


# Dissimulation as an Editorial Strategy in the *Life of William Wilberforce*

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*In 1838, Robert and Samuel Wilberforce published, in five volumes, The Life of William Wilberforce. Although the subject of some contemporary controversy, this work, containing extensive quotations from his diaries, rapidly established itself as the principal source for subsequent biographical writings about Wilberforce and strongly influenced later interpretations. The production of a complete initial transcription of the diaries by the Wilberforce Diaries Project for the first time enables a systematic comparison between the Life and its principal source. This reveals a systematic attempt by his sons to minimize references to Wilberforce's participation in some aspects of Hanoverian sociability, his use of medication to deal with his worsening health, his close associations with and respect for Nonconformists and his own evangelical commitment and spirituality. As a consequence, the Wilberforce we know from the biography is as much a product of early Victorian myth-making as the Wilberforce of 1759–1833.*

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In 1838, less than five years after the death of their father, Robert and Samuel Wilberforce<sup>1</sup> published, in five volumes, *The Life of William Wilberforce*.<sup>2</sup> While it was well received in many quarters,<sup>3</sup> the book would soon become the subject of controversy. Initially, this centred around Robert and Samuel's rather shabby treatment of the contribution of Thomas Clarkson to the campaigns for abolition and emancipation in general, and of his account of the abolition

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<sup>1</sup> Robert (1802–57) and Samuel (1805–73) Wilberforce were both ordained in 1838 as Anglican clergymen who, in contrast to their father, were high churchmen and early followers of the Oxford Movement. In 1845, Samuel became bishop of Oxford and then, in 1869, bishop of Winchester, while Robert became a convert to Roman Catholicism in 1854. The most sympathetic portrayal of their religious development remains David Newsome, *The Parting of Friends* (London, 1966).

<sup>2</sup> Robert Isaac Wilberforce and Samuel Wilberforce, *The Life of William Wilberforce*, 5 vols (London, 1838) [hereafter: *Life*].

<sup>3</sup> For example, *The Edinburgh Review* 67/135 (1838), 142–80.

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campaign in particular.<sup>4</sup> This feature was noticed in an early consideration of the book in the *Quarterly Review*<sup>5</sup> and elaborated in a book-length reply, *Strictures on the Life of Wilberforce*, by Clarkson himself with the support of Henry Brougham and Henry Crabb Robinson.<sup>6</sup> Although they were initially inclined to defend their position, Robert and Samuel gradually withdrew the most egregious material from subsequent editions of the *Life* and, in 1844, wrote to Clarkson with a formal apology.<sup>7</sup> A further and more limited controversy emerged with the publication, in 1854, of the autobiography of Wilberforce's friend, the Independent minister, William Jay, chief pastor at the Argyle Chapel in Bath.<sup>8</sup> This protested against the impression given in the *Life* that their acquaintance was slight and formal, contending that it was, instead, cordial, generous and warm, and Jay's editors provided evidence to support their claims in the form of a collection of letters between Jay and William and Barbara Wilberforce.<sup>9</sup> The Jay controversy suggested that the brothers might have been somewhat selective in approaching their father's friends for copies of correspondence, and convinced Christopher Tolley, who has produced the most comprehensive account of Robert and Samuel's biographical practice, that his sons found this aspect of Wilberforce's religious life 'hard to understand'.<sup>10</sup>

Thereafter, despite some contemporary reservations about the use made of their father's religious journal,<sup>11</sup> the *Life* became a received text and its extensive quotations have been the main quarry for subsequent treatments of Wilberforce and his career, even by those who also made use of the diaries, such as the biographies by Robin

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Clarkson, *The History of the Rise, Progress and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave Trade by the British Parliament* (London, 1808).

<sup>5</sup> *The Quarterly Review* 62/123 (1838), 214–85.

<sup>6</sup> Thomas Clarkson, Henry Brougham and Henry Crabb Robinson, *Strictures on a Life of William Wilberforce by the Rev. W[.] [sic.] and the Rev. S. Wilberforce* (London, 1838). Brougham (1778–1868) was a leading lawyer and politician who had been prominent in the abolition campaign. Robinson (1775–1867) was a diarist and journalist.

<sup>7</sup> Christopher Tolley, *Domestic Biography: The Legacy of Evangelicalism in Four Nineteenth-Century Families* (Oxford, 1997), 166–8.

<sup>8</sup> William Jay, *The Autobiography of the Rev. William Jay*, ed. George Redford and John Angel James (London, 1854).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* 300–27.

<sup>10</sup> Tolley, *Domestic Biography*, 172.

<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of these concerns, see *ibid.* 173–6.

Furneaux<sup>12</sup> and William Hague.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, Reginald Coupland, whose biography of Wilberforce was first published in 1923, with a second edition in 1945, reported, on comparing one of the family collections of Wilberforce manuscript diaries with the work of Robert and Samuel, that: 'practically every item of interest or importance had been quoted in the *Life*'.<sup>14</sup> It was not until 1961, with the appearance of Ford K. Brown's *Fathers of the Victorians*, that modern historiographical claims began to be made about Robert and Samuel's agenda in writing the *Life*. In particular, Brown argued that Wilberforce's more high church sons had sought to conceal their father's evangelicalism by a variety of means, including minimizing the use of the word in the *Life*, failing to point out the religious character of his associates, and using sleight of hand to disguise the evangelical content of Wilberforce's language.<sup>15</sup> According to Brown, this enterprise was facilitated by the likelihood that Wilberforce himself had, in later life, 'gone over to High Church'.<sup>16</sup> He supported this claim by what he regarded as evidence that the later Wilberforce displayed a disdain for Nonconformity and a growing fear of ecclesiastical irregularity.<sup>17</sup> Brown's proposals were immediately challenged by David Newsome, who, in a fifteen-page review in the *Historical Journal*, assailed virtually every aspect of the book, from its theme and content, to its repetitive prose style and lack of sympathy with its subject.<sup>18</sup> Particular ire, however, was reserved for Brown's treatment of Robert and Samuel's biography of their father. Newsome argued, on the basis of a thorough review of the extensive correspondence between Robert and Samuel while writing the *Life*, that the sons did not create their portrait of their father through ambiguity, deliberate distortion or suppression of material.<sup>19</sup> He did accept, though, that they had been 'less than candid' in their depiction of

<sup>12</sup> Robin Furneaux, *William Wilberforce* (London, 1974).

<sup>13</sup> William Hague, *William Wilberforce: The Life of the Great Anti-Slave Trade Campaigner* (London, 2008). For an exception, though focussing on Wilberforce's domestic and family life, rather than aiming at a comprehensive biography, see Anne Stott, *Wilberforce: Family and Friends* (Oxford, 2012).

