewed atmosphere among the flower-beds, disturbed only by the "wakeful lark". The *Contemplations of the Night* takes the reader for an evening stroll: "a walk in one of the finest recesses of the country, and one of the most pleasant evenings which the summer season produced".[20] Even the lengthy theological arguments of *Theron and Aspasio* take place against the background of a visit by Aspasio to Theron's country seat, and each new Dialogue begins with a description of the *décor*. Here is a sample from the opening of Dialogue II:

> The spot adjoining to the house was appropriated to the cultivation of flowers—in a variety of handsome compartments, were assembled the choicest beauties of blooming nature. Here the hyacinth hung her silken bells, or the lilies reared their silver pyramids. There stood the neat narcissus, loosely attired in a mantle of snowy lustre, while the splendid ranunculus wore a full trimmed suit of radiant scarlet . . .
>
> Having strolled in this darksome avenue, without a speck of sunshine, without a glimpse of the heavens; on a sudden they step into open day. Surprising! cries Aspasio. What a change is this! What delightful enchantment is here! One instant, whelmed in Trophonius's cave, where darkness lours and horror frowns; transported, the next, into the romantic scenes of Arcadia, where all is lightsome, all is gay. Quick as thought, the arches of heaven expand their azure. Turrets and spires shoot into the skies. Towns, with their spacious edifices, spread themselves to the admiring view. Those lawns, green with freshest herbage, those fields rich with undulating corn; where were they all a moment ago?[21]

From the setting, Hervey goes on to "meditate", to give expression to the thoughts evoked by what he sees, and especially the Scriptures which are brought to his mind. Any of his works might serve as an example; the *Reflexions in a Flower-Garden* will suit our purpose. The peaceful scene in the early morning in the garden is first described, and reminds our author of the folly and loss

[20] P. 247 (Liverpool edn., ed. M'Nicoll, from which all quotations are given).

[21] *Theron and Aspasio* (Kelly's edn. in 2 vols., London, 1814), pp. 25 ff.

of those who stay in bed instead of sharing his own enjoyment, a reflexion in which his own reason is reinforced by both the Scriptures (Cant. 7: 11-12) and the Classics (a few lines from Virgil's third *Georgic*).

> Is it the surmise of the imagination, or do the skies really redden with shame, to see so many supinely stretched on their drowsy pillows ? — Shall man be lost in luxurious ease ? Shall man waste these precious hours in idle slumbers, while the vigorous sun is up, and going on his Maker's errand? While all the feathered choir are hymning the Creator, and paying their homage in harmony? No. Let him heighten the melody of the tuneful tribes, by adding the rational strains of devotion. Let him improve the fragrant oblations of Nature, by mingling with the rising odours, the more refined breath of praise.

Then the rising of the sun turns his thoughts to the Sun of Righteousness, to whom all men must turn for "the supreme happiness of the eternal state". Our thoughts are next directed to the sun as the highest symbol of divinity, enlightening not only our spirits but our intellects as well. "Jesus arose upon our benighted minds, and brought life and immortality to light. . . . He *arose*, to enlighten the wretched Gentiles, and to be the glory of His people Israel." Moreover, the sun is the principle of all life— "Just in the same way were the rational world 'dead in trespasses and sins', without the reviving energy of Jesus Christ".

So it goes on, with no clearly defined plan, but allowing the mind to wander from one topic to another extracting the spiritual honey like a bee going from flower to flower. Herein lies perhaps one reason for the popularity of these meditations and dialogues: the reader can return to them again and again and find interest and refreshment in reading a page at random or re-reading some favourite passage, without the necessity of close attention to a closely-knit argument.

But this is only a negative virtue ; there must have been something far stronger to win the attention of so many readers. It is this: as far as the contents are concerned, we cannot doubt that in the landscapes and descriptive passages, in the rural solitudes and country churchyards, in the contemplation of the glories of Creation and the transitoriness of human life, Hervey struck a note in harmony with the prevailing mood of his day. The brilliant classicism of Dryden and Pope can have had little hold on the minds of the majority ; its striving after precision and perfection gave place to the vague and melancholy yearnings and sentiment of the Romantics. In the Romantic Movement in European Literature this self-effacing rector of a Northamptonshire parish

has a most important place. M. Mornet, enumerating the literary origins of the French Romantics, says: "On traduit *l'élégie sur un cimetière de campagne* de Gray, les *Méditations* d'Hervey et les *Nuits* de Young. . . Tout cela crée, avont Rousseau, le goût du sombre."[22] The Romantic backcloth, with its conventional landscape, its inevitable churchyard and tombstones and its solemn young man "meditating" amidst it all, is there already long before Gray's *Elegy* and Rousseau's *Promeneur Solitaire*, Lamartine's *L'Isolement* and Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey*. The eighteenth century was a many-sided period,[23] and in it Hervey represented one characteristic and considerable stream. Nor is it on literature alone that Hervey's *paysages* left their mark, but also on the visual arts. The etcher and landscape painter Samuel Palmer (1805-1881) and his even more celebrated friend William Blake, poet and artist, both read their Hervey assiduously and freely acknowledged their indebtedness to him.[24]

When we turn our attention to Hervey's style, we find, and that not unnaturally, all the critics of one voice in their denunciations. "Mawkish", says Oliver Elton.[25] "A strange compound of religion and rhetoric", is the opinion of Thomas Seccombe, "but the rhetoric is in reality of a pinchbeck order, as of a prose Robert Montgomery".[26] "The thoughts", comments Archdeacon W. H. Hutton, "might be found in Jeremy Taylor ; but how different is the pompous and posturing performance with which Hervey seeks to impress the reader from the plangent feeling which inspired Taylor even in his richest and most gorgeous prose! In Hervey the ideas are impoverished and the expression is at once affected and commonplace".[27] Even Canon Overton in his sympathetic study says: "If he had condescended to write plain English, many of his descriptions would have been pleasing".[28]

It will be noticed, however, that all these opinions come from

[22] D. Mornet, *Histoire de la littérature et de la pensée françaises* (1924), p. 161.

[23] This is finely brought out in Lord David Cecil's life of Cowper, *The Stricken Deer* (1929).

[24] G. Grigson, *Samuel Palmer, the Visionary Years* (1947).

[25] O. Elton, *Survey of English Literature*, 1730-80, vol. ii, p. 228.

[26] T. Seccombe, *The Age of Johnson* (1899), p. 125. The reference to Robert Montgomery is of course to the subject of Macaulay's most withering essay.

[27] In *Cambridge History of English Literature*, vol. x, p. 365. Perhaps one might be permitted to suggest that here the Venerable Archdeacon is getting dangerously near to a purple patch himself!

[28] In *DNB*, vol. xxvi, p. 283.

critics of the later Victorian age, a period whose style and idiom already begin to seem not a little unnatural and conventional to us but half a century later. Hervey of course falls strangely on our ears, but we of the age of atom bombs and man-made moons cannot capture the impression made on contemporary ears by the *Meditations* and *Theron and Aspasio*.

This brings us to our third point; it may be true that Hervey's rhetoric is of a pinchbeck order, but the same cannot be said of his religious sentiment. His style may be mawkish but these same things have been said again and again of the hymns of Sankey and P. P. Bliss and the prose style of Spurgeon and of Moody—and that not without point when the criteria of judgment are purely aesthetic. But these were men of God, men who knew in their own experience the pardon of sins and the indwelling power of God Himself, and were communicating this knowledge to sinful men and women. And this, no doubt, is *par excellence* the reason why so many read Hervey. The sparkle and wit, the indifference and rationalism of the Augustan age had nothing to say to the troubled soul. We may smile condescendingly at the prosody of "Hold the fort" or "Let the lower lights be burning", or at the prosy diction of a passage like this:

> Those sheep, which give their udders to be drained by the busy frisking lambs, are fattening their flesh for *our* support; and while they fill their own fleeces, are providing for *our* comfortable clothing. Yonder kine, some of which are browzing upon the tender herb; others satiated with pasturage, ruminate under the shady covert; are, though conscious of no such design, concocting for *our* use, one of the softest, purest, healthiest liquors in the world[29]—

but it was the revival hymns and the tedious *Meditations* which in their own generations caused men to think of their latter end and led them into the knowledge of God's way of salvation.

II

Turning from Hervey as man of letters, we must examine a more distressing subject, Hervey as a theological controversialist, and especially his unfortunate differences with Wesley.

Hervey, it will be remembered, was one of the early members of the "Holy Club" at Oxford. He had been particularly helpful in his influence over Richard Morgan, the younger of two brothers who were in turn pupils of Wesley and members of his circle. William, the elder brother, died in 1732, and enemies of the Methodists averred that Wesley was responsible for the calamity

[29] *Theron and Aspasio*, vol. i, p. 30.

through having forced his followers to fast.[30] Richard seems to have been quite a handful for his tutor, who, according to Gambold, another member of the little group, invoked the aid of Hervey to bring him to heel:

