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cises, employed himself in an extensive perusal of the most approved dramatists and poets in the English language.¹

Two years after he went to Oxford, his father died ; and this event, together with the exhortations and counsels he received from the dying minister in his last moments, so affected him, that he at once abandoned poetry and plays, lost his liveliness of disposition, sunk into a state of melancholy, and made the salvation of his soul the chief business of life. Painful experience was the inspirer of a short poem of his, afterwards published in his collected works :—

“ In nature’s ebbs, which lay the soul in chains,
Beneath weak nerves and ill-sufficing veins,
Who can support bare being, unendow’d
With gust voluptuous, or reflection proud?
No more bright images the brain commands,—
No great design the glowing heart expands,—
No longer shines the animated face,—
Motion and speech forget their conscious grace.
How can the brave, the witty, and the gay
Survive, when mirth, wit, courage die away?
None but the Christian’s all-comprising power
Subdues each chance, and lives through every hour :
Watchful, he suffers all, and feels within
All smart proportion’d to some root of sin ;
He strikes each error with his Maker’s rod,
And, by self-knowledge, penetrates to God.”

Gambold entered Christ Church College in the same year that Charles Wesley did, the latter being more than two years older than the former. John Wesley also was a member of the same college, and twelve months before, on September 19, 1725, had been ordained a deacon. In 1729, the society of Oxford Methodists was formed by Charles Wesley ; and, a year afterwards, Gambold, still only in his teens, became one of them. He shall narrate his own story, written when Wesley was in Georgia. The account is long ; but, containing as it does a full description of the rise and peculiarities of the “ Holy Club,” and a faithful delineation

¹ It is a noticeable fact, that Whitefield also was extremely fond of reading plays, not only when at school in Gloucester, but, even after he went to Oxford.

of the character and influence of their confessed "curator," it is too important to be omitted. Gambold writes:—

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"Mr. Wesley, late of Lincoln College, has been the instrument of so much good to me, that, I shall never forget him. Could I remember him as I ought, it would have very near the same effect as if he was still present; for a conversation so unreserved as was his, so zealous in engaging his friends to every instance of Christian piety, has left nothing now to be said, nothing but what occurs to us as often as we are disposed to remember him impartially.

"About the middle of March, 1730, I became acquainted with Mr. Charles Wesley, of Christ Church. I was just then come up from the country, and had made a resolution to find out some pious persons of religion to keep company with, or else to instil something of it into those I knew already. I had been, for two years before, in deep melancholy: so God was pleased to order it, to disappoint and break a proud spirit, and to embitter the world to me; as I was inclining to relish its vanities. During this time, I had no friend to whom I could open my mind, to any purpose. No man did care for my soul; or none, at least, understood its paths. They, that were at ease, could not guess what my sorrow was for. The learned endeavoured to give me right notions, and the friendly to divert me. But I had a weight upon my heart, which only prayer could in some degree remove. I prepared myself to make trial of the value and comfort of society, being a little recovered. One day, an old acquaintance entertained me with some reflections on the whimsical Mr. Wesley, his preciseness and pious extravagancies. Though I had lived with him four years in the same college, yet, so unable was I to take notice of anything that passed, that I knew nothing of his character; but, upon hearing this, I suspected he might be a good Christian. I therefore went to his room, and, without any ceremony, desired the benefit of his conversation. I had so large a share of it henceforth, that hardly a day passed, while I was at college, but we were together once, if not oftener.

"After some time, he introduced me to his brother John, of Lincoln College. 'For,' said he, 'he is somewhat older than I, and can resolve your doubts better.' This, as I found afterwards, was a thing which he was deeply sensible of; for I never observed any person have a more real deference for another, than he constantly had for his brother. Indeed, he followed his brother entirely. Could I describe one of them, I should describe both. And therefore I shall say no more of Charles, but that he was a man made for friendship; who, by his cheerfulness and vivacity, would refresh his friend's heart; with attentive consideration, would enter into and settle all his concerns; so far as he was able, would do anything for him, great or small; and, by a habit of openness and freedom, leave no room for misunderstanding.

"The Wesleys were already talked of for some religious practices, which were first occasioned by Mr. Morgan, of Christ Church. From

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these combined friends, began a little society; for several others, from time to time, fell in; most of them only to be improved by their serious and useful discourse; and some few espousing all their resolutions and their whole way of life.

“Mr. John Wesley was always the chief manager, for which he was very fit; for he not only had more learning and experience than the rest, but he was blest with such activity as to be always gaining ground, and such steadiness that he lost none. What proposals he made to any was sure to charm them, because he was so much in earnest; nor could they afterwards slight them, because they saw him always the same. What supported this uniform vigour, was the care he took to consider well of every affair before he engaged in it, making all his decisions in the fear of God, without passion, humour, or self-confidence: for, though he had naturally a very clear apprehension, yet, his exact prudence depended more on humanity and singleness of heart. To this I may add, that he had, I think, something of authority in his countenance; though, as he did not want address, he could soften his manner, and point it as occasion required. Yet, he never assumed anything to himself above his companions. Any of them might speak their mind, and their words were as strictly regarded by him as his were by them.

“It was their custom to meet most evenings, either at his chamber or one of the others, where, after some prayers, (the chief subject of which was charity,) they ate their supper together, and he read some book. But the chief business was to review what each had done that day, in pursuance of their common design, and to consult what steps were to be taken the next.

“Their undertaking included these several particulars:—to converse with young students; to visit the prisons; to instruct some poor families; and to take care of a school, and a parish workhouse.

“They took great pains with the younger members of the University, to rescue them from bad company, and encourage them in a sober, studious life. If they had some interest with any such, they would get them to breakfast; and, over a dish of tea, endeavour to fasten some good hint upon them. They would bring them acquainted with other well disposed young men. They would help them in those parts of learning which they stuck at. They would close with their best sentiments, drive on their convictions, give them rules of piety, when they would receive them, and watch over them with great tenderness.

“Some or other of them went to the Castle every day; and another most commonly to Bocardo. Whoever came to the Castle was to read in the chapel to as many prisoners as would attend, and to talk to the man or men whom he had taken particularly in charge. Before reading, he asked: Whether they had prayers yesterday? (For some serious men among the prisoners read family prayers with the rest.) Whether they had read over again what was read last, and what they remembered of it? Then he went over the heads of it to them; and afterwards went on in the same book for a quarter of an hour. The books they used were the ‘Christian Monitor,’ the ‘Country Parson’s Advice to his Parishioners,’

and such-like. When he had done, he summed up the several particulars that had been insisted on, enforced the advice given, and reduced it at last to two or three sentences, which they might easily remember. Then he took his man aside, and asked him, Whether he was in the chapel yesterday? and other questions concerning his care to serve God, and learn his duty.

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“When a new prisoner came, their conversation with him, for four or five times, was particularly close and searching. Whether he bore no malice towards those that did prosecute him, or any others? The first time, after professions of good-will, they only inquired of his circumstances in the world. Such questions imported friendship, and engaged the man to open his heart. Afterwards, they entered upon such enquiries as most concern a prisoner. Whether he submitted to this disposal of Providence? Whether he repented of his past life? Last of all, they asked him, Whether he constantly used private prayer, and whether he had ever communicated? Thus, most or all of the prisoners were spoken to in their turns. But, if any one was either under sentence of death, or appeared to have some intentions of a new life, they came every day to his assistance; and partook in the conflict and suspense of those who should now be found able, or not able, to lay hold on salvation. In order to release those who were confined for small debts, and were bettered by their affliction, and likewise to purchase books, physic, and other necessaries,—they raised a small fund, to which many of their acquaintance contributed quarterly. They had prayers at the Castle most Wednesdays and Fridays, a sermon on Sundays, and the Sacrament once a month.

“When they undertook any poor family, they saw them, at least, once a week; sometimes gave them money; admonished them of their vices; read to them, and examined their children.

“The school was, I think, of Mr. Wesley’s own setting up. At all events, he paid the mistress, and clothed some, if not all, of the children. When they went thither, they enquired how each child behaved; saw their work (for some could knit and spin); heard them read; heard them their prayers and catechism; and explained part of it.

“In the same manner, they taught the children in the workhouse; and read to the old people as they did to the prisoners.

“Though some practices of Mr. Wesley and his friends were much blamed,—as their fasting on Wednesday and Friday, after the custom of the Primitive Church,—their coming on those Sundays, when there was no sacrament in their own colleges, to receive it at Christ Church,—yet nothing was so much disliked as these charitable employments. They seldom took any notice of the accusations brought against them; but, if they made any reply, it was commonly such a plain and simple one, as if there was nothing more in the case, but that they had heard such doctrines of their Saviour, and believed and done accordingly,—‘Shall we be the more happy in another life, the more virtuous we are in this? Are we the more virtuous, the more intensely we love God and man? Is love, as all habits, the more intense, the more we exercise it? Is either helping, or trying to help man, for God’s sake, an exercise of love to God or man?

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Particularly, Is the feeding the hungry, the giving drink to the thirsty, the clothing the naked, the visiting sick persons, or prisoners, an exercise of love to God or man? Is the endeavouring to teach the ignorant, to admonish sinners, to encourage the good, to comfort the afflicted, to confirm the wavering, and to reconcile enemies, an exercise of love to God or man? Shall we be the more happy in another life, if we do the former of these things, and try to do the latter? Or if we do not the one, nor try to do the other?"

In the above extracts, the reader has the practices which principally distinguished the Oxford Methodists from their fellows. The account is full of interest, and of great importance, being written by one of the members of this godly brotherhood, and immediately after that brotherhood was broken up. The remainder of Gambold's narrative is chiefly a defence and eulogy of Wesley, their "Curator;" and only such parts of it will be given as affect the whole of these earnest students. Gambold continues:—

"What I would chiefly remark upon, is the manner in which Mr. Wesley directed his friends.

"Because he required such a regulation of our studies, as might devote them all to God, he has been cried out upon as one that discouraged learning. Far from that;—the first thing he struck at in young men, was that indolence which would not submit to close thinking. Nor was he against reading much, especially at first; because then the mind ought to fill itself with materials, and try every thing that looks bright and perfect.

"He earnestly recommended to them a method and order in all their actions. After their morning devotions (which were at a fixed and early hour, from five to six being the time, morning as well as evening), he advised them to determine with themselves what they were to do all the parts of the day. By such foresight, they would, at every hour's end, not be in doubt how to dispose of themselves; and, by bringing themselves under the necessity of such a plan, they might correct the impotence of a mind that had been used to live by humour and chance, and prepare it by degrees to bear the other restraints of a holy life.

"The next thing was to put them upon keeping the fasts, visiting poor people, and coming to the weekly Sacrament: not only to subdue the body, increase charity, and obtain Divine grace; but (as he expressed it) to cut off their retreat to the world. He judged, that, if they did these things, men would cast out their name as evil, and, by the impossibility of keeping fair any longer with the world, oblige them to take their whole refuge in Christianity. But those, whose resolutions he thought would not bear this test, he left to gather strength by their secret exercises.

"It was his earnest care to introduce them to the treasures of wisdom

and hope in the Holy Scriptures: to teach them not only to endure that book, but to form themselves by it, and to fly to it as the great antidote against the darkness of this world. For some years past, he and his friends read the New Testament together at evening. After every portion of it, having heard the conjectures the rest had to offer, he made his observations on the phrase, design, and difficult places. One or two wrote these down from his mouth.

“He laid much stress upon self-examination. He taught them (besides what occurs in his Collection of Prayers) to take account of their actions in a very exact manner, by writing a constant diary. In this, they noted down in cipher, once if not oftener in the day, what chiefly their employments had been in the several parts of it, and how they had performed each. Mr. Wesley had these records of his life by him for many years past. And some I have known, who, to seal their convictions and make their repentance more solemn, would write down such reflections upon themselves as the anguish of their soul at that time suggested, adding any spiritual maxim which some experience of their own had confirmed to them.

“Then, to keep in their minds an awful sense of God’s presence, with a constant dependence on His help, he advised them to ejaculatory prayers. They had a book of Ejaculations relating to the chief virtues, and, lying by them as they stood at their studies, they at intervals snatched a short petition out of it. But at last, instead of that variety, they contented themselves with the following aspirations (containing acts of faith, hope, love, and self-resignation at the end of every hour)—‘Consider and hear me,’ etc.

“The last means he recommended was meditation. Their usual time for this was the hour next before dinner.

“After this, he committed them to God. What remained for him to do, was to encourage them in the discomforts and temptations they might feel, and to guard them against all spiritual delusions. In this spiritual care of his acquaintance, Mr. Wesley persisted amidst all discouragements. He overlooked not only one’s absurd or disagreeable qualities, but even his coldness and neglect of him, if he thought it might be conquered. He helped one in things out of religion, that he might be more welcome to help him in that. His knowledge of the world, and his insight into physic, were often of use to us.

“If any one could have provoked him, I should; for I was slow in coming into his measures, and very remiss in doing my part. I frequently contradicted his assertions; or, which is much the same, distinguished upon them. I hardly ever submitted to his advice at the time he gave it, though I relented afterwards. One time he was in fear, that, I had taken up notions that were not safe, and pursued my spiritual improvement in an erroneous, because inactive, way. So he came over and stayed with me near a week. He accosted me with the utmost softness, condoled with me the incumbrances of my constitution, heard all I had to say, endeavoured to pick out my meaning, and yielded to me as far as he could. I never saw more humility in him than at this time. It was

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enough to cool the warmest imaginations that swell an overweening heart. It was, indeed, his custom to humble himself most before the proud,—not to reproach them; but, in a way of secret intercession, to procure their pardon.

“He had not only friends in Oxford to assist, but a great many correspondents. He set apart one day at least in the week (and he was no slow composer) for writing letters; in which, without levity or affectation, but with plainness and fervour, he gave his advice in particular cases, and vindicated the strict original sense of the Gospel precepts.”¹

This long account does something more than give a general idea of the Oxford Methodists and of their distinguished leader. It exhibits the course of life adopted by Gambold in his twentieth year. Like the rest of his youthful friends, he became an earnest religionist; but he was not happy. “He gave way to desponding thoughts; neglected his person and apparel; confined himself as much as possible to his room; and applied, in search of information and comfort, to the works of such authors as he supposed could satisfy his inquiries, namely, the fathers of the first ages of the Christian Church. Of these, the most abstruse were his greatest favourites, and particularly those which are called mystics. Being well versed in the Greek language, he was much pleased with that energy of expression in which it excels. The deep speculations of these ancient writers, their beautiful allusions, the richness of style with which they clothed their ideas, and the strain of piety running through the whole, suited his taste, and so far influenced his understanding, that he adopted their sentiments, went the same lengths with them in the scenes of imagination, and, by degrees, became so much like one of them, that his cast of mind bore a nearer resemblance to that which was peculiar in them, than to any that appeared among the modern. By a close attention to writers of this stamp, he contracted such a turn of mind, and imbibed such an exalted notion of internal purity, that he could not be satisfied with himself, unless he became such a refined being as those philosophical Christians portrayed. This being the state to which his aim was directed, he spared no pains to model himself according to the idea which he had formed of it. His exertions were abortive. Disappointment

¹ *Methodist Magazine*, 1798, p. 172