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Samuel Wesley was born in Bristol on 24 February 1766 into a family of extraordinary achievements and high-mindedness. Charles Wesley, his father, was the principal poet and hymn-writer of Methodism; his uncle John was the movement’s founder. Samuel was to be the youngest child, joining Charles, eight years his senior, and Sarah, almost seven years older. The family was a musical one: Samuel’s father had played the flute in his youth, his mother sang, and his brother Charles was a child prodigy whose musical abilities had brought a steady stream of visitors to the family home since his earliest childhood.

It was not long before Samuel was showing unmistakable signs of musicality himself. His father later recorded Samuel’s delight at a very early age at hearing music, and his insistence on attending Charles’s harpsichord lessons and accompanying him ‘on the chair’.¹ According to the same account, he played his first tune at just under 3, taught himself to read from a copy of Handel’s *Samson* at 4, and at 5 ‘had all the recitatives, and choruses of *Samson* and the *Messiah*: both words and notes by heart’. At the age of 6 he had some keyboard lessons from David Williams, a Bristol organist, although according to his father ‘it was hard to say which was the master and which the scholar’. He also had violin and organ lessons, and at 7 played a psalm at a service at St James’s church. His first compositions apparently pre-dated his learning to write music: according to his father he frequently improvised scenes from oratorio texts at the keyboard, and the family noticed that when he came to repeat them, the music was always the same. Before he was 6 he had composed the airs for an entire oratorio, *Ruth*, which he then held in his memory until he was able to write them down, over two years later.

These exploits predictably attracted attention. In 1774, shortly after Samuel had written down the music of *Ruth*, William Boyce visited the family, announcing that he had heard that there was ‘an English Mozart’ in the house. The comparison

¹ Charles Wesley senior’s account of the musical talents of his two sons, as given to Daines Barrington, was included in Barrington’s Miscellanies (1781), 291–310, and forms the basis of much of the following paragraphs.
would readily have come to mind: the young Mozart, ten years Samuel’s senior, had spent fifteen months in London in 1764–5, exhibiting much the same near-miraculous precocity. Boyce’s comment after looking over the score of *Ruth* was: ‘these airs are some of the prettiest I have seen; this boy writes by nature as true a bass as I can by rule and study.’ His remark went to the heart of the matter: like Mozart, his brother, and other musical child prodigies before and since, Samuel possessed from his earliest years musical accomplishments that normally took years of concentrated work to acquire.

The education of children as talented as Charles and Samuel caused obvious problems. It would have been unthinkable for one in Charles Wesley senior’s position to have exhibited them in public for financial gain; in fact he appears to have kept them as much as possible out of the public gaze, and to have strictly rationed their appearances at public concerts. At the same time, he would have realized that if they were to develop their full potential they would need to learn from the best teachers and to be exposed to as many musical experiences as possible. Such considerations were no doubt uppermost in his mind when he decided to move the family from Bristol to London. In 1771 he was given the use of a house in Marylebone—at the time a village on the outskirts of London—by a wealthy well-wisher. For some time the family kept on their Bristol house and divided their time between Bristol and London, but in 1776 Samuel moved permanently to Marylebone, and two years later the family moved entirely from Bristol.

Perhaps inevitably, Samuel spent much of his childhood in the company of adults. For some of the time he was entrusted to the care of his godfather, the evangelical clergyman and amateur musician Martin Madan. Madan would later achieve notoriety for his controversial *Thelyphthora; or a Treatise on Female Ruin* (1780). At this time, however, he was chiefly known as a charismatic preacher and as the chaplain of the Lock Hospital, an asylum for men and women with venereal diseases, where the chapel had achieved renown because of the excellence of its music. Madan took Samuel on visits to his friends and acquaintances, where his musical abilities inevitably made him the object of much attention. Another child might have enjoyed the experience, but Samuel stated later that he had felt humiliated by it, and had resented his father’s behaviour in allowing Madan to carry him around ‘like a raree show’: ‘This soured my temper toward him at an early age. I contracted a dislike of my father’s conduct, which grew with my growth, and strengthened with my strength.’

But Samuel’s visits to Madan’s friends were not entirely taken up with music: family letters from the summer of 1776 include descriptions of an extended stay with the Russell family in Guildford, which included games of cricket.

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2 Rylands, DDCW 6/93Q.
experiments with home-made explosives, and firework displays. John Russell senior (1711–1804), the head of the family, was a printer and several times mayor of Guildford; John Russell, RA (1745–1806), his elder son, was a portrait painter who during this visit painted the well-known portrait of Samuel as a boy which now hangs at the Royal Academy of Music. Also among the Guildford circle was the experimental scientist James Price, sometimes described as the last of the alchemists, who in 1783 committed suicide after being unable to substantiate claims that he was able to transmute mercury into silver and gold, and who left Samuel a house at Guildford and £1,000 in his will.

Some of the problems faced by Charles Wesley senior in deciding how best to manage the upbringing of Charles and Samuel were those which have always confronted the parents of exceptionally gifted children.3 But these were compounded by Charles’s prominent position within Methodism and by other, class-related, factors. As a music-lover himself, and as a Christian father mindful of the parable of the talents, he would have considered it his duty to ensure that Charles and Samuel were given every opportunity to develop their abilities to their fullest extent. On the other hand, many Methodists, including Charles’s brother John, looked with considerable suspicion on the sensual appeal of music and its use in any other context than that of worship. Public concerts, with their close associations with the theatre, were a cause of particular disapproval, and even religious music was suspect if it was at all elaborate. Charles was already criticized in some Methodist circles for the worldliness of his social circle. John Fletcher voiced what was presumably a widely felt concern when he wrote to Charles in 1771:

‘You have your enemies, as well as your brother, they complain of your love for musick, company, fine people, great folks, and of the want of your former zeal and frugality. I need not put you in mind to cut off sinful appearances.’4 Charles Wesley tended to react robustly to criticisms of his children’s musical activities, replying on one occasion to a correspondent who had criticized him for allowing Charles to play in public that he had intended him for the Church, but that nature had intended otherwise, and that the only way he could have prevented him from being a musician would have been by cutting off his fingers.

It is apparent, however, that for all his love of music and his desire to see his children receive the best possible musical education, Charles Wesley senior had considerable misgivings about music as a suitable profession for them. His unease, although it may have been magnified by the particular circumstances of his position, did not arise specifically from his Methodist background, but would have been shared by most parents of his time and class. Irrespective of the value

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4 Fletcher to Charles Wesley, 13 Oct. 1771, quoted in Gill, 190.
one might individually place on music, one would not welcome the prospect of one’s children entering a profession with such a low status and high degree of insecurity.5

For the moment, however, Charles Wesley’s first priority was to advance his sons’ musical education, and allowing them to organize concerts at the family home must have appeared to him as an ideal way of achieving this aim. He set out his motives in a document headed ‘reasons for letting my sons have a concert at home’ dated 14 January 1779, which reveals much of the ambivalence of his attitudes:

(1) To keep them out of harm’s way: the way (I mean) of bad music and bad musicians who by a free communication with them might corrupt both their taste and their morals.

(2) That my sons may have a safe and honourable opportunity of availing themselves of their musical abilities, which have cost me several hundred pounds.

(3) That they may enjoy their full right of private judgment, and likewise their independency; both of which must be given up if they swim with the stream and follow the multitude.

(4) To improve their play and their skill in composing: as they must themselves furnish the principal music of every concert, although they do not call their musical entertainment a concert. It is too great a word. They do not presume to rival the present great masters who excel in the variety of their accompaniments. All they aim at in their concert music is exactness.6

The family concerts, which ran for nine seasons from 1779 to 1787, included examples of music in both the ‘ancient’ and modern styles, performed by a small professional ensemble which included both Charles and Samuel, to audiences which on occasion numbered over fifty. In addition to giving both boys experience of performing, the concerts were also ideal opportunities for them to try out their compositions, and all of Samuel’s instrumental music of the period—including five symphonies and a number of organ and violin concertos—can be assumed to have been written for them. Recent recordings and performances have shown them to be highly competent and attractive works, if sometimes understandably derivative in style.

Although the family concerts did much to fulfil Charles Wesley senior’s aim of furthering his sons’ musical education while keeping them ‘out of harm’s way’, it is not clear how they fitted into any longer-term plans he may have had for their

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6 Rylands, DDWES 14/65, quoted in Lightwood, 51–2.
future. If, on the one hand, the concerts reflected his reluctant acceptance that they would probably eventually become professional musicians despite all his misgivings, he may have looked on them as a sheltered apprenticeship, in which they could gain necessary experience without being exposed too early to the potentially corrupting professional music world. But both sons would sooner or later need to make the transition, and the family concerts only delayed the moment when this would need to happen. In fact, by the time of the final series of concerts in 1787, they were both of an age when their less privileged contemporaries would long have been earning a living in music. If, on the other hand, he envisaged that his sons would eventually earn their living in other fields, he would have seen the concerts as a way of allowing them for the moment to practise music at the highest level with professionals, while still remaining gentlemen amateurs. But if this was what he had in mind, it too was unsatisfactory, in that the concerts effectively provided a full professional training that led nowhere.

Sheltered though he was from the world of professional music-making during the late 1770s and early 1780s, Samuel was nonetheless searching out new musical experiences wherever he could find them. He would no doubt have attended services at St Paul’s Cathedral, Westminster Abbey, and other Anglican establishments. Rather more surprising, however, was his discovery of Roman Catholic worship, and a very different set of religious and musical traditions. From remarks in two letters from Charles Wesley to his wife, the date can be established as the late summer of 1778. Samuel’s involvement must have been with one or more of the embassy chapels, which were at this time the main centres of worship for London Roman Catholics. The three largest chapels were those of the Bavarian, Sardinian, and Portuguese embassies, where the Mass and the Offices were celebrated with considerable splendour of liturgy and ritual. At an early stage Samuel would have met Samuel Webbe I (1740–1816), the organist of the Sardinian and Portuguese chapels, and the most important figure in Roman Catholic church music in London at this time. Webbe would have welcomed Samuel and would have given him the opportunity to sing in the choir, play the organ, and in time to compose for the services.