> No impression could be made on the gay, thoughtless youth for a long time ; it was not made by him [i.e., Wesley] at last. . . . To leave nothing untried, he desired Mr. Hervey to keep him company, who, by his easy and engaging conversation, by letting him see a mind thoroughly serious and thoroughly happy . . . gained his heart. Since Mr. Morgan became that meek Christian that he now is, he has had a singular affection towards Mr. Wesley, such that he has run some hazard to be in his company.[31]

Wesley, for his part, had been a respected teacher and far more to Hervey, as we have seen. It is interesting that it was in a letter to Hervey dated March 20, 1739, that Wesley penned the famous words that now form his epitaph in Westminster Abbey: "I look upon all the world as my parish".[32] As the years went by, one after another of the Oxford Methodists of the early 1730's detached himself from allegiance to the leader, but not so Hervey, who remained a warm admirer.

It is true that they did not see eye to eye on all things. Wesley's development was in the direction of Arminianism, whereas Hervey tended rather towards Calvinism, but Wesley would have been the first to say that such differences of opinion should not sever friendship.[33] Nevertheless, the friendship was sadly interrupted. In 1753, Hervey was engaged on the writing of *Theron and Aspasio*, and as the successive Dialogues were completed the author sent them to various friends for comment. The first went to George Whitefield, who like himself had been Kinchin's curate at Dummer.[34] Wesley read the first three Dialogues, and returned them to Hervey with a few minor suggestions. Hervey seems to have been rather disappointed, and so he wrote back to Wesley asking for more: "You are not my friend if you do not take more liberty with me". Thus invited, Wesley returned to his task of criticism, this time executing it far more thoroughly, and in fact wounding his friend by the severity of some of his observations. Tyerman

[30] Reynolds, *Evangelicals at Oxford*, p. 8.

[31] Letter from Rev. John Gambold (probably about 1736), published in the *Methodist Magazine* for 1798 ; quoted in Wesley's Journal (ed. Curnock, n.d.), vol. viii, p. 268.

[32] Wesley's *Letters* (ed. Telford, London, 1931), vol. i, p. 286.

[33] See J. S. Simon, *John Wesley the Master Builder* (London, 1927), esp. ch. xii: *A regrettable incident*, which gives a balanced and fair-minded account of the rift, based chiefly on Tyerman's *Oxford Methodists*.

[34] Reynolds, p. 173.

says: "It is quite certain that when Hervey's work was nearly ready for the public, Hervey and Wesley by some means had become alienated and were no longer the warm-hearted friends they had been in former days".[35]

The work was finally published on February 18, 1755. Wesley appears to have written earlier, but his real broadside did not appear for more than a year and a half; his letter of October 15, 1756, fills no less than eighteen printed pages of *Wesley's Letters.*[36] Wesley's chief concern was the dangerous tendency he perceived in the book to antinomianism. He rebuked Hervey for his unscriptural expression, as he regarded it, the "Imputed Righteousness" of Christ:

> For Christ's sake, and for the sake of the immortal souls which He purchased with His blood, do not dispute for that particular phrase "the imputed righteousness of Christ". It is not scriptural; it is not necessary. Men who scruple to use, men who never heard, the expression, may yet "be humbled, as repenting criminals at His feet, and rely as devoted pensioners on His merits". But it has done immense hurt. I have had abundant proof that the frequent use of this unnecessary phrase, instead of "furthering men's progress in vital holiness", has made them satisfied without any holiness at all—yea, and encouraged them to work all uncleanness with greediness.[37]

And again:

> The goodness of God leadeth to repentance. This is unquestionably true; but the nice, metaphysical doctrine of Imputed Righteousness leads not to repentance, but licentiousness.[38]

From this expression of his feelings on the doctrine of Imputed Righteousness, Wesley pursues his argument to a point where he almost seems to teach the Sinless Perfection of the believer:

> Do not the best of men frequently feel disorder in their affections? Do they not often complain: 'When I would do good, evil is present with me?' I believe not. You and I are only able to answer for ourselves. . . . The cure of sin will be perfected in heaven? Nay, surely in paradise, if no sooner. This is a noble prerogative of the beatific vision? No, it will then come too late. If sin remain in us till the Day of Judgment, it will remain for ever. Our present blessedness does not consist in being free from sin? I really think it does; but whether it does or no, if we are not free from sin we are not Christian believers; for to all these the Apostle declares, "Being made free from sin ye are made the servants of righteousness".[39]

[35] *Oxford Methodists,* quoted by Simon, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

[36] Wesley, *Letters,* vol. iii, pp. 371-388.

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 372. In each of the passages quoted from this letter it will be seen that Wesley quotes points from *Theron and Aspasio,* and replies to them *seriatim.*

[38] *Ibid.*, p. 373.

