

**HETTY WESLEY**

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Hetty Wesley by Sir Arthur T. Quiller-Couch

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**SIR ARTHUR T. QUILLER-COUCH**

**HETTY WESLEY**



# Hetty Wesley

By "Q"

A NEW EDITION



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LONDON  
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1903



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## PREFACE

TO A NEW EDITION, 1908.

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I HOPE the reader will not misunderstand me if I take the opportunity of this new edition of *Hetty Wesley* to offer some remarks upon the criticism that greeted my story when it first appeared, five years ago. With its general reception I had every reason to be content. To be sure, had the public turned from it and let it severely alone, the author could not have complained, since he holds that men and women are under no obligation to read anything but what they find interesting; but the public bought the book. The literary critics, too, were more than usually kind; kind to the writer, and—what gratified him more—kind to his beloved and deeply-wronged heroine. For himself the book is written and done with. He wishes it had been better written; still, and on the whole, it is the book of his which he can regard with most satisfaction, and certainly with a satisfaction impossible to one who doubted its essential truth.

If I am disappointed then, the disappointment is, as nearly as may be, impersonal. It rests upon the reception given to *Hetty Wesley* by present-day "leaders of Wesleyan thought"—to use a pet phrase of their own newspapers—and it springs (if they will believe me) less from any concern in myself or my book, than from a concern—a

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somewhat perplexed concern—in the apparently prevalent state of mind of a religious body wherein I count so many of my own good friends.

This story of Hetty Wesley is a plain marshalling of facts, to be tested by going straight to the source whence I drew them—that is, to documentary evidence. In the following pages I have invented one unimportant letter, to fill up a gap. It occurs on p. 236 of this edition, and the tenor of the lost original, for which I was forced to substitute it, is plainly indicated in Hetty's authentic reply. I have further altered the circumstances, without altering the actual truth, of poor Hetty's downfall. For the rest nothing essential happens that cannot be tested by evidence in black and white, and by evidence which ought to be familiar to Wesleyans who think their history worth the pains of a little scholarship. I claim—but may, of course, be wrong—that no candid man can examine that evidence without finding my story to be at least a reasonable interpretation of it. I claim at any rate, and with confidence, that no candid man can read the Wesley correspondence and not own that, whatever he may think of my portrait of Samuel Wesley, he must alter his opinion of Tyerman's.

Now the trouble with my Wesleyan critics is not that they consent to dismiss my book as "caricaturing" the Wesley family, and the elder Samuel in particular, but that the language in which they condemn it proves they have never so much as looked the facts in the face. Worse, it raises a suspicion that they do not face



the facts because they do not dare. It is comfortable to believe in the Wesley family as in a collection of plaster saints. The laborious Tyerman, covering with laboriousness an uneducated habit of mind, provides that comfort. "Let us embrace it and no further inquire; and if any sceptical fellow raise an awkward question about our plaster saint, let us answer that Tyerman has disagreed with him by anticipation, and that Tyerman was a learned man."

But learning the most laborious will but aggravate error when it starts upon wrong principles and works on a vicious process. And that man, however learned, is working on a vicious process who argues "Wesleyan Methodism was a saintly movement, and therefore must have proceeded from saints. Saintliness and certain human infirmities—such as cruelty, vindictiveness, injustice, callousness to another's pain—are incompatible. Therefore none of our elect founders can possibly have exhibited these infirmities; and, therefore where the evidence asserts that they did, we must ignore it or explain it away."

I will tell my friends of two things even less compatible than saintliness and cruelty. They are genuine Nonconformity and intellectual cowardice. Whatever may be said against Dissent, it presupposes—or should presuppose—the quality of courage; and as I have enough of Wesleyan in my blood to make me curious about the men and women who passed it down to me, so, having studied what memorials remain of their lives and

characters, I can say pretty surely that their faith did not repose on any tradition of plaster saints with accurately parted hair, or of figures stuffed with wind and chocolate creams—at once fulsome and flatulent—but bore in every fibre the impressed paternity of John Wesley, himself full of faults, and one of the pluckiest Englishmen that ever breathed.

Worst of all was the subterfuge of those who, too ignorant or too cowardly to confute me, put up the plea that by dragging to light the infernal wrong done to Hetty by her pious father, and acquiesced in by her pious brethren, I was injuring her memory. "Were it not kinder—were it not merely decent to let this poor sinner lie forgotten" in the grave in which her obliging kindred laid her, still living, and stamped her down? Well, if my friends really require an answer—no, it were not. Though Samuel Wesley were ten times a saint, his treatment of this daughter of his shall stand against his account in this world, as he will have (I hope) to crawl for pardon in the next. "But Hetty, were she alive to-day, would entreat for oblivion." Ah, there, my friends, you must forgive me. You see, I found this woman, generous and lovely and full of sorrows, lying dumb under the ruins piled on her by hands of which, by a thousand tender offices, she had deserved better, even though natural kindness had not taught them better. I have sought to clear away some of the heavier stones, and have sat long beside her. . . .

Yes, indeed, my friends, you must allow me to know better than you what is best for Hetty Wesley; and for this best of reasons, that I am thinking first of her, whereas you are thinking how to make her reputation subserve others more famous. Permit me only to remind you that they are all in heaven by this time, she and her family; and as in heaven there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage, so we may reasonably infer that there, too, the right of parental savagery is not continued even for the sake of cockering up an earthly saint.

A word more on a smaller matter. Several critics have asserted that for the method of this book—the mixture of invented narrative and dialogue with authentic documents—I followed and copied Miss Gertrude Atherton's *The Conqueror*, that fine study of the career of Alexander Hamilton. I admire Miss Atherton's work so greatly, that to have improved a book of mine by her example would certainly cost me no pain to confess. But I believe that as a fact—and demonstrable, were it worth while—every page of *Hetty Wesley* was in the publisher's hands before *The Conqueror* appeared in book form, the only form in which I read it or (to my knowledge) ever saw it.

ARTHUR T. QUILLER-COUCH.

THE HAVEN,  
FOWEY,  
August 20th, 1908.