<sup>14</sup> Reginald Coupland, *Wilberforce*, 2nd edn (London, 1945; first publ. 1923), 431.

<sup>15</sup> Ford K. Brown, *Fathers of the Victorians: The Age of Wilberforce* (Cambridge, 1961), 487–98.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 499.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* 500–1.

<sup>18</sup> David Newsome, 'Fathers and Sons', *HistJ* 6 (1963), 295–310.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* 301–2.

their father's relationship with William Jay.<sup>20</sup> He also noted that much of Brown's criticism of the sons' work could only be conjectural because he was not able to consult the original sources.<sup>21</sup> However, neither party to the dispute was able to cite the manuscript diary to demonstrate their position and the argument therefore subsided into a clash of opinion.<sup>22</sup>

The production of a draft transcription of the extant portions of Wilberforce's diary – an early fruit of the Wilberforce Diaries Project<sup>23</sup> – offers for the first time not just a means of adjudicating between the rival claims of Ford K. Brown and David Newsome, now some sixty years old, but also the opportunity for a more systematic comparison between the *Life* and the diaries which comprise its most fundamental source. In undertaking such a comparison, it becomes possible to examine Robert and Samuel's biographical method and to draw some conclusions about the multiple agendas revealed by the choices that they made as they handled their material. This article focusses on the treatment of three aspects of Wilberforce by his sons: his participation in everyday Hanoverian life, especially in matters relating to the body, on which his sons were notably reticent; his relationship with non-Anglicans, especially Protestant Dissenters, including his long-running friendship with William Jay; and the character of his personal religion, including the question of the persistence of his evangelical position and the nature of his spirituality.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 305.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 301.

<sup>22</sup> Brown's work was based exclusively on printed sources. Newsome had been given access to collections of Wilberforce papers for the research which led to the publication of *The Parting of Friends* in the mid-1960s, but (at least up to 1963) seems to have restricted himself largely to material concerning the sons, rather than their father. See Newsome, *Parting of Friends* (London, 1966), x–xi, 455–8.

<sup>23</sup> For details of the Wilberforce Diaries Project, which aims to produce the first scholarly edition of Wilberforce's surviving diaries and journals, see online at: <https://wilberfordiariesproject.com/>. Thanks are due to my editorial colleagues, in particular John Coffey and Anna Harrington, without which the analysis presented here would not have been possible. Diaries kept at the Bodleian Library are catalogued in a number of series and are cited following Bodleian document references b.2 and c.40 etc. The large volume kept at the Wilberforce House Museum in Hull has no catalogue reference and is cited by name. The folios in each volume are as numbered by Wilberforce. In the case of the Hull volume, he numbered each page separately in two sequences, the second differentiated from the first by the addition of a lower-case x. For ease of reading, quotations from the diaries expand many of Wilberforce's abbreviations; inserted letters are given in square brackets.

The social and political culture of Wilberforce's contemporaries was strongly marked by its relish for the pleasures of food and drink and, for the political classes in particular, the dining table was a key locus of connection, conversation and sociability. According to the architect Robert Adam, while the French retired immediately after dining and sought out other rooms for conversation,

It is not so with us. Accustomed by habit or induced by the nature of our climate, we indulge more largely in the enjoyment of the bottle. Every person of rank here is either a membre [*sic*] of the legislation, or entitled by his condition to take part in the political arrangements of his country, and to enter with ardour into those discussions to which they give rise; these circumstances lead men to live more with one another and more detached from the society of the ladies. The eating rooms are considered as the apartments of conversation, in which we are to pass a great part of our time.<sup>24</sup>

Many of Wilberforce's political contemporaries and associates were notable drinkers on these occasions. According to Sir Gilbert Elliot, in a much-quoted passage:

Fox drinks what I should call a great deal, though he is not reckoned to do so by his companions, Sheridan excessively, and Grey more than any of them. ... Pitt, I am told, drinks as much as anybody, generally more than any of his company and that he is a pleasant convivial man at table.<sup>25</sup>

Wilberforce's popularity in company meant that he was a frequent guest at social gatherings as well as a key host, especially at supper parties in his strategically placed lodgings in Old Palace Yard, a short stroll from the Commons debating chamber.<sup>26</sup> In the *Life*,

<sup>24</sup> *The Works in Architecture of Robert and James Adam*, ed. Robert Oresko (London, 1975), 48.

<sup>25</sup> Gilbert Elliot, *Life and Letters of Sir Gilbert Elliot, First Earl of Minto*, ed. Emma Eleanor Elizabeth Hislop Elliot, 3 vols. (London, 1874), 1: 189.

<sup>26</sup> Wilberforce took these lodgings in 1786 and used them regularly for parliamentary entertaining, even after his marriage in 1797, until 1808, when he moved his family residence from Clapham to Kensington Gore. See 'Places', *The Wilberforce Diaries Project*, online at: <<https://wilberforddiariesproject.com/places/#homes>>, accessed 6 August 2023. Sociable dining at the House of Commons is discussed in Caroline Shenton, *The Day Parliament Burnt Down* (Oxford, 2012), 121–4.

the details of Wilberforce's dining habits are largely excluded and the sons are at pains to draw a contrast between Wilberforce and his contemporaries on this point. Thus, they comment on the rules he set himself for conduct at the table: 'He was not labouring to reduce intemperate habits within the limits of that self-indulgent propriety which contents the generality of men. From this point he started, but aiming at a higher standard, he sought to live a life of mortification in the midst of luxury.'<sup>27</sup>

This passage suggests a high moral purpose in Wilberforce's rules for temperance while dining, portraying him as a sort of reasonable ascetic. In the diary, however, the rules seem related primarily to Wilberforce's concern for his fragile health. He noted in July 1788, for example: 'Hitherto always meat Suppers & plentiful – Begin to suspect they or fermented liquor at Night disturb my Heart.'<sup>28</sup> Wilberforce had to tread a narrow line between temperance and abstemiousness, since he believed that too much austerity might also prove dangerous, concluding later in the same month that 'my health requires throughout an indulgent regimen'.<sup>29</sup> Nonetheless, given that Wilberforce, at least after his conversion, regarded his health as a gift from God to be carefully stewarded so that he could continue to be useful,<sup>30</sup> it would be misleading to attempt to draw too great a distinction between the physical and spiritual motivations for his attempts at temperance.