Charles Wesley’s reaction to Samuel’s continuing involvement with Roman Catholicism is not recorded, but can readily be imagined: intense disapproval, coupled with anxiety for Samuel’s spiritual welfare, and above all a fear that he might convert. At the same time, it would have been inconsistent with his views on freedom of conscience for him to have considered forbidding Samuel’s continued attendance. He was also no doubt sufficiently realistic to realize that any attempt to do so would be counter-productive, as by this time Samuel was exhibiting a rebellious streak and becoming increasingly resistant to any form of parental discipline. His worries may have been to some extent assuaged by the
thought of the musical benefits that Samuel was deriving from his attendance, and the assurances that Samuel may well have given that his reasons for continuing to attend were exclusively musical.

In fact, Samuel did convert in early 1784: a course of action which dismayed and sorrowed Charles Wesley and further contributed to the already deteriorating relationship between father and son. To mark the event, in May Samuel composed a large-scale setting of the Mass which he later fair-copied and had bound and sent off to Pope Pius VI. The Missa de Spiritu Sancto, scored for soloists, chorus, and orchestra and lasting for around ninety minutes in performance, was Wesley’s longest and most ambitious work to date, written on a scale matched by few other Mass settings of the period either in England or on the continent, and suitable for liturgical use on only the grandest of occasions. It seems unlikely that Samuel expected that it would be performed in Rome, and there were certainly no opportunities for it to be used in the London embassy chapels. He probably regarded it as a presentation piece, written to demonstrate at the same time his seriousness of commitment and his technical prowess.

Samuel’s period of whole-hearted commitment to Roman Catholicism appears to have lasted for some years, although as time went on there were increasing tensions between his own convictions and the teachings of the Church. Some correspondence of early 1792 shows him unprepared to accept the Church’s authority on certain points of doctrine. Uncertain whether or not his views were to be regarded as heretical, he stated that until the matter was resolved he no longer intended to attend services at ‘public chapels’. This disagreement may in fact have marked the end of his active spiritual involvement with Roman Catholicism, and when he returned to the Church some years later, it was for purely musical reasons. In later life he regarded the episode of his conversion with embarrassment and tried to pretend that it had never happened, claiming that ‘although the Gregorian music had seduced him to their chapels, the tenets of the Romanists never obtained any influence over his mind’. His subsequent attitude to the Roman Catholic Church was highly ambivalent, consisting of a fascination with its liturgy and music combined with a deep distaste for its teaching and doctrines, summed up in his remark that ‘if the Roman Doctrines were like the Roman Music we should have Heaven upon Earth’.

Samuel’s conversion to Roman Catholicism was only one of a number of factors adversely affecting his relations with his family at this time. Another was his passionate relationship with Charlotte Louisa Martin, whom he first met in October 1782 and was to marry in April 1793. The daughter of George Martin, variously described as a demonstrator of anatomy and a surgeon at St Thomas’s

7 Obituary in The Times, 12 Oct. 1837. 8 SW to Jacob, 5 Nov. [1809].
hospital, she was four or five years older than Samuel, and may have been a
teacher at one of the schools at which Samuel gave music lessons. The family
disapproved of her and her background from the start, claiming that she was
vain and extravagant, and pointing to a history of financial imprudence in her
family. At some stage Charles Wesley appears to have attempted to insist that
Samuel should break off the relationship and have nothing more to do with her.
The result was predictable: Samuel refused, the relationship between him and
his father—already under strain because of Samuel’s involvement with Roman
Catholicism—further deteriorated, and the bond between him and Charlotte was
further strengthened.

Inextricably entangled with Samuel’s family problems during his adolescence
were the beginnings of the mental illness which so markedly affected his later career.
His tendency to depression, leading on occasion to periods of prolonged incapacity,
has always been recognized by his biographers. It is clear, however, that this was
only one aspect of his illness, and that a more accurate diagnosis is of manic de-
pression, in which periods of depression alternate with periods of hypomania.
Hypomaniac periods are typically characterized by a wide range of uninhibited
behaviour, and in the case of creative artists often by great creativity. The irregu-
lar pattern of Samuel’s compositional output in the 1780s, varying between great
productivity and almost complete inactivity, is consistent with such a diagnosis.
So is his behaviour at the same time, as reported in family letters: it included inci-
dents of drunkenness, staying out all night, and the physical abuse of servants, all
of which suggest something more than the normal mood-swings of adolescence.
A low point must have been reached in the summer of 1785, when his father felt it
necessary to take the extraordinary and humiliating step of begging Bishop Talbot,
the Roman Catholic Vicar Apostolic of the London district, to assert his spiritual
authority to keep Samuel under control, as he was no longer able to do so himself.

Wesley attained his majority in February 1787. Now that he was no longer either
a child prodigy or a precocious adolescent, he needed to find a role in the adult
world. He seems to have regarded a future as a musician with scant enthusiasm.
As subsequent remarks scattered through the correspondence reveal, he deeply
resented the quirk of fate which had given him such outstanding musical abilities,
and which he considered had at the same time disqualified him from following
any other profession. Much of this resentment was directed at his father, for
encouraging his musical education and ‘suffering’ him to be a musician. By the
time he entered adult life, the unglamorous reality of much of the musician’s life
must have become ever more apparent to him: the low status of the professional
musician, the large amount of teaching that all but the most eminent performers
needed to undertake in order to earn a basic living, the frequent physical dis-
comforts of concert life, and the lack of any career progression.
Biographical Introduction

In fact, Wesley appears for the moment to have turned away from music: there are no records of him performing in public and he seems to have stopped composing. His sole musical activity was his teaching, both in schools and privately. This was undemanding work for one of his abilities, and had little to recommend it beyond the money it brought in. Otherwise, little is known about his activities at this period, and his life appears to have been one of aimlessness and lack of direction, very probably punctuated by shorter or longer periods of depression.

In 1787, according to his obituary notice in The Times, Wesley suffered a serious head injury which he subsequently blamed for his mental health problems. But there is no mention of such an incident in family letters or papers, and the first signs of Wesley’s condition had manifested themselves at least three years earlier. As the account of the head injury apparently came from Wesley himself, it should not be dismissed as a fiction, but there must be doubt about the precise date at which it occurred, to say nothing of its effects.

In December 1788 Wesley became a Freemason. Little is known about this event; it should be stressed, however, that it is not (as has sometimes been supposed) of any relevance to the question of his continued commitment to Roman Catholicism, as there was no ideological incompatibility at this time in England between Roman Catholicism and Freemasonry, and many English Catholics were also Freemasons.

Throughout the 1780s, Wesley and Charlotte remained as committed to each other as ever, their relationship no doubt gaining in strength with each additional instance of family opposition. After the death of Charles Wesley in March 1788, it might have been expected that they would consider marriage: by this time they had known each other for over five years, and their commitment had been tested by constant family opposition, at least on Wesley’s side. In addition, Wesley had on his majority come into money left to him in various bequests, including the substantial one from James Price. As he and Charlotte intended to spend the rest of their lives together and were openly conducting a passionately physical relationship, there were no compelling reasons, apart from family disapproval, why they should not marry, and several reasons why they should.

In fact, the question of marriage does not seem for the moment to have been considered, and when the subject came up again some time later, the grounds of the family’s concern had shifted. By now, they recognized the strength and apparent permanence of Wesley’s commitment to Charlotte, and had abandoned their former attempts to persuade him to give her up. Instead, they now tried to persuade him to regularize the situation by marrying her. Part of their concern undoubtedly stemmed from worries about Charlotte becoming pregnant, and the stigma of illegitimacy which would attend any resulting children. Indeed, it appears from a reference in a family letter of 1791 that Charlotte had by this time
already had a child by Samuel;⁹ nothing further is known of this child and its fate, however, and it seems most likely that it was either stillborn or died in early infancy, or possibly that it was given away for adoption.

It is at this point that the story takes a totally unexpected turn. Wesley’s response to family suggestions that he and Charlotte should marry was a flat refusal, on the surprising grounds that he considered them to be married already by virtue of their sexual intimacy, and that going through a religious ceremony would do nothing to alter matters. This stance, which he set out in detail in a remarkable series of letters to his sister Sarah in the summer of 1791, derived from arguments which his godfather Martin Madan had elaborated, but for very different purposes, in Thelyphthora. In an attempt to force men to take responsibility for their sexual behaviour, Madan had argued that the essence of marriage lay not in a legal ceremony but in sexual intercourse. If this could be established and enshrined into law, a man who had sexual intercourse with a woman could be held responsible for her maintenance and that of any resulting child or children. Madan claimed that this well-intentioned but eccentric position was supported by scriptural authority, arguing that there was nothing in the Bible to suggest that a religious ceremony was an essential component of marriage. One very obvious problem with this position was posed by men who had sexual intercourse with more than one woman. To cope with this, Madan was obliged to argue for polygamy, once more citing the Bible. Not surprisingly, it was this aspect of his argument that attracted the most attention and opposition—often from those who had not troubled to familiarize themselves with the entirety of his argument—and which led first to his public notoriety and ultimately to his disgrace.

In Wesley’s hands, Madan’s arguments were given a new and personal application. If the essence of marriage was indeed in sexual intercourse, then he and Charlotte were already married, and there could be no reason for them also to go through a church ceremony. It is difficult to think of a position which could have caused more offence and hurt to his family. In his refusal to marry, Samuel was claiming to be adopting not a libertarian stance, but a position of principle, backed by the full weight of biblical authority. At the same time he paraded his physical intimacy with Charlotte in front of his family, expressed his contempt for the marriage ceremony, and impugned the integrity of all those who celebrated it. It was an extraordinary position to take, and one which—Madan and Thelyphthora apart—finds no resonance in any thinking of the time.

