Conclusion:
The Search for Pristine Purity

There is, they say, (and I believe there is)
A spark within us of th’ immortal fire,
That animates and moulds the grosser frame;
And when the body sinks escapes to heaven,
Its native seat, and mixes with the Gods.
Meanwhile this heavenly particle pervades
The mortal elements; in every nerve
It thrills with pleasure, or grows mad with pain,
And, in its secret conclave, as it feels
The body’s woes and joys, this ruling power
Wields at its will the dull material world,
And is the body’s health or malady.

Dr John Armstrong, *The Art of Preserving Health*.

Homo sum; humani nihil a me alienum puto.

John Wesley, Title page, *Primitive Physic*.1

Wesley’s quotation from Terence – ‘I am a man; therefore I deem nothing human to be outside my interest’ – thoroughly epitomises his cast of mind, as summed up by J.C. Bowmer:

He was interested in everything that pertained to life – not life as a biological study or theological abstraction, but life lived, gloriously or sordidly, by men and women of flesh and blood.2

Theological abstraction and biological study were of interest to Wesley in as much as they could be used to correct man’s nature. *Primitive Physic* was a manual designed to remedy that mortal condition: ordinary people could mitigate everyday diseases of the flesh, but its spiritual component involved an implicit desire for readers to pursue pristine purity and achieve a common life in the body of Christ. For Wesley, theological abstraction and biological study were fused together in a dynamic and powerful way because he was fascinated by the full range of human existence; nowhere is this more
apparent than in his *Journal*, which offers the historian many picaresque insights into eighteenth-century life. Georgian existence, however, was frequently shattered by disease and death, and Wesley's journal entries are repeatedly shot-through with such themes:

I went to Yarn. There I found a lovely young woman in the last stage of a consumption; but such a one as I never read of, nor heard any Physician speak of, but Dr. Wilson. The seat of the ulcers is not the lungs, but the windpipe. I never knew it cured…this young woman died in a few weeks.3

In such a context as this, where physic was of little use, Wesley attempted to reassure those dying that they would receive hope and salvation in the eternal realm of the afterlife.

Wesley made a direct and simple connection between science, health and life, but never confused medicine and religion. He firmly believed in the power of spiritual healing, though this belief was not expressed in the remedies set out in *Primitive Physic*. His separation of the medical and religious is evidenced by the way he treated diseases suffered by his friends and family. We have seen how Wesley took a pragmatic, orthodox approach when asked to provide medical advice to his brother Charles, but his journal entries and letters reveal the extent to which he accepted medical opinion when it came to treating his own ailments. The following long passage extracted from a journal entry for 4 January 1774 demonstrates this very well:

Three or four years ago a stumbling horse threw me forward on the pummel of the saddle. I felt a good deal of pain, but it soon went off, and I thought of it no more. Some months after I observed, *testiculum alterum altero duplo majorem esse*. I consulted a physician. He told me it was a common case, and did not imply any disease at all. In May twelvemonth it was grown near as large as a hen’s egg. Being then at Edinburgh, Dr. Hamilton insisted on my having the advice of Dr. Gregory and Munro. They immediately saw it was a hydrocele, and advised me, as soon as I came to London, to aim at a radical cure…When I came to London, I consulted Mr. Wathen. He advised me, 1. Not to think of a radical cure, which could not be hoped for, without my lying in one posture fifteen or sixteen days; and he did not know whether this might not give wound to my constitution, which I should never recover. 2. To do nothing while I continued easy. And this advice I was determined to take.

Last month the swelling was often painful. So on this day Mr. Wathen performed the operation, and drew off something more than half a pint of thin, yellow, transparent water. With this came out (to his no small surprise)