A single passage in Volume I of the *Life* indicated that, at times, Wilberforce struggled with his own rules.<sup>31</sup> This is an example of a common editorial method employed by Robert and Samuel of producing a distorted picture not by outright omission of a prominent feature of their father's life, but rather by minimizing it. In the eleven years between 1788 and 1799, for example, there are well over two hundred references in Wilberforce's diaries to his having broken his own rules for the table. In November 1788, for example, he lamented: 'All my Mens Rules sadly violated again & again.'<sup>32</sup> These frequent infractions were almost as frequently preceded and

<sup>27</sup> *Life*, 1: 197.

<sup>28</sup> Oxford, Bodl., MS Wilberforce b.2, fol. 6, Diary, 27 July 1788.

<sup>29</sup> Quoted in *Life*, 1: 181.

<sup>30</sup> See, for instance, Bodl., MS Wilberforce b.2, fol. 10<sup>v</sup>, Diary, 6 Feb 1789.

<sup>31</sup> *Life*, 1: 197–8.

<sup>32</sup> Bodl., MS Wilberforce c.4, fol. 4, Diary, 19 November 1788. 'Mens' (an abbreviation of *mensa*) was Wilberforce's standard shorthand for matters to do with the table and is

followed by renewed resolutions to keep to his regime. In 1789, for example, he noted in successive diary entries:

Receiv[e]d Sacrament & strong Sense of past Follies & Determination by divine Grace to amend – yet wasted time sadly rather exceeded Mens &c & all this most unpardonable because Buxton Waters have been of great Service to me. I now hope to amend – Mens: Mod[erate] – & ferms – No Des[sert].<sup>33</sup>

Congenial company was, with many Hanoverians, the route to excess at table and Wilberforce was no exception.<sup>34</sup> Dessert seems to have been a particular weakness. Earlier in 1789, for example, he recorded: 'In spite of all my solemn Resolutions, yesterday at Dinner at Lord Chatham's I exceeded Mens in all ways, chiefly dessert sweets'.<sup>35</sup> The diary also frequently comments on excessive consumption, by Wilberforce's own standards, of fermented drink, probably beer taken with meals, but possibly also including wine. Thus, in February 1791, he noted: 'din[e]d Pitt before House Moderately, but at night quite exceeded ferms'.<sup>36</sup> Often though, he overindulged in food and drink together, as in October 1792: 'I have been going on everyway ill, & the Effects of this bad frame have appear[e]d in my almost constant Mens: Excedings as usual both in ferms & otherwise'.<sup>37</sup> Much less frequent are references to overindulgence in spirits, probably brandy consumed after dinner.<sup>38</sup> He also berated himself for indulgence in tea and coffee, which he believed interfered with his sleep and impaired his usefulness.<sup>39</sup> Robert and Samuel showed a particular determination to exclude such material from the *Life*, not only

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often to be found in the diary in conjunction with the abbreviation 'reg' or 'regs', representing *regula* or regulations.

<sup>33</sup> Bodl., MS Wilberforce b.2, fol. 18, Diary, 4–5 October 1789. 'Ferms' was Wilberforce's standard shorthand for fermented liquor.

<sup>34</sup> See, for instance, Bodl., MS Wilberforce b.2, fol. 24<sup>r</sup>, Diary, 12 Feb 1791: 'Sykess & Smiths & Xtian dined with me - again I did not adhere strictly - unless I can keep my Mens: & other Resolves – I must now break off this living so much in Company.'

<sup>35</sup> Bodl., MS Wilberforce c.4, fol. 4, Diary, 3 Jan 1789.

<sup>36</sup> Bodl., MS Wilberforce b.2, fol. 24<sup>r</sup>, Diary, 14 Feb. 1791.

<sup>37</sup> Bodl., MS Wilberforce c.40, fol.48, Diary, 4 Oct 1792.

<sup>38</sup> Bodl., MS Wilberforce b.2, fol. 11<sup>v</sup>, Diary, 2 March 1789. Wilberforce occasionally used the shorthand term 'dis' to represent overconsumption by his own standards of spirits. See, for example, Bodl., MS Wilberforce c.41, fol. 105, Diary, 2 April 1797.

<sup>39</sup> Bodl., MS Wilberforce b.2, fol. 16, Diary, 15 June 1789; *ibid.*, fol. 17<sup>r</sup>, Diary, 31 July 1789.

steering clear of passages in the diary which dwelt on Wilberforce's consumption of food and drink, but also silently omitting references to his dining habits in material that they did use. May 1789, for example, saw a climactic moment in Wilberforce's public career as he prepared to introduce his first abolition motion in a three-and-a-half-hour speech to the House of Commons. The diary recorded that Wilberforce exceeded his own dietary rules twice in the preceding five days, first at Pitt's house at Holwood, where he found himself incapacitated from discussing the detail of abolition with the Prime Minister, and the second on the day before his speech, probably at Matthew Montagu's in company with leading abolitionists William Burgh, John Clarkson and James Ramsay. The consequences were frankly noted in his diary: 'Very indiff[eren]t *from hav[ing] exceeded day before*: came to town sadly unfit for work but by Divine Grace enabled to make my Motion so as to give Satisfaction'.<sup>40</sup>

The same passage is accurately reproduced in the *Life*, but with the italicized words silently omitted, the sons clearly reluctant to show that their father had almost tripped himself up on such an important occasion.<sup>41</sup> However, none of Wilberforce's consumption of food and drink was in the least remarkable for his age and place in society. Indeed, in their analysis of the political day in London, Hannah Greig and Amanda Vickery have identified the period 1780–1820 as 'the zenith of elite hard drinking and fast living, the epitome of Georgian excess', noting that the succeeding Victorian political culture eschewed heavy drinking. Thus, to Victorian readers, weakness in this area had perhaps become less acceptable in respectable circles, and especially in a Christian hero.<sup>42</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that Wilberforce's sons chose to minimize this aspect of their father's life.

Masculine sociability, lubricated by alcohol, inevitably produced a freer mode of conversation than that which the sons wished to present to their early Victorian readership. Omitted from the *Life*, therefore, are diary entries in which Wilberforce lamented his having given countenance to inappropriate conversation around the table. For instance, in March 1798 after a dinner with the Prime Minister, he

<sup>40</sup> Bodl., MS Wilberforce b.2, fol. 13, Diary, 12 May 1789. Emphasis added.

<sup>41</sup> *Life*, 1: 218.

<sup>42</sup> Hannah Greig and Amanda Vickery, 'The Political Day in London c.1697–1834', *P&P* 252 (2021), 101–37, at 131.



noted: ‘Conv[ersation] & Comp[an]y Reg[u]l[at]ion[s] sadly neglected, laugh[e]d improv[e]rly at someth[in]g rather profane Pitt said’.<sup>43</sup> Similarly excluded from the *Life* were Wilberforce’s own occasional lapses into acerbity. In Volume IV, for example, the sons quoted Wilberforce’s diary as recording: ‘Thorpe has published a pamphlet addressed to me’.<sup>44</sup> The diary, however, reveals a much more extreme reaction:

that vile demon Thorpe (really He must be a Subject of Black Inspiration or rather which is perhaps the same thing a little Insane, which when it affects the moral principle produces an extreme Intensity of wickedness & malignity), has published a pamphlet addressed to me.<sup>45</sup>

This is not typical of Wilberforce and a number of factors clearly contributed to this outburst. Robert Thorpe had been Chief Justice of Sierra Leone and his pamphlet attacking the administration there must have seemed like an act of betrayal to Wilberforce, who was at the time both grieving the loss of his close friends Henry Thornton and John Bowdler, and also trying to secure a registration bill aimed at tightening up the 1807 Abolition Act.<sup>46</sup> It is unsurprising that the sons wished to conceal that their father was capable of extreme language, but their decision rendered Wilberforce a blander character than the one the diary reveals.

Many other regular features of Hanoverian life are similarly expunged from the published presentation of Wilberforce’s experience, despite being the subject of extensive and even reflective comment in the diary. Readers of Volume I, for example, would find Wilberforce in December 1794 passing the night at his London lodgings in some discomfort. Robert and Samuel quoted his journal as recording: ‘A disturbed night – full of ambition. How small things confound human pride! why not such small things God’s agents as

<sup>43</sup> Bodl., MS Wilberforce c.41, fol. 117, Diary, 11 March 1798.

<sup>44</sup> *Life*, 4: 242.

<sup>45</sup> Bodl., MS Wilberforce c.39, fol. 28, Diary, 11 Feb. 1815.

<sup>46</sup> For Thorpe, see, for instance, Gareth Atkins, *Converting Britannia: Evangelicals and English Public Life, 1770–1840* (Woodbridge, 2019), 165–6. For the deaths of Thornton and Bowdler of tuberculosis on 16 January and 1 February 1815 respectively, see Stott, *Wilberforce*, 172–88. For the registration bill, see, for example, John Pollock, *Wilberforce* (Tring, 1977), 249–51.

much as locusts?<sup>47</sup> Only when reading the diary, however, is it possible to identify the precise source of his discomfort: ‘Flea Bitten full of ambition &c how small things confound human Pride why not fleas as much Gods Judgem[en]ts & agents as locusts; sad night.’<sup>48</sup> For most Hanoverians, especially for frequent travellers like Wilberforce, attack by fleas was a regular problem. Such occasions are frequent objects of comment for Wilberforce, especially when his rest was disturbed. There are no fewer than eighty-six explicit references in the extant diary volumes which provide a sort of geography of hazard. Wilberforce was bitten frequently on his continental tour in both France<sup>49</sup> and Italy,<sup>50</sup> while in Switzerland he alarmingly encountered ‘immense fleas even bigger than Bees’.<sup>51</sup> Back in Britain, he was bitten all through the night in a Leicestershire inn,<sup>52</sup> but also in more salubrious conditions, such as when on holiday in Ryde,<sup>53</sup> or while taking the waters at Bath.<sup>54</sup> His sleep was similarly impaired when he stayed with the Gisbornes at Yoxall Lodge,<sup>55</sup> and at Sir Charles and Lady Middleton’s house at Teston.<sup>56</sup>

Robert and Samuel Wilberforce were not alone in wishing to erase evidence both of occasional angularity and of the less salubrious features of Hanoverian life from their presentation of their subject. Anne Stott notes a similar process in the biography of Wilberforce’s friend Hannah More, first published in 1834.<sup>57</sup> Some thirty years later, a correspondingly liberal use of the redactor’s pencil was evident in Edward Austen Leigh’s edition of the surviving correspondence of Jane Austen. In order to preserve the existing Austen myth, he erased all traces of acerbity and all references to fleas.<sup>58</sup> Presented for a Victorian audience, the ‘Christian Senator’, like ‘Aunt Jane’, could be neither biting nor bitten.

<sup>47</sup> *Life*, 1: 69–70.

<sup>48</sup> Bodl., MS Wilberforce c.34, fol. 41, Diary, 30 December 1794.

<sup>49</sup> Bodl., MS Wilberforce Don, e.164, fol. 81, Diary, 18 July 1785.

<sup>50</sup> Bodl., MS Wilberforce Don, e.164, fol. 80, Diary, 5 July 1785.

<sup>51</sup> Bodl., MS Wilberforce Don, e.164, fol. 83, Diary, 2 August 1785.

<sup>52</sup> Bodl., MS Wilberforce b.2, fol. 21, Diary, 17 July 1790.

<sup>53</sup> Bodl., MS Wilberforce d.54, fol. 14, Diary, 8 October 1808.

<sup>54</sup> See, for instance, Bodl., MS Wilberforce c.34, fol. 148, Diary, 15–21 January 1798; Bodl., MS Wilberforce c.41, fol. 115, Journal, 21 January 1798.

<sup>55</sup> Bodl., MS Wilberforce b.2, fol. 21<sup>f</sup>, Diary, 5 August 1790.

<sup>56</sup> Bodl., MS Wilberforce c.34, fol. 33, Diary, 5–7 August 1794.

<sup>57</sup> Anne Stott, *Hannah More* (Oxford, 2003), viii–ix.

<sup>58</sup> Emily Auerbach, *Searching for Jane Austen* (Madison, WI, 2004), 7–11.

However, in eliminating such references, the sons also deprived their readers of an important insight into the spirituality of their subject. In a document written largely in a penitential mode, one of the most joyful passages in Wilberforce's spiritual journal relates to his encounter with, and deliverance from, the attentions of a flea:

Sadly wander[in]g in fam[il]y prayer. But may the promise be fulfill'd in me 1 Cor 1: 30.<sup>59</sup> I wo[ul]d not be Superstitious but hav[in]g felt last night ab[ou]t. Bedtime, a Sort of glorying, rather, & then a flea in Bed convincing me of Weakness, & pray[ing] to God that by catch[in]g it my night might be no longer disturb[e]d & I be unfitted for [the] Service of this day. I caught it almost immed[iate]ly. A similar Instance happen'd lately. Rem[embe]r Locusts, Grasshoppers, Flies &c. made God's Instruments, & whatever really lowest convinces of weakness, &c drives to him – 1 Cor. 1: 30.<sup>60</sup>

Wilberforce's capacity to see spiritual significance, not only in large matters of politics and philanthropy, but in the everyday accidents of life is particularly well captured in this passage, as are the immediacy of his relationship with God and his commitment to careful scriptural (as well as spiritual) application of his experience. This is a rather different spirituality to that suggested by Robert and Samuel's focus on their father's rules for living, the subject of so much attention in the *Life*.<sup>61</sup>

The largest and most extensive feature of Wilberforce's regime eliminated from the *Life*, however, was any proportionate representation of the measures he took to manage his health. This was in a delicate and deteriorating condition almost continuously from the late 1780s, when it was briefly thought that he might die.<sup>62</sup> His principal resort, especially when dealing with acute intestinal pain, from this point until the end of his life, was to the medical use of opium. Robert and Samuel made one reference to Wilberforce's opium use in the first volume of the *Life* which was embedded in a carefully crafted apologetic passage located after a discussion of his health crisis:

<sup>59</sup> In the Authorized Version, 1 Cor 1: 30 reads: 'But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.'

<sup>60</sup> Bodl., MS Wilberforce c.41, fol. 123, Journal, 23 September 1798.

<sup>61</sup> See below p. 407.

<sup>62</sup> See, for instance, Furneaux, *Wilberforce*, 76–8.

Beyond all calculation he was visibly gaining strength at Bath. His returning health was in great measure the effect of a proper use of opium, a remedy to which even Dr. Pitcairne's judgment could scarcely make him have recourse; yet it was to this medicine that he now owed his life, as well as the comparative vigour of his later years. So sparing was he always in its use that as a stimulant he never knew its power, and as a remedy for his specific weakness he had not to increase its quantity during the last twenty years he lived. 'If I take,' he would often say, 'but a single glass of wine, I can feel its effect, but I never know when I have taken my dose of opium by my feelings.'<sup>63</sup>

As with many other aspects of their father's embodied life, Robert and Samuel would probably have preferred to omit any reference to his use of this particular medicine altogether. However, his use of the drug was no secret and certainly sufficiently well-known for Thomas De Quincey to refer to him as an opium eater in his *Confessions* alongside a range of other public figures, including Wilberforce's friend and mentor, Isaac Milner.<sup>64</sup>

Robert and Samuel's approach to defusing this issue was certainly a successful one and seems to have strongly influenced subsequent biographers. Coupland, for example, described Wilberforce as 'taking minute doses of opium',<sup>65</sup> while Furneaux reproduced the sons' account virtually verbatim, while opining that: 'The greatest amount of opium ever taken by Wilberforce seems to be about six grains per day.'<sup>66</sup> Later biographers, such as John Pollock and William Hague, followed a similar line, though with a greater concern to justify Wilberforce's use of the drug.<sup>67</sup> When compared with the diary,

<sup>63</sup> *Life*, 1: 173–4.

<sup>64</sup> For the original reference, see *The London Magazine* 4 (1821), 294. De Quincey, by his own account, intended a full public identification, but the discretion of his publisher delayed this until 1856. Thomas De Quincey, 'Original Preface to the Confessions 1821', in *The Works of Thomas De Quincey*, 16 vols (Edinburgh, 1878), 1: v–vi. For Milner, see Kevin C. Knox, 'Milner, Isaac (1750–1820), natural philosopher and dean of Carlisle', *ODNB*, online edn (2004), at: <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/18788>>, accessed 13 May 2005. Despite the reference to medical opinion in the *Life*, it is not unlikely that Milner was key as a trusted advisor in introducing Wilberforce to opium and his own experience of intestinal pain (like being gnawed by rats, according to De Quincey) was very similar to that of Wilberforce, who in his diary described his stomach as being 'raked': Bodl., MS Wilberforce b.2, fol. 10b, Diary, 2 February 1789.

<sup>65</sup> Coupland, *Wilberforce*, 90.

<sup>66</sup> Furneaux, *Wilberforce*, 78–9.

<sup>67</sup> Pollock, *Wilberforce*, 78–81; Hague, *Wilberforce*, 161–2.

however, it is clear that the sons were adopting a strategy of dissimulation through minimization in order to protect their father's reputation. Wilberforce's management of his opium regime was a major sub-theme of his journaling and, in all probability, a component of his reasons for continuing it. He usually took opium in the form of pills kept in a box,<sup>68</sup> which seems to have enabled him to monitor his dosage carefully. His record provides clear evidence that his dose gradually increased from three or four grains each day in the 1790s,<sup>69</sup> to around nine grains a day in 1803,<sup>70</sup> twelve in 1810,<sup>71</sup> to fifteen in 1826.<sup>72</sup> The increased dose was almost certainly a response to habituation as well as to worsening health, but the diary certainly does not support his sons' claim that he was sparing in his use of the drug, nor their suggestion that Wilberforce had no need to increase his intake for the last twenty years of his life. This must have been very apparent to Robert and Samuel as they deployed the diary in their biography.<sup>73</sup> The claim that Wilberforce was a stranger to the effects of opium as a stimulant is also contradicted by William's journaling. On 10 March 1813, for example, he noted that he was 'more languid' because he had forgotten his opium;<sup>74</sup> three years later, while dining with the Stephens, he reported being 'so sleepy [fro]m want of sleep & hav [in]g forgot Opium that I could not keep awake.'<sup>75</sup> Contrary to the contrast between the effects of wine and opium recalled by his sons, Wilberforce was constantly conscious of occasions when he had missed or mismanaged his usual dose.<sup>76</sup> Although it may have gradually undermined his health in other respects,<sup>77</sup> Wilberforce seems to have had a good relationship with his medical regime, and to have

<sup>68</sup> Bodl., MS Wilberforce d.55, fol. 280, Diary, 4 June 1824.

<sup>69</sup> Bodl., MS Wilberforce c.34, fol. 117, Diary, 12 June 1796.

<sup>70</sup> Bodl., MS Wilberforce c.36, fol. 10, Diary, 6–7 September 1803.

<sup>71</sup> Bodl., MS Wilberforce d.54, fol. 67, Diary, 4 August 1810.

<sup>72</sup> Bodl., MS Wilberforce d.55, fol. 305, Diary, 6 October 1826.

<sup>73</sup> If the phrase indicating that William had no need to increase his dose as a 'remedy for his specific weakness' was intended to provide cover for the sons' handiwork, it is unclear whether it was their deception or self-deception that was being camouflaged.

<sup>74</sup> Bodl., MS Wilberforce d.54, fol. 171, Diary, 10 March 1813.

<sup>75</sup> Hull, Wilberforce House Museum [hereafter: WHM], Wilberforce Journal, fol. 61, Diary, 19 August 1816.

<sup>76</sup> For example, WHM, Wilberforce Journal, 7, Diary, 6 March 1814; WHM, Wilberforce Journal, 44x, Diary, 6 May 1816.

<sup>77</sup> For a discussion of the long-term health effects of Wilberforce's opium use, see Pollock, *Wilberforce*, 81.

regarded opium as a blessing. He noted in 1798, ‘Much medicine today, (how thankful sho[ul]d I be for it), has just set me up again’<sup>78</sup>; in 1821, he described opium in biblical terms as ‘my daily bread’.<sup>79</sup> It is understandable that in their presentation of their father as a Christian hero, Robert and Samuel sought to avoid linking him with the controversy around the use of opium ensuing from the publication of De Quincey’s work and, possibly, emerging concern about the China trade.<sup>80</sup> However, in so doing, they concealed an important consideration bearing on any appraisal of his life, whether public or private.

A similar story emerges when examining the presentation in the *Life* of Wilberforce’s relationship with Methodists and Dissenters. As high church Anglicans, influenced by Tractarian emphases on apostolic succession as the foundation of valid ministry, Wilberforce’s sons were generally unsympathetic to Nonconformity, especially in its more assertive phase in the later 1830s and 1840s.<sup>81</sup> However, Wilberforce’s close friendships and collaborations with a wide range of Nonconformists, including Quakers and even Unitarians, were far too well known to be excluded altogether.<sup>82</sup> Nonetheless, as with his opium use, Robert and Samuel chose to deploy in their biographical writing a range of techniques, including apologia, minimization and occlusion, to prevent Wilberforce’s non-Anglican friendships from appearing too prominent and to contextualize them in such a way as to suggest that his approach to Nonconformity hardened over time. The most prominent example of apologia appeared in Volume III of the *Life* which, commenting on his involvement in the formation of the Bible Society, noted:

Mr Wilberforce saw no danger to the Church from the cooperation of Dissenters who at that time professed an affectionate regard for the

<sup>78</sup> Bodl., MS Wilberforce c.41, fol. 118, Journal, 1 April 1798.

<sup>79</sup> WHM, Wilberforce Journal, fol. 255, Diary, 26 November 1821.

<sup>80</sup> For such concerns, see, for instance, Robert Philip, *No Opium! Or Commerce and Christianity, working together for good in China; a letter to James Cropper, Esq of Liverpool* (London, 1835). James Cropper, the putative addressee of the pamphlet, was an abolitionist associated with Wilberforce in the African Institution and a leader of the later emancipation campaign.

<sup>81</sup> See, for example, Newsome, *Parting of Friends*, 234–5.

<sup>82</sup> Some of Wilberforce’s Nonconformist connections are explored in John Coffey and Michael Morgan, ‘William Wilberforce and English Dissent’, *Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society* 11 (2022), 3–20.

national establishment. Bishops Porteus and Barrington, who had supported his efforts for enforcing the King's proclamation, readily joined with him here; and by no other machinery could the result have been obtained. So great was the torpor of the Church, that all more strictly regular exertions had absolutely failed, and they who devised this powerful instrument of good, are hardly to be blamed, though they have with a holy daring called up a spirit too mighty for their absolute control.<sup>83</sup>

The British and Foreign Bible Society was the most significant of the voluntary religious organizations in which Anglicans and Nonconformists cooperated in the nineteenth century, and Wilberforce was inescapably prominent among its founders.<sup>84</sup> The Society, while attracting wide support (not least because Wilberforce's name lent it respectability), was nevertheless controversial from its inception because of its irregular nature.<sup>85</sup> Opposition from high churchmen was, if anything, hardening in the late 1830s under Tractarian influence.<sup>86</sup> The apologia, like that for Wilberforce's use of opium, is therefore carefully constructed. In this case, the dangerous association with Dissenters is neutralized by an emphasis on the respectability of Wilberforce's involvement, endorsed by episcopal support and its suitability for the times when the church was torpid, and Dissenters well disposed. The reader is left to supply the conclusion that Wilberforce would have acted differently in the late 1830s, when the church was more active and Dissenting hostility more evident.

The technique of minimization in the *Life* was applied to references to Dissenters in general, but especially to Wilberforce's connections with Dissenting ministers and to matters of religious practice. The editors of William Jay's autobiography were entirely correct to suggest that the half dozen references to Jay in Robert and Samuel's biography did not present an accurate reflection of the cordiality of a relationship that stretched over forty years. They were also right to suspect that Wilberforce's sons had chosen not to use the

<sup>83</sup> *Life*, 3: 91–2.

<sup>84</sup> Roger H. Martin, *Evangelicals United: Ecumenical Stirrings in Pre-Victorian Britain, 1795–1830* (London, 1983), 85–6.

<sup>85</sup> See, for instance, H. H. Norris, *A Practical Exposition of the Tendency and Proceedings of the British and Foreign Bible Society*, 2nd edn (London, 1814; first publ. 1813).

<sup>86</sup> Martin, *Evangelicals United*, 93.

material at hand to paint a fairer portrait. There are almost eighty separate references to William Jay in the extant manuscript diaries and journals, and additional references in the parts of their father's correspondence to which the sons had access when writing their biography.<sup>87</sup> Of the material at their disposal, they deployed in the biography only four excerpts from the diary, two of which might be regarded as positive in tone<sup>88</sup> and two negative.<sup>89</sup> This is a very different balance to that found in the diary, where, at most, five per cent of Wilberforce's comments on Jay might be considered critical or disobliging, while the general tone is highly favourable. In October 1797, for example, after a disappointing Anglican sermon in the morning, Wilberforce went in the evening to the Argyle Chapel and heard 'Jays excellent Sermon on Abijah A Good Thing in him tow[ar]ds God – much edified.'<sup>90</sup> There is nothing in the *Life* that reflects the friendship and intimacy between the two men and their families, expressed in occasions of mutual sociability, as faithfully depicted in the diary.<sup>91</sup> Robert and Samuel also were at considerable pains to disguise the spiritual kinship between the two friends. They omitted altogether the many positive comparisons made by their father between Jay's preaching and that of mainstream Anglicans, as in May 1791, when he heard: 'M'. Jay at his Chapel – very powerful & able – O how earnest does he seem compar[e]d with the formal Preachers of the Establish[e]d Church'.<sup>92</sup> Wilberforce also much appreciated Jay's published devotional works, reading them for himself and to other members of his family.<sup>93</sup> As late as March 1833, just four months before his death, he began re-reading Jay's memoir of the Dissenting minister Cornelius Winter.<sup>94</sup> None of this material found its way into the *Life*. Indeed, in their account of the year 1815, Robert and Samuel resorted to unacknowledged selective quotation to

<sup>87</sup> While the sons seem to have sought out correspondence from a number of their father's friends (see *Life*, 1: vii), they do not appear to have asked William Jay. Jay's correspondence with Wilberforce was subsequently published in his own autobiography. See *William Jay*, ed. Redford and James, 299–324.

<sup>88</sup> *Life*, 2: 234, 313.

<sup>89</sup> *Life*, 2: 240; 5: 258.

<sup>90</sup> Bodl., MS Wilberforce c.34, fol. 144, Diary, 8 October 1797.

<sup>91</sup> For example, Bodl., MS Wilberforce c.34, fols 134–5, Diary, 12 February 1797; Bodl., MS Wilberforce c.39, fol. 79, Diary, 8 December 1825.

<sup>92</sup> Bodl., MS Wilberforce b.2, fol. 25<sup>v</sup>, Diary, 29 May 1791.

<sup>93</sup> For instance, Bodl., MS Wilberforce d.54, fol. 9, Diary, 31 August 1808.

<sup>94</sup> Bodl., MS Wilberforce c.38, fol. 91, Diary, 25 March 1833.



disguise the origin of a sermon Wilberforce had read to his family, citing the diary as saying: 'Read in the evening a sermon on the fig tree a cumberer of the ground to my family',<sup>95</sup> whereas the manuscript text begins the sentence with: 'Read a most strik[in]g Sermon [of] Jay's ...'.<sup>96</sup> In the *Life*, the same paragraph noted Wilberforce's reading of Voltaire and Hume, together with Blair's Lectures and Scott's *Waverley*. Only William Jay, seemingly, was too dangerous to mention.

Perhaps most consequential of Robert and Samuel's misleading depictions of Wilberforce's relationship with Jay is the final reference to the Dissenting minister, which appears in Volume V of the *Life*. This quoted the diary as saying: '\_\_\_ at Jay's, where I greatly wished to go, but thought it wrong'.<sup>97</sup> This is largely an accurate quotation, the omitted name being that of Robert and Samuel's sister Elizabeth.<sup>98</sup> But by including this material, they clearly wished to give the impression that their father had come to the position that it was wrong for him to attend a Dissenting place of worship. However, in order to create this illusion, they were forced to omit subsequent entries in the diary that recorded attendance at Jay's chapel by Wilberforce<sup>99</sup> and other members of his family.<sup>100</sup> An almost identical manoeuvre was undertaken with respect to Wilberforce's attendance at the chapel of the Baptist Robert Hall in Bristol.<sup>101</sup>

A close comparison between the *Life* and the diary also makes it clear that the sons regularly deployed unacknowledged selective quotation to disguise Wilberforce's friendly relationships with Nonconformists. It was not uncommon, for example, on occasions when a Dissenting minister was staying the night or had come for breakfast, for Wilberforce to invite the guest to lead his family's morning devotions,<sup>102</sup> but none of these occasions was represented in the biography. When citing a portion of the diary where their father had assigned the title 'Revd' to a Dissenting minister, Robert

<sup>95</sup> *Life*, 4: 225.

<sup>96</sup> Bodl., MS Wilberforce c.39, fol. 26, Diary, 1 January 1815.

<sup>97</sup> *Life*, 5: 258.

<sup>98</sup> Bodl., MS Wilberforce c.39, fol. 77, Diary, 23 Oct 1825.

<sup>99</sup> For example, Bodl., MS Wilberforce c.39, fol. 78, Diary, 4 December 1825; Bodl., MS Wilberforce c.38, fol. 60, Diary, 23 Sept 1832.

<sup>100</sup> For instance, Bodl., MS Wilberforce c.39, fol. 78, Diary, 27 November 1825.

<sup>101</sup> *Life*, 5: 140; Bodl., MS Wilberforce c.39, fol. 86, Diary, 28 May 1826.

<sup>102</sup> For example, WHM, Wilberforce Journal, fol. 6, Diary, 3 March 1814.

and Samuel removed the title,<sup>103</sup> and they were similarly willing silently to intervene to excise what they presumably regarded as over-enthusiastic comments about Wilberforce's Dissenting acquaintances. Thus, a diary entry for December 1811, 'Allen the Quaker, truly great & good Man din[e]d with us',<sup>104</sup> is rendered in the *Life* simply as: 'Allen the Quaker dined with us'.<sup>105</sup> To further their project of minimizing Wilberforce's Dissenting contacts, Robert and Samuel even resorted, on occasion, to doctoring lists of people he had invited to breakfast. Their biography, for example, noted on 3 January 1814: 'Very large party at Breakfast M<sup>r</sup> Cardale & several others';<sup>106</sup> whereas the corresponding diary entry reads: 'Very large party at Br[ea]k[as]t M<sup>r</sup> Cardale M<sup>r</sup> Attley dissent[in]g Min[ist]er & several others.'<sup>107</sup> Christopher Tolley has suggested that the sons found it hard to understand their father's friendships with Dissenters.<sup>108</sup> It seems more likely that they understood only too well that his commitment to what he called 'real Christianity' was far more important to him than denominational boundaries, but that they did not like it and were not prepared to advertise his particular form of catholicity, especially in the new circumstances of the late 1830s.

The character of Wilberforce's religion was necessarily a central feature of any endeavour to write his biography and, as probably the most famous lay evangelical of the period, it would have been remarkable if his sons had attempted to disguise this aspect of their father's life. Nonetheless they appear to have made strenuous attempts to avoid the term, reducing the almost fifty uses of 'evangelical' and its cognates in the extant diary to a handful in the *Life*, and eschewing Wilberforce's critical use of the word 'unevangelical' altogether. Sometimes, they proceeded by simple omission, perhaps understandably in the case of the diary entry for 28 December 1828: 'Hendon Church Morn[in]g Dear Rob[er]t preached on If Ye love them that love you what reward have you, do not even the Publicans so ... I own I'm not at all satisfied with dear Rob[er]ts

<sup>103</sup> Bodl., MS Wilberforce c.35, fol. 30, Diary, 9 January 1802.

<sup>104</sup> Bodl., MS Wilberforce d.54, fol. 126, Diary, 28 December 1811.

<sup>105</sup> *Life*, 3: 566.

<sup>106</sup> *Life*, 4: 153.

<sup>107</sup> Bodl., MS Wilberforce d.54, fol. 183<sup>v</sup>, Diary, 3 January 1814.

<sup>108</sup> Tolley, *Domestic Biography*, 172.

Sermon nothi[n]g Evangel[ica]l in it.’<sup>109</sup> They also made frequent use of unacknowledged selective quotation, conducting a series of surgical strikes against the word evangelical where it appeared in material they otherwise wished to include. Thus, an entry for May 1817 reads in the diary: ‘Lambeth public day Sat next [to] B[isho]p of Ossory Fowler, who immed[iatel]y began talk[in]g on Catholic Quest[io]n on which had spoke yesterday, w[ith] great frankness & afterw[ar]ds on Evangel[ica]l Clergy indicating a Generous manly spirit & good understanding.’<sup>110</sup> The same passage appeared in the fourth volume of the *Life* as: ‘Dined Lambeth, public day – sat next the Bishop of Ossory, who immediately began talking on Catholic Question, on which he had spoken yesterday, with great frankness, indicating a generous manly spirit and good understanding.’<sup>111</sup> This was a largely accurate quotation, save for the excision of the evangelical clergy.

However, Robert and Samuel also faced the problem that there were sections of the diary which they wished to quote in their biography which featured the unwelcome use of the word evangelical and its cognates in contexts where the terms could not simply be excised. To deal with these passages, the sons deployed an additional technique: unacknowledged substitution of an entirely different word. This often changed the meaning or emphasis of the original. Volume I of the *Life*, for example, contained an account of a Sunday morning in 1789: ‘Went to Cripplegate church to hear Gregory the Bishop of London’s protégé for the Asylum – elegant, serious, and devotional, but sadly *obscure* in his views.’<sup>112</sup> The diary, however, was much clearer about Wilberforce’s reservations about the preacher: ‘went to Cripplegate Church to hear Gregory, Bishop of London’s Protégé for the Asylum: “Come unto me all ye that labor” &c – elegant & serious & Devotional but sadly *unevangelical* in his Views.’<sup>113</sup> Similarly, in 1811, when contemplating a potential contested election in Yorkshire, the *Life* has Wilberforce musing: ‘But if there should be any contest, the Sidmouth and Methodist story would be circulated ... and people hostile to religion, and suspecting all *religious persons* of hypocrisy, would believe it; and

<sup>109</sup> Bodl., MS Wilberforce d.55, fol. 344, Diary, 28 December 1828. See also Bodl., MS Wilberforce c.39, fol. 45, Diary, Monday 26 August 1816.

<sup>110</sup> WHM, Wilberforce Journal, fol. 73, Diary, 17 May 1817.

<sup>111</sup> *Life*, 4: 323.

<sup>112</sup> *Life*, 1: 201. Emphasis added.

<sup>113</sup> Bodl., MS Wilberforce b.2, fol. 9, Diary, 18 January 1789. Emphasis added.

the credit of true religion might with my own be tarnished.’<sup>114</sup> However, the diary is much more specific:

if there sho[ul]d be a contest & the Sidm[ou]th & Meth[odis]t story might very prob[abl]y stir one up if the Elect[io]n to take place (before its falsehood can be prov[e]d,) the story would be circulated ... & people hostile to Relig[i]o[n] & suspecting all *Evangel[ica]l* people of Hypocrisy would believe & the Credit of true Relig[i]o[n] might with my own be tarnish[e]d<sup>115</sup>

Here the substitution of ‘religious’ for ‘Evangelical’ was particularly urgent because of Wilberforce’s identification of the latter with ‘true Religion’.

This particular form of misrepresentation of their source text was also deployed by Robert and Samuel more generally, but it was applied with particular precision to the removal of the word evangelical. Their evident determination in this endeavour is perhaps best explained by developments in the Church of England in the first third of the nineteenth century. During this period, the term ‘evangelical’ had become ever more firmly a label attached to a particular party within the Church of England,<sup>116</sup> and one from which Robert and Samuel stood apart. They would not have wished to burnish the reputation of the evangelical party by linking it clearly with their heroic portrait of their father; neither would they have wished to diminish his reputation by close association with a party from which they wished to distance themselves.

A final aspect of their father’s religious life on which the sons sought to tread a careful line was its interior character. Wilberforce had been a warm advocate for the importance and validity of religious affections in his *Practical View* (1797),<sup>117</sup> and there was plenty of material in his diaries and journals to display their importance in his own spiritual life. This was material that Robert and Samuel wished to use to illustrate their father’s warm and lively character.

<sup>114</sup> *Life*, 3: 356. Emphasis added.

<sup>115</sup> Bodl., MS Wilberforce d.54, fols 115–6, Diary, 24 August 1811. Emphasis added.

<sup>116</sup> For the hardening of church parties, see, for instance, John Walsh and Stephen Taylor, ‘The Church and Anglicanism’, in John Walsh, Colin Haydon and Stephen Taylor, eds, *The Church of England c.1689–c.1833* (Cambridge, 1993), 29–51.

<sup>117</sup> William Wilberforce, *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians in the Higher and Middle Classes in this Country Contrasted with Real Christianity* (London, 1797), 54, 85–6, 136–7.

On the other hand, it was vital for the portrait they aimed to create that Wilberforce should not appear as an enthusiast, and that his brand of Christianity was indeed 'a religion for gentlemen'. The journal, even in its oft repeated self-critical commentary on Wilberforce's dead and cold spiritual state, gave evidence of his expectation that its true condition was warm and lively. The sons, however, chose to emphasize the rules-based aspects of Wilberforce's spiritual practice and to comment that his prescriptions displayed, 'not the heated tone of enthusiasm, but the sober reality of a reasonable faith.'<sup>118</sup> This underlay their minimization and occlusion of Wilberforce's connections to those notorious enthusiasts, the Dissenters and evangelicals.

Robert and Samuel's attempt to write a biography of their father as centred around his public life as a politician and philanthropist was largely successful. They were perspicuous in stressing the importance of his orientation towards domesticity in the midst of his political engagement and to the importance of his personal spirituality. They were, however, much less reliable, and often positively misleading, when it came to the details of his lived experience, the breadth of his spiritual horizons and the character of his spirituality. The careful and systematic misrepresentations to which they resorted were in part, no doubt, the product of both filial piety and their own theological partisanship. Perhaps most importantly, however, the posthumous portrait they created, reproduced in many a subsequent biography, both pious and scholarly, of a hero more than worthy of a pedestal, was not really the William Wilberforce of 1759–1833. He was rather the Wilberforce of 1838: reminted, like the coinage, for a new reign with evolving canons of respectability and new religious alignments. In this sense, Ford K. Brown had his generations the wrong way round. The Wilberforce we know was in many of his essentials not the father of the Victorians, but their son.

<sup>118</sup> *Life*, 1: 107.