Although Madan’s arguments gave Samuel’s position intellectual backing of a sort, he had more down-to-earth reasons for his refusal to marry, which on occasion he was prepared to acknowledge. One was financial; the other purely a

⁹ Sarah Wesley to SW, 27 May 1791 (Emory).
matter of his refusal to conform to expected norms of behaviour. As he explained to Sarah in June 1791:

I have but two objections to marrying. The first is I am not rich enough: the second that to tie my person wd be to lose my heart: and she who valued it would hardly consent to that. It is impossible for me to explain to another the reason of some irresistible antipathies, and I can only declare this truth, that my aversion to constraint is invincible.10

For all the vehemence of Wesley’s arguments and his repeated protestations of his commitment to Charlotte, it was not until the autumn of 1792 that they decided to set up house together and live together as man and wife. Samuel described this move in an important letter to his mother which more than any other document conveys his own feelings for Charlotte, his family’s opposition, and his views on marriage:

I think I need not be told that every grand Step in Life ought to be well weighed, & thoroughly considered before it be taken:—It is certain that I have taken one of these grand Steps within this Month past, & I hope, not without having previously & seriously reflected on the Consequences of it.

An Acquaintance of ten Years duration has confirmed me in the Resolution of passing ‘Life’s Sea’ with that ‘Mate’, whose every Action has given the Lye to her Accusers.—It is true that her Enemies have been found only among the Base & Unworthy, yet as their cruel & unfounded Aspersions have unfortunately sunk too deep in the Minds of those who deserve to be undeceived, I shall not believe it Time lost, to animadvert upon a few of their Charges. Charlotte Louisa Martin has been represented as a fickle & unsteady Character. Whether this be true or false, let the following Fact decide.—It was in October 1782 that I first became acquainted with her; soon after which time, she acknowledged that she loved me: since then she has to my Knowledge had repeated & eligible Offers not of a dishonourable Connexion but of an honourable Alliance; not of Concubinage but of Marriage, from Men qualified to support her in a Style similar to that in which she was originally educated: but to these she has preferred Me in my wooden Cottage, with my splendid Fortune of 150 Pounds a Year!

Again, she has been held forth as of a careless, prodigal Disposition, & as closely resembling an extravagant Father & a vain Mother, whose Iniquities she has (indeed most unjustly) borne.—But how does this Charge agree with another Fact? (which let him deny who can): M’ King, (a Bristol Merchant who has the Management of the desperate Affairs of the Family) has allowed her, for several Years past, 30 Pounds per Annum, on which she has hitherto lived, decently, & out of debt. That she was ever assisted by me in pecuniary Matters, I can safely & solemnly declare to be untrue.—From me she never received or would accept aught but mere Trifles, although amongst the other diabolical Slanders it was affirmed (by him who is gone to his own Place) that I had engaged to liquidate her Debts & administer to her Luxuries, as soon as I should become of Age.

10 SW to Sarah Wesley, 5 June [1791] (Fitzwilliam).
She has been called a Coquette, nay more; a wanton.—On these Accusations, as false as God is true, I can reflect with no Patience: they were engendered in the Heart of Envy, & vomited from the Mouth of Malice.—Suffice it to say that I have had personal Proofs that till she was mine, she was pure & untouched: proofs which it would not be delicate to adduce.—If she was seduced, I alone was her Seducer.

It may easily be believed that the Woman whom I so well love I would ever wish to render respected by all those whose good Opinion may be valuable: & if I were to consider Her as anything else than my Wife, I should confess that I was adding Insult to Injury. But she is truly & properly my Wife by all the Laws of God & Nature. She never can be made more so, by the mercenary Tricks of divine Jugglers; but yet, if a Million of Ceremonies, repeated Myriads of Times, by as many Successors & Imitators of Simon Magus, can serve to make her more happy, or more honourable, I am ready to pay them for their Hocus Pocus, for I am told that in this Evangelical Age, ‘the Gift of God is’ not ‘to be purchased’ without Money.11

The house described here as a ‘wooden Cottage’ was in Ridge, a small village in Hertfordshire near St Albans, some thirteen miles outside London, and Wesley and Charlotte were to live there for the next four years. The decision to move there was on the face of it a bizarre one. It was probably prompted in the first place by Wesley’s disenchantment with London, coupled with a desire to live out a rural idyll with Charlotte, far from the intrusive and censorious attentions of family and acquaintances. Another factor was no doubt his ‘splendid Fortune of 150 Pounds a Year’, which was—notwithstanding his dismissive comment—in fact quite sufficient to free him from the necessity of full-time work and hence the obligation to live in London.

If worries about the prospect of illegitimate children were the main factor in the family’s attempts to persuade Wesley and Charlotte to marry, these must have increased after the move to Ridge. The issue soon became pressing, for early in 1793 Charlotte became pregnant. The impending birth of a child was evidently successful in inducing a change of attitude where repeated arguments and pleas from the family had failed: Wesley and Charlotte rapidly abandoned their previously cherished principles and married in early April. Not surprisingly, given the circumstances and the vehemence with which they had held their former position, the ceremony was quiet, not to say secretive: it was by special licence, thus obviating the need to call the banns, and not at Ridge but at Hammersmith, where presumably neither Wesley nor Charlotte was known. None of Wesley’s family was present, and they were not informed that the marriage had taken place until much later. Incredibly, in letters to Sarah of late August Wesley was still arguing his old position on the redundancy of the marriage ceremony and making no mention of the fact that he and Charlotte were now

11 SW to his mother, 7 Nov. 1792 (Rylands, DDWF 15/5).
married. It was not until the following January that Sarah could record that she had had their marriage ‘confirmed’ and had met Charlotte for the first time as SW’s wife.

In this way Wesley and Charlotte embarked on married life. Their first child, Charles, was born on 25 September 1793. But the relationship which had thrived on ten concentrated years of family opposition before the marriage rapidly deteriorated after it. As early as October 1794, as Charlotte’s confinement with a second child approached, Wesley was confessing to Sarah: ‘I love her, as you know, but the event has proved that she was never designed for my second self. I dwell on her virtues even now, and as little on her faults as she will let me. But where can esteem be for her or him who knows not to bridle the tongue?’

From this point, Wesley made no attempt to conceal his marital unhappiness from his family, and his letters to his mother and sister describe frequent quarrels, on occasion escalating into physical violence. Perhaps not surprisingly, his complaints about Charlotte’s character and behaviour bore a great similarity to those expressed by his family before the marriage. By July 1795, he was considering separation as his only way of escaping a situation that he was finding increasingly intolerable, and predicting that Charlotte’s ‘open violence’ would drive him ‘more speedily to comfort’ than he had previously expected. Eighteen months later, he was confiding to his old friend James Kenton that life with Charlotte had adversely affected his health: his memory was weakened, he was seldom calm, and he had aged a dozen years since the marriage. There was no arguing with Charlotte’s ‘diabolical, ungovernable, ferocious, ungrateful disposition’, and he and Kenton were agreed that she was ‘incurable among lunaticks’.

Despite repeated crises, resulting from time to time in periods of temporary separation, Wesley and Charlotte remained together until 1810. There may, of course, have been peaks of happiness to match the troughs of misery, and more settled and uneventful times which went unrecorded in the family correspondence. For a while, at least, some of the strong attraction that had sustained their commitment through their ten-year courtship appears to have survived: in an undated letter from around this time, Charlotte confided to Sarah that Wesley had been ‘the love of her youth’, that she had loved him ‘better than mortal’, and that he had ‘taken too strong root’ for her ever to stop loving him, even though she considered that some aspects of his behaviour disgraced him.

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12 SW to [Sarah Wesley], [22 Aug. 1793] (Rylands, DDWF 15/6), selectively quoted in Lightwood, 84.
13 Sarah Wesley, ‘Mercies of the Year 1794’, entry for 18 Jan. 1794 (Emory).
14 SW to Sarah Wesley, 26 Oct. 1794 (Emory).
15 SW to Sarah Wesley, [8] July 1795 (Fitzwilliam).
16 SW to Kenton, 18 Jan. 1797 (Duke).
17 Charlotte Wesley to Sarah Wesley, undated [?1795–7] (Drew).
Musically, Wesley’s time at Ridge seems to have been almost entirely fallow. He continued with his teaching, but there is no evidence of him performing in public during the period, and apart from one major work (the *Ode to St Cecilia*) there were no compositions of any significance.

By 1797, any attractions which Ridge may have once have possessed had evidently long since disappeared, and the Wesleys moved to Finchley: now a suburb of London, but at the time still an outlying village. They were to be there until some time after May of the following year, when they moved to Hornsey Lane, near Highgate. The move appears to have had a dramatic effect on Wesley’s life. Participation in London musical life immediately became feasible, even if Wesley still needed on occasion to use the Marylebone house for overnight stays after evening engagements, as he had when he lived at Ridge. The change in Wesley’s circumstances is apparent in a fresh crop of compositions. A number of glees, catches, and other small-scale vocal compositions points to his involvement with the world of the glee clubs and other more informal private gatherings where professionals joined with amateurs for relaxed and convivial music-making.

After a long silence, Wesley was also once more composing Latin church music. His compositions of this period include such pieces as the ambitious eight-part settings of ‘Deus Majestatis intonuit’ and ‘Dixit Dominus’ and a five-part setting of ‘Exultate Deo’, all of them reflecting his by now considerable knowledge of English and continental Renaissance polyphonic styles. As with his earlier Latin church music, there is no evidence to link these works with any one location, but it is probable that they were written for the Portuguese embassy chapel, where the 16-year-old Vincent Novello had recently taken up the post of organist.

The rise in spirits that can be inferred from Wesley’s sudden resumption of composition can also be seen in the earliest letters in this volume. Many are to Joseph Payne Street, a City businessman and a prominent member of the Madrigal Society, whom Wesley may have got to know through one or other of the glee clubs, or as a pupil. It was also at around this time that Wesley renewed his acquaintance with the music historian Charles Burney, and laid the foundations of a friendship that would continue until Burney’s death in 1814.

