manship began to respond to new influences, though in its fundamental character it remained unchanged. It was compounded in almost equal measure of elements of weakness and of strength. It was not inspiring but it was certainly not contemptible. In outlook it was neither mystical nor otherworldly. It set exaggerated store by moderation, and the qualities it esteemed most highly were temperance, restraint, and reasonableness. It had little sympathy with the more austere virtues and studiously ignored the claims of self-denial. It adapted itself all too readily to the tastes of an age which exalted common sense and pursued material prosperity, yet it stoutly resisted the rampant immorality and the rationalist disbelief of a hard-bitten society. Even in its worthiest representatives it lacked originality, poetic sensibility, and prophetic insight; in justice we must concede that it possessed solid scholarship, unwearied industry, practical sagacity, and sober piety.

10

Methodism and the Evangelical Revival

THE Hanoverian Church of England, despite its redeeming qualities, stood sorely in need of reform. The age of reason had forgotten certain fundamental human needs; natural religion might satisfy the minds of some, but the hearts of multitudes were hungry. The weaknesses of the established church – its failure to provide adequate care, the inflexibility of its parish system, its neglect of the new towns – left a vast and needy population waiting to be touched by a new word of power. 'Just at this time, when we wanted little of "filling up the measure of our iniquities", two or three clergymen of the Church of England began vehemently to "call sinners to repentance". In two or three years they had sounded the alarm to the utmost borders of the land. Many thousands gathered to hear them; and in every place where they came, many began to show such a concern for religion as they never had done before.' This is Wesley's own account of the beginnings of the Methodist revival.

John Wesley was born in 1703 in the Lincolnshire rectory of Epworth. His father was a man of ability – ardent, opinionated, impractical; a poet as well as an irrepressible controversialist, an unbending churchman, and an unyielding Tory. His mother was a remarkable woman by any standard. To great natural ability she united a strong sense of duty and of her responsibility as the mother of a large family. Her system of child training was stern in its simplicity. The first essential was to break the unregenerate will of a child; the second, to guide him by strict discipline in the way in which he ought to go. The system is theoretically defective; it produced John and Charles Wesley.

John went to Christ Church, Oxford, and in due course became a fellow of Lincoln College. Charles followed him to Christ Church, and was responsible for assembling the little

band of seekers known as the 'Holy Club'. Its members met regularly for fellowship, for Bible study, and for prayer. They were faithful in attendance at the ordinances of the church, and pledged themselves to assist the needy and the destitute. Oxford was predominantly a clerical community; that such a programme should have provoked ridicule is a revealing commentary on the condition of the Hanoverian church.

The members of the Holy Club were ardent and unsatisfied. In search of more exacting service, the Wesleys set sail for Oglethorpe's new colony of Georgia. At this stage, John Wesley was an unyielding rigorist. He had no mercy on himself, nor on others. He had not found peace within, he created enmity about him, and was virtually driven from the colony. He brought back to England his sense of insufficiency, now fortified by the knowledge that he had miserably failed. For some time he floundered about in search of light. Both on shipboard and in Georgia he had met, and been profoundly impressed by, the Moravians. In London, one of their number continued the work already begun, and at length, on 24 May 1738, the light broke in upon John Wesley's soul. 'In the evening', he wrote, 'I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the *Epistle to the Romans*. About a quarter to nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt that I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved me from the law of sin and death.'

In Wesley's *Journal* there immediately follows this comment: 'I then testified openly to all there what I now first felt in my heart.' He had found his message. He had not yet found his method. With monotonous regularity he discovered that the doors of the parish churches were closed against him. Wherever he preached, he was informed that he need not return. His orbit seemed to be steadily contracting. It was George Whitefield, a friend of the Holy Club days, who showed him the way ahead and helped him to find a new

and marvellous medium. If he could not preach in the churches, why not preach in the fields? 'At four in the afternoon,' Wesley records in his *Journal* on 2 April 1739, 'I submitted to be more vile, and proclaimed in the highways the glad tidings of salvation, speaking from a little eminence . . . to about three thousand people. The scripture from which I spoke was this . . . "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor. He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted; to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind; to set at liberty them that are bruised, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord." '

