
CHAPTER VI.

SECTION I.

A REVIEW OF MR. WESLEY'S CHARACTER.

MANY particulars of Mr. Wesley's life, both of a public and private nature, have already been detailed; and I hope in such a manner as to enable the intelligent reader, by this time, to form an opinion of his character upon good evidence. But we must remember that some particular circumstances, or a few occasional acts in a man's life, do not form his character, but the general tenor of his conduct. Because this shows some fixed principle that uniformly operates upon him, which, with a correspondent practice, forms his character. And when a long, virtuous, and useful life, is crowned with an end suitable to it, death puts a stamp upon his virtues, which shows us they are not counterfeit, but genuine. If the candid reader will review Mr. Wesley's whole life, and judge of him by this rule, I am persuaded he

will think with me, that, whatever failings as a man he might have, he had a degree of excellence in his character to which few men have attained.

But, to complete the picture which I have attempted to draw, it is necessary that some features in it should be more strongly marked. Some persons have affected to insinuate that Mr. Wesley was a man of slender capacity; but certainly with great injustice. His apprehension was clear, his penetration quick, and his judgment discriminative and sound: of which his controversial writings, and his celebrity in the office he held at Oxford, when young, are sufficient proofs. In governing a large body of preachers and people, of various habits, interests, and principles, with astonishing calmness and regularity for many years; he showed a strong capacious mind, that could comprehend and combine together a vast variety of circumstances, and direct their influence through the great body he governed. As a scholar, he certainly held a conspicuous rank. He was a critic in the Latin and Greek classics; and was well acquainted with the Hebrew, as well as with most of the European languages now in use. But the Greek was his favorite language, in which his knowledge was extensive and accurate. At College, he had studied with a good deal of care, Euclid, Keil, Sir Isaac Newton's Optics, &c. &c. but he never entered far into the more abstruse parts, or the higher branches of the mathematics; finding they would fascinate his mind, absorb all his attention, and divert him from the pursuit of the more important objects of his own profession. He was no great friend to metaphysical disquisitions: and I must own, that I always thought he held metaphysical reasoning, even when properly and modestly conducted, in too low estimation. But this, I apprehend, proceeded chiefly from the incompetency of most of those who have entered upon these kinds of speculations, and the mischief which he observed their writings had done, both in the affairs of civil life, and also in religion. He was a most determined opposer of those systems of natural philosophy, which represent the powers of matter as the efficient causes of all the phenomena of nature; whereby God is banished out of the world, and all things, even the actions of men, are supposed to be determined by laws unalterably fixed, no place being left for the interpositions of superintending providence. He doubted, but did not deny, the truth of the calculations of the planetary distances, and some other parts of modern Astronomy. Natural history was a field in which he walked at every opportunity, and contemplated with infinite pleasure, the wisdom, the power, and goodness of God, in the structure of natural bodies, and in the various instincts and habits of the animal creation. But he was obliged to view these wonderful works of God, in the labors and records of others; his various and continual employments of a higher nature, not permitting him to make experiments and observations for himself.

“As a writer, he certainly possessed talents, both from nature and education, sufficient to procure him considerable reputation.” But Mr. Wesley did not write for fame; his object was to instruct and benefit that numerous class of people, who have a plain understanding, with plain common sense, little learning, little money, and but little time to spare for reading. In all his writings he constantly kept these circumstances in view. Content with doing good, he used no trappings merely to please, or to gain applause. The distinguishing character of his style is, brevity and perspicuity. He never lost sight of the rule which Horace gives,

*Est brevitate opus, ut currat sententia, neu se
Impediat verbis lassas onerantibus aures.*

“Concise your diction, let your sense be clear,
Nor with a weight of words fatigue the ear.”

In many of his works we may observe, his words are well chosen, being *pure*, *proper* to his subject, and *precise* in their meaning. His sentences commonly have clearness, unity, and strength: yet he sometimes closes a sentence in a manner which destroys its harmony, and subtracts much from its beauty. But whenever he took time, and gave the necessary attention to his subject, both his manner of treating it, and his style, show the hand of a master.