Wesley’s one large-scale work of the period was his *Confitebor tibi, Domine*, an hour-long setting for soloists, chorus, and orchestra of Psalm 111, which he completed in August 1799. The *Confitebor* is the most successful of Wesley’s large-scale choral works, combining choruses in the ‘ancient’ Handelian manner with florid solo sections in a more modern idiom in a manner which demonstrates Wesley’s easy mastery of both styles. As with the earlier *Ode to St Cecilia*, we know nothing about the circumstances of its composition, and can only speculate on the plans that Wesley may have had for its performance. It seems most likely
that he wrote it with performance at one of the Lenten oratorio concerts in mind. If so, he may have intended it for the 1800 Covent Garden season, following the belated first performance of his *Ode to St Cecilia* there in February 1799. What is less certain, however, is how acceptable a setting of a Latin sacred text would have been at an oratorio concert at this time, and it may have been for this reason that plans for its performance eventually foundered.

The abortive *Confitebor* project notwithstanding, it is clear that by 1799 Wesley was beginning to establish himself in London professional musical life. In the spring of 1798 he had applied unsuccessfully for the post of organist at the chapel of the Foundling Hospital, where the musical traditions inaugurated during the lifetime of Handel still continued. His failure to be elected on this occasion was one of many similar disappointments throughout his life, and appears to have had nothing to do with his abilities or his fitness for the post: his reputation as an organist, and particularly as an extempore player, was by this time well established. In April 1800 he appeared at the King’s Theatre in one of the earliest performances in England of Haydn’s *Creation*, playing continuo and performing his own recently composed D major organ concerto between the acts. In addition, his most recent music was beginning to appear in print: a set of twelve sonatinas for piano was published in late 1798 or early 1799, followed around two years later by a further set of piano sonatas and duets.

A more determined effort to break into London musical life was the ill-starred series of subscription concerts at the Tottenham Street rooms that Wesley and his brother Charles arranged in early 1802. It was for performance at one of these that Wesley composed his Symphony in B flat, his only mature work in the genre, and a piece which, like the *Confitebor*, amply demonstrates Wesley’s familiarity with the late music of Haydn. Contemporary information on the concert series is sparse, consisting only of a single press advertisement and a letter to Burney which gives details of the programme of one of the concerts and expresses Wesley’s regret that they had not been able to engage the services of the soprano Elizabeth Billington. Nonetheless, it is clear from remarks in subsequent letters that the series was an expensive and embarrassing failure which cost Wesley and Charles around £100 each.

Notwithstanding the performance of the *Ode to St Cecilia*, a few concert appearances, and the promotion of the Tottenham Street series, it cannot be said that Wesley was a major figure in London’s music at this time: the picture is one of isolated events rather than of sustained activity. A large part of the reason no doubt lay in his continuing mental health problems, the cyclical nature of which...
must have made any long-term career development difficult, if not impossible. At the same time, his relationship with Charlotte continued to be stormy. Family letters, not always precisely datable, reveal a long catalogue of quarrels and unhappiness, culminating in Wesley’s love affair in or around 1799 with Anne Deane, a close friend of his sister Sarah. The result, in the autumn of 1801, was a separation from Charlotte and a serious rift with Sarah, followed by an extended period of depression which appears to have been at its most severe in the summer of 1802 and to have rendered Wesley for a time incapable of any but the most routine activities. The house at Five Mile Stone, Highgate, where he and Charlotte had been living since the summer of 1799, was sold, and for a while nothing is known of Wesley’s activities, either private or public.

Wesley and Charlotte appear to have had some sort of rapprochement in the spring of 1805, and it was probably at around this time that they moved into the house in Arlington Street, Camden Town that they were to occupy until the final breakdown of their marriage in 1810. Another child, Emma Frances, was born in January or February 1806, joining Charles, now 12, and John William, born in the summer of 1799 and now 6. But although differences had been patched up and accommodations reached for the moment, the relationship was evidently as highly charged as before, and as likely to turn to acrimony and violence. The Roman Catholic bluestocking Mary Freeman Shepherd, who had known Wesley since his boyhood and had been his confidante at the time of his conversion in 1784, took a jaundiced view of the relationship. Learning in January 1806 of Charlotte’s impending confinement, she remarked contemptuously in a letter to Wesley’s sister Sarah: ‘his wife I find is ready to lay in. By and by they will be quarrelling again, like cats that fight when they cease caterwauling.’

With the move to Camden Town and the birth of Emma, some degree of domestic normality appears to have returned, although Wesley’s depression continued. He was dissatisfied with his lot as a musician, in particular the school teaching by which he was obliged to make his main living. He was also plagued with money worries—some of them no doubt the result of the domestic problems of the previous few years—and could no longer afford to maintain Charles at St Paul’s School, where he had placed him only the previous year. For the moment he felt himself trapped by debt and a heavy load of family responsibilities, and his mood was one of grim resignation. In a letter of April 1806 to his mother he set out the grounds for his discontent:

It is absolutely impossible for me to maintain myself & four other People (not reckoning the infant) upon my present Income, especially when it is considered that the Person

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19 Mary Freeman Shepherd to Sarah Wesley, 15 Jan. 1806 (Rylands).
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whose sole Care & Business ought to be to make the most of every Thing, is & ever will be, a thoughtless, not to say a determined Spendthrift. If another School, equal in Emolument to Mrs Barnes’s were to offer (which is not very likely) even then the Matter would not be mended, because the simple Fact is that my Head & Nerves will not bear the Drudgery of more Dunces assaulting my Ears for six Hours together. It is not that I am averse from Employment; no, not of the closest Kind, for those who know me best know that Application has been my Delight; but this contemptible, frivolous Work of hammering Sounds into blockheads, which at last they never rightly comprehend, is an Avocation, which I cannot increase, without driving myself either into Madness or Ideotism.20

This shows Wesley at his most despairing. Other letters of the period show him in a happier and more active frame of mind. By mid-January 1807, he was able to profess himself in a letter to his mother ‘much more recovered’ in bodily health than he ever expected to be.21 Although elsewhere in the letter he expresses more gloomy thoughts, the tenor of the whole is cheerful enough, and his letter of the same date to his brother Charles (included in this volume) extends to eleven pages of lively news and gossip. The contrast with the despairing letters of the previous year could not be stronger.

At around the same time as Wesley’s reconciliation with Charlotte and the resumption of a more settled domestic life was an event which was both to transform his professional fortunes and to give him a cause into which to concentrate his considerable energies: his discovery of the music of J. S. Bach.

Although Wesley may have come across a few isolated examples of Bach’s music earlier in publications by A. F. C. Kollmann, William Shield, and Clementi, which appeared between 1796 and 1800, they do not seem to have made very much of an impression on him. Nor does he appear to have encountered the three continental editions of the ‘48 published around 1801, copies of which presumably arrived in England shortly afterwards. In fact, according to his account in his Reminiscences, written in 1836, Wesley’s first encounter with the ‘48 was through the violinist and composer George Frederick Pinto. This fixes the date with some precision: it cannot have been later than early 1806, as Pinto died at the early age of 20 on 23 March of that year. Wesley subsequently made his own manuscript copy from a copy lent to him by the flautist John George Graeff.22 Thereafter, for the moment, his interest appears to have lain dormant.

The explosive awakening of Wesley’s interest in Bach’s music can probably be dated to early 1808. In April, Wesley wrote to Burney to tell him about his enth-
siasm for Bach, subsequently visiting him at Chelsea College to play examples from the ‘48’ to him. As a result of Wesley’s advocacy, Burney became an enthusiastic convert to the Bach cause, and Wesley came to rely on him for advice on how Bach’s music could best be promoted. By this time Wesley was also asking Burney for his opinion on the likely demand for an English edition of the ‘48’, to be published by subscription. As a result of Burney’s advice that Bach’s music might be ‘played into fashion’, Wesley arranged an evidently successful concert of Bach’s music at the Hanover Square Rooms on 11 June. At the same time, Wesley consulted Burney on the advisability of lecturing on Bach, and in another letter recounted his success in playing Bach while on a visit to Cambridge.

From August 1808 to the following December the main source of information on Wesley’s activities in promoting Bach is his letters to Benjamin Jacob, organist of the Surrey Chapel. First published in 1875 in an edition by Wesley’s daughter Eliza as *Letters of Samuel Wesley to Mr Jacobs, relating to the Introduction into this Country of the works of John Sebastian Bach*, the *Bach Letters* are the most widely known of Wesley’s letters. With their excitable tone, extravagant language, and all-pervading use of religious imagery, they convey Wesley’s enthusiasm for Bach at its height. In addition, they are an invaluable source of information on the day-to-day progress of the English Bach movement at a crucial early stage.

