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income. He worked hard, but still the debts increased. In 1700 Samuel appealed to the Archbishop of York, Dr. John Sharpe, listing all his expenses—including rebuilding a barn and supporting his elderly mother—which had led to his falling three hundred pounds into debt, an astounding sum, considering his annual salary was just two hundred pounds. The archbishop was moved to help Samuel financially and even prevailed upon others to do so. But his financial difficulties continued. He was overwhelmed by it all, especially given the increasing number of children he had to support. He fell into a depression, terribly disappointed that he had not made more of a success of his life.

It was during this time that he made a desperate and irresponsible decision: he abandoned his wife, his children, and his congregation. The reason he gave for leaving had nothing to do with his finances. Many years later, his son John described the grim situation: "The year before King William died my father observed my mother did not say amen to the prayer for the king. She said she could not, for she did not believe that the Prince of Orange was king. He vowed he would not cohabit with her till she did. He then took horse and rode away; nor did she hear anything of him for a twelvemonth."⁶

Susanna was hardly alone in refusing to view King William III, Prince of Orange—who was Dutch—as England's true king. Many shared her view. King William's claim to the throne came through his wife, Queen Mary II. She was the daughter of James II, and she and William served as co-regents of England, Scotland, and Ireland while James was exiled during the religious wars. They were crowned in 1689. But it's hard for us to fathom how something like this could cause such problems in the Wesley marriage.

Precisely why Susanna wouldn't mutter an "amen" to assuage her distressed and sensitive husband's feelings, or conversely why something so seemingly small could be the excuse for a man to abandon his family, causing them to suffer tremendously, is a great mystery to us, three centuries hence. Here is a window into Susanna's thinking in a letter to her friend, Lady Yarborough.

You advise me to continue with my husband, and God knows how gladly I would do it, but there, there is my supreme affliction, he will not live with me. . . . [Since] I'm willing to let him quietly enjoy his opinions, he ought not to deprive me of my little liberty of conscience.⁷

Susanna also confided in Suffragan Bishop George Hicke:

My master will not be persuaded he has no power over the conscience of his Wife. . . . He is now for referring the whole to the Archbishop of York and Bishop of Lincoln, and says if I will not be determined by them, he will do anything rather than live with a person that is the declared enemy of his country.⁸

After Samuel had been absent for a year, however, fate intervened. The house in which Susanna and her children were living caught fire, nearly killing one of her small daughters and destroying most of the house and all their belongings. Upon hearing this news, Samuel returned to his family and set about rebuilding the house. And since Queen Anne had ascended the English throne during this time, the Dutch-born source of the couple's conflict had been removed.



As her husband rebuilt their home, Susanna turned her attention to the education of her children, a job she would continue for twenty years as additional offspring arrived. It was not at all customary to educate girls in that time, so it is remarkable that Susanna wanted not just her three sons, but all her children to be able to read, write, and reason well. Nor did her ideas about education end with letters and logic. She also knew that above all she must teach her children to love God.

As far as she was concerned, the state of their souls formed the

sons Greek, Latin, and classical literature in order to prepare them for additional, formal schooling at boarding schools, to which all of the boys were subsequently sent.

One of the most dramatic examples of how busy and crowded the house often was is that as a signal to her children to be quiet, Susanna would sometimes sit down and pull her apron over her head so that she could pray in peace. When she was thus accoutered, the children knew not to interrupt her.



In 1705, something else happened that would add to the family's woes. During an election campaign, Samuel came out in support of two of the four men running—one Tory and one Whig. But when he discovered that the Whig position on the church and royalty differed from his own, he withdrew his support, causing the Whig candidate's supporters to publicly attack Samuel. And then the real troubles began. Samuel wrote a letter about it to Archbishop Sharpe.

"The election began on Wednesday, 30th," he wrote. "A great part of the night our Isle people kept drumming, shouting, and firing of pistols and guns under the window where my wife lay, who had been brought to bed [to recover from childbearing] not three weeks. I had put the child to nurse [the nurse lived nearby]; . . . the noise kept his nurse waking till one or two in the morning. Then they left off, and the nurse, being heavy to sleep, overlaid the child," suffocating him.²⁰ Frightened servants threw the dead child into the arms of a barely awake Susanna.

What this must have been like for her can only be imagined. Later, Samuel was told by friends that some of the local men intended to kill him. When he arrived home, "they sent the drum and mob, with guns etc., to compliment me till after midnight. One of them, passing by on Friday evening and seeing my children in the yard cried out, 'O ye devils! We will come and turn ye all out of doors a-begging shortly.'"²¹

SEVEN WOMEN

The vicious harassment continued for some time, and what they suffered seems unimaginable. Villagers stabbed several of the family's cattle, wounded their dog, and set fire to their crops. Then one of the men to whom Samuel was indebted, furious over his change of mind in the election, had Samuel tossed into debtors' prison, where he languished for some time. At one point, Susanna sent him her wedding rings so that he might sell them and pay off his debt, but he would not hear of it and sent the rings back.

Of course, with Samuel behind bars, Susanna found it more difficult than ever to feed her large family. The vile characters behind such attacks were attempting "to starve my poor family in my absence," Samuel wrote, "my cows being all dried up by it, which was their chief subsistence,"²² because the cows provided milk, butter, and cheese for the Wesleys. Friends eventually sent enough money to pay off Samuel's debt, allowing him to return home, where he bravely continued his parish work.

But in 1709 the most terrifying event yet to affect the Wesley family took place when the family's home burned a second time. Susanna described the event to her nineteen-year-old son, Samuel, then away at school:

The fire broke out about eleven or twelve o'clock, we being all in bed, nor did we perceive it till the roof of the corn chamber . . . fell upon your sister Hetty's bed. . . .

We had no time to take our clothes. . . . When I was in the yard I looked about for your father and the children; but seeing none, concluded 'em all lost. But thank God, I was mistaken! Your father carried sister Emily, Suky, and Patty into the garden; then, missing Jacky [John], he ran back into the house, to see if he could save him. He heard him miserably crying out in the nursery and attempted several times to get upstairs, but was beat back by the flame; then he thought him lost and commended his soul to God and went to look after the rest. The child climbed up to the window, and called out

to them in the yard; they got up to the casement and pulled him out just as the roof fell into the chamber.²³

Another servant, Harry, saved Mary and Hetty by breaking the glass in the parlor window and throwing them out to safety.

This time the house burned to the ground completely, along with everything they owned. Having suffered thus twice, Samuel would now rebuild the house with brick. It is certainly possible that Samuel's enemies started the fire. In any event the terrifying event was life-altering and contributed to Susanna's many difficulties. As she wrote to her brother years later, "Mr. Wesley rebuilt his house in less than a year; but nearly thirteen years are elapsed since it was burned, yet it is not half furnished, nor his wife and children half clothed to this day."²⁴

A month after the fire, Samuel and Susanna's nineteenth and last child, Kezia, came into the world. Nine of the Wesley children had died in infancy; those who survived were three sons—Samuel, John, and Charles—and seven daughters: Emelia, Susanna, Mary, Hetty, Anne, Martha, and Kezia.



The fire not only threatened the lives of the Wesley children but also had an adverse effect on their characters as well and, Susanna feared, their very souls. During the many months it took to rebuild the rectory, the children lived in the homes of friends and relatives as far away as London. Susanna lamented: "Never were children better disposed to piety . . . till that fatal dispersion of them, after the fire, into several families. In those they were left at full liberty . . . to run abroad, and play with any children, good or bad. They soon learned to neglect a strict observation of the Sabbath, and got knowledge of several songs and bad things. . . . A clownish accent, and many rude ways, were learned, which were not reformed without some difficulty."²⁵

When the children were finally home again, Susanna supplemented