[39] *Ibid.*, p. 380.

It was at this juncture that his quarrel with Wesley became open. Not only do we find no reply either to Wesley's more detailed criticism which Hervey had invited, nor to this later letter, but writing to others,[40] Hervey says quite definitely that he had broken off the connexion. Why should so courteous a man and so devoted a friend suddenly adopt this attitude? We must, of course, remember that he was a very sick man, but there seems another and more palpable element in the situation. Very shortly after the appearance of *Theron and Aspasio* a second edition was called for, and among those whose aid Hervey sought in the work of revision and preparation for the press was the Rev. William Cudworth, minister of an Independent Congregation in Margaret Street, London. Cudworth was a man without formal education, who had gained his knowledge of evangelical doctrine by wide reading, and whose ambition seems to have been to publish an evangelical library of excerpts from the great expository and devotional classics.[41] More important still for our purpose, ten years before he had been in violent controversy with Wesley.

In December, 1756, Wesley wrote *A Preservative against unsettled notions in Religion*, which, when published later as a two shilling pamphlet, included the long letter on *Theron and Aspasio* already discussed. Hervey sketched out a reply in eleven letters, which he asked Cudworth to look through. Cudworth accepted the task and turned the *Eleven Letters* into a bitter personal attack on Wesley.[42] But Hervey, burdened with the malady which was shortly to bring him to his grave, would not have them published. On the eve of his death, his brother William asked what was to be done with the letters, should they be published? Hervey was most emphatic in his insistence that they should not. At first, William Hervey faithfully observed his brother's wishes, but two events caused him to weaken in his resolve. First, he was in financial difficulties, and the income from such a publication would be most useful. Moore, in his *Life of John Wesley*,[43] tells how his banker bluntly told him:

[40] Especially Lady Frances Shirley (see Simon, pp. 166-7). Wesley was hurt by his friend's silence, see Letter to Hervey, Nov. 29, 1758 (*Letters*, vol. iv, p. 46).

[41] Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 48, has a fairly lengthy footnote on Cudworth.

[42] It is difficult to say how much of the anti-Wesley violence came from Hervey, and how much from Cudworth. Hervey seems to have endorsed Cudworth's comments by making a fair copy of the whole thing.

[43] Vol. ii, p. 248 n., quoted by Simon, p. 169.

> Mr. Hervey, you know that your brother ordered you to destroy those letters against Mr. Wesley. But you thought they would be productive, and you published them.

Secondly, in 1764 there appeared a pirated edition of the *Eleven Letters*, and so William was able to claim that he must publish an authentic version to ensure that the public should have an authoritative text. This edition appeared in 1765, and only served to exacerbate feelings.[44]

This sorry affair had results out of all proportion to its importance. In Scotland, with its long Calvinist traditions, Hervey found more acceptance than Wesley, who had in fact in his criticisms accused him of teaching predestination. In 1765 the Rev. John Erskine, one of the ministers of the Old Greyfriars Church, published an Edinburgh edition of the *Letters*, and the prejudice and antagonism they aroused against Wesley were sufficient to hinder the progress of Methodism in Scotland for many years.

It would no doubt be satisfying to idle curiosity to be able to apportion the blame as between Wesley and Hervey in this distressing affair, but it would be difficult to do so with any real understanding or justice, and as always it ill becomes us to sit in judgment. But one or two points are worth underlining:

1. Hervey was a very sick man, subject to much weariness and many anxieties. It would not be surprising if this circumstance impaired his judgment towards the end. For instance, had he not ceased, rather sulkily as it seems to us, his correspondence with Wesley, much misunderstanding might have been avoided.

2. With every desire to be just, it seems impossible entirely to acquit Cudworth of using this matter to pursue his personal vendetta against Wesley. Nor does William Hervey's part appear to have been above criticism.

3. Wesley and Hervey were men of totally different temperaments. The active and energetic Wesley did occasionally seem to ride roughshod over the feelings of others; Hervey was not the first—nor the last—with whom he quarrelled![45] But this side of his character was simply part of that very forcefulness which enabled him in the span of his lifetime to accomplish so much. And he did refuse to continue the controversy after Hervey's death.

[44] The responsibility was William Hervey's. Cudworth died in 1763 (Tyerman, *Life of Wesley*, ii, 530).

[45] See, e.g., M. M. Hennell, *John Venn and the Clapham Sect* (London, 1958), p. 20.

> Shall my hand be upon that saint of God? No, let him rest in Abraham's bosom. When my warfare is accomplished, may I rest with him until the resurrection of the Just.[46]

4. Wesley and Hervey were both godly men, each in his own way zealous for the glory of God. They were divided not by fundamental cleavages of doctrine, but by differences of emphasis. To a great extent both were in the right. As Simeon said, "The Truth is not in the middle, and not in one extreme, it is in both extremes".[47]

III

Finally, to return to a happier topic, the personal character of Hervey. Like many philosophers and religious teachers from Plato in ancient Greece to "Frank and Ernest" of the Bible broadcasts from Radio Luxembourg in our own day, Hervey put his great work of Theology into the form of Dialogues. One character, Theron, asks all the right questions and makes all the right mistakes, the other, Aspasio, furnishes the right answers and suitable corrections. Perhaps it may not be fanciful to see in Aspasio a picture of Hervey as he saw himself, or at least as he would have liked to be.

> Aspasio was not without his share of polite literature and philosophical knowledge. He had taken a tour through the circle of the sciences, and, having transiently surveyed the productions of human learning, devoted his final attention to the inspired writings. . . . These he studied with the unbiassed impartiality of a critic; yet with the reverential simplicity of a Christian. These he regarded, as the unerring standard of duty—the authentic charter of salvation—and the brightest mirror of the deity; affording the most satisfactory and sublime display of all the divine attributes.
>
> Theron was somewhat warmer in his temper; and would, upon occasion, make use of a little innocent raillery; not to expose his friend, but to enliven the conversation, sometimes disguising his true sentiments in order to sift the subject, or discover the opinion of others. Aspasio seldom indulges in the humorous or satyrical vein, but argues with "meakness of wisdom". Never puts on the appearance of guile, but always speaks the dictates of his heart.[48]

What impression did Hervey's personality make on those who knew him? We have already seen how he could influence a headstrong young undergraduate, and the cordiality of the friendship of so great a man as Wesley is no mean testimony to his character. He was known for his generosity (he devoted all the proceeds of his writing to charity), and for his extreme rectitude

[46] Tyerman, *Life of Wesley*, ii, 529.

[47] H. C. G. Moule, *Charles Simeon* (I.V.F. edn., 1948), p. 77.

[48] Vol. i, pp. 1-2.

in money matters. Rylands, his Baptist neighbour at Northampton, tells how he wished to make Hervey a present of Baskerville's new and sumptuous edition of Virgil:

> He received me with his usual sweetness, and expressed the tenderest gratitude for my regard to him: said he, "My dear friend, if I intended to keep this book, I would accept it; but as I shall never read it, you must allow me to pay for it, for I shall surely give it away".[49]

Sir James Stonhouse[50] is said to have been the author of the obituary notice in the *Northampton Mercury*:

> In his ministerial province, he was pious, fervent, indefatigable. In his ordinary connections with the community, he was ever cheerful, conscientiously punctual in all his dealings, and amiably candid to persons of all denominations. To his charities he set no bounds, scarcely leaving himself the mere requisites of his station. Under the severest trials of infirmity for several years, he displayed the highest example of fortitude, serenity, patience and an entire resignation to the divine will . . .
>
> But, reader, it is not the acquisition of his understanding, but the improvement of his heart, and his confidence in the great Redeemer, which will now avail this most excellent man.

Eighteenth-century hyperbole perhaps, and yet behind it all there seems to be the expression of a very sincere esteem.

No less a one than George Whitefield wrote to the Rev. Thomas Jones of Southwark:

> I think you honoured in being the chief mourner at the funeral of one of the greatest gospel-writers that England ever saw. Happy man, he is entered into the Master's joy. May our latter end be like his.[51]

Jones himself wrote: "God help us to copy him".

To conclude this brief sketch, no more fitting words could be found than those which sum up the article in the *Dictionary of National Biography* written by a High-Church historian, Canon J. H. Overton:

> A more gentle, pious, unworldly spirit than that of James Hervey it is difficult to conceive. He was never known to be in a passion; he made a solemn vow to dedicate all the profits of his literary work to pious and charitable uses, and scrupulously performed it. . . . His popularity as a writer never let him take a false view of his own powers, when it was at its height he frankly confessed that he was not a man of strong mind, and he had not power for arduous researches.

[49] Brown, p. 111.

[50] Sir J. Stonhouse, of St. John's College, Oxford, a well-known physician and infidel, was converted in mid-career, took holy orders and became a persuasive preacher. He was a close friend of Hervey. See Reynolds, p. 11. The article quoted is from Brown, p. 410.

[51] Both of these quotations are from Brown, pp. 412 f.

Surely Hervey's passing was like that of Mr. Valiant-for-Truth: "When the day that he must go hence was come . . . he passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side". *Birkenhead.*