The following is a just character of Mr. Wesley as a preacher. “His attitude in the pulpit was graceful and easy; his action calm and natural, yet pleasing and expressive: his voice not loud, but clear and manly; his style neat, simple, and perspicuous; and admirably adapted to the capacity of his hearers. His discourses, in point of composition, were extremely different on different occasions. When he gave himself sufficient time for study, he succeeded; but when he did not, he frequently failed.”—It was indeed manifest to his friends for many years before he died, that his employments were too many, and he preached too often, to appear with the same advantage at all times in the pulpit. His sermons were always short: he was seldom more than half an hour in delivering a discourse, sometimes not so long. His subjects were judiciously chosen; instructive and interesting to the audience, and well adapted to gain attention and warm the heart.

The travels of Mr. Wesley in the work of the ministry, for fifty years together, are, I apprehend, without precedent. During this period, he travelled about four thousand five hundred miles every year, one year with another; which give two hundred and twenty-five thousand miles, that he travelled after he became an itinerant preacher! It had been impossible for him to perform this almost incredible degree of labor, without great punctuality and care in the management of his time. He had stated hours for every purpose: and his only relaxation was a change of employment. His rules

were like the laws of the Medes and Persians, absolute and irrevocable. He had a peculiar pleasure in reading and study; and every literary man knows the force of this passion, how apt it is to make him encroach on the time which ought to be employed in other duties: he had a high relish for polite conversation, especially with pious, learned, and sensible men; but whenever the hour came he was to set out on a journey, he instantly quitted any subject or any company in which he might be engaged, without any apparent reluctance.—For fifty-two years, or upwards, he generally delivered two, frequently three or four sermons in a day. But calculating at two sermons a day, and allowing, as a writer of his life has done, fifty annually for extraordinary occasions, the whole number during this period will be, forty thousand five hundred and sixty. To these may be added, as the same writer justly observes, an infinite number of exhortations to the societies after preaching, and in other occasional meetings at which he assisted.

“In social life, Mr. Wesley was lively and conversible.” He had most exquisite talents to make himself agreeable in company: and having been much accustomed to society, the rules of good breeding were habitual to him. The abstraction of a scholar did not appear in his behavior; he was attentive and polite. He spoke a good deal where he saw it was expected, which was almost always the case wherever he visited: his invitations to the best families being generally given to show him respect, and hear him converse on the different subjects proposed. Having seen much of the world in his travels, and read more, his mind was well stored with an infinite number of anecdotes and observations; and the manner in which he related them, was no inconsiderable addition to the entertainment they afforded.—And in private life among his friends, his manner was equally sprightly and pleasant. It was impossible to be long in his company, either in public or private, without partaking of his placid cheerfulness; which was not abated by the infirmities of age, or the approach of death; but was as conspicuous at fourscore and seven, as at one and twenty.

This part of Mr. Wesley's character is genuine, being drawn from a view of his life and manners. But how different from an observation made upon him, by Dr. Thomas Herring, Archbishop of Canterbury; in a letter dated January, 1756.* The archbishop says, “Whitefield is Daniel Burges *redivivus*; and to be sure, he finds his account in his joco-serious addresses. The other author (Mr. John Wesley) in my opinion, with good parts and more learning, is a most dark and *saturnine* creature.” As it is evident the archbishop knew nothing of either of these gentlemen, but by the report of those as ignorant of them as himself, or from some uncertain conjecture, this censure shows great want of liberality; and the editor of these letters

* See the Archbishop's letters to William Duncombe, Esq. printed in 1777, page 171.

would have done more credit to his friend's memory if he had suppressed it.

The late celebrated Dr. Johnson, was remarkably fond of sprightly, rational, polite conversation. And, I apprehend, there was no better judge in England of a man's talents in this way, than the Doctor.— He was personally acquainted with Mr. Wesley, and his judgment of Mr. Wesley's manner of conversation is left on record. He said, "Mr. Wesley's conversation is good; he talks well on any subject; I could converse with him all night." But Dr. Johnson, would certainly not have expressed himself in this strong language of approbation, had Mr. Wesley been that *dark, saturnine* creature, represented by Archbishop Herring.

"A remarkable feature in Mr. Wesley's character, was his placability." Having an active penetrating mind, his temper was naturally quick, and even tending to sharpness. The influence of religion, and the constant habit of close thinking, had in a great measure corrected this disposition. "In general he preserved an air of sedateness and tranquillity, which formed a striking contrast to the liveliness conspicuous in all his actions." Persecution, abuse, or injury, he bore from strangers, not only without anger, but without any apparent emotion. But in contests of another kind, this was not the case. Opposition from his preachers, or people, he could not so easily brook; and on some of these occasions he would speak with a degree of warmth which cannot be defended. But this was only for a moment; and he was very sensible of the impropriety of it. What he said of himself was strictly true: that he had a great facility in forgiving injuries.— Submission on the part of the offender, presently disarmed his resentment, and he would treat him with great kindness and cordiality."— No man was ever more free from jealousy or suspicion than Mr. Wesley, or laid himself more open to the impositions of others. Though his confidence was often abused, and circumstances sometimes took place, which would have made almost any other man suspect every body about him, yet he suspected no one; nor was it easy to convince him, that any one had intentionally deceived him. And when facts had demonstrated that this was actually the case, he would allow no more, than that it was so in that single instance. And if the person acknowledged his fault, he believed him sincere, and would trust him again. If we view this temper of his mind in connexion with a circumstance before mentioned, that his most private concerns lay open to the inspection of those constantly about him, it will afford as strong a proof as can well be given, of the integrity of his own mind; and that he was at the furthest distance from any intention to deceive, or impose upon others.

"The temperance of Mr. Wesley was extraordinary." When at college he carried it so far, that his friends thought him blamable. But he never imposed upon others, the same degree of rigor he ex-

exercised upon himself. He only said, "I must be the best judge of what is hurtful, or beneficial to me." Among other things, he was remarkable in the article of sleep; and his notion of it cannot be better explained, than in his own words. "Healthy men," says he, "require above six hours sleep; healthy women, a little above seven, in four and twenty. If any one desires to know exactly what quantity of sleep his own constitution requires, he may very easily make the experiment, which I made about sixty years ago. I then waked every night about twelve or one, and lay awake for some time. I readily concluded, that this arose from my being in bed longer than nature required. To be satisfied, I procured an *alarum*, which waked me the next morning at seven (near an hour earlier than I rose the day before,) yet I lay awake again at night. The second morning I rose at six; but notwithstanding this, I lay awake the second night. The third morning I rose at five; but nevertheless I lay awake the third night. The fourth morning I rose at four, as, by the grace of God, I have done ever since: and I lay awake no more. And I do not now lie awake, taking the year round, a quarter of an hour together in a month. By the same experiment, rising earlier and earlier every morning, may any one find how much sleep he wants."

It must, however, be observed, that for many years before his death, Mr. Wesley slept more or less every day. And his great readiness to fall asleep at any time when fatigued, was a considerable means of keeping up his strength, and enabling him to go through so much labor. I have known him, near thirty years ago, come to the place where he had to preach at noon after a long wearisome ride in a hot day, and without any refreshment lie down and immediately fall fast asleep. After sleeping ten minutes or a quarter of an hour, he would get up refreshed and fit for his work. He never could endure to sleep on a soft bed. I have seen him at night, when he thought the bed too soft to sleep upon, lay himself across it, and roll two or three times backward and forward, till it was sufficiently flattened, and then get into it. Even in the latter part of life, when the infirmities of age pressed upon him, his whole conduct was at the greatest distance from softness or effeminacy.

A writer of Mr. Wesley's life, from whom some observations respecting his general character, have already been taken, has further observed, "Perhaps the most charitable man in England, was Mr. Wesley." His liberality to the poor, knew no bounds but an empty pocket. He gave away, not merely a certain part of his income, but all that he had: his own wants provided for, he devoted all the rest to the necessities of others. He entered upon this good work at a very early period. We are told, that, "When he had thirty pounds a year, he lived on twenty-eight, and gave away forty shillings. The next year, receiving sixty pounds, he still lived on twenty-eight, and gave away two and thirty. The third year he received ninety pounds,

and gave away sixty-two. The fourth year he received one hundred and twenty pounds. Still he lived on twenty-eight, and gave to the poor ninety-two." In this ratio he proceeded during the rest of his life; and in the course of fifty years, it has been supposed, he gave away between twenty and thirty thousand pounds; a great part of which, almost any other man than himself would have put out at interest, upon good security.

Mr. Wesley's charitable donations, were often misrepresented.—Envy will never want a pretext, to put the worst construction on the best and most generous actions. Some years ago, Erasmus, Bishop of Crete, visited London. It has been said, that his Episcopal character was authenticated by a letter from the Patriarch of Smyrna; who added, that the Turks had driven him from his see, for baptizing a Mussulman into the faith of Christ. That the known liberality of Mr. Wesley, should induce him to be kind to such a stranger in distress, is not to be wondered at; but the report circulated in some periodical publications of that time, that Mr. Charles Wesley had offered him forty guineas to consecrate his brother a bishop, is totally without foundation, and has not even the shadow of probability to give it credit.

In the distribution of his money, Mr. Wesley was as disinterested. as he was charitable. He had no regard to family connexions, nor even to the wants of the preachers who labored with him, in preference to strangers. He knew that these had some friends; and he thought the poor destitute stranger might have none, and therefore had the first claim on his liberality. When a trifling legacy has been paid him, he has been known to dispose of it in some charitable way before he slept, that it might not remain his own property for one night. "Every one knows the apostrophes in which he addressed the public, more than once, on this subject, declaring, that his own hands should be his executors." And though he gained all he could by his publications, and saved all he could, not wasting so much as a sheet of paper; yet by giving all he could, he was preserved from 'laying up treasures upon earth.' He had declared in print, that, if he died worth more than ten pounds, independent of his books, and the arrears of his fellowship, which he then held, he would give the world leave to call him, "a thief and a robber." This declaration, made in the integrity of his heart, and height of his zeal, laid him under some inconveniences afterwards, from circumstances which he could not at that time foresee. Yet in this, as all his friends expected, he literally kept his word, as far as human foresight could reach.—His chaise and horses, his clothes, and a few trifles of that kind, were all, his books excepted, that he left at his death. Whatever might be the value of his books, is of no consequence, as they were placed in the hands of trustees (though the trust has been violated) and the profits arising from the sale of them to be applied to the use and

benefit of the Conference; reserving only a few legacies which Mr. Wesley left, and a rent-charge of eighty-five pounds a year to be paid to his brother's widow; which was not a legacy but a debt, as a consideration for the copy-right of his brother's hymns.

Among the other excellences of Mr. Wesley, his moderation in controversy deserves to be noticed. Writers of controversy too often forget, that their own character is intimately connected with the manner in which they treat others: and if they have no regard for their opponents, they should have some for themselves. When a writer becomes personal and abusive, it affords a fair presumption against his arguments, and ought to put us on our guard against deception. Most of Mr. Wesley's opponents were of this description; their railing was much more violent, than their reasons were cogent. Mr. Wesley kept his temper, and wrote like a Christian, a gentleman, and a scholar. He might have taken the words of the excellent Hooker as a motto to his polemical tracts, "To your railing I say nothing, to your reasons I say what follows." He admired the temper in which Mr. Law wrote controversy: only in some instances Mr. Law shows a contempt for his opponent, which Mr. Wesley thought was highly improper.

During the time that Mr. Wesley strictly and properly speaking, governed the societies, his power was absolute. There were no rights, or privileges; no officers of power or influence; but what were created or sanctioned by him: nor could any persons hold them, but during his pleasure. The whole system of Methodism, like a great and complicated machine, was formed under his direction, and his will give motion to all its parts, and turned it this way or that, as he thought proper. His influence, like a mighty torrent, gathered strength in its progress, at every intermediate step between him and the great body of the people. Let us suppose, for instance, that on some important matter which concerned all the societies, or the nation at large, Mr. Wesley gave his orders to the assistants, dispersed through the three kingdoms: these would impress them on the other itinerants, in number together, let us suppose three hundred. With the influence of this body, these orders would pass on, to about twelve hundred local preachers in a vast variety of situations; who, in conjunction with the itinerants, would impress them on about four thousand stewards and class leaders; and these, by personal application, might, in a short time, enforce them on about seventy thousand individuals, members of the societies. In addition to this, we may suppose, the itinerant and local preachers in the course of ten days or a fortnight, publicly address between three and four hundred thousand people, when the same matter might be further urged upon them. Now, what could stand against such influence as this? so combined, diffusive, and rapid in its progress, when once put in motion? If directed against any individuals in the societies, whatever might be their

character or influence, their opposition could only be like pebbles before a torrent rolling down the side of a mountain; it would be swept away without being perceived.

I do not say, that Mr. Wesley ever exercised his authority on so extensive a scale, as here represented: all I mean to show the reader is, that, had any occasion of sufficient importance required it, he had the power of doing so: and that, in the Methodist economy, the influence of the ruling preachers operates in this way, and has actually been exerted since the death of Mr. Wesley, on a larger scale than here mentioned.

It is natural to suppose, that some persons would be offended with Mr. Wesley's power over the whole connexion; as thinking they had some right to share it with him. He has, accordingly, been charged with the love of power, even so far as to be a blemish in his character. But he always denied the charge. This however is certain, that he always considered his power, as inseparably connected with the unity and prosperity of the societies over which he presided: and, whether mistaken or not, it is probable, that on this account only he was so tenacious of it. This may certainly be said to his praise, that no man ever used his power with more moderation than Mr. Wesley. He never sought his own ease or advantage in the use of it: the societies labored under no inconvenience from it, but prospered under his government. They derived this benefit from his supreme power, that if any were injured or oppressed by the ignorance or rashness of a preacher, they obtained immediate redress by applying to him. Having known him for twenty-five years, and having examined his private papers, I have no hesitation in declaring, that I am fully convinced he used all his influence and power to the best of his judgment, on every occasion, to promote the interests of Christianity, the prosperity of the people he governed, and the peace and welfare of his country, disregarding any private concern, or attachment whatever, when it stood in the way of his general purpose of doing good.

Hitherto I have spoken of Mr. Wesley's power only in relation to his personal character. But I readily acknowledge, that his absolute unlimited power, has in its consequences, since his death, been a great injury to the societies. It has been the *parent* of a system of government, highly oppressive to many individuals, and much more injurious to the rights of the people, than his own. He constantly acted as a middle person, between the preachers and people; and was ready to protect the people, the poor as well as the rich, against any insult or oppression they might receive. At present, the preachers claim unlimited powers, both to make laws and execute them, by themselves or their deputies, without any intermediate authority existing, to act as a check in favor of the people. But what is still much worse than all the rest, is, that the present system of government

among the Methodists, requires such arts of human policy and chicanery to carry it on, as in my opinion, are totally inconsistent with the openness of gospel simplicity. It is happy that the great body of the preachers do not enter into the spirit of it, and indeed know little about it: being content with doing their duty on the circuits to which they are appointed, and promoting the spiritual welfare of the people. And the hope is, that this mode of government will soon be altered.

I shall finish this review of Mr. Wesley's character, with two or three sketches of it drawn up by different persons, and printed soon after his death; being persuaded they will be highly acceptable to the candid reader.

“Now that Mr. John Wesley has finished his course upon earth, I may be allowed to estimate his character, and the loss the world has sustained by his death. Upon a fair account, it appears to be such, as not only annihilates all the reproaches that have been cast upon him; but such as does honor to mankind, at the same time it reproaches them. His natural and acquired abilities, were both of the highest rank. His apprehension was lively and distinct; his learning extensive. His judgment, