THE ROMANTIC MOVEMENT AND METHODISM

THESIS

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INTRODUCTION

A period so intricate and various as the eighteenth century, or more definitely the years between 1660 and 1800, cannot be characterized as a unit. It had many characteristics and was complex and self-contradictory. There was the so-called Neo-classicism, which, simplified, meant following rules of the ancients, but there was also an inclination to abandon rules for natural expression. There was the restraint of emotions and a tendency to avoid any expression of feeling or enthusiasm. Along with this, however, there was an undercurrent of what has been called romanticism, which gave utterance to feelings, to the desire to escape to solitude, to melancholy meditation. There were several major characteristics of the age.

But if it is difficult to describe the dominant attitude of an age, especially one of this extent, we can say that the early years of the eighteenth century emphasized certain things. It was inclined to be realistic, restricting man's activities to what he was certain to attain and what he was certain would be of use to him. Literature became didactic and moralizing.¹ Only science that was utilitarian was considered. It was held that man's life should be based

chiefly on "common sense," or "reason," as it was called, but not on the speculative reason of the scientist. This meant the elimination of sentimentalism in all phases of life—in man's relation to man and to religion. The ethics taught by the poets was "common sense" and practical. Religion became largely ethical and formal to the subordination of the mysteries and the fervor of religious emotion.

There was a certain practical optimism based on the thought that society might overcome all its difficulties by applying reason and common sense to the affairs of life. But there were some teachers of the age who doubted that man would ever use reason and criticized him severely for not using it. Such were Swift and Mandeville.

Man gets on best by considering and knowing his limitations. This thought led to the doctrine of "uniformitarianism," imposing restrictions on the individual and leading to a distrust of the expert, the specialist, or the genius. According to the doctrine of uniformitarianism, Reason, sometimes called "Nature," was identical in all men. Differences of opinion were evidences of error. The efforts of religion, morals, and social reform were to standardize men's beliefs, tastes, activities, and institutions.²

We may be justified, then, in saying that the first three decades of the eighteenth century were dominated by

the spirit of rationalism, which in general was an unemotional attitude, a critical attitude, a practical or utilitarian attitude, and an attitude of distrust of individual genius or individual inspiration. It is not necessary here to go into the much-disputed question as to the origin of this tendency in the eighteenth century, whether it came into England with the returning court of Charles II as a direct importation from France, or whether it was an aspect of the Renaissance which had been latent for some years.

My immediate purpose is to point out that, after this period of rationalism, to use a term not entirely satisfactory or even comprehensive, there appeared a reaction to all that is implied in rationalism which had two phases—one in literature, which has been called romanticism, and one in religion, expressed mainly by the rise of Methodism. It is not entirely accurate to say "after this period," because, as a matter of fact, the spirit of romanticism and of Methodism existed as an under-current in the midst of the rationalistic era.

So far as the present writer can find, the extent to which Methodism, the main current of the religious revival, influenced the Romantic Movement has never been completely determined. There are those who see Methodism as the main-spring of the Romantic Movement. Among them are Frederick C. Gill, author of The Romantic Movement and Methodism, and C. Brompton Harvey, whose article on the same subject appeared in a 1934 issue of the London Quarterly Review. On the other
hand, there are any number of critics who find only a vague relationship between the two movements. To determine whether or not Methodism exerted any immediate influence upon the Romantic Movement, or conversely, whether the Romantic Movement influenced Methodism, is the purpose of this thesis. Perhaps there may be no positive answer to the question, for there appears to be evidence on both sides of the argument.

In order to understand clearly the two movements and their relationship, it has been expedient to divide the thesis according to the following studies: in the first place, what the Methodist Movement meant in its setting of contemporary English life, its philosophy, and its organization; in the second place, what the Romantic Movement meant in English literature, its standards, philosophy, and development; and finally, in the third place, the essence of the two movements when they are seen in a comparative study.

Chapter One will deal with Methodism in the strict sense of "Wesleyan Methodism" and not in the broader meaning that would include the whole eighteenth century Evangelical Revival or even the Calvinistic branch of Methodism. An attempt will be made to give a brief account, or rather a picture, of the general religious temper of the age in which Methodism had its birth. Knowledge of such background is necessary for a proper understanding of the movement's development and influence. Then the revival itself will be seen in its early stages when the force of its appeal swept millions of Englishmen literally off their feet in emotional exaltation.
Limitations of time and space will necessitate the briefness of Chapter Two's account of the highly complex Romantic Movement in literature. There will be given, however, the essentials of that movement--its ideals and leadership and its slow rise to prominence.

The purpose of Chapter Three is to see the two movements in their relationship--to learn what they have in common and to learn whether their common qualities are a matter of cause and effect or are merely parallel developments with a common source.
CHAPTER I

THE METHODIST MOVEMENT

The dawn of Methodism broke upon an age of decay in the fluctuating life of England. Although Methodism is fundamentally a religious movement, it can be understood clearly only as it is seen in relation to its political, social, and economic background.

Moral and religious trends are rarely, if ever, separate from the forms of government under which a people live. Having shortly been rescued from "Jacobite" power through civil war, eighteenth century England was fixing upon itself a new character, one by which both politically and religiously it would build an invincible bulwark against the Stewart Pretender and the Pope at Rome. Under Anne and the indifferent Hanoverian Georges England maintained a limited monarchy in which Parliament had succeeded in establishing its control and the creation of a system of responsible government. Political stagnation gave the nation a much needed breathing spell during which it could rest from the struggle of its civil war before and gather strength for the closing years of the century, when, within a few years, it was to run afoot of three revolutions: the American, the Industrial, and the French.¹

The spirit of compromise which pervaded politics served as a stabilizer and promoter of England's economic life, for men were left more free to expend their energy in private enterprise. Thus they were able to build a great overseas colonial empire and to make remarkable strides towards modern agriculture, commerce, and industry that were to be climaxed in the Industrial Revolution late in the eighteenth century.

While wealth and power mounted, the moral life of the nation slumped. That gulf between the "haves" and the "have-nots" broadened. Upper society, bedecked in its finery and steeped in pride for its achievement in an age of "Reason," complacently ignored, for the most part, the miserableness of the lowly. Though the practical arts--architecture, landscape gardening, and interior decoration--brilliantly progressed, the sense of moral obligation was quiescent. Debtors' jails and insane asylums dotted the countryside. Parliament had no thought yet for a social awakening. Its primary function was to promote such legislation as would maintain the status quo in England so far as politics, religion, and economics were concerned.

In order that the Church of England might continue to be the "established" one and that its wealthy, politically-minded prelates might be protected in their luxury and power, Parliament zealously guarded against all nonconformists, whether they were Protestant dissenters, Roman Catholics, or
Jews. By the Toleration Act of 1689 a gradual spirit of toleration had permitted most nonconformists to worship as they pleased, but political disabilities of the Test and Corporation Acts were still directed against both Catholics and Protestant dissenters. By the strict letter of the law both groups were thus debarred from all civil and military positions under the crown, from municipal corporations, and from the universities. Opposition to the relaxation of these laws was, however, not very strong. By "occasional conformity," nonconformists might qualify for office by partaking of the Anglican Sacrament annually. Yet fear on the part of the Anglicans that Catholics would be granted too much freedom delayed repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts until 1828 and 1829.

Persecution came to be political rather than ecclesiastical. Nonconformists were regarded not so much as heretics but as representative of an interest which was opposed to the dominant class of landed gentry. The Church as such had lost the power of discipline and was gradually falling under the dominance of the aristocracy. Church feeling was strong, but the clergy in general became subservient to the nobility and squirearchy.\(^2\)

The Church of England was indeed the "established" church, but within it there was certainly no uniformity of belief or

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even too much uniformity in practice. On the one hand were Latitudinarians, who favored freedom and difference of opinion respecting government, worship, and doctrine. At the other extreme were the zealous asserters of episcopacy, who, among the most orthodox High Churchmen, were in the next century to bring about the religious revival known as the Oxford Movement. Unfortunately, the two main parties of the Church came to be identified with the two main parties of the government. High Churchmen were thought of as Tories, while Latitudinarians and other Low Churchmen were considered Whigs.

The Georgian government, with rare consistency, favored the Whigs. Following an upsurging of sentiment on the part of Tories and High Churchmen produced by the High-Tory speech of Dr. Sacheverell in 1709, in which he attacked the whole Revolution Settlement, Parliament refused from 1717 to 1850 to allow the Church to meet in Convocation for the dispatching of business. As a result the Church had no rallying-point, no meeting place where important matters could be discussed, counsel be given, or reforms be effected in a constitutional way. The clergy lost all opportunity of expressing its needs and views, and the bishops lost the benefit of a criticism which would have served both as a check to their partisan views and a stimulus to their religious activity. The clergyman, thus left to his own whims, very often sank into sloth and apathy. 3

In this period of "sleepy prosperity," the Church of England evinced material and spiritual characteristics which may be taken as both cause and effect of its decay. The traditional three-fold organization was maintained in its bishops, priests, and deacons, with rigid territorial divisions of dioceses and parishes. The wealth of the Church was frankly concentrated in the episcopacy, whose misfortune it was to have its most brilliant dignitaries more interested in politics, social activity, and theological wrangles than in their neglected and needful parochial duties. William Cowper's poetic commentary strikes close to the heart of the situation:

The royal letters are a thing of course--
A king, that would, might recommend his horse;
And deans, no doubt, and chapters, with one voice,
As bound in duty, would confirm the choice.
Behold your bishop! well he plays his part--
Christian in name, and infidel in heart,
Ghostly in office, earthly in his plan,
A slave at court, elsewhere a lady's man!

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For Providence, that seems concern'd t' exempt
The hallow'd bench from absolute contempt,
In spite of all the wrigglers into place,
Still keeps a seat or two for worth and grace;
And therefore 'tis, that, though the sight be rare,
We sometimes see a Lowth or Bagot there. 4

Cowper was careful to spare a few higher clericals from his indictment, for indeed there were within the age several bishops of outstanding merit and integrity. Still the charge of Cowper remained generally true:

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Church ladders are not always mounted best
By learned clerks, and Latinists profess'd.
Th' exalted prize demands an upward look,
Not to be found by poring on a book.
Small skill in Latin, and still less in Greek,
Is more than adequate to all I seek.
Let erudition grace him, or not grace,
I give the bauble but the second place;
His wealth, fame, honours, all that I intend,
Subsist and centre in one point—a friend!
A friend, whate'er he studies or neglects;
Shall give him consequence, heal all defects.
His intercourse with peers, and sons of peers—
There dawns the splendour of his future years;
In that bright quarter of his propitious skies,
Shall blush betimes, and there his glory rise.

While we look with amazement and disgust upon such men
of the higher clergy, it is the parish priest who compels our
sympathy and righteous indignation. His was the pitiable lot.
He had to choose between living in poverty or becoming a
pluralist.

Of Church preferment he had none:
Nay, all his hopes of that was gone;
He felt that he content must be
With drudging in a curacy.
Indeed on ev'ry Sabbath day
Through eight long miles he took his way
To preach, to grumble, and to pray,
To cheer the good, to warn the sinner,
And, if he got it—eat a dinner.
And all his gains, it did appear,
Were only thirty pounds a year.⁶

It is small wonder that pluralism, accompanied by absenteeism,
became a crying disgrace in England. Says one historian, "It
was the inadequacy of the tithes that was at fault, not the
incumbent's moral character, when a clergyman had to be

⁵Ibid., pp. 250-251.
⁶Quoted by M. E. Synge, A Short History of Social Life
in England, p. 299.
presented to more than one so-called living in order to provide him with moderate competence."7

The religion of that day bears out the "reasonableness" which characterizes the trend in all English eighteenth century thought. "Churchmanship," Norman Sykes states, "like the epoch of which it was born, was prosaic and calculating, conceived as a prudent investment promising assured blessings both temporal and celestial."8 The virtues chiefly emphasized were self-control, temperance, and rational conduct. The reaction against Puritanism, the great strides made in scientific thought, and the influence of Deistic arguments left nothing exempt from analysis or criticism. The spell of church authority and tradition were broken so far as ideas were concerned. Among churchmen and dissenters alike there was a growing antagonism to the faith of their fathers.

Consequently, since the government was intent on suppressing all forms of enthusiasm for fear of Jacobitism, and, since the Church was preoccupied with politics and the problem of testing the reasonableness of Christianity, the "heart" element of religion was forgotten. Even though the lessons of the Latitudinarians were often true, they were cold and deadening. They depreciated excitement and denounced fanaticism, claimed that the practice of virtue brings its own reward in

8 Norman Sykes, *Church and State in England in the XVIIIth Century*, p. 419.
this life, insisted upon the excellence of moderation, tried
to disprove the reality of special spiritual illumination,
and defended Christianity on the ground that faith is less
illogical than unbelief. Sir Leslie Stephen vividly de-
scribes the theology of the time:

God was an idol compounded of fragments of tradition
and of frozen metaphysics. . . . The grotesque Deity of
Bishop Warburton was a supernatural chief-justice whose
sentences were carried out in a non-natural world; a
constitutional monarch who had signed a constitutional
compact and retired from the active government of affairs.

W. H. Fitchett, in Wesley and His Century, adds to the
description:

The religious literature of that age shows how curiously
pale and ineffective the notion of God had become for
even those who professed to be His ministers. . . . There
was a God; and He had once touched human life. But it
was a long time ago, and in a far-off land. He had now
emigrated from His own world. . . . Of God as the Father
of our spirits, as actually living in His own universe
and ruling men's lives. . . . no trace is to be found in the
theology of the eighteenth century. Superstition, accord-
ing to its theologians, consisted in the belief that God
ever revealed Himself in the affairs of the modern world.
Fanaticism was the imagination that He revealed Himself
by any touch, or breath, or thrill of influence to the
personal soul.

Deism, we repeat, thick with arctic fogs and frozen
with arctic chills, constitutes the working theology of
that unhappy age. In that theology Christ is attenuated
to a shadow. He serves as a label for a creed, but He
has only the offices of a label. His Gospel did not
consist of 'good news,' but only of good advice. It was
not a deliverance, but a philosophy.

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9Wakeman, op. cit., p. 419.

10Leslie Stephen, History of English Thought in the
Eighteenth Century, II, 238.

11W. H. Fitchett, Wesley and His Century, pp. 142-143.
Small wonder it was, then, that the simple Gospel message of God's redeeming love—"come unto me all ye that are heavy-laden, and I will refresh you"—preached by dynamic speakers to the poor, the hungry, the oppressed, the dispossessed, and the hopeless and spiritually-starved ones of England should have been a challenge too thrilling and too impelling to deny. Such was the message of those first Methodists, calling for a new life of fervent devotion and personal righteousness in a wilderness of spiritual inertia.

England, it seems, was ready and waiting for the man John Wesley to make his appearance. He was born at Epworth, in Lincolnshire, in 1703, the fifteenth child of Samuel Wesley, Epworth's learned and talented rector, and Susanna Wesley, one of the most remarkable mothers of history. John began his early schooling at Charterhouse in 1713, and from there he advanced to Christ Church College in 1720. In 1726 he became a fellow at Lincoln College, Oxford, where Methodism as an organized movement had its beginning.

The "Holy Club" of Oxford had already been founded when John Wesley entered there. It was a society composed of a few pious young men who desired to live by the Church's rules of fasting, almsgiving, and prayer, and the reception of the Holy Communion weekly. Robert Southey, writing nearly a century later, remarked that "such conduct would at any time have attracted observation in an English university."[^12]

[^12]: Cited in Cambridge History of English Literature, X, 411.
unpopular beginnings soon passed beyond the petty criticisms of those at Oxford. Upon his return to college in 1729, John joined this "Holy Club" and remained at Oxford for some years, actively engaged in works of piety. His fellow-students, George Whitefield and Charles Wesley, his younger brother, joined him in the practical applications of their common beliefs.

After Wesley was ordained a priest of the Church of England, he served as his father's curate at Epworth and Wroot. In 1735 he went as a missionary to Georgia, which was at that time a British colony. The next year he was followed there by his brother Charles, and in 1738, by Whitefield. The freedom of missionary work in America exposed the young men to new religious influences that led them away from some of the accepted theology of the Church. While Wesley was attracted by the Moravians, and especially by their leader Count Zinzendorf, Whitefield espoused Calvinism, which was then dying a natural death in the English Church. Its survival and revival there is largely due to his influence. After two years in Georgia, Wesley returned to England.

Although he had previously been notably influenced by the writings of Thomas à Kempis, Jeremy Taylor, and William Law, it was in London at a little meeting of Moravian brethren on Aldersgate Street that Wesley had, in the year 1738, that mystical experience which he described as having his heart "strangely warmed." A notable entry in his famous
Journal is dated May 24, 1738:

About a quarter to nine, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation, and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death. 13

As a witness to his brother's exaltation, Charles Wesley wrote, "That same memorable night my brother was brought in triumph by a troop of friends, and declared, 'I believe!'" 14 Then they sang Charles Wesley's exultant lines, composed the previous day on his own conversion:

Where shall my wondering soul begin?  
How shall I all to heaven aspire? 15

Charles rejoiced with John on his conversion, but another brother, Samuel, thought that John had gone out of his mind.

Out of John Wesley's conversion experience came the tremendous impulse of Methodism. From that time on the lives of the two Wesleys and Whitefield were given new direction and power. Then began the long years of itinerant preaching over thousands upon thousands of miles of countryside, village, and city. Whitefield and the elder Wesley preached to ever-increasing crowds--first in churches until they were denied use of them, and then in great open fields. Unprecedentedly large congregations were held as if almost by magic. Both preachers were utterly sincere in their passionate zeal for

15 Quoted, Ibid.
souls; and, while Whitefield was the superior in his genius for public address, Wesley possessed the greater intellect, the richer spirituality and understanding of people. Their direct preaching of simple Gospel truths was made even more effective by the addition of hymn-singing under the direction of the talented Charles Wesley.

Methodism, as a movement, had its beginning, and remained until after the death of John Wesley, at least theoretically, within the Established Church. Methodism had no new doctrine; it merely revived those that had long been neglected in the Church. There was no quarrel with the Church, but there was a reaction rather against the rationalism of Anglican divines and the deists, who with cold reason had let the life of their religion slip away. Methodism allowed for natural emotion and attempted, in Wesley's words, "to bring the life of God into the souls of men." There was a great emphasis upon the personal relation between the individual and God in all stages of religious experience. Witness was given to a conviction of sin and the loss of the favor of God, accompanied by repentance and redemption, with an inner certainty of the forgiveness of sin and the returning grace of God. The deity of Christ and the witness of the spirit were strongholds of belief. The invitation was, "All may come, whoever will," as opposed to the stern Calvinistic doctrine of election.16

Methodism owed its great popularity largely to the fact that it offered to the eighteenth century an emotional

and subjective religion with a message of hope for everyone. By this democratic principle, reinforced by an emphasis on brotherhood and an injunction to social as well as private duty, the movement put itself in line with certain other equalitarian tendencies of the century. Methodism had thus an important influence on the shaping of social and humanitarian theory.17

Methodism’s appeal was made primarily to the poorer and more ignorant classes whom the Anglican Church had failed to reach. The common folk cared little or nothing for the moderation which had been preached to them before, but they were carried away by a message of love and hope. Although Wesley was an ordained Anglican priest, the enthusiasm which his spirited preaching aroused among his hearers was looked upon as fanaticism by the Church and was met by strong opposition. For those divines

The first great duty of religion was to be tepid. There must be no enthusiasm, no heroics. Extremes were to be shunned. ‘We should take care never to overshoot ourselves, even in the pursuits of virtues,’ was the counsel of one of the preachers of that age. ‘Whether zeal or moderation be the point we aim at, let us keep fire out of one and frost out of the other.’... Its divines were much more afraid of being suspected of believing too much, than of doubting everything.18

It was Bishop Butler, one of the very few really great Anglican divines of his century, who said of his own people:

The deplorable distinction of our age is an avowed scorn of religion, and a growing disregard for it.19

Yet he forbade Wesley and Whitefield to preach to the coal-

17Ibid., p. 883.
18Pitchett, op. cit., p. 144.
19Quoted, ibid., p. 146.
miners of Kingswood, who were as untouched by the forces of Christianity as if they had been savages of darkest Africa. Fitchett says of Bishop Butler that

His conscience was not disquieted by the lapse into mere heathenism of a whole class within sound of the bells of his cathedral; but he grows piously indignant at the spectacle of an ecclesiastical irregularity! Enthusiasm in good men was, in his eyes, a more alarming spectacle than vice in bad men. . . . A sound divine was much more anxious to purge himself of the suspicion of enthusiasm, than of the scandal of heresy. 20

Thus it was the spirit of compromise which characterized the politics, philosophy, and theology of the day, that tended to prove fatal to enthusiasm.

Henry Carey (1687?-1743), it is said, had the reputation of wanting to like everybody and everything, but his traditional good-will did not extend to the Methodists. In "The Methodist Parson" he asks with a good bit of sarcasm,

What signifies learning and going to school, When the rabbles' so ready to follow a fool? A fool did I say? No, his pardon I crave He cannot be a fool, but he may be a knave. 21

Then, with added taunt, he accuses the preachers of being mercenary and predicts their early failure:

But let them alone, and they'll dwindle away, As they rose of themselves, of themselves they'll decay; At first they astonish, at last they're a joke, They burst forth in flames, and they vanish in smoke. 22

George Crabbe's sarcastic criticism of Methodism is more

20Ibid., pp. 146-147.
21Quoted by H. N. Fairchild, Religious Trends in English Poetry, I, 386.
22Ibid.
subtle. In the "Preface" to his poem "The Borough," he describes Methodism as "this spiritual influenza."23 One writer states that Crabbe saw the movement "as a disease which was virulent and infectious, striking down its victims in masses, heating their blood to fever pitch and their brains to the point of delirium, and leaving them, if it did ever leave them, debilitated and weak."24 Through the words of a zealous Methodist parson, Crabbe, with fair accuracy, pictures the typical meeting:

Oh! now again for those prevailing powers,
Which once began this mighty work of ours;
When the wide field, God’s temple, was the place,
And birds flew by to catch a breath of grace;
When 'mid his timid friends and threat'ning foes,
Our zealous chief as Paul at Athens rose:
When with infernal spite and knotty clubs
The Ill-One arm’d his accouplements and his scrubs;
And there were flying all around the spot
Brands at the preacher, but they touched him not;
Stakes brought to spit him, threatn’d in his cause,
And tongues attun’d to curses, roar’d applause;
Louder and louder grew his awful tones,
Sobblings and sighs were heard, and rueful groans;
Soft women fainted, prouder men express’d
Wonder and wo, and butchers smote the breast;
Eyes wept, ears tingled; stiff’ning on each head,
The hair drew back, and Satan howl’d and fled.25

As these lines infer, Wesley actually suffered many physical indignities as well as those of the pen. Horace Walpole, that man of reason, restraint, decorum, and propriety, confessed that he was unable to understand any religious emotion.


24 T. B. Shepherd, "George Crabbe and Methodism," *London Quarterly Review*, CLXVI (April, 1941), 166.

He hated Wesley and the Methodists and accused Calvin and Wesley of having the same views as the Popes, with wealth and power as their chief objects. And still

It had to be confessed that they made thieves honest, drunkards sober, wife-beaters gentle. They lit human faces with the glow of a strange joy on their lips. But their work had one fatal vice, the worst the age knew—it was irregular! ... Even Southey, telling the story a hundred years afterwards, cannot quite forgive the Wesleys for saving men and women in an unconventional fashion. 27

Should not Reason have guarded the Methodists against such trespasses of convention? Yet it was to Reason that Wesley made a bold appeal in support of faith. One of his early publications in explanation and defense of Methodism was called "An Appeal to Men of Reason and Religion." In it he declared, "It is a fundamental principle with us that to renounce Reason is to renounce Religion: that Religion and Reason go hand in hand, and that all irrational religion is false religion." 28 It was his theory that Reason must be used in judging and formulating Religion and that faith must forever carry Reason along with it.

For Wesley, however, Reason meant the apprehension of wholeness, of consistency, and coherence throughout the whole domain both of Reality and of the Faith that responds to it. Above all, he meant the satisfying sense of proportion, of the pre-eminence of the


27Fitchett, op. cit., p. 154.

highest spiritual Values, as the instrument of their vindication, and fulfillment.\textsuperscript{29}

John Wesley was not the ignorant Methodist preacher whom Crabbe criticized, for he was by all judgment a learned scholar and profound thinker. His faith was tested by his own severest questioning and probing. His spiritual and intellectual development and his genius for organization well fitted Wesley to be the founder of so important a force as Methodism.

At the time when his career began to make history Wesley was a "clergyman without a charge, a leader without a party, a preacher with every pulpit in the three kingdoms shut against him."\textsuperscript{30} After he had once preached in a church, it almost automatically forbade him further hospitality. By the end of 1738 he had become little more than an ecclesiastical outcast. If churches refused to hear him, he found responsive listeners in crowded jails or open fields. In one condemned group Charles Wesley reported to have found a child of ten who was awaiting execution.\textsuperscript{31} Social and moral conditions called from Wesley his ceaseless efforts. He set up a dispensary with free supply of medicine to the poor; he fought against political corruption; he established relief employment for the destitute. During a half-century he preached forty thousand

\textsuperscript{29}\textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{30}\textit{Pitchett, op. cit.}, p. 278.
\textsuperscript{31}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 152.
sermons and travelled approximately a quarter of a million miles. 32

The several religious societies which the Wesleys founded severed their connection with the Moravians in 1740. In 1743 the followers of George Whitefield became distinguished as the Calvinistic Methodists, while those of John Wesley were known as the Arminian Methodists. It was not until 1764, however, that the separation of the two bodies became permanent. It has been said that this date might well mark the creation, from the original movement, of a newly organized dissent. 33 Arminianism, as Wesley saw it, was far truer to the nature of God in its theological implications than was fatalistic Calvinism. Arminianism made bold to assert that all mankind might be saved, not just the elect few.

Not only England but also Ireland and Scotland knew the personal influence of Wesley. In cities large and small he held conferences with preachers, whom he, without ecclesiastical authority, had ordained, and lay leaders.

Each of these centres had its library of standard works in divinity, natural philosophy, and history. Wesley trained his preachers there, and was guide, philosopher and friend to people of all ranks and conditions. He was consulted on almost every possible subject. 34

Rules of membership and discipline for the Methodist societies.

32 Cambridge History, op. cit., p. 412.
33 Ibid.
34 George Nayre, John Wesley: Christian Philosopher and Church Founder, pp. 44-45.
were issued by Wesley, and these rules were followed by standards of teaching for preachers whom he called out and appointed to various chapels. By ordaining these men, Wesley violated a fixed church law, for in the Anglican communion only bishops have the power of ordination. Wesley was only a priest. In reality it was this act of his that, for all practical purposes, divorced Wesley and his followers from the Church, even though he remained Anglican in name to his death. In the view of the Church his acts of ordination were considered invalid and ignored. Charles Wesley, by far the more strict churchman of the two brothers, made light of John's assumption of such authority:

How easily are bishops made
By man or woman's whim!
Wesley his hands on Coke hath laid,
But who laid hands on him?35

As the Methodist movement advanced, the breach between it and the Established Church widened. The Act of Toleration forbade the holding of religious services outside the regular Anglican ones except in the case of licensed dissenters. By the enforcement of this law the Methodists were compelled ultimately to register as dissenters and complete their break with the parent church. In 1784 Wesley wrote in his Journal:

...a kind of separation has already taken place, and will inevitably spread, though by slow degrees. ... Their enemies provoke them to it, the clergy in particular, most of whom, far from thanking them for

35Quoted, ibid., p. 105.
continuing in the Church, use all the means in their power, fair and unfair, to drive them out of it.36

Another breach of discipline which Wesley thought necessary was the overstepping of parochial boundaries. He and his colleagues felt that they should be able to preach anywhere without being restrained by anyone's jurisdictional authority.

Two years before his death Wesley made an impassioned appeal to his followers not to separate:

In God's name stop! Ye yourselves were first called to the Church of England, and although ye will have a thousand temptations to leave it and set up for yourselves, regard them not. Be Church of England men still. Do not cast away that peculiar glory which God hath put upon you, and frustrate the design of Providence, the very end for which God raised you up.37

The first Wesleyan conference, meeting in 1744, had stated that it did not desire schism with the Church, but the majority of converts increasingly felt no strong tie to it. Out of deference to their leader, the Methodists waited until after Wesley's death in 1791 to make a bold proclamation of their separation. In that year their number was eighty thousand. One hundred years later it was twenty-five million.38

Thus, from its earliest beginning, Methodism was a rigorous, searching, dynamic movement, quite revolutionary in its scope. Its powerful effect was felt to a pronounced

36 Quoted by Fitchett, op. cit., p. 400.
37 Quoted by Wakeman, op. cit., p. 437.
38 Mr. B. Synge, op. cit., p. 302.
degree upon eighteenth century England's spiritual, moral, and social life. To a somewhat lesser degree it affected the political and literary development of England.
CHAPTER II

THE ROMANTIC MOVEMENT

Rather parallel to the growth of Methodism was the development of the Romantic Movement in English literature. (Like Methodism, too, the Romantic Movement was a decided reaction to the superficiality and, especially, the coldness which characterized the Age of Reason. The romantic attitude can best be understood as it is seen in its relation to the spirit of classicism. Too much, it seems, is included in the definition given by H. N. Fairchild when he says that

Romanticism is the endeavor, in the face of growing factual obstacles, to achieve, to retain, or to justify that illusional view of the universe and of human life which is produced by an imaginative fusion of the familiar and the strange, the known and the unknown, the real and the ideal, the finite and the infinite, the material and the spiritual, the natural and the supernatural.¹

Even Mr. Fairchild admits that something so broad in its scope as romanticism cannot be confined to a simple, one-sentence definition. It is best, then, that the spirit of romanticism be studied in its various aspects and implications.

¹H. N. Fairchild, The Romantic Quest, p. 251.
of inspiration.

Romanticism has been variously defined as the 'Renaissance of Wonder'; 'Strangeness added to Beauty'; 'Return to the Middle Ages.' All of these meanings entered into the spirit of the age. Men sought relief from the commonplace and found it in new forms of beauty remote from their ordinary selves and in ages long past. 2

The England in which Alexander Pope had held sovereign sway over literary art had felt no regard for the crude Middle Ages. Men of reason glorified the greatness of their own achievement. Contemptuously, they termed "Gothic" anything that smacked of oldness or medievalism. The essence of classicism was reserve, self-suppression, and polish. How revolutionary were the romanticists that they should prefer an age far less refined and finished than that of the Augustan classicists.

... in the Middle Ages lay just the material for which the Romantic spirit yearned. Its religion, military and social life, and all forms of mediaeval art can hardly be better characterized than by the word Picturesque; and souls weary of form and finish, of 'dead perfection,' of 'faultily faultless' monotony, naturally sought the opposite of all this in the literature and thought of the Middle Ages. 3

More than any other period of history, the Middle Ages had been lately neglected or treated with contempt. But the romanticist believed, as we find in the poem of J. St. Loes Strachey, that

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2 P. H. Houston, Main Currents of English Literature: A Brief History of the English People, p. 280.

The Past alone is firm, alone is sure,  
You know it is, though you should know no more.  
It cannot alter and it cannot die,  
It cannot mock you, and it does not lie.  
Not God Himself, not chance, not change, not Fate  
Can blot it out, post-date, or ante-date.  
It is our Rock of Ages—-we have been,  
Have laughed, have wept, have felt, have heard, have seen.

The children of the Past, ourselves we see  
Shut in the boundless Pale of Destiny.  
The Past directs. Each thought, each word, each act  
Is but the product of some fertile past  
Made long ago. Set in its terms there lay  
Sequestered our to-morrow and to-day.4

Not only did they find inspiration in this past, but it was  
to romanticists a much-needed anchor.

The "romantic quest" sought in the life and thought of  
the Middle Ages an escape from the satirical criticism and  
prosaic formality which had been defended and promoted by the  
school of Dryden and Pope in the early eighteenth century.  
To these "neo-classicists" beauty consisted in order; the  
value of Nature consisted in its practical use to Man; and  
literature was the vehicle of aristocracy and should be  
rather rigid in form and didactic in purpose. As a mode of  
literary expression, the heroic couplet was developed and  
refined to serve such ends.

William Lyon Phelps says, "if there was anything on which  
the Augustans prided themselves, it was their perfect sanity—  
their immense superiority in reason and common-sense over  
their own ancestors and over the nations of the north and

4Quoted by H. A. Beers, A History of English Romanticism  
in the Nineteenth Century, p. 220.
east."\(^5\) But the romanticist's attitude differed. The spirit of the Middle Ages had upon his mind an effect of wonder, of mystery, of dim, longing aspiration. It provided him with a wider range of subject matter for his literary efforts. It opened the way for an expression of his deeper feelings, whether they be enthusiasm or subjective melancholy. His choice of subjects was further increased in his "romantic quest" by the revival of the old English ballad, around 1765, and by the translation into English of much Norse mythology in 1779.

In seeking to evoke from the past a beauty and meaning that they found wanting in the present, early romanticists found inspiration in Edmund Spenser, the Elizabethan romanticist, and, oddly enough, in the Puritan John Milton. Spenser was as typically romantic as Pope was neo-classic. Indeed, they were virtual opposites: Pope—all intellect, didactic, and satirical, the poet of town life and of fashionable society; Spenser—all imagination and exaggeration, the poet of dreamland, of woods and streams, of fairy and supernatural life.\(^6\) Until after the death of Pope in 1744, Spenser was known not by the mass of literary men, but only by the scholars and antiquarians. "As soon as he was really brought before the public," Mr. Phelps states, "writers and readers turned to his pages with avidity—eager for that solace and

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\(^5\) Phelps, op. cit., p. 18.

\(^6\) Ibid., p. 46.
refreshment which the dry bones of Classicism could no longer afford. 7 Spenser's influence effected the revival of the sonnet and gave impetus to creative imagination. His Faerie Queene stirred the latent genius of many.

The influence of Milton came not from his form, but from his thought. In Il Penseroso he exhibited "the love of meditative comfortable melancholy that penetrated most deeply into the Romantic soul." 8 William Collins, Thomas Gray, and the Warton brothers are among the "poets of melancholy" who show most clearly this phase of Milton's influence.

The Romantic Movement, while having a sound footing in the present, had an eye both to the past and to the future. Spenser and his Faerie Queene also played an important role in awakening in the English mind a greater consciousness of, and appreciation for, nature. For the classicist, wild, romantic nature had as little appeal as did Gothic architecture or romantic poetry—and that was negligible. 9 It is believed that Thomas Gray was one of the first men in Europe who had a real understanding and appreciation of external nature such as we find later in Wordsworth. "After an age of convention, of skepticism, of external rules with their chief emphasis upon good form, had run its course, came a quick revolt to the simple, the instinctive, to a direct contact with

7Ibid., pp. 47-48.
8Ibid., p. 87.
9Ibid., p. 167.
nature."10 The romanticist, therefore, speaks not in general terms of a tree, but he notes differences in the shade of green of the leaves and the peculiarities of the bark.

Coupled with this rebirth of love for nature for itself was the growth of a new emotionalism in literature. Emotion was anathema to the classicist; any form of emotional exhibition was fanaticism. Good taste demanded restraint and cool poise. Again it is Mr. Phelps who declares:

Romantic literature could hardly hope to find favor in an age whose standard was one of fidelity to everyday life and exact copying of Franco-Latin models. Then the Augustans called a poem or story 'romantic,' they meant that it was either wildly improbable and extravagant or else over-sentimental; and in either case it deserved an unqualified condemnation. Everything must conform to their own standard of criticism; otherwise, it could not hope for the serious consideration of sane men and women.11

The romanticists, however, were bold in their beliefs and set up their own standards of criticism.

It is only a truism to state that the Romantic Movement was just as strong as the writers who fostered it. It was as difficult for romanticism to gain a sure footing in the affection of the English people of the eighteenth century as it was for Methodism to combat the opposition of the established order and to attain a degree of respectability. The disciples of Pope were adamant in opposing any such romantic innovations as enthusiasm or melancholy in poetry, a revival

10Houston, op. cit., p. 279.
11Phelps, op. cit., p. 266.
of interest in the antiquities of Britain and of the Scandi-
navian countries, or a spectacular change in the accepted
poetic forms. The conservative leader of literary criticism
after the deaths of Pope and Swift was Dr. Samuel Johnson;
and he, in turn, was upheld by his ally, Oliver Goldsmith.
Adhering to the principles of rationalism, even in literature,
they continued to the end to protect literary standards which
allowed a minimum of warmth or human interest. Among their
works one quite often finds the use of such abstractions as
Folly, Noise, Laughter, and Prosperity.

Even Pope, however, was not wholly immune from the
temptation to be a romanticist. In his private correspondence
with Lady Mary Montagu, he wrote,

> The more I examine my own mind, the more romantic
> [meaning sentimental] I find myself. . . . Let them say I
> am romantic; so is every one said to be that either
> admires a fine thing or praises one; it is no wonder
> such people are thought mad, for they are as much out
> of the way of common understanding as if they were mad,
> because they are in the right.\(^{12}\)

Though Pope would not permit himself the indulgence of non-
conformity so far as the public knew, he once more showed a
glimpse of romanticism in the advice which he wrote to
Mrs. J. Cowper in 1723:

> I could wish you tried something in the descriptive
> way on any subject you please, mixed with vision and moral:
> like pieces of the old Provencal poets, which abound with
> fancy, and are the most amusing scenes in nature. . . . I
> have long had an inclination to tell a fairy tale, the
> more wild and exotic the better; therefore a vision.

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\(^{12}\)Alexander Pope, *The Works of Alexander Pope*, IX,
360-361.
which is confined to no rules of probability, will take in all the variety and luxuriance of description you will; provided there be an apparent moral to it. I think one or two of the Persian tales would have given one hint for such an invention.\textsuperscript{13}

This testimony of Pope's private correspondence is a witness to the fact that there was much fusion between the literary periods of romanticism and neo-classicism.

Perhaps the most commanding figure of his generation, Samuel Johnson did much to defer the on-rushing tide of romanticism by his classical devotion to formalism in poetry, to satire, and by his aversion to sentiment. With the richness of his insight into men and manners, he laid the test of common sense to the follies and fads of his day. "Dr. Johnson accused many of his contemporaries of being silly, affected, and trivial; and in a changed age tried to preserve the old reverence for traditionally enshrined universal truth, combined with a sternly anti-sentimental morality of resignation and disillusion."\textsuperscript{14}

Oliver Goldsmith was a loyal follower of Johnson's teachings. Yet Goldsmith's natural taste in many directions was romantic. Consequently, we find in much of his work, e.g. The Deserled Village, a mixture of both the classic and the romantic.

In reaction to the prosaicness and superficiality which drained the color and warmth from literature in accordance with the literary standards of Johnson's time, Poetic Justice was written in 1762 by Samuel Johnson. The example of this work is to be found in the work of Oliver Goldsmith, who was a leading exponent of the romantic movement in literature.

\textsuperscript{13}\textit{Ibid.}, pp. 431-432.

with the standards of classicism, the romanticist searched
the dim past with longing aspiration and curiosity. Often-
times his searchings there for greater truths and broader
views led him into an attitude of melancholy, and usually he
was provoked to deeper feeling. As an early example of
romanticism there developed the school of "melancholy poets."

From the time of Dryden to the ascendency of Pope there
was seldom heard in England a voicing of melancholy or sigh-
ings for the blessings of solitude. The eighteenth century
was an age of realism without idealism. And since melancholy
is largely associated with the study of nature, there was no
real nature poetry in the early part of this period. To
James Thomson (1700-1748) is due much credit in the develop-
ment of descriptive nature poetry. The Seasons, which he
published in final form in 1744, created a vogue that lasted
for fifty years. Its chief value lies in the multiplicity
of images which Thomson revealed in his objective view of
external nature.

The melancholy of nature prompted poetic imagination.
Following the lead of Thomson, John Dyer in Grongar Hill,
William Collins in his Ode to Evening, and Mark Akenside in
The Pleasures of Imagination, found in nature a needed stim-
ulus for the imagination. Nature became for them an escape
from the trivialities of the life about them. Expressing a
love for the solitudes of nature where his emotions might be
nursed, Collins, the best lyrical poet of his day, voiced
the plea:
be mine the hut,
That, from the mountain's side,
Views wilds and swelling floods,
And hamlets brown, and dim-discovered spires;
And hears their simple bell; and marks o'er all
Thy dewy fingers draw
The gradual dusky veil.15

In the images of Gray's Elegy we find the high-water mark of
nature poetry as a background for the display of emotion:

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day,
The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea,
The ploughman homeward plods his weary way,
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.16

Closely akin to the melancholy of nature was the poetry
classified under the melancholy of solitude. Here was to be
found something of the same idea of retirement from a busily
superficial society into an atmosphere of quiet contempla-
tion. Among the expressions of this type are The Choice of
John Pomfret, The Pleasures of Melancholy by Thomas Warton,
Thomas Parnell's A Hymn to Contentment, and James Thomson's
The Castle of Indolence.

A third type of melancholy poetry was that which ex-
pressed a complaint of life—a sense of futility. In both
Thomas Gray's Elegy and his Ode on a Distant Prospect of
Eton College is revealed the futile realization that

The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,
Awaits alike the inevitable hour:
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.17

16Thomas Gray, The Poems of Thomas Gray with a Selection
of Letters and Essays, p. 28.
17Ibid., p. 29.
Dr. Johnson, too, gave vent to the spirit of melancholy which was coloring the age by writing *The Vanity of Human Wishes*. His was the contention that "all is vanity," that human wishes bring only misery and lead to the inescapable grave.

Another manifestation of melancholy poetry is expressed by Robert Burns in his two poems "Thou Lingering Star" and "Highland Mary." It is the melancholy of love. In both poems he sings of the death of his beloved one.

A final phase of the poetry of melancholy concerns the subject of death. Representative of this somber mood are *The Complaint, or Night Thoughts*, in which Edward Young expresses a fear of death as punishment, *The Grave* by Robert Blair, and Thomas Parnell's *A Night-Piece on Death*. In its subjective tone, its vague aspiration, and its fondness for solitude and gloomy meditation, the literature of melancholy was quite different from the tone of Augustan literature. It must be considered, therefore, an important factor in the beginnings of romanticism.¹⁸

The picturesque past captivated the mind of the romanticist by adding the element of curiosity to beauty. As one of the first faint echoes of medievalism, Thomas Parnell's "Fairy Tale" breathes of real romance. Its introductory lines set the atmosphere:

In Britain's isle, and Arthur's days,
When midnight faeries daunc'd the maze,
Liv'd Edwin of the green;

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Edwin, I wis, a gentle youth,  
Endow'd with courage, sense and truth,  
Though badly shaped he been.19

Parnell takes us directly back to the mood of the great romanticist Spenser.

Of major importance in the history of the Romantic Movement is the revival of the past through several different sources. Though the "Cassian" poems have not stood the test of time, they powerfully influenced such romanticists as Gray and Lord Byron by their wildness, their vague suggestions to the imagination, their disregard of conventional forms, their profusion of rhetorical figures, and their deep feeling of melancholy. These poems were published between 1760 and 1764 by James Macpherson, a Highland schoolmaster. Macpherson claimed to have translated them from an old manuscript which was the work of Cassian, a third century Gaelic poet. While they probably were a forgery, the poems nevertheless had great influence.

The appeal to eighteenth-century primitivism and sentimentality was irresistible. The imagination of Macpherson's generation was captivated by the thought of a great Celtic bard who rivaled Homer.20

The publication in 1765 by Thomas Percy of The Reliques of Ancient English Poetry was an epoch-making event in the history of the Romantic Movement. This work is a collection of old English ballads and songs, many of which are romantic.

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19 Thomas Farnell, The Poetical Works of Thomas Farnell, p. 25.

20 Eighteenth Century Poetry and Prose, op. cit., p. 760.
narratives. Sir Walter Scott and William Wordsworth, especially, acknowledged their indebtedness to the influence of Percy's *Reliques.* In 1770 Percy once more furthered the revival of the past by the publication of his own translation of Mallet's *Northern Antiquities.* All the strength and weirdness of Norse mythology was for the first time made easily accessible to the English world. Because classical mythology had become hackneyed, poets like Gray turned with rejoicing to this new fountain of resource.

The Gothic revival, sponsored by Horace Walpole, was an additional departure that exerted mighty influence upon awaking romanticists.

The Romantics particularly delighted in 'umbrage'—thick woods, ruined castle-towers, twilight coloring and all quietistic landscape scenery.21 It was just those elements in English literature that Walpole was able to make popular. About 1750 he erected a Gothic residence on his estate, called "Strawberry Hill," which became the talk of fashionable England and soon found many imitators. The study of medieval architecture was promoted, and many were surprised to learn that things could be both old and good at the same time. Because he was not confident of a kindly reception of his break with traditional regularity and probability, Walpole published *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Romance* anonymously in 1764 and professed that it was a translation. This novel gave a pronounced impetus to the

21 *Phelps, op. cit.*, p. 94.
writing of tales that were ultra-romantic; its influence pervaded England and reached to America, where it affected the novelist Charles Brockden Brown. In the last decade of the eighteenth century Gothicism and chivalry were as popular as they had been unpopular during the reign of Pope. Phelps observes that

It is to this part of the development of Romanticism that Walter Scott belongs, and of which he was perhaps the culmination. We may conveniently call this the objective side of the movement, as distinguished from the subjective, which advanced parallel with it. The former pertains to the subject-matter; the latter to the mood of the author, as we say that Scott was Romantic because of his subjects and Byron because of his sentimental mood.  

Coming clearly into sight at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth was an awakening tendency towards democracy. The cry of "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity," raised by the French revolutionists, set the pace for English romantic poets.

The eighteenth century had been aristocratic with a reliance upon general principles; the romantic period began with an assertion of the worth of the individual and a democratic revolt from the old aristocratic appeal of literature. . . . at the beginning of the century [the nineteenth] the poets and philosophers had a wonderful vision of hope, of human brotherhood, to be accompanied by revolution or not as the case might serve.  

The concern for human need was further stimulated by the great religious awakening of the middle and latter part of the eighteenth century, led by John Wesley and George Whitefield. For the critical temper of the age was substituted to

22 Ibid., p. 102.
23 Houston, op. cit., p. 279.
a great degree religious enthusiasm, and "the latent energies of the people found an outlet in this, rather than in politi-
cal revolution, as happened across the Channel." Accompany-
ing humanitarian movements of the same period were that of
John Howard in prison reform and that of Clarkson and Wilber-
force toward the abolition of slavery in the colonies. The
poetry of man reached unprecedented heights when Burns sang of
the worth of the Scotch peasant, when Wordsworth pictured
the life of humble shepherds and dalesmen, when Byron's lines
rang with a cry of liberty for all, and when Shelley immor-
ialized the dreams of universal brotherhood.

In this very limited story of the beginnings of the Roman-
tic Movement, it remains to describe briefly a change that
was effected in the established and accepted forms of litera-
ture. It may be noted that the modern novel was the one lit-
erary innovation of the eighteenth century. In the forties
and fifties it came into prominence under the hands of
Henry Fielding, Samuel Richardson, and several minor novelists.
According to the opinion of Percy H. Houston, it was largely
due to the writing of the eighteenth-century novels that the
middle class became a dominating force in English life and
thought. The importance of the novel, it is true, could
hardly be over-emphasized; it opened the way for a fuller
presentation of contemporary life and ideas.

24Ibid., p. 235.
25Ibid., p. 237.
It was in the field of poetry, however, that the chief reaction in form took place during the eighteenth century. An age which rebelled against the satire, the highly-polished wit, the superficiality and coldness of the Augustan period had little use for the heroic couplet perfected by Pope. The new subject-matter, which has been described in preceding paragraphs, found itself readily adaptable to such forms as the Spenserian sonnet or blank verse. "Romanticism," said Victor Hugo, "is nothing but liberalism in literature." Thus it was that

The same spirit that in other times and places rebelled against the Unities in dramatic art, struggled successfully in England with the tyranny of the Heroic Couple in poetry. By 1786 the sovereignty of the Couplet was doomed, though for the rest of the century it lived and spasmodically flourished.28

Romanticists, weary of the monotony of the heroic couplet, found more freedom for expression in their newly-adopted blank verse, octosyllabics, and Spenserian stanza. Among those liberals who promoted the schism with the neo-classical school the poet Edward Young was most notable. Struggling against the didacticism of his predecessors, Joseph Warton published in 1746 with his thin volume of odes these significant remarks:

The public has been so much accustomed of late to didactic poetry alone, and essays on moral subjects, that any work where the imagination is much indulged will perhaps not be relished or regarded. The author therefore of these pieces is in some pain lest certain austere critics should think him too fanciful and

28Phelps, op. cit., p. 36.
descriptive. But as he is convinced that the fashion of moralizing in verse has been carried too far, and as he looks upon Invention and Imagination to be the chief faculties of a poet, so he will be happy if the following odes may be looked upon as an attempt to bring back poetry into its right channel. 27

Warton held true to his critical opinion in his published poetry so much that he has been claimed by some critics to be the first "consciously" romantic poet in the eighteenth century. 28

It may be concluded that the Romantic Movement in English literature is that period of transition that had its dim beginning sometime in the early decades of the eighteenth century, while England was saturated with the literary ideals of neo-classicism, and had a slow, steady growth in spite of appreciable obstacles throughout the rest of the century, until finally it attained full stature in the Age of Romanticism of the nineteenth century. (Essentially, it was a movement of liberation, both in thought and in deed, for it was an unleashing of the imagination, of the feeling, of the creative power of a generation of Englishmen whose very souls reacted in protest to the coldness and formality of their fathers.


28 Phelps, op. cit., p. 93.
CHAPTER III

METHODISM AND THE ROMANTIC MOVEMENT IN ENGLAND

In a most interesting article published in 1934, Mr. F. Brompton Harvey has challenged the literary world to a greater appreciation of the role which Methodism played in bringing about the Romantic Movement in English literature. Mr. Harvey states that adequate acknowledgement has been expressed by critics concerning the importance of Methodism's influence upon the social, political, economic, and religious life of England, but he contends that "it is in the world of literature, where presumably social and ecclesiastical passions are quiescent, that there has been an egregious blindness to the significance of Methodism." Since the literature of a nation should be the expression of its total life, then surely there must be some close relationship between the dynamic force of Methodism and the revolutionary movement of Romanticism.

The historian and critic, Leslie Stephen, is one who has been accused by Mr. Harvey of blindness in the matter of Methodism's relation to the Romantic Movement. In contrasting the Oxford Movement with the Evangelical Revival, Leslie Stephen is said to have found in the latter an absence of any

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1 Hargre, op. cit., p. 289.
literature possessing more than a purely historical interest. H. N. Fairchild finds that "Pure Methodism is almost completely sub-literary." As an offering of proof for his contention, Mr. Harvey presents several suggestions to illustrate that "the literary influence of Methodism was far wider and deeper than our historians have discerned; that it was, indeed, one of the main tributaries contributing to that fertilizing river which is called the Romantic Revival." By tracing briefly the trend of English thought through the Age of Pope and Neo-Classicism to the triumph of Romanticism in the nineteenth century, Mr. Harvey draws the conclusion that

It is ultimately through Methodism that the soul of modern England has been leavened by this new-found spiritual and imaginative passion, passion at once 'apocalyptic' and human. In the long run, it was this 'emotional exaltation' which was the seed-plot from which sprang those astonishing qualities which distinguish the poetry and fiction of the nineteenth century from those of its predecessor.

An insight into the thought of the Neo-classical school gives evidence of an almost universal anti-romantic spirit in England at the time of the birth of Methodism. With Addison and Pope as the twin pillars of the classic edifice, there was little room for the expression of enthusiasm or deep

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2Ibid., p. 289.
4Harvey, op. cit., p. 290.
5Ibid., pp. 301-302.
feeling. Of Addison, Mr. Henry Bett declares:

Addison in particular shrank from every bold and every profound expression as from an offense against good taste. He dared not use the word 'passion' except in the vulgar sense of an angry paroxysm. He durst as soon have danced a hornpipe on the top of the Monument as have talked of 'rapturous emotion.' What would he have said? Why 'sentiments that were of a nature to prove agreeable after an unusual rate.'

Jonathan Swift, too, had nothing savouring of romanticism about him. "A man suffering from his malaise, compounded of cynicism, thwarted ambition, and an irresistible bias for destructive criticism, would hardly have been made 'romantic' if he had read all the books in Don Quixote's library." Labelling Pope as the typical representative of this anti-romantic sentiment, Mr. Harvey concurs with the ideas of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who believed that the excellence of Pope's writings consisted in "'just and acute observations on men and manners in an artificial state of society, as their matter and substance; and in the logic of wit conveyed in smooth and strong epigrammatic couplets as their form.'"

Ecstatic fervour, imaginative boldness, and the note of wonder appeared to the mind of Pope as loathsome "enthusiasm" and spiritual pride. If Wordsworth may be taken as a literary authority, then we shall agree with him that with one or two negligible exceptions, "the poetry of the period intervening between the publication of Paradise Lost and The Seasons

6Quoted, ibid., p. 291.

7Ibid.

8Quoted, ibid.
does not contain a single new image of external nature; and
scarcely presents a familiar one from which it can be inferred
that the eye of the poet had been steadily fixed upon his
object, much less that his feelings had urged him to work upon
it in the spirit of genuine imagination."9 Henry Bett, whom
Mr. Harvey also quotes, adds to the claim of Wordsworth:

'It would be equally true to say that for a similar
period, beginning and ending a little later, say, from
the death of Henry Vaughan to the youth of Robert Burns,
the lyrical note was never heard in these islands. Fire
and fervour, the sense of wonder, the arresting note of
reality, had all gone. Lyrical passion, sincerity, and
spontaneity reappear first of all in the Hymns of
Methodism.'10

Although lyrical expression was found lacking in the period
of literary Neo-classicism, that age was not without merit.

It is true that, for the space of almost a century
and a half, certain artistic and literary fashions were
imposed upon the Englishman, and a distinctive literary
style was produced for him to follow, in some cases
whole-heartedly, in some cases reluctantly, and in both
cases with mixed profit and loss. For almost the first
time, he was enabled to write a prose consistently clear,
simple and straightforward; and if his natural predilec-
tion for emotional lyrical utterance was temporarily
stifled during this period, still he could find compensa-
tion in his strengthened grasp upon realities in his
writing—in his novel, in his drama of manners, in his
penetrating satire, in his discursive essay.11

Also is it true that the philosophy of reason, so highly
developed by the Neo-classicists, was employed to shed light
upon the defects of its own promoters. For them there was
real significance in the maxim of Charles Johnson in Medea:

9Wordsworth's Literary Criticism, p. 185.
10Quoted by Harvey, op. cit., p. 292.
Learn then no happiness can be secure,
Placed in whatever lies beyond our power.12

Yet the practice of "Reason," carried to its full implications,
undermined the status quo. Planted in the soil of Neo-classicism itself were the seeds of reaction. In the contemplation
of "things themselves," the prevailing ideas broke down.

Reason came soon to search out the inherent absurdities of the belief in the divine right of kings or in the pretended superiority of the nobility over the common man. In the field of art, the complacent assertions of a Pope or an Addison, when subjected to the light of reason, failed to convince the liberal man that they represented the only possible pathway to high achievement.13

It is to be admitted, then, that at the time of the advent of the Methodist Movement, the mind of England was being prepared for a change of attitude. These stirrings, however, were for the most part hidden from the eye. On the surface all was quietly complacent. The romantic spirit had not yet burst forth.

One of the earliest evidences of the stirring of the romantic spirit may be seen in the very heart of Methodism, that is, in the 1738 recording of John Wesley's conversion experience in his Journal. Because "Romanticism" has been variously defined as "the Renascence of Wonder," as "the emancipation of the ego," as the expression of "vital and immediate feeling," it is worth the while to look at Wesley's entry. There one finds a perfect cluster of romantic elements--


"heart strangely warmed," an "assurance was given me."
"where shall my wondering soul begin?"—there one finds full expression of feeling, immediate vision, intuition, wonder. There also should be noted the significant italicizing of the personal pronouns, my, mine, me. Here there is a close resemblance to the expression of Keats in his sonnet "On first looking into Chapman's Homer."

Then felt I like some watchful of the skies
When a new planet sways into his ken;14

This note of rapture, so evident in both instances, is one of the touchstones of romanticism.

Though they knew full well the danger of unleashed emotions, the Wesleys had no fear of rapture. They heartily espoused it in reaction to the prevailing coldness of Anglicanism. They would have agreed with Shelley that "No heart is pure that is not passionate; no virtue is safe that is not enthusiastic."15 As an example of what the new enthusiasm could do for expression, we have the effect of Wesley's touch upon the lines of the eighteenth century hymn-writer, Dr. Philip Doddridge. Originally there were the words,

Ye humble souls that seek the Lord,
Chase all your fears away,
And bow with pleasure down to see
The place where Jesus lay.16

In place of the word "pleasure" Wesley substituted "rapture"

14 The Complete Poetry of John Keats, p. 47.
15 Quoted by Harvey, op. cit., p. 293.
16 Quoted, ibid.
and lifted the hymn to another plane. Again we find that favorite and apt word used by the Wesleys:

The dear tokens of His passion
Still his dazzling body bears;
Cause of endless exultation
To His ransomed worshippers;
With what rapture
Gaze we on those glorious scars!17

And also:

O the rapturous height
Of the holy delight
Which I felt in the life-giving blood!18

In the lyrical passion of Charles Wesley we find the influence of St. Augustine:

I cannot see Thy face, and live,
Then let me see Thy face, and die!19

This exalted feeling, which was the mainspring of Methodism, had its counterpart repeated many times over among even the lowliest of the new converts. The confession of William Black is typical of what was taking place all over England in the wake of Methodist conversion:

'everything conspired to make me happy. If I looked upon the heavens above, or the earth beneath, both sparkled with their Creator's glory; and all creation seemed to smile on my soul, and speak its Maker's praise. My heart glowed within me, while the fields broke into singing, and the trees clapped their hands. . . . Whether I looked on man or beast, I saw the wisdom, power, and goodness of God shine conspicuously. I was filled with wonder, and felt the greatest tenderness and love for every creature God had made.'20

17Quoted, ibid., p. 294. 18Quoted, ibid.
19Quoted, ibid.
Through their religious experience of conversion and with the help of countless evangelistic hymns to add color to their daily lives, the lives of common folk were touched by the spirit of rapture.

It was an uncommonly difficult thing for people to be at the same time enthusiastic and respectable. John Nelson, a Yorkshire stone-mason, was even imprisoned for preaching Methodism and was branded a religious fanatic. Still, in prison his hope and faith were enthusiastic, and he could triumphantly declare:

"My soul was as a watered garden, and I could sing praises to God all the day long, for He turned my captivity into joy, and gave me rest on the boards as if I had been on a bed of down. Now could I say, "God's service is perfect freedom."" 21

"It is evident," says Sister M. Kevin Whelan, "that religious enthusiasm was regarded as something basically false, something engendering madness, if indeed not an actual expression of it." 22 Actually, the traditional association of immediate inspiration with madness was not without some foundation. In his study of "enthusiasm" down through the centuries, Dr. Humphrey Lee has found that there was much fanaticism bordering on insanity during the third quarter of the seventeenth century. Some of the insanity, however, was brought about by cruel punishments and deprivations under the

21 Quoted by Harvey, op. cit., p. 294.

Clarendon Code of the Restoration Period. "Even when there was no actual insanity," Dr. Lee suggests, "the physical phenomena often attending the 'visitation of the Spirit' helped to identify enthusiasm with madness." 23 From the descriptions of evangelistic meetings held by George Whitefield and John Wesley one is tempted to agree with Jonathan Swift, who observed the effect upon the audiences of this ecstatic preaching and praying. Says Dean Swift, "Thus, it is frequent for a single vowel to draw sighs from a multitude; and for a whole assembly of saints to sob to the music of a solitary liquid." 24 How apt is the aphorism of Benjamin Whichote, the Cambridge Platonist: "Among Christians, those that pretend to be inspired seem mad; among the Turkes, those that are mad are thought to be inspired." 25

A society that was sensitive to correct form and elegance of behavior considered those who talked much about religion as lacking in good breeding.

Lord Shaftesbury had set the fashion of smiling in a superior way at the extravagances of enthusiasts, and this method was carried out with a right good will by the playwrights and satirists; polite society learned to laugh at the ill-breeding of enthusiasts, instead of trembling at supposed plots of the 'inspired' to cut the throats of disbelievers. 26

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24Quoted, ibid., p. 100
25Quoted, ibid., pp. 98-99.
26Ibid., pp. 115-116.
Inevitably, though, that spirit of enthusiasm, which had its
dim beginning in the "Holy Club" at Oxford and which was
received so ardently by the middle class, finally filtered
through to some in the upper strata of society. Summarizing
the situation, Mr. Handley Jones finds:

The Wesleys actually succeeded in making a generation of
ordinary John Bull Englishmen think and feel in this
highly romantic fashion. In preaching a religious revival
they brought about a psychological revolution; and when
at last the romantic writers appeared on the stage, they
found an audience already trained to understand them.\(^27\)

Lord David Cecil's study of William Cowper brought him to the
conclusion that the eighteenth century religious revival
exerted a strong influence upon English Literature, for he
said:

Finally, Evangelicism, and in this also it was unique
among the philosophies of its day, could satisfy the
temperament of the artist. For it alone set a supreme
value on that emotional exaltation in which the greatest
art is produced; it alone made the imagination the centre
of its system, and not a mere decorative appendage to it.
An attitude of civilized disillusionment is all very well
in its way, but it is not conducive to creative art.\(^28\)

The truth of Lord Cecil's statement may clearly be seen
in the poets Cowper and Blake, and in the novelists of the
nineteenth century. In the latter was to be found expression
of deep emotion in times of re-union that has a strong kin-
ship with the mystical re-union of the pardoned soul with
God. These writers, however, will be discussed more fully


\(^28\)David Cecil, *The Stricken Deer or the Life of Cowper*,
p. 100.
later. There is sufficient proof, therefore, according to F. Prompston Harvey, to claim for Methodism a very definite and significant influence upon the rise of romantic literature in England.

If, then, by Romanticism we mean the note in poetry, in art, in life, when it rises from the traditional or imitative level to the climaxes of inspiration, when to those wrapped in the commonplace of daily use, the immeasurable heavens break open to their highest, are we not entitled to claim Methodism as being not only a prelude, but one of the main causes of the new spring-time in literature? 29

An affirmative answer to Mr. Harvey’s question is not so obvious as he implies. The problem of the influence of Methodism upon the Romantic Movement or of the influence of the Romantic Movement upon Methodism might not ever be solved satisfactorily. Mr. Harvey boldly suggested that students of literature should make Aldersgate Street a place of pilgrimage.

While some critics may see the two movements as a matter of cause and effect, others see them only as parallel movements stemming from a common beginning. In their History of English Literature, Emil Legouis and Louis Casamian maintained that Methodism had neither an immediate nor a widespread effect upon literature, but it did exercise an influence on the people that was as great as it was productive—

Methodism, i.e., the original and principal form of this religious awakening—modified the general attitude

29Harvey, op. cit., p. 293.
of minds towards the problems and duties which life brings in its train. The outcome itself of certain unfathomable psychological needs and of a secret agitation in the national conscience, it came in its turn to react as a stimulating emotional force upon the sensibility of the people.  

It was the psychological preparation of the people for a literature of the heart that made possible a friendly reception of the bold strokes of such romantics as Wordsworth and Coleridge. "...the reading public had to acquire a more spontaneous facility for seeing and feeling according to the laws of the mystical imagination; and there had to be a rekindling of thought, a regeneration of the whole inner soul."  

It was for this inspiration to idealistic zeal and for its service in the preparation of the public conscience that Messrs. Legouis and Cazamian attribute literary significance to Methodism.  

Charles Edwin Vaughan reflects a somewhat similar attitude toward the influence of Methodism upon English romantic literature. It is his belief that the religious revival

disimprisoned a whole world of thought and feeling which had been fast chained beneath the hide-bound formalism of the preceding era. And, all things considered, it is difficult to resist the conclusion, not indeed that the religious movement was the cause of the literary movement, but that both sprang in the first instance from a common source; and that, as years went on, the revival in literature was immeasurably quickened by finding an atmosphere charged with emotion and sympathy ready to receive it.  

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The author of *Enthusiasm in English Poetry of the Eighteenth Century*, Sister M. Kevin Whelan, is in agreement with the theory set forth by Mr. Vaughan. She gives credit to an earlier author for the idea that the Methodist Movement acted as a powerful leaven for many years afterwards. With him she concurs in the opinion that

People had begun to recognize that they were creatures of emotion, not instruments of reason; they wanted an ardent and living faith, not a dead-cold philosophy. In just the same way, they grew tired of the dicta of reason in literature, and longed for the vivid and emotional; and writers surely felt some revolutionary impulse from the religious movement profoundly stirring the multitudes.\(^{32}\)

However, Sister Whelan states that the religious enthusiast found in Methodism a temporary relief and a momentary answer to the questionings of his soul; though from the day of its inauguration, Wesleyanism

set the religious pendulum swinging from rationalism and intellectualism, from universalism and scepticism to super-naturalism and emotionalism, subjectivism and individualism. . . opened up the way still wider for sensibility and for democracy, for its message was for the heart of the masses coming gradually to power, and its aim was their emotional regeneration.\(^{34}\)

But to Frederick C. Gill, author of *The Romantic Movement and Methodism*, Methodism was the solid and central movement of which Romanticism was the purely intellectual and imaginative expression. It is his belief that the Methodist experience, in its highest and purest forms, is indistinguishable


\(^{34}\)Ibid., p. 151.
from the romantic experience, in its highest and purest forms.  

The Methodist lines

Come, O Thou Traveller unknown,
Whom still I hold, but cannot see.
My company before is gone,
And I am left alone with Thee;
With Thee all night I mean to stay
And wrestle till the break of day.

Mr. Gill finds to be true romantic poetry.

In seeking to learn the relationship between the religious revival known as Methodism and the literary revival known as the Romantic Movement, it is most timely to note any similarities of the two movements. Neither Romanticism nor Methodism was anything essentially new in English history. It was in reality the literature of Neo-classicism that was alien to the temper of Englishmen. "The mind of the Englishman, from the time of the Anglo-Saxon invasions of Britain to the present, has always been given more to emotion and imagination, and less to intellectual balance, logical neatness, and mannered convention, than the arbiters of eighteenth century taste would have allowed." There was much of the imagination and lyrical fervour in the new Romanticism that had existed during the Elizabethan days. The spirit of Methodism, in like manner, was not something new to England. It was primarily a return to the neglected fundamental doctrines and

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36 Ibid.

teachings of the Christian Church. Its zeal and enthusiasm bore much resemblance to the spirit of the Franciscans of the Roman Catholic Church. Even Wesley, himself, was many times charged with being a Papist because of his unusual tolerance of Catholics. The leaders of Methodism sought to restore the spirituality and the discipline of the primitive Church to their own people. A considerable part of the romantic expression, similarly, was intended by its originators as a practical remedy for the ills of humanity, as for example, the "preaching of human brotherhood, the beneficent force of nature, the hatred of tyranny and oppression." 38

While it is clearly evident that the Romantic Movement drew much of its source from the teachings of the French philosopher, Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), it cannot yet be seen just how much or what Methodism drew from him.

Rousseau was at various times churchman, vagabond, musician, social theorist, essayist, and novelist. The influence which he exerted gave him claim to being one of the most important men of the last three centuries. 39 Millions of people were convinced of the soundness of his doctrines--religious, political, and social--so much so that political revolution and a tremendous impulse to lyrical poetry resulted. Concerning religion, Rousseau was a sentimental deist. To him, God was a spirit working always for good--not a supernatural

38 Ibid., p. 29.
39 Ibid., p. 3.
being in the image of man, but a beneficent, paternal force, 
the creator of the world and man. Rousseau believed that

any contemplation of this spirit must necessarily be 
inspiring, emotionally stimulating and exalting. Since 
this creating spirit is manifest in nature and in man, 
it must follow that man in a natural setting, as free as 
possible from artificial restraints imposed by the demands 
of society, is in his happiest state. Hence, the contem- 
plation of nature, of natural landscape and natural 
phenomena, was the surest way in which man could approach 
God; the more primitive man's environment, the closer he 
was to perfection, which was by no means impossible of 
attainment on earth, because man was essentially good.40

Through such reasoning was thus developed the doctrine of 
naturalism, or primitivism, which largely colored English 
romantic thought. Such a philosophy had an immeasurable effect 
in causing a widespread disrespect and dissatisfaction for 
tradition and social, political, and religious institutions.

Should anyone have suggested to a young romantic natural- 
ist, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, that he go 
to a priest, the giver of the suggestion would have been 
"drowned in a flood of noble remarks about priesthood and 
kingcraft, chains of monkish superstition, pedantic theology, 
the light of natural reason, the dictates of the heart, and 
the spirit of universal nature."41 Robert Southey was one 
who had learned to associate organized religion with the 
soul-blighting spirit of rationalism in theology and with 
political conservatism. In his "Stanzas Written on Sunday 
Morning," he addresses the orthodox worshipper:

40Ibid.
41Fairchild, Romantic Quest, op. cit., p. 182.
Go, thou, and seek the House of Prayer!
I to the woodlands bend my way,
And meet Religion there!
She needs not haunt the high-arched dome to pray,
Where storied windows dim the doubtful day:
At liberty she loves to rove,
Wide o'er the heathy hill or cowslip dale. 42

The romantic naturalist disliked formal worship and could pray least in a church.

It may or may not have been this Rousseauistic disregard for traditions and institutions that gave the Methodists the courage and impulse to break with the Established Church. That, doubtless, must remain a matter of speculation. However, the democratic principles of Rousseau's naturalism compare very favorably with the levelling tendencies of Methodism.

Because of the simplicity of the message preached by the Wesleys and Whitefield, Methodism first appealed to poorer classes in England—to factory workers, colliers, farmers, tinsmiths, and the like. To them was preached a doctrine of the equality of all men in the sight of God. It was the same idea as that which was being expounded by the revolutionary writers of France and which was to bring about the great civil strife there. That the Methodists preached "equality" to a large degree brought them disfavor from people of influence and high social standing. Society had been organized on the idea of "superiority," and this Arminian teaching caused no small offense. The letter written by the Duchess of Buckingham, the natural daughter of James II, to the Countess of

42Quoted, ibid., pp. 182-183.
Huntington, the patroness of Whitefield, is illustrative of this condemnation of Methodism:

'I thank your ladyship for the information concerning the Methodist preachers. Their doctrines are most repulsive, and strongly tinctured with impertinence and disrespect toward their superiors, in perpetually endeavoring to level all ranks, and do away with all distinctions. It is monstrous to be told that you have a heart as sinful as the common wretches that crawl on the earth. This is highly offensive and insulting; and I cannot but wonder that your ladyship should relish any sentiments so much at variance with high rank and good breeding.\(^{43}\)

The gospel of salvation, of reunion with a loving and compassionate Father, gave the humble folk a novel sense of self-respect. As they began to realize that they, too, were of value in the scheme of things, they felt less of a tie, less of an obligation, to those institutions which had so long oppressed or neglected them. John Wesley had to keep constant watch lest his followers carry the idea of freedom to the extremity of anarchy. Often he was kept busy weeding out the doctrines of Antinomianism, by which men were taught to believe that, under the gospel dispensation, the moral law is of no use or obligation, faith alone being necessary to salvation.

Long previous to the time of Rousseau natural emotions were suppressed by a civilization that was extremely artificial. In great contrast, Rousseau preached simplicity of living and a freer and more untrammeled emotional life.

According to his belief, the evils of the modern world were due to cramping customs and institutions, and it

\(^{43}\)Quoted by Lee, *op. cit.*, p. 129.
was therefore the duty of man to throw off whatever interfered with a free expression of the personal self. 44

In his *Social Contract* (1762), Rousseau maintained that the will of the majority at any given moment may break the contract between a people and their sovereign government. Such a theory, accepted by the downtrodden French, naturally led to their revolution.

It is widely acknowledged that it was the religious revival that was largely responsible for averting an English counterpart of France's bloody scene. John Wesley was wholeheartedly loyal to his government and out of sympathy with political revolutionists. It was the spiritual revival, the hope of salvation and of eternal glory, that gave the impoverished classes of England consolation and emotional release from the hardships and woes of their everyday world. In sermons, in hymns, in popular writings published by the Wesleys, Methodists learned the blessedness of a personal religion--a personal communion with God--that they had never before known.

Methodism's message of equality and of human brotherhood has much in common with the spirit of romanticism. One writer has tersely summed up this romantic attitude:

Specifically, the romantic urges with intensity that mankind is a vast brotherhood; it stands in awe of man's immense possibilities for good as well as for evil; it sees the essential beauty as well as the savagery of nature. It praises beauty in all forms; it delights in the comeliness of the body and of the soul alike; it

demands the sensuous and the sensitive. It can feel an unrestrained joy in living, or it can grow melancholy at the thought of the inevitable decay and death that await all beauty and life. It honors the glories of the past, but it looks to the future with hope and enthusiasm. It resents anything that stands in its way; it stands firm against what it considers arbitrary restraint and tyranny; it rebels against the unfriendly and remorseless logic of facts that oppose it. It brings softness, color, and warmth to life, and a freedom in the range of human feelings, imagination and expression. It represents, in a word, the triumph of what man would like to be; it can be mankind's escape from unpleasant reality but it can be also his inspiration to mighty deeds.45

The ideal of human brotherhood, in the light of Methodism, led not to some beautiful mystical contemplation, but to an active concern for the welfare of the individual, both spiritual and physical. Wesley's humanitarian efforts in behalf of the laboring class, the destitute sick, and those hopelessly imprisoned bore much fruit in the nineteenth century humanitarian movement.

The new interest in the welfare of the individual developed slowly in the second half of the eighteenth century, but its development was evident and inevitable. There are early traces of it to be found in the writings of Cowper, Gray, Goldsmith, Crabbe, and Burns. William Cowper (1731-1800) is known, more or less, as the poet of the eighteenth century religious revival. Because of his peculiar emotional make-up, Cowper's religion lent a melancholy, and sometimes a morbid, coloring to his religious poetry. He is equally well-known, however, as a poet of nature and of humanity—"the poet of England's countryside and country people."

The very practice of his religion, which he seldom relinquished even in periods of despondency, took him to the homes of the poor lace-makers of Olney and gave him an intimate knowledge of the lower classes that few poets of his or the preceding generations had had—a knowledge which he shared with the world with a new directness and simplicity. His religion gave him also a depth and breadth of sympathy for man as man irrespective of classes and nationalities that struck another new note in his poetry. 46

Among his works, "The Task" most clearly displays Cowper's refined, gentle humor and his simple and true manner of picturing rural scenes and incidents. He claimed to have described no spot which he had not seen nor to have expressed any emotion which he had not felt. Nature and God were to him inseparable. "God made the country, and man made the town" epitomizes his attitude in "The Task." It may be added, incidentally, that Cowper's hymns, numbering around seventy, are among the noblest in our language.

The humanitarian spirit that leads towards democracy may be glimpsed in Thomas Gray's "Elegy." Gray finds that men are essentially equal and that in death their equality is recognizable. Speaking of the humble folk, he states:

Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,
Their homely joys, and destiny obscure;
Nor Grandeur hear with a disdainful smile
The short and simple annals of the poor.

The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,
Awaits alike the inevitable hour:
The paths of glory lead but to the grave. 47

47 Gray, op. cit., p. 29.
The poet sees that fame and fortune are too often matters of circumstance. There was greatness among the forgotten dead equal or superior to that of celebrated heroes.

Although Oliver Goldsmith's "The Deserted Village" is largely an idealization of rural life, it brings to literature an early touch of humanitarian interest as it depicts something of the hardships which the luxury of one class can cause to another.

"Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey, Where wealth accumulates and men decay; Princes and lords may flourish, or may fade; A breath can make them, as a breath has made: But a bold peasantry, their country's pride, When once destroy'd, can never be supplied."\(^48\)

Poverty and failure gave George Crabbe a first-hand knowledge of the sordidness to which mankind is often subjected by circumstance. "The Village" is in direct contrast with Goldsmith's idealization, for Crabbe deals with the painful realities of the poor in uncompromising sincerity. His fierce indignation at the suffering and evil of his village at times bears real bitterness. Here is manifest "his flair for sordidness and gloom in the life of humble folk; but its interest in the common man, makes of Crabbe that apparent anomaly, a romantic realist."\(^49\)

Of all romanticists, Robert Burns was probably most truly expressive of the democratic spirit. His clever

\(^{48}\)The Poems of Oliver Goldsmith, p. 55.

\(^{49}\)Literature of England, op. cit., II. 96.
satire was many times launched against the tyranny of the
Scottish church and against the supposed superiority of those
who claimed wealth or nobility. Value, he believed, was not
determined by worldly rank.

Is there, for honest poverty,
That hangs his head, and a' that;
The coward-slaive, we pass him by,
We dare be poor for a' that!
For a' that, and a' that,
Our toils obscure, and a' that,
The rank is but the guinea stamp,
The man's the gowd for a' that.

Then let us pray that come it may,
As come it will for a' that,
That sense and worth, o'er a' the earth,
May bear the gree, and a' that.
For a' that and a' that,
It's coming yet, for a' that,
That man to man, the world o'er.
Shall brothers be for a' that.

With utter simplicity he expressed the essential note in the
idea of human brotherhood.

Free expression of the natural emotions, previously men-
tioned as one of the tenets of Rousseau's philosophy, was
rigidly adhered to by both the early Methodists and the lit-
erary romanticists. Examples of Methodist enthusiasm have
already been noted sufficiently in this paper. In the realm
of literature, "The Enthusiast," published by Joseph Warton
in 1744, is accorded by some authorities to be the first
deliberate expression in England of the feeling out of which
grew the Romantic Movement. The enthusiast, in this poem,
loses himself in the contemplation of Nature and foreshadows

that mystical attitude toward nature so fully manifested during the Romantic Movement.\(^{51}\)

But let me never fail in cloudless nights,
When silent Cynthia in her silver car
Through the blue concave slides, when shine the hills,
Twinkle the streams, and woods look tipped with gold,
To seek some level mead, and there invoke
Old Midnight's sister, Contemplation sage,
(Queen of the rugged brow and stern-fixed eye)
To lift my soul above this little earth,
This folly-fettered world; to purge my ears,
That I may hear the rolling planets' song,
And tuneful-turning spheres.\(^{52}\)

Contemplation of nature was made a step toward God by William Whitehead (1715-1785), whose poem bears the same name as Wharton's. Whitehead found that

Here Contemplation points the road
Through Nature's charms to Nature's God;
These, these are joys alone.\(^{53}\)

The inclination of the early romantic enthusiast was to withdraw within himself, "wandering lonely as a cloud," leaving his fellow-men behind, and seeking a solitary communion with Nature. Later he heard the voice of Reason speaking to him:

Art thou not man? and dar' st thou find
A bliss which leans not to mankind?
Presumptuous thought, and vain!
Each bliss unshar'd is unenjoyed,
Each power if weak, unless employed
Some social good to gain.\(^{54}\)

The literary enthusiast had no fear of the idea of immediate

\(^{51}\)Lee, op. cit., p. 117.
\(^{52}\)Quoted in Eighteenth Century Poetry and Prose, op. cit., p. 563.
\(^{53}\)Quoted by Lee, op. cit., p. 117.
\(^{54}\)Quoted, ibid., p. 118.
inspiration, which might come to the lowliest of men, that had caused such a stir in the affairs of religion. Once again the democratic tendency is evident. Whereas the word "enthusiasm" had been used by the Augustans in condemnation to describe anything which threatened the established order, it gradually lost much of its disfavor and came into respectable usage.

The literature of melancholy and mysticism has also come to be associated with the eighteenth century religious revival. Methodism and the Evangelical Revival within the Church of England placed much emphasis upon the "personal" element of religion and taught a stricter self-examination. In some instances this self-examination led to a manifestation of melancholy, as in the case of William Cowper. In other instances it led to a mystical other-worldliness, for which we have William Blake as an example. His was a visionary world; and as he withdrew more and more into it, his wife had cause to say, "I have very little of Mr. Blake's company; he is always in Paradise."55

Blake, called by his biographer, Osbert Burdett, "the Wesley of the arts," was profoundly influenced by evangelicalism, though he was by no means formally orthodox. He knew, in an evangelical way, the possibilities of light and darkness in the human soul. His "Songs of Innocence and of Experience" show these contrary states. At the core of

55Quoted in Eighteenth Century Poetry and Prose, op. cit., p. 1051.
Blake's experience was the doctrine of forgiveness and reconciliation that was so firmly held by Methodists. He appreciated, too, the heroic qualities of the revivalist leaders—

He sent His two servants, Whitefield and Wesley,
Were they prophets?
Or were they idiots and madmen?
Shew us miracles?
Can you have greater miracles than these?
Men who devote
Their life's whole comfort to entire scorn,
injury and death?56

Closely akin to the mysticism of Blake is that mysticism which one finds in some of the Wesleyan hymns. For example, "Author of Faith, Eternal Word" supplies these mystical lines:

Faith lends its realizing light,
The clouds disperse, the shadows fly;
The invisible appears in sight,
And God is seen by mortal eye.57

We find the same experience in other lines of Wesley:

I rode on the sky,
(Freely justified I!)
Nor envied Elijah his seat;
My soul mounted higher
In a chariot of fire,
And the moon was under my feet.58

"The Fountain of Life" furnishes additional evidence of the element of mysticism in Methodist thought—

We soon shall reach the boundless sea;
Into Thy fullness fall;
Be lost and swallowed up in Thee,
Our God, our all in all.59

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56 Quoted by Harvey, op. cit., p. 296.
57 J. A. Paulkner, "Wesley the Mystic," London Quarterly Review, CLIII (July, 1926), 159.
58 Quoted, ibid.
59 Quoted, ibid.
J. A. Faulkner, in his study of John Wesley and mysticism, states that "Methodism combined the restfulness of the mystic with the activity of the soldier."\textsuperscript{60}

It should be noted that some of the subjectivism of the Romantic Movement in literature and of the religious revival lent itself as a means of escape from reality. One commentator holds to the opinion that

Such was the effect of the vague and yearning quest after the beautiful, the good, and the sublime; the emotional intoxication coming from the glamour of the past or of the remote in space; the welcoming of melancholy as readily as joy; the anesthetic absorption in an other-worldly religion—all this was the result of a pathetic desire to build an ivory tower for habitation, where only the agreeable and entrancing could enter.\textsuperscript{61}

Such a tendency laid claim to Blake and Coleridge.

A final affinity between Methodism and English literature of the Romantic Movement may be found in the pages of the great nineteenth century novelists. In them are laid bare rapturous experiences of the same calibre as those of Methodist enthusiasts. There are very few traces of this emotion in the candid eighteenth century novelists, but it is many times welcomed in Thackeray, Meredith, Dickens, and Charlotte Bronte. "One of the most rapturous scenes in English fiction," declares Mr. Harvey, "is the meeting of Henry Esmond and Lady Castlewood in Winchester Cathedral, on Esmond's return from the wars."\textsuperscript{62} An excerpt from Henry

\textsuperscript{60}Quoted, ibid., p. 160

\textsuperscript{61}The Literature of England, op. cit., II, 29.

\textsuperscript{62}Harvey, op. cit., p. 299.
Eamond substantiates Mr. Harvey's claim.

'And today, Henry, in the anthem, when they sang it "When the Lord turned the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream," I thought, yes, like them that dream--them that dream. And then it went, "They that sow in tears shall reap in joy; and he that goeth forth and weepeth, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him." I looked up from the book and saw you. I was not surprised when I saw you. I knew you would come, my dear, and saw the gold sunshine around your head.'

'Do you know what day it is?' she continued. 'It is the twenty-ninth of December--it is your birthday! But last year we did not drink it, no--no. . . . But now--now you are come again, bringing your sheaves with you, my dear.' She burst into a wild flood of weeping as she spoke; she laughed and sobbed on the young man's heart, crying out wildly, 'bringing your sheaves with you--your sheaves with you!'

There we find real rapture of reunion--the note of triumph, of astonishing fulfillment, of tragedy transcended. Mr. Harvey's description of this emotion is too effective to be lost. "Rapture," he says "is peace out of pain, the rainbow glory after the storm, the flower of Paradise whose roots are in sorrow. . . . the homecoming after exile, the turning of the tables upon sorrow, a consummation almost too wonderful to be true." For so full a revelation of the heart to be accepted by English readers, they, themselves had to be made psychologically ready for emotional liberation. Just that is what Methodism helped to bring about in England. Through the religious revival they learned the meaning of reunion and reconciliation with God. Multitudes found "peace out of pain."


64Harvey, op. cit., p. 300.
CONCLUSION

In many respects, the two reactionary movements discussed in the preceding chapters had much in common. Both movements, it has been seen, were reactions against coldness and formalism. Each sought to evoke from the past some element of strength that would give new meaning to life. For the Methodist this return meant the revival of fundamental principles and practices of the primitive Christian church; for the romanticist it meant seeking material and warmth for his imagination in the life and thought of the Middle Ages.

Both Methodism and the Romantic Movement advocated freer expression of feeling. Rousseauistic philosophy taught that feeling was good because man was good. Fairchild states that "when the sceptic has lost faith in reason, he is likely to cultivate faith in feeling."¹ The decay of rationalism in England had actually set in by the early eighteenth century. By then it had come to be thought that the natural man, being nearer Nature than a highly-civilized one, would possess natural goodness since Nature and God were inseparable. Protestant Christianity of the eighteenth century was still colored by puritan thought. Man had been left largely to his own resources since the idea of "Holy Church" had been depreciated. The inner voice had supplanted the authority of


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an infallible church. With this emotional reaction to coldness and formalism came expressions of enthusiasm, and sometimes, melancholy. Wonder and mystery attended both romanticism and Methodism. The idealism of romantics corresponded to the doctrine of perfectionism that was held by the Methodists. In both movements the "heart" element stands paramount.

The Methodist and Romantic Movements were both sympathetic to poor and humble people. Wesley's message was directed to them primarily, and from it they gained measures of self-esteem. Romantic poets spoke of the middle class as being the strength of a nation. Both developments were direct approaches to democracy.

While it is clearly discernible that Methodism and the Romantic Movement have some common characteristics, it is not so easy to decide their respective origins. The time was ripe in England for both reactions to take place by approximately 1750. The proverbial pendulum of human history had swung about as far to the extreme of conservatism as it was possible to swing; and, therefore, it was inevitable that the pendulum should start in the opposite direction. Yet it is a fact that neither movement was a deliberate revolt against prevailing systems. The literary movement had no recognized leadership as did its French counterpart. While Methodism did actually have a recognized head, its leader did not intend for his followers to separate from the mother church.

If the Romantic Movement is taken to include not only
the literary reaction but also the total program of reaction, then Methodism was at least one of the main channels of romanticism. The literary reaction, however, was just as inevitable as was the religious one; and although Methodism was antecedent by some years to the period of literary romanticism, it does not follow that the first produced the second.

Without the religious revival and the swelling of enthusiasm that attended it, it is probable that romantic literature would have taken longer to become acceptable to the English public. Opposition existed in previously-established literary standards, but the temper of the newly-important middle class was receptive to romantic expression. Still retaining to a significant degree the puritan's fear of the worldly arts, Methodism could not directly affect literary production. Yet in spreading throughout the land a religious fervour that emphasised joyous feeling and rapture, it paved the way for a fuller expression of individual feeling in realms other than religious.

The religious and literary reactions of the eighteenth century in England appear to be, more or less, rather loosely-related manifestations of the same movement. Both grew out of a need for internal stability. For too long a time stress had been laid upon outward form and outward progress without sufficient attention to psychological and emotional needs. Methodism gave to receptive Englishmen an anchor; and once they were anchored, they were safe from fear of the tempests.
Methodism, then, though not in any sense an immediate cause of the romantic revival in literature, helped to prepare the ground for the rich harvest of romanticism.
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