In the earliest letter of the collection Wesley proposes the formation of a ‘junto’ of Bach enthusiasts and a programme of concerted action to counter the resistance to Bach’s music that he was evidently encountering among more conservative musicians, including his brother Charles. A month later he gives Jacob his celebrated account of the conversion of Burney to the Bach cause. Subsequent letters contain a wealth of information on a number of Bach-related activities: the projected publication by Wesley and C. F. Horn of an English translation of Forkel’s biography of Bach, their edition of the organ trio sonatas, and Wesley’s insertion of an arrangement of a Bach fugue in a performance of one of his own organ concertos at a music festival at Tamworth. Letters of late 1809 contain details of encouraging sales of the organ trios, which Wesley and Horn had been issuing in individual numbers since the spring of that year, and in a letter which is probably addressed to Horn, a report of strong public demand for their proposed new edition of the ‘48’. There is also discussion of plans for a large-scale recital of Bach’s music at the Surrey Chapel, to include one or more of the violin sonatas in addition to Preludes and Fugues from the ‘48’, and

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23 Quoted in SW to Burney, 23 June [1808]. 24 SW to Burney, 7 July 1808.
25 SW to [Jacob], 13 Aug. [1808]. 26 SW to Jacob, 17 Sept. 1808.
27 SW to Jacob, 17 Oct. 1808. 28 SW to Jacob, 3 Mar. 1809.
29 SW to Jacob, 25 Sept. 1809. 30 SW to [C. F. Horn], c.30 Sept. 1809.
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evidence of a strong pro-Bach lobby among the London banking community.31 Other letters show Wesley taking care to keep Burney fully informed of the progress of his activities, and on occasion arranging private performances of Bach’s music for him at his apartments in Chelsea. One such was in September 1809, when Wesley on the violin and Jacob on the piano performed one or more of the violin sonatas;32 another was in July 1810, when Wesley and Novello performed the Goldberg Variations on two pianos, one of which had to be specially moved into Burney’s apartments for the purpose.33

It was during this exceptionally busy period that the final breakdown of the Wesleys’ marriage occurred. Although details are sparse, it is clear that the immediate cause was Wesley’s liaison with his domestic servant or housekeeper Sarah Suter, at the time 15 or at most 16 years old. The final separation, no doubt precipitated by the discovery of Sarah’s pregnancy, was in early 1810, whereupon Wesley and Sarah set up house together. They were to live together unmarried until Wesley’s death. Samuel Sebastian, their first child, was born on 14 August 1810, followed by eight further children over the next twenty years.

Wesley’s abandonment of his wife and family for his teenage servant was naturally a great scandal. Divorce was not a practical possibility at this time for any but the wealthy, and Wesley and Charlotte thus had no option but to remain married. As Charlotte outlived him, Wesley’s relationship with Sarah Suter remained irregular until the end, and all their children were illegitimate. In 1812 a Deed of Separation was drawn up which put the separation on a formal basis and awarded Charlotte annual maintenance of £130, an amount which probably represented around a third of Wesley’s income at the time.34

Little is known about Sarah Suter, and she remains a peculiarly shadowy figure. In accordance with Wesley’s compartmentalization of his life, she is mentioned only rarely in the letters in this volume. Wesley’s early biographers, anxious to maintain propriety, make no mention of her and the twenty-seven years that she and Wesley lived together, even though their relationship must have been common knowledge. Almost the only documentary evidence of her existence is a series of forty-two letters that Wesley wrote to her between 1810 and 183035 and which now forms part of the collection of family manuscripts, letters, and papers bequeathed to the British Museum by Eliza in 1895. From these, it is apparent that Wesley enjoyed a measure of domestic stability and contentment with Sarah and their many children that had been lacking in his marriage to Charlotte.

31 SW to Jacob, [24 Nov. 1809]. 32 SW to Jacob, 4 Sept. [1809] and [30 Sept. 1809].
33 SW to Burney, 17 July 1810.
34 Rylands, DDCW 6/88. For private separation at this time, see Lawrence Stone, Road to Divorce (Oxford, 1990), 149–82. 35 BL, Add. MS 35012.
The incident of the *Goldberg Variations* performance marks the entry of Vincent Novello into the correspondence and provides the first evidence of his friendship with Wesley. Wesley may in fact have known Novello since a good deal earlier, but his absence from the letters until 1810 suggests that Wesley’s closer association with him did not begin until around this time.

From May 1811, Wesley’s letters to Novello dominate the correspondence. By this time, Wesley was acting as Novello’s assistant at the Portuguese Embassy Chapel, and in this capacity needed to be in frequent contact with him to discuss arrangements for the chapel’s music, particularly on those occasions when Novello was absent and Wesley deputized for him. This appears to have been how the correspondence began, and many of the early letters are largely if not entirely concerned with one aspect or another of the music of the chapel.

But Portuguese Embassy Chapel matters account for only part of the contents of the letters to Novello, which over the next five years contain a host of details of Wesley’s increasingly crowded life as a performer, composer, concert organizer, reviewer for the *European Magazine*, and teacher. In addition, they chronicle the continuing story of Wesley’s promotion of Bach, often now with Novello as his partner in duet performances of the organ music. Finally, they show Wesley’s promotion of his own music, both at his annual benefit concerts and at the Covent Garden Lenten oratorio concerts, where he was the regular organist from the beginning of the 1813 season.

This appointment immediately put Wesley at the heart of London’s concert world and gave him a markedly higher public profile. The period from 1813 to 1816 marked the peak of Wesley’s career, when for the first time, and in his late forties, he at last achieved a central position in London’s musical life. In addition he was busy making the social contacts, both within and outside the profession, which were vital if his career was to prosper. In May 1812 he had been appointed masonic Grand Organist, a position which involved him in regular contact with many in the highest reaches of London society. In June 1815 he was appointed to full membership of the recently founded Philharmonic Society and in November of the same year became a Director, subsequently playing a significant role in the affairs of the Society.

The letters of this period also show Wesley’s involvement in music-making outside London. For Wesley, as for most of his fellow musicians in the capital, London offered concert engagements for only part of the year. After the main winter season and the series of self-promoted or benefit concerts that followed it, the season petered out in June. But part of the off-season period could be filled by concert engagements out of London, principally on the provincial music festival circuit. Such festivals, in towns and cities such as Norwich, Birmingham, Manchester, and Liverpool, provided provincial audiences with their only
opportunities to hear large-scale choral and orchestral music performed by professional forces, mostly drawn from London.

Wesley’s first involvement with this world had been in 1809 in Tamworth, and he had subsequently been invited to direct the 1811 Birmingham festival. On both of these occasions he would have been engaged by a local committee for a set fee and possibly a share of box-office takings. But he also on occasion promoted his own concerts. A speculative visit in September 1812 with Samuel Webbe II to Ramsgate and Margate on this basis narrowly escaped failure, largely because of a lack of local knowledge and poor forward planning. Wesley had happier experiences in East Anglia, however, where a visit to the Ipswich festival in July 1813 at the invitation of his old friend Charles Hague was followed by successful visits to Norwich in 1814 and to Norwich and Great Yarmouth in 1815.

Wesley’s long run of success came to an end in August 1816. Early in the month an infant child had died, just as he was preparing to go to Norwich for a third concert visit. This event appears to have set in train a rapid deterioration in his mental and physical health which eventually culminated in a serious breakdown the following May.

Although Wesley managed to set off for Norwich, he collapsed on the way and never arrived. The loss of the £100 that he was expecting from the trip plunged him into a financial crisis which no doubt compounded his mental problems. By early October, in an attempt to regain his health in the purer air of what was still a country area, he had moved out of the family home into lodgings in Hampstead. A few isolated letters from this time chart his decline and his increasing reliance on Novello to deputize for him in his teaching.

In spite of everything, however, Wesley was for the moment still continuing to work: he was able to fulfil his teaching commitments for most of the time, and was at his usual place at the organ for the Covent Garden Lenten oratorio concerts in February and March 1817. But his health was evidently continuing its downward spiral. The crisis came on 6 May, when, imagining himself to be pursued by creditors set on him by Charlotte, he flung himself from an upper-storey window. According to his sister Sarah’s account, written a few days later, the fall was ‘25 feet, upon stones’, and his injuries were so severe that he was given only hours to live.

Wesley’s fall and subsequent incapacity turned what was already a serious financial situation into a desperate one. He was now completely out of action for the foreseeable future, and he and his family—by this time consisting of Sarah Suter, Samuel Sebastian, and Rosalind, aged 2 or 3—faced the prospect of immediate and total financial ruin.

36 SW to Novello, 1 Oct. [1812].
37 Sarah Wesley to William Wilberforce, [c.12 May 1817] (Emory); see also Sarah’s diary entry for 6 May 1817, quoted in Lightwood, 183.
It was at this point that William Linley and some of SW’s other musical and masonic friends stepped in. Their immediate priority was to cope with the aftermath of the fall, but they soon also needed to consider how best to manage what was evidently going to be a protracted period of illness and convalescence. Eventually the decision was taken to place Wesley in Blacklands House, Chelsea, a private lunatic asylum. He remained there until late June 1818, when he was pronounced cured and discharged.38

Wesley wrote few letters during his illness, and the period from his breakdown until his recovery around 1823 is particularly poorly documented. Nonetheless, it is clear that by late 1818 he was attempting to pick up the threads of his career. In a letter to Novello he enquired about the appropriate level of payment for a copying job which William Hawes had asked him to undertake, no doubt out of kindness.39 By the beginning of the 1819 season he was back in action at the Covent Garden oratorio concerts, his place during the previous season having been taken by Jacob. But he was for the moment only partly recovered, and for some time to come his spirits were low.

Wesley’s breakdown had had a disastrous effect on his finances. Arrangements painstakingly built up over a period of years were disrupted, some never to return. In his absence, other musicians no doubt gladly stepped into his shoes, and many of his pupils would have found other teachers. For the next few years, Wesley would need to take work wherever he could find it, however menial. Two affecting letters to Novello show him begging for copying work of any sort, literary or musical,40 one of them eliciting the comment from Novello that he was placing it on record as an eternal disgrace to the pretended Patrons of good music in England, who could have the contemptible bad taste to undervalue & neglect the masterly productions of such an extraordinary Musician as Sam Wesley, and who had the paltry meanness of spirit, to allow such a real Genius . . . to sink into such poverty, decay and undeserved neglect, as to be under the necessity of seeking employment as a mere drudging Copyist to prevent himself from starvation!

Notwithstanding letters such as these, the picture was not entirely negative, and Wesley was gradually able to resume some of his former activities and to take on some new ones. In June 1819 he applied to R. M. Bacon, proprietor of the recently launched Quarterly Musical Magazine and Review, with an enquiry about work on Bacon’s projected dictionary of music,41 and in October 1821, amidst protestations of his lack of ability as a composer, he composed a Latin

Magnificat setting for a projected publication of Novello’s. A different side to his activities is shown in letters of late 1822 to the wealthy Irish landowner Walter McGeough concerning the arrangements of music that he was making for the barrel organ that McGeough had commissioned for The Argory, his new house in Co. Armagh.

Perhaps the clearest sign of Wesley’s return to health was his composition of his Anglican Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis in late 1822. These two settings were companion-pieces to the Te Deum and Jubilate that he had written as long ago as 1808, and completed a full Anglican morning and evening service. They were first performed at St Paul’s on Christmas Day 1823, just as the Te Deum and Jubilate had been on the same day fifteen years earlier. No doubt as a result of favourable comments received on this occasion, Wesley decided early in 1824 to publish the full Service by subscription. Proposals were issued in February, the Service received two complete performances at St Paul’s in April, and was published in October.

By the time of the publication of the Service, Wesley’s recovery was complete and he was once more playing an active part in London’s musical life. As before, he was making a living from a number of different activities, of which performing and teaching were the most important. Some of his former activities had disappeared, however, and the pattern of his employment was now rather different from before his illness.

One activity which did not survive Wesley’s illness was his musical journalism. It is one of the greatest ironies of Wesley’s career that his illness in 1817 had exactly coincided with the preparations for the launch, and the launch itself, of QMMR, London’s first long-run music journal. Had Wesley been in good health during this crucial period, his strong opinions, trenchant prose style, and experience in musical journalism would no doubt have ensured him a role of some sort in the new journal. In the event, by the time Wesley had sufficiently recovered his health to be thinking about writing for QMMR, its organization was well established and a team of contributors headed by William Horsley was in place.

Another casualty of Wesley’s illness was his involvement with the Philharmonic Society. As we have seen, for a short time in 1815 and 1816 Wesley had played a prominent part in the Society’s affairs in a way which suggests that he had become firmly established as a member of the most influential group of musicians in London. His motet ‘Father of Life’ had been performed at one of the Society’s concerts in April 1816, and he was no doubt looking forward both to further performances of his music and to his own continuing participation as a performer.

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42 SW to Novello, 2 Oct. [1821], 9 Oct. 1821.
43 SW to McGeough, 12 Oct. 1822, 11 Nov. 1822.
and, on occasion, as director. He could also have been confident that the contacts with his fellow directors would be fruitful in other ways not directly connected with the Society. All of this ceased with his breakdown. His membership appears to have lapsed at the time of his illness, and he never subsequently rejoined. He performed at no more of the Society’s concerts, and no more of his music was included in its programmes.

In the absence of further information it is impossible to do more than speculate on the reasons for the severing of relations with the Philharmonic Society. In the years following his breakdown Wesley must have cut a sorry figure, and it is possible that his former fellow directors, always concerned with respectability and the reputation of their fledgling organization, would have been unenthusiastic about reinstating his lapsed membership, let alone restoring him to his former position on the board. It is also possible that there was a quarrel or a more general cooling of relations with the Society or with some of its leading members.

Whatever the truth of the matter, Wesley’s absence from the Philharmonic Society and its concerts is indicative of a more general change in his position in London’s concert life. Before his illness he had been fully involved in all the activities of a busy freelance musician: a hectic schedule of oratorio and other concerts in London during the season, supplemented with appearances at provincial music festivals and other out-of-town concerts during the off-season. After his recovery, much of that involvement is missing. Although he continued to play at the Covent Garden oratorio concerts, he was now appearing increasingly as a solo recitalist rather than as a soloist in choral and orchestral concerts. Perhaps in consequence of a reluctance to undertake the necessary travelling, he was also undertaking fewer engagements out of London, and he seems entirely to have given up his involvement with the provincial music festival scene. Later in the decade he would once more venture out of London for concert engagements: to Birmingham in May 1828, to Leeds in September of the same year, and finally to his native Bristol in September 1829, but for the moment he appears to have been content to remain close to home.

This change in direction may have been the result of a deliberate choice. Wesley was always ambivalent about the music profession and his own role in it, and frequently scathing about his fellow professionals. He may now have felt wearied with large-scale concerts and have decided to concentrate as much as possible on solo recitals and lectures, where contact with other musicians could be kept to a minimum. But other factors may also have contributed. Wesley, always conservative by temperament, must have felt increasingly out of place in the transformed London concert world of the 1820s, which featured music by a new generation of composers and the extended visits of Rossini and Liszt in 1824 and of Weber in 1826. One looks in vain in the letters for anything but brief and
derogatory comments on these composers and their music. It is clear that by the mid-1820s Wesley was no longer making any attempt to keep up with modern developments.

One area in which a conservative outlook was no disadvantage was Anglican church music, and it is not surprising to find Wesley turning his attention once again to church appointments. As early as 1821 he had been an unsuccessful candidate for the new parish church of St Pancras, and further unsuccessful applications to St Lawrence, Jewry in January 1823 and to St George’s, Hanover Square in February 1824 followed. In May 1824, he was appointed organist at Camden Chapel, a new church in the St Pancras parish. This was by no means a prestigious appointment for one of Wesley’s abilities, and the salary of £63 per annum was not princely, but it was no doubt a welcome addition to the family finances.

For the 1820s, as for earlier periods, Wesley’s output of letters is a good indicator of his general health and level of activity. The trickle of letters of 1822 and 1823 increased dramatically in 1824, and by 1825 had reached a spate comparable to the high points of the period immediately before his illness. As before, most were to Novello, and although the subject matter is varied, two topics occur again and again: Wesley’s reactions to reviews of his Service, and the protracted negotiations with the University of Cambridge over the granting of permission to publish music from the Fitzwilliam collection. As Wesley’s discussion of these matters occurs in a fragmentary fashion over a number of letters and a considerable period of time, it may be helpful to summarize the sequence of events here.

Wesley’s Service was first reviewed in the January 1825 number of the Harmonicon, following its publication the previous October. The anonymous reviewer was on the whole respectful and deferential, acknowledging Wesley’s learning and distinction as a church musician, and commending the overall high quality of the music. At the same time he permitted himself some criticisms of infelicities in the harmony, commenting on one progression that it included ‘the chord of the 7th and 2nd in an extremely bare, crude, state, and to our ears very cacophonous, though Dr. Blow might have enjoyed it much’. Wesley was outraged by these criticisms and immediately planned a reply, to be published if possible in a future number of the Harmonicon, or, failing that, elsewhere. Perhaps surprisingly, he had no idea who had written the review, although he quickly discovered that William Ayrton, Thomas Attwood, and William Crotch were considered to be the most likely authors. By 27 January he had finished his reply and was ready to submit it to the Harmonicon, although with no great confidence that it would be printed. When in time the Harmonicon declined to

44 SW to Novello, 27 Jan. [1825].
publish it, Wesley discussed with Novello the possibility of placing his reply in a number of other journals, including the *Examiner*, the *Gentleman’s Magazine*, and, eventually, the *News of Literature and Fashion*. None of these negotiations came to anything.

Even as Wesley was still attempting to secure a reply to the *Harmonicon* review, the Service received its second review, in *QMMR*. The new review was three times the length of the earlier one, and far more detailed in its comments. It was also, after its initial courtesies, decidedly more hostile, containing many detailed criticisms of specific points of harmony in a manner very close to that practised by Wesley himself in his *European Magazine* reviews. Although Wesley seems not to have known who had written it, his enquiries soon revealed that it was generally thought to be by Horsley, and Wesley accordingly wrote an ‘inquisitorial Line’ to him on the subject in late April. Unsurprisingly, Horsley denied any involvement, but Wesley by now had few doubts that he was the author, and Horsley’s reply did nothing to persuade him otherwise. In fact, given Horsley’s position as Bacon’s leading associate on *QMMR* and its chief reviewer of church music, his authorship of the review cannot ever have been seriously in doubt to anyone familiar with the journal’s organization.

Even after the appearance of the *QMMR* review, Wesley still tried to find a publication which would be prepared to print his reply to the original *Harmonicon* review. Despite the growing staleness of the topic, he was eventually successful, and his article eventually appeared in the *Literary Chronicle* in June. It was presumably its polemical tone and panache rather than the precise details of its content that secured its appearance, for the *Literary Chronicle* did not generally include articles on music, and five months on from the original review the matter must have lost any topical interest it ever have had for the journal’s readership.

Meanwhile, Wesley was seeking to gain separate redress for the injustices done to his reputation in *QMMR*. As with the *Harmonicon*, his first attempt was to try to have a reply published in *QMMR* itself, and to this end he wrote to Bacon in August 1825. Following Bacon’s refusal to comply with his demands, Wesley turned to Novello’s friend (and future son-in-law) Charles Cowden Clarke, claiming that Clarke was ‘the only man to give my paper to the world’ and hoping that Clarke’s contacts in the world of periodical journalism would help to find it a home. Clarke seems to have used his good offices on Wesley’s behalf with Henry Southern, the editor of the *London Magazine*, and for a while Wesley was confident that his article would appear in the November number. All, however,

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came to nothing,⁵⁰ and it was at this point, almost eleven months after the appearance of the Harmonicon review, that Wesley tacitly admitted defeat and allowed the matter to drop.

Wesley was also involved in smaller and less complicated publishing ventures throughout the 1820s, much as he had been before his illness. Most of these publications, which included a number of organ voluntaries, involved the outright sale of the copyright to the publisher, thus avoiding the capital investment and risk involved with self-publication.

Perhaps emboldened by his experiences with the Service—or, at any rate, aware of the healthy profits that could be made from such ventures—Wesley was soon considering plans for future publications. A further possible opportunity almost immediately presented itself. In December 1824 the University of Cambridge had set up a syndicate to consider how parts of the important collection of music manuscripts bequeathed to the University in 1816 by Lord Fitzwilliam might be published. Following an invitation from the University to catalogue and examine the collection and recommend possible schemes of publication, Novello visited Cambridge in late December 1824 and early January 1825 and duly submitted his catalogue and report.⁵¹ The Senate considered these on 18 March and immediately granted a Grace which gave Novello permission to publish any parts of the collection that he should think fit, but at his own expense and at his own risk. Novello made at least one further visit to Cambridge in the course of the year to work on the publication, and the first part of his five-volume selection, consisting entirely of sacred choral music by Italian composers of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, was published as The Fitzwilliam Music in December 1825 or January 1826.⁵²

It must have quickly become apparent to Novello as he examined and catalogued the Fitzwilliam collection that it contained material for more than one selection, and it was not long before Wesley was enquiring whether the University would consider granting him permission to publish his own. Wesley’s initial enquiries appear to have been made in late April or early May 1825 through the Hebrew scholar Daniel Guilford Wait, at this time in Cambridge cataloguing the oriental manuscripts in the University Library; how he and Wesley had come to know each other is not known. The matter needed careful handling in the light of Novello’s continuing work on his own selection, and Wesley was anxious to avoid any appearance of underhandedness. As can be seen in the letters of 1825, he consulted with Novello at every stage of the negotiations and kept him fully in

⁵⁰ SW to Novello, 23 Nov. 1825.
⁵¹ Novello to Thomas Le Blanc, 27 Jan. 1825 (Cambridge, CUR 30.1). The catalogue is not preserved.
touch with their progress. An early stage in the negotiations is marked by a letter of 11 May from Wait, in which Wait reported that he had discussed the matter with Thomas Le Blanc, the Vice Chancellor. Le Blanc had given his opinion that the Senate would be likely to grant Wesley the necessary permission, but not until Novello had completed his own selection; he had also advised that Novello should provide Wesley with a letter of recommendation, making it clear that he was aware of and had no objections to Wesley’s plans.

This was the background to Wesley’s visit to Cambridge in June 1825. Although he had not as yet been granted formal permission to publish by the University, Wesley was confident that it would eventually be forthcoming, and was evidently already making a start on his transcriptions. It was important that his work did not duplicate that of Novello, and accordingly he wrote to Novello to ask for a list of all the pieces that Novello was intending to publish, and a confirmation that he was not proposing to include any music by Paradies or Scarlatti.

As is clear from a letter to Samuel Sebastian, Wesley was similarly occupied on a second visit to Cambridge in late July and early August, and was already anticipating a healthy financial return from his activities.

Although Wesley’s preoccupation with the critical reception of the Service and his negotiations with the Cambridge authorities over the publication of the Fitzwilliam music loom largest in the letters of 1825, these were far from being the only matters concerning him. In terms of organ playing, he was as busy as he had ever been. In February and March he was involved once more as organist in the Covent Garden oratorio concerts, and he now also had a regular Sunday commitment at Camden Chapel. At the same time, as we know from a letter to Mary Ann Russell, he was making piano reductions for music published by the Royal Harmonic Institution, and thus too busy to have any part in performing the same task for her proposed edition of her late husband’s oratorio Job. Less than a month later, however, presumably after her failure to find others prepared to carry it out, he agreed to take on the arrangement single-handed. Meanwhile, Wesley’s financial and personal problems continued. On 7 May Charlotte had him arrested and briefly imprisoned in a debtors’ prison, doubtless for non-payment of maintenance. It is a mark of Wesley’s recovered health that he seems to have viewed this evidently distressing experience as no more than a temporary nuisance.

The Fitzwilliam project was not the only large-scale publishing venture that Wesley was pursuing during the summer of 1825: he was also thinking about

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53 Wait to SW, 11 May 1825 (BL, Add. MS 11729, fo. 258): see SW to Novello, 15 May [1825], n. 2.
54 SW to Novello, 21 June 1825.
55 SW to Samuel Sebastian Wesley, 1 Aug. 1825.
56 SW to Mary Ann Russell, 16 Apr. 1825.
57 SW to Novello, 10 May [1825].
58 Ibid.
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the possibility of publishing the still unperformed *Confitebor*. He had already remarked to Novello that it was the ‘least imperfect’ of his compositions, and the one which might have a chance of success if published; he was now proposing to take the matter further.

The lack of performance of the *Confitebor* was a major obstacle to its successful publication, as few people would be prepared to subscribe for a piece they had not heard, no matter how glowingly it was presented in the prospectus. Accordingly, during his Cambridge visit Wesley arranged a performance with Novello in a four-hands arrangement on the organ of Trinity College chapel before an invited audience. This was an experiment, designed to allow him to gauge public response without financial risk, and to help him make up his mind about the likely success of a subsequent full-scale performance in London, to be followed in due course by publication if there were sufficient demand. As Wesley was able to report to Samuel Sebastian, the response was encouraging, and several subscriptions appeared to be assured from among the audience. On his return to London, he arranged to have a paragraph written by himself inserted in the *Examiner* describing the Cambridge performance and its enthusiastic reception, and announcing that the *Confitebor* would be performed in the following year’s Lenten oratorio season.

Wesley’s more immediate thoughts, however, were on his projected publication of selections from the Fitzwilliam collection. During the summer, as we have seen, he had been sufficiently confident that permission to publish would be forthcoming to make a start on his own transcriptions. In September, however, he received news from Wait of complications which threatened the granting of permission. In the absence of the relevant letter from Wait and other crucial parts of the correspondence it is impossible to establish the full details of what was evidently a complex situation. It appears, however, that some members of the Senate were concerned about the apparent clash of interest between Wesley and Novello, and were unhappy about granting Wesley permission to publish a selection which might appear to be in competition with Novello’s own. Faced with the threat of such a major upset to his plans and the prospect of the transcriptions he had already made going to waste, Wesley contemplated writing directly to the Vice Chancellor to put his case. It is not known if he did in fact do so, and if he did, what effect his letter had. In a later attempt to resolve the situation, Wesley wrote to ask Novello if he would be prepared to state that his intention was to publish music only from Italian composers, and that he was happy for others to publish selections from composers of other schools. Such a declaration would make it clear that Wesley’s publication was not in any way in competition with

59 SW to Novello, 9 Oct. 1821. 60 SW to Samuel Sebastian, 1 Aug. 1825.
Novello’s. Whether this suggestion came from Wesley himself or from the University authorities, Novello acceded to it, and included a statement along the lines suggested by Wesley in his Preface to the *Fitzwilliam Music*.

Novello’s declaration appears to have had the desired effect, and Wesley was duly granted his Grace by the Senate on 1 March 1826. But the agreement may not have represented what either Novello or Wesley had originally intended. Novello may originally have had long-term plans to publish music by English or German composers which he was now not able to carry out; in particular, he may have hoped to explore some of the riches of the collection’s Handel manuscripts. For his part, Wesley may have originally intended to publish music by Italian composers. In the summer of 1825, as we have seen, he had music by Paradies and Scarlatti in his sights, and he may have spent time in the summer transcribing music by these and other Italian composers. If this was the case, all this work was now rendered useless.

It is apparent that the Fitzwilliam affair was the cause of a serious quarrel between Wesley and Novello. It certainly marked the end of the main sequence of Wesley’s letters to Novello, which ceased abruptly at the end of 1825. One looks in vain for further information of this rift in Wesley’s other letters of the period, which shed no further light on the matter and contain no mention of Novello. Evidence of the quarrel is, however, contained in the June 1826 number of the *Harmonicon*, in the form of a letter from a correspondent signing himself ‘Jubal’. By this time, Wesley had issued proposals for his own *Fitzwilliam Music*, and ‘Jubal’ felt it incumbent on him to draw some aspects of the situation to the attention of the readers of the *Harmonicon*. He found it strange that Wesley should be intending to publish a selection of music from the Fitzwilliam collection so soon after Novello’s own, and insinuated that this behaviour was a betrayal of Novello’s friendship and generosity in introducing him to the Fitzwilliam collection in the first place. The identity of ‘Jubal’ is not known. As can be seen from Wesley’s letters to Novello of 1825, his grasp of the situation was imperfect, and his accusations of bad faith were ill-founded and malicious. Nonetheless, his letter clearly indicates the existence of a disagreement between the two men in early 1826, and gives some of the reasons for it.

No copies of Wesley’s proposals have survived, but it is clear that the intended first volume was to have been an edition of antiphons from Byrd’s *Gradualia*, which Wesley had transcribed from an eighteenth-century score in the Fitzwilliam collection. The Byrd publication never appeared, for reasons explained by Wesley over four years later in a long and revealing letter to Street:

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61 Novello and SW in time resolved their differences and resumed contact: see SW to Novello, 10 June 1830, which appears to date from the time of their reconciliation.  
62 *Harmonicon* 4 (1826), 113.
despite a lively interest in the publication, a healthy subscription list of over two hundred names which would have guaranteed a profit on the venture, and the completion of nine of the plates, Wesley was unable to find sufficient money to pay his engraver for the remainder of the work.\footnote{SW to Street, 25 May 1830.}

Wesley did not go into details in his letter to Street about the nature and cause of his financial problems. It is apparent from family letters, however, that in the summer of 1826 he was being particularly hard pressed by his creditors, while at the same time himself being owed money from a number of quarters. His first priority was to cast around for short-term loans to avert the threat of immediate imprisonment for debt. Under these circumstances, finding additional money to pay his engraver would have been out of the question, and the project was accordingly shelved.

Part of the reason for Wesley’s financial problems may have been the expenses incurred in his *Confitebor* performance, which had finally taken place on 4 May, the projected performance as part of the Covent Garden Lenten oratorio season having failed to materialize. Despite the involvement of singers of the calibre of Mary Ann Paton and Henry Phillips, at presumably heavy expense, the *Confitebor* appears to have aroused little interest or subsequent comment in the press beyond a brief paragraph in the *Harmonicon*, and Wesley seems for the moment to have abandoned his plans to publish it.

In September 1826, with financial crises held for the moment at bay, Wesley was able to make a further visit to Cambridge to continue his examination of the Fitzwilliam manuscripts. He had now turned his attention to the extensive collection of Handel autographs, and was confident that everything he was transcribing was unpublished and would ‘therefore prove an entire novelty’.\footnote{SW to Sarah Suter, [13 Sept. 1826] (BL, Add. MS 35012, fo. 61).}

His most profitable find on this visit was completely unexpected: a single sheet of Handel’s autograph containing three tunes by Handel to well-known hymns by his father. This link between Charles Wesley and Handel was hitherto unknown, and Wesley correctly saw that the hymns would be of great interest, especially to Methodists. Moreover, as the hymns were already familiar to Methodist congregations, the newly discovered Handel tunes could be put to immediate use in Methodist chapels. Publication of the hymns could be done cheaply, quickly, and easily, and there was every likelihood of large sales.

Wesley was sufficiently confident of the commercial possibilities of the hymns to have the hymns engraved even before sounding out his few contacts in the Methodist community. His first approach on 31 October was to Eliza Tooth, a close friend of his brother and sister and a member of a prominent Methodist
family whose links with the Wesleys went back to his parents’ generation. A week later, at Tooth’s suggestion, he wrote to the Revd Thomas Jackson, the Methodist Connexional Editor and editor of the Wesleyan Methodist Magazine. This letter, although apparently not intended by Wesley for publication, conveniently set out the background to the hymns and was included by Jackson in the December number of the Magazine. It must have done much to publicize Wesley’s edition, which had appeared by the end of November.

This was in fact the first of two editions by Wesley of the hymns. Containing only a title page and three pages of music, it would have cost little to produce, and the high price of 1s. 6d. would have ensured good profits. But the format, consisting only of the melody and bass and the words of the first verse of each hymn, was not as useful as it might have been. At the suggestion of friends Wesley prepared a second edition, this time containing a four-part harmonization of the tunes and the words of all the verses. This appeared in March 1827.

One consequence of Wesley’s contact with Jackson over the Handel hymns was an opening up of relations with the Methodist congregation at the City Road Chapel. For most of his adult life, Wesley had had no dealings with Methodism, and his links with Roman Catholicism and his irregular private life had for long made him an embarrassment in Methodist circles. With the publication of the Handel hymns, however, came friendly overtures from the Methodists, leading to an invitation to attend the annual Breakfast for the Children of the Methodist Preachers at the City Road Chapel on 3 May.65 It was probably through the same process that Wesley was invited to open the organ at Brunswick Chapel, Leeds, in September 1828.66

The success of the Handel hymns and the establishment of friendly relations with Jackson also prompted Wesley to turn his attention to other ways in which he could make the most of his name and family background. One obvious option was to compose tunes of his own for the hymns currently in use in Methodist congregations. As with the Handel Hymns, Wesley moved quickly: less than a month after a first exploratory letter to Jackson in late April 1828, he was writing again to announce that he had composed the tunes and to offer the copyright to the Book Room Committee.67 As the Book Room minutes reveal, this proposal was turned down, and Wesley proceeded to publish at his own expense: a more risky, but a potentially more profitable course of action. The Original Hymn Tunes, adapted to every Metre in the collection by the Rev. John Wesley were published by late

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65 SW to Sarah Wesley, 29 Apr. 1827 (Fitzwilliam); SW to Charles Wesley jun., [4 May 1827] (Fitzwilliam).
66 SW to Sarah Suter, [10 Sept. 1828] and 13 Sept. [1828] (BL, Add. MS 35012, fos. 50 and 73).
67 SW to Jackson, 21 Apr. 1828 and 17 May 1828.
August,\textsuperscript{68} and received a glowing review in the \textit{Wesleyan Methodist Magazine} in October, where the writer hoped that the publication would obtain a large share of the public attention, ‘a distinction to which it is justly entitled’.\textsuperscript{69}

After the cessation of the letters to Novello at the end of 1825, it becomes more difficult to chart Wesley’s activities in any detail. As we have seen, some letters of 1825 and 1826 document his publishing ventures; others concern arrangements for various lecture courses in early 1828. At the same time, family letters reveal a partial rapprochement with his brother and sister, occasioned perhaps by Sarah’s declining health. After Sarah’s death in September 1828, however, information from family letters largely disappears too. As his surviving letters show, Charles Wesley junior had little taste or aptitude for correspondence. Wesley’s contacts with him had never been extensive, and after Sarah’s death appear to have been almost non-existent.

The final events in Wesley’s public career took him back to his native Bristol. In September and October 1829 he gave a number of organ recitals there, including three at St Mary Redcliffe, the parish church, when he was joined by Samuel Sebastian, now aged 19 and at the beginning of his own career. Wesley’s powers were evidently still undiminished. The local organist Edward Hodges ecstatically described his playing as

the most wonderful I ever heard, more even than I had before been capable of conceiving; the flow of melody, the stream of harmony, was so complete, so unbroken, so easy, and yet so highly wrought and so superbly scientific, that I was altogether knocked off my stilts . . . I walked home afterwards, but my head was full of naught but Samuel Wesley and his seraphic genius . . . He is the Prince of Musicians and Emperor of organists.\textsuperscript{70}

In the following January Wesley returned to give a course of lectures at the Bristol Institution. Both this and the earlier visit were probably arranged through Wait, who in addition to his Cambridge connections was curate of Blagdon, near Bristol. The second also involved Hodges, at whose house Wesley stayed during part of his visit.

In the summer of 1830 Wesley was incapacitated by another severe attack of depression. A subscription was arranged by a group of his musical and masonic friends led by John Capel, MP, Linley, and Novello,\textsuperscript{71} which no doubt helped to alleviate the inevitable financial hardship for Wesley and his family. By now, Samuel Sebastian was approaching 20 and had probably left home, but there were still five children to be supported: Rosalind, aged around 16, Eliza (11),

\textsuperscript{68} See SW to Upcott, 20 Aug. [1828]. \textsuperscript{69} Quoted in Lightwood, 211. \textsuperscript{70} Quoted in Lightwood, 215. \textsuperscript{71} Copy at BL, Add. MS 56411, fo. 34, printed in Lightwood, 219–20.
Matthias Erasmus (9), John (5), and Thomasine (2); in addition, Sarah Suter was pregnant with another child.\textsuperscript{72}

Although depression seems to have affected Wesley for some of the time during his final years, he appears to have continued to teach, to compose, and publish. Among his compositions were a large number of hymn tunes for Novello’s mammoth four-volume collection \textit{The Psalmist} (1835–42): of its 400 tunes, no fewer than fifty-five are by Wesley, most of them specially written for the volume, and there are a further twenty-five arrangements by him of Gregorian melodies and tunes by other composers.

There are even a few signs of him attempting to return to public performance. In March 1834 he wrote to suggest himself as a director of one of the concerts of the Handel Commemoration, to be held at Westminster Abbey in the June of that year. Whether or not this was a proposal that he expected to be taken seriously, he was not appointed. His last public appearance was on 7 August 1834 at a Sacred Harmonic Society concert, when he accompanied a performance of his anthem ‘All go unto one Place’, written for the memorial service for Charles, who had died earlier in the year.

Little is known of how Wesley and his family managed financially during his final years: with extreme difficulty, on the evidence of the letters to Thomas Jackson which are among the last in this volume. Wesley had renewed his contacts with Jackson following the death of his brother, when the annuity granted to his mother by the Methodist Book Room in respect of the copyright of his father’s hymns descended to him as the last surviving member of the family. As the Secretary of the Book Room, it was Jackson’s responsibility to make the small weekly payments.

By 1836, perhaps at the suggestion or with the encouragement of Sarah Suter and their children, Wesley wrote his manuscript Reminiscences, in which he recorded on scraps of paper all he could remember of his life in music. Although containing much of interest, the Reminiscences are anodyne in style and completely lack the outspokenness and sardonic wit of the letters, while the laboriousness of the handwriting and the frequent repetitions show all too clearly how much Wesley’s physical and mental powers had declined. The same manuscript also contains passages of historical writing, clearly written with publication in mind and relating to Wesley’s last piece of published work, an article entitled ‘A Sketch of the State of Music in England, from the year 1778 up to the Present Time’, which appeared in the first number of the \textit{Musical World} on 18 March 1836. In fact the article only covered the period up to around 1800, and was intended to be continued in a subsequent number. The second instalment never

\textsuperscript{72} Robert Glenn Wesley, born 21 Nov. 1830.
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appeared, however, possibly because of factual errors and other inadequacies in the first, or because of Wesley’s inability to provide a satisfactory sequel.73

Wesley appears to have had a remarkable recovery of health shortly before his death. In July 1837 he wrote out from memory the full score of his Ode to St Cecilia of 1794, which he believed that he had lost, and in October wrote a further eight tunes for The Psalmist, which were his last compositions.

On 12 September he was taken by Eliza and Rosalind to Mendelssohn’s recital at Christ Church, Newgate Street. Afterwards, as Mendelssohn recorded:

Old Wesley, trembling and bent, shook hands with me and at my request sat down at the organ bench to play, a thing he had not done for many years. The frail old man improvised with great artistry and splendid facility, so that I could not but admire. His daughter [Eliza] was so moved by the sight of it all that she fainted and could not stop crying and sobbing. She believed she would certainly never hear him play like that again; and alas, shortly after my return to Germany I learned of his death.74

This was the last time that Wesley left his house. He died on 11 October after a short illness and was buried on 17 October at Marylebone parish church, where his father, mother, and brother were also interred. The service was attended by many of the leading figures in the London church music and organ world, including a large body of singers who sang the music of the burial service to settings by Purcell and Croft, concluding with ‘His body is buried in peace, but his name liveth for evermore’ the words adapted from Handel’s Funeral Anthem for Queen Caroline. Directing the proceedings was James Turle, organist of Westminster Abbey and a former chorister at the Portuguese Embassy Chapel under Wesley and Novello.75

73 Olleson, 1111.
75 The Times, 18 Oct. 1837.