Thus begins one of the most remarkable episodes in the history of the church. Page after page, the sober prose of the *Journal* unfolds the marvellous story. John Wesley set out to carry the Gospel to people wherever they were willing to listen, and experience showed that throughout the length and breadth of the land they were waiting for such a preacher. 'In journeyings oft . . .', said the Apostle, and Wesley might have echoed his words. A conservative calculation suggests that he covered a quarter of a million miles in days when travelling was both difficult and dangerous. He preached to unnumbered multitudes. Two, three, five, ten thousand – these were by no means exceptional congregations; sometimes the figures rose to twenty and even thirty thousand. He preached in the streets or in the churchyards, in the fields or on the moors. He could always gather an audience, but he could not always gain a hearing. Crowds were often hostile, sometimes dangerous. Rocks and stones or other missiles would come flying at the preacher; sometimes he was mobbed and beaten. There was much misery and distress in the second half of the eighteenth century. Food was scarce, prices were high, and often the prevalent discontent vented itself on the Methodist preachers. Sometimes it was incited against them by hostile squires or parsons. But Wesley feared not the face of man. By a strange personal magnetism he awed the turbulent crowds and constrained them to silence. Even when driven

out, he never hesitated to return. As a record of indomitable courage there are few narratives that can match it.

Both Wesley and Whitefield were preachers of extraordinary power. In his ability to sway an audience, Whitefield was supreme. He won the admiration of David Garrick, perhaps the ablest exponent of the art of rhetoric in an age of magnificent orators. He commanded the attention, if not the assent, of worldlings as hardened as the cynical Earl of Chesterfield. Wesley's power is more difficult to understand. His sermons, so closely reasoned, so massive in their doctrinal structure, bear little resemblance to what our age would consider popular preaching. Yet he could collect a congregation at any hour of the day. By preference he preached at five o'clock in the morning, but at night – even amid the violence of a thunderstorm – his hearers hung upon his words with absorbed attention. The preaching of both leaders produced the most dramatic results. As emotion swept the crowd, some confessed themselves sinners; some shouted that they were kings; some broke into songs of thanksgiving; some were seized with convulsions. 'While I was preaching,' records Wesley, 'one before me dropped down as dead, and presently a second or a third. Five others sank down in half an hour, most of whom were in violent agonies. We called upon the Lord and he gave us an answer of peace.' A brutalized age, long deprived of any outlet for religious emotions, reacted strongly to the new preaching, and it is not surprising that Hanoverian clerics looked askance at such manifestations of the Spirit.

In the early days of the revival, Wesley and Whitefield were joint leaders in a common task. They had had the same experience, they shared the same enthusiasm, they used the same methods. But they did not hold the same beliefs. Whitefield was a Calvinist, Wesley was not. Calvinism, which exalts the absolute sovereignty of God, claims that in his inscrutable wisdom he has ordained to salvation only those whom he selects. Arminianism, on the other hand, leaves far greater scope for man's free will. Wesley was a convinced Arminian. He held firmly to the belief that 'God willeth all men to be saved'. Whitefield viewed such beliefs with dismay. In *A Letter to the Rev. Mr John Wesley* (1752), he claimed that because Wesley had misunderstood the doctrine of election he had fallen into the heresy of universal redemption. To Whitefield it was clear that Arminianism dulled the all-important sense of sin; it made men complacent, whereas election tended to 'rouse the soul out its carnal security'. Was Wesley right, he asked, in holding that Calvinism killed all hope and led to indifference? Did not the contrary view surrender the vital concept of an almighty God? This was a debate between great men, both deeply concerned about great issues. In his blunt way, Wesley once told his friend that 'your God is my devil'. Because they were great men, they parted in charity, but the debate was continued by lesser men in a more vindictive spirit, and had lasting results on the course of the evangelical revival.

Wesley differed from Whitefield in doctrine and was distinctly his inferior in the arts of pure oratory, but as an organizer he was supreme. In this area his gifts were transcendent, and lifted him into that select company to whom the over-worked term 'genius' can properly be applied. Wherever Whitefield went he left an overwhelming impression of impassioned eloquence; wherever Wesley went he left a company of men and women closely knit together in a common life. At an early stage he realized the importance of organization. Even in Georgia, he recommended his more earnest hearers 'to form themselves into a sort of little society, to meet once or twice in a week, in order to reprove, instruct, and exhort one another'. This method was promptly applied to his expanding work in England. In Bristol, in 1742, the members of the Society decided to divide themselves into classes of about twelve each and to appoint leaders to be responsible for oversight and for the receipt of 'class money' (a penny a week). The pattern thus established was adopted wherever Methodism spread. In the following year, Wesley set forth a code of rules for his followers, which laid on each of them the duty of resisting

evil, of doing good wherever possible, and of attending the ordinances, and he 'desired everyone seriously to consider whether he was willing to conform thereto or no'. Here was the basis for the discipline which became so characteristic of the movement. A year later, we have the genesis of the Conference – originally a consultation about increasing problems and responsibilities, soon a powerful part of the system of government. In 1746 a further step was taken, and neighbouring societies were formed into 'circuits or rounds'. Quarterly meetings were added in due course, and when Districts were set up the system was complete.

A closely knit organization and a strong central government were thus characteristic of Methodism from the beginning. The measure of personal authority wielded by Wesley himself was immense, but perhaps the notable feature of the system was the degree to which it developed lay leadership. The class leaders, stewards, trustees, and local preachers gained experience of administration and grew in stature. The qualifications for office did not put responsibility beyond the reach of humble folk, and gave the movement a firm foundation in popular support. Regular business meetings at every level of activity unified 'the connexion', and simplified the task of supervision. Every member was drawn into a corporate life whose extension depended upon his regular financial support.

Methodism had embarked upon a bold experiment. Necessity, reinforced by conviction, made Wesley rely increasingly on the gifts and capacities lying dormant in the average man. But this meant that he had to train his people, and often they had to be taught the simplest duties of the Christian life. This accounts for the strict discipline, corporate as well as personal, which Wesley enforced. In his private life, each member had to conform to an exacting standard. He was pledged to various forms of religious activity – regular reading of the Bible, the practice of public and private prayer, full participation in the varied activities of the society, and the conversion of others to his way of life. He was given direction concerning food and drink, clothing

and ornaments, forms of self-indulgence, the use of money, buying and selling, the observance of the Sabbath, and attendance at church. The conscience of the individual was reinforced by the concern of the class meeting. Each member was expected to report his victories or defeats, and his way of life was subjected to searching scrutiny. As he advanced in responsibility he was expected to submit to an increasingly stringent discipline. The penalty for failure was expulsion, and this was no empty threat. At Newcastle, in 1743, Wesley read the rules, and proceeded to exclude sixty-four members, guilty of cursing, swearing, Sabbath-breaking, drunkenness, quarrelling and brawling, wife-beating, lying, railing, idleness and laziness, lightness and carelessness. Rigorous discipline was the counterpart of the human material which Wesley was trying to reform. He himself never questioned either the necessity of the method or the benefits which it produced. Wherever discipline was enforced, numbers rose and spiritual vitality increased.

The nature of his constituency determined the character of his programme. He went by choice to the needy and neglected. Beyond any of his contemporaries, he knew the poor and loved them. He spoke with withering scorn of the selfish ostentation of the rich, but 'I love the poor,' he said; 'in many of them I find pure genuine grace, unmixed with paint, folly, and affectation.' Many of his enterprises were inspired by their needs. 'All my leisure hours this week,' he records in 1783, 'I am employed in visiting the . . . poor and in begging for them.' He raised considerable sums of money in order to buy necessities, which he often distributed in person. When well past eighty, he spent four days on such a mission, trudging through streets 'filled with melting snow, which often lay ankle deep, so that my feet were steeped in snow water . . . from morning till evening'. He opened a dispensary 'for many of the poor that were sick'. He started a loan society to tide needy people over temporary distress or to launch them on some enterprise that promised a better way of life. He founded a home for widows and a school for poor children. He even recognized that poverty was not

merely 'a sore evil', but a social problem with which the government ought to be concerned, and in his *Thoughts on the Present Scarcity of Provisions* (1773), he suggested practical measures which it might adopt.

Lack of money was the problem of some; the possession of it was the problem of others, and Wesley gave much thought to the subject of wealth and its proper use. Because Methodism converted men to lives of sobriety and industry, the members of the society prospered. Wesley did not regard the acquisition of wealth as wrong, especially when it was the result of honest industry. He certainly regarded it as dangerous, and he viewed with concern the growing prosperity of his people. 'I went on to Macclesfield,' he writes, 'and found a people still alive to God, in spite of swiftly increasing riches. If they continue so, it will be the first instance I have known in above half a century. I warned them in the strongest terms I could . . .' His own practice was strict. 'For upward of eighty-six years I have kept my accounts exactly. I will not attempt it any longer, being satisfied . . . that I save all I can, and give all I can – that is, all I have.'

In politics Wesley was a Tory, a loyal subject of the Hanoverian kings, and a firm believer in the system of government inaugurated by the Revolution of 1688. Much has been written of his part in saving England from the kind of upheaval which convulsed France at the close of the century. But there was no close parallel between conditions on the two sides of the Channel. England had had a constitutional revolution, and the economic life of the country was already being transformed. This does not depreciate the role Wesley played in reaching the poor of England. 'There were thousands of men and women in Manchester and Leeds', wrote the Hammonds, 'who found self-respect and contentment in the duties and dreams of their religion.' The loyalty which Wesley inculcated in his members gave them a solidity which was of some significance in a disturbed period, and which predisposed them to support the more gradual processes of reform which in the next century

transformed English public life. And when preaching the duties of good citizenship, Wesley was resolute in attacking the abuses which he recognized in public life. With every means at his disposal he opposed bribery and corruption in politics. He campaigned ceaselessly against the press gang, and insisted that no Methodist should have any part in smuggling or in the plundering of wrecked vessels. Nor should his unflinching stand against slavery be overlooked.

In certain directions his influence was used to more dubious effect. His views on toleration were restricted by his dislike of popery and his fear of its influence. In this he shared the attitude of a generation which clung too tenaciously to the fears rekindled by James II, and on this question his views were those of his great contemporary, the Earl of Chatham. In education his lack of imagination gave him little understanding of the young. In his school at Kingswood, the pupils' day began at 4 a.m., but in a curriculum crammed with every conceivable subject, he allowed no time at all for play. Here again Wesley shared the limitations of his age, and it is not fair to judge Hanoverian practices by modern theories. It is only right to remember that few men in his period did more to promote the cause of education – and to add that his practice was better than his principles. On one point contemporary accounts agree: his great love of little children and his power to attract them. Methodism began among poor people; its advance was built upon the pennies they contributed. This accounts for its indifference to art, to music, and to literature. In these areas it was almost wholly sterile, with one very notable exception. The hymns of the movement were its greatest glory. They explain the power of its appeal, and constitute its most revealing record. Charles Wesley left an imperishable legacy not only to Methodism but to the whole Christian world.

Methodism sprang up within the Church of England, and Wesley was determined that it should never separate from it. Early in his ministry, when 'a serious clergyman' asked 'in what points' the Methodists differed from the Church,

Wesley answered, 'In none.' 'The doctrines we preach', he added, 'are the doctrines of the Church of England; indeed, the fundamental doctrines of the church, laid down in her prayers, articles, and homilies.' 'I live and die a member of the Church of England,' he said. 'None who regard my judgement or advice will ever separate from it.' Nor were these isolated statements; they can be multiplied times without number, and resolutions of the conference reinforced them. There is a deep pathos but a certain inevitability about the final breach. The Hanoverian Church was ill equipped to deal with such a phenomenon as Methodism. The reaction of the bishops was varied. Gibson was cautious, aware of difficulties, but anxious not to condemn. Archbishop Potter was cordial. 'Mr Wesley,' said Bishop Lowth, 'may I be found sitting at your feet in another world.' Many of the bishops were outspoken in their opposition. Warburton wrote a strong attack on the Methodist doctrine of grace, and on Wesley as the ablest proponent of the dangerous new trend in religion. Bishop Butler was also hostile; his famous rebuke ('Sir, the pretending to extraordinary revelations and gifts of the Holy Ghost is a horrid thing – a very horrid thing') shows how far removed in spirit a great Hanoverian churchman could be from the new movement. There was no unanimity among the bishops because there was no concerted policy in the church. Convocation was in abeyance, and consequently none could be framed. In any case, attention was concentrated on other things; many highly placed ecclesiastics were absorbed in the intricacies of place-hunting, and they did not see that Methodism was a challenge to the church. As the new societies expanded, they developed the characteristics of congregations. Many of their members, snatched from indifference and irreligion, had no attachment to the established church, and desired none. The developing life of the movement became less and less dependent on the church; in spite of everything that Wesley said, many of his followers were content that it should be so. The severance of Methodism from the church was the consequence of Wesley's acceptance

of an apostolate to the growing industrial population which was virtually untouched by Anglican ministrations. But the church could not overlook Wesley's claim to disregard parish boundaries; still less could it admit his right to ordain. Wesley had become increasingly perturbed at the failure of the church to provide adequate ministrations in the colonies; study and reflection persuaded him that presbyters could legitimately ordain. Consequently he embarked on a course that his own church could not countenance. The separation between Anglicanism and Methodism may have been inevitable; it is impossible not to regard it with profound regret.

Many features of the Methodist revival can be explained in terms of the needs of the time and the gifts of the man who was raised up to meet them. In both social and religious matters England was ready to listen to Wesley's message. He came with the assurance that God's forgiveness was available to all: the power of a new life could be had for the asking. The flexibility of his method and the novelty of preaching in the open air gave the widest currency to the good news he brought, while his superb gifts of organization conserved the results which he achieved. But to Wesley himself such explanations would have seemed irrelevant. In his eightieth year he himself found the secret of his ministry chiefly in 'the power of God, fitting me for what he calls me to'. He was persuaded that his whole life and every detail of it were under the immediate direction of God. And in the response of the people he found confirmation of this same power. 'The drunkard', wrote Wesley, 'commenced sober and temperate; the whore-monger abstained from adultery and fornication, the unjust from oppression and wrong. He that had been accustomed to curse and swear for many years, now swore no more. The sluggard began to work with his hands, that he might eat his own bread. The miser learned to deal his bread to the hungry, and to cover the naked with a garment. Indeed, the whole of their life was changed: they had left off doing evil and learned to do well.' A Methodist, said Wesley, is 'happy in God, yea, always happy'; a quality

which survives in the songs of the movement was first expressed in the lives of its members. One of the most satisfactory accounts of the dynamic quality of Methodism is Wesley's description of the Yorkshire societies in 1751. 'I found them all alive, strong, vigorous of soul, blessing, loving and praising God their Saviour. . . . From the beginning they had been taught both the law and the gospel. "God loves *you*: therefore love and obey *Him*. Christ died for *you*: therefore die to sin. Christ is risen: therefore rise in the image of God. Christ liveth evermore: therefore live to God, till you live with him in glory." So *we* preached; and so *you* believed. This is the scriptural way, the *Methodist* way, the true way. God grant we may never turn from it, to the right hand or to the left.'

The evangelical revival cannot be equated with the Methodist movement, still less with the life of the Wesleyan societies. Whitefield, after parting company with Wesley on doctrine, continued to work along parallel lines, though with more ephemeral results. After his comparatively early death, Calvinistic Methodism was most prominently represented by the Countess of Huntingdon. She undertook to commend Methodism to the upper classes; in addition she claimed the right as a peeress to appoint as her chaplains clergymen willing to work on behalf of Methodism. These men, were, of course, predominantly priests of the Church of England, since Methodism was still a movement, not a denomination. But the Countess also had close relations with nonconformity. Her theological college at Trevecca trained clergy both for the church and for the dissenting bodies. Her chaplains exerted a wider influence than their numbers would have suggested, and her practices were challenged. In 1779 the consistory court of London disallowed her claim that she could appoint to the rank of chaplain, and use in public ministrations, as many Anglican priests as she desired. She thereupon registered her chapels as dissenting meeting houses, and 'the Countess of Huntingdon's Connexion' became a nonconformist body. In one more respect the ties between Anglicanism and Methodism were severed.

Methodism began within the established church. Whitefield and Wesley were Anglican priests, and their aim was to revitalize the church. Many clergymen who were influenced by their example did not identify themselves with their movement. Samuel Walker of Truro, who was largely responsible for a notable revival in western Cornwall, gathered his converts into societies similar to those of Wesley. Grimshaw of Haworth and Berridge of Everton were itinerant evangelists as well as parish priests. Like the Methodists, they emphasized the need for a vital spiritual religion. They believed that the immediate action of the Holy Spirit leads men through conversion to a holy life. Their theological affinities were with Whitefield rather than with Wesley. Toplady (author of *Rock of Ages*, and of many vigorous polemical works) was a vehement Calvinist. The Evangelicals accepted the total depravity of man: of his own will, he cannot turn to God, and restoration to divine favour can be effected by Christ alone. They were opposed both to the meagre theology of their age and to the unabashed worldliness of the Hanoverian Church. Bluntly and without qualification they proclaimed the great evangelical doctrines.

These men were in conscious revolt against many of the characteristic aspects of their age. Their protest against its frivolity intensified the puritanical strain so congenial to their Calvinistic outlook. They condemned cards, theatres, dancing, and all amusements that savoured of dissipation. They kept steadily in the forefront of their thought the high seriousness of life and the dread solemnity of death, and they insisted that the demands both of time and of eternity can be met victoriously only by those who rely completely upon divine aid.

They combined this strength with its less admirable elements. They developed an almost morbid preoccupation with death. In their reaction against rationalism they allowed unfettered scope to the emotions. Because the prevalent theology had developed Latitudinarian, even Socinian, tendencies, they deprecated intellectual pursuits and relied on an uncritical Biblical literalism. As a result, the evangelical

movement proved comparatively sterile as a theological force. Stock phrases supplanted reasoned arguments, and a distinctive idiom became the badge of piety.

In the closing years of the eighteenth century, the Evangelicals made rapid headway. John Newton, William Romaine, and Thomas Scott were active in London; so were Richard Cecil and Basil Wood. Bishop Beilby Porteus encouraged them, and in increasing numbers the clergy of the capital associated themselves with the movement. At Oxford they were weak, at Cambridge strong. Isaac Milner, the President of Queens', was a notable figure both in the university and beyond it. Charles Simeon, a fellow of King's, exercised a highly influential ministry at Holy Trinity Church. At Cambridge, and increasingly throughout the Church of England, religious earnestness found a congenial home in the Evangelical party. Not many of its members were in positions of power, but by the end of the century it had established itself as the most active and aggressive group in the church.

The Evangelicals, unlike the Methodists, remained within the church, but they emphasized only one aspect of its teaching, and attached little value to methods on which it had always relied. In their intense preoccupation with the salvation of the individual, they minimized the corporate life of the church. But they proved that men and women can be converted to a new life and can be sustained in true godliness. Nor was their influence a doctrinaire and otherworldly force. They were devoted to good works, and showed that the Gospel which transformed individuals can profoundly affect society as well.

This growing awareness of Christian responsibility for the weak and the destitute inspired some of the notable movements which flourished during the closing years of our period. The crusade against the slave trade represents perhaps the greatest victory of the awakened Christian conscience over a strongly entrenched evil. In the long, slow process of exposing the traffic in human lives the Quakers played a distinguished part, but the contribution of the

'Clapham Sect' (a group of earnest and influential Evangelicals) was decisive. The slave trade was firmly established and powerfully supported. It had been an axiom of British policy that the prosperity of the country – the expansion of its manufacturing, shipping, and colonial trade – required active participation in this traffic. The trade in slaves had been sanctioned by three seventeenth-century charters; it had been legalized by an Act of Parliament in 1698; Britain's share had been augmented by treaties in 1713, 1725, and 1748. The African Company was described as 'the most beneficial to this island of all the companies that ever were formed by our merchants'. The trade had been pushed with considerable success. During the century before 1786, the British alone transported at least 2,000,000 negroes to the new world. All the other maritime nations – the French, the Portuguese, the Dutch, the Danes, and the New Englanders – had a share in the traffic. But finally an age not unduly sensitive to human suffering was shocked by the horrors of 'the middle passage' and by the rigours of the plantation system. The rising tide of humanitarian feeling began to protest. Some of the most distinguished men of the day challenged the commercial interests involved. In 1787 the Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade was formed, and Grenville Sharp, Clarkson, Zachary Macaulay, and William Wilberforce were prominent members. A committee of the Privy Council collected a great deal of information about the traffic, and in 1788 William Pitt, in Wilberforce's absence through illness, raised the subject in the House of Commons. Repeal was delayed by the preoccupations of war as well as by fear that unilateral action would merely benefit England's rivals. Victory tarried; the persistence of Wilberforce and his associates guaranteed ultimate success. This was a notable triumph of the Christian conscience, and its origins, as well as the spirit which sustained the long endeavour, are revealed in Wilberforce's famous work, *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious Systems*. This popular book was the most influential manifesto of the Evangelical party.

The work of Hannah More illustrates another aspect of Evangelical zeal. Before her conversion, this able woman had been a prominent literary and social figure. Her growing interest in 'serious Christianity' found expression in *Thoughts on the Importance of the Manners of the Great to General Society* (1788), a courageous work which had an appreciable effect on social customs. Wilberforce directed her attention to the conditions which prevailed in the villages of the Mendip Hills. The labourers were ignorant and poverty-stricken; the more substantial farmers were despotic and overbearing; the clergy were indifferent and indolent. In thirteen adjoining communities there was not a single resident clergyman of any kind. To combat the prevailing ignorance and vice, Hannah More and her sister established schools, first for the children, then for the adults. At every turn they encountered an opposition bred of superstition and fear. The courage of these women, as well as their enlightened and disinterested enthusiasm, reflected the evangelical spirit in its most attractive guise.

In many other areas the Evangelicals were active. They helped to establish the Church Missionary Society, the Religious Tract Society, and the British and Foreign Bible Society. Their spirit was sometimes narrow and their sympathies circumscribed, but at one point after another their influence stimulated and guided the Christian conscience.

11

England: The Rise and Fall of the Cult of Reason

In the early part of the eighteenth century, the prestige of English thought stood very high. This was largely due to the immense authority of two men: Isaac Newton, who had unlocked the secrets of the physical universe, and John Locke, who had laid bare the inner nature of man. English ideas, when transplanted to continental countries, often proved revolutionary in their implications.

In England itself the conflict of ideas was intense but seldom turbulent. Though the contestants differed about great essentials, they shared certain fundamental assumptions. The new science disposed men to regard the universe as an orderly system, guided by a purpose in which man can participate and governed by laws which human intelligence can grasp. The new philosophy had opened the way to a deeper understanding of human nature and particularly to a new appreciation of the workings of the human mind. As the eighteenth century began, there was a widespread assumption that the truths of Christianity could and should be made attractive to men of calm and dispassionate judgement. The recent past had been disfigured by violent and apparently unprofitable controversies; therefore faith seemed most attractive when presented in its most reasonable light. This reaction against the factiousness of theological disputes showed itself in two forms: positively, in the wide diffusion of Latitudinarian views; negatively, in the challenge of Deism.

Latitudinarianism seems such a dull and meagre form of faith that it is easy to dismiss it with impatience. In an earlier chapter we have noted its rise. In a slightly modified form it persisted throughout most of the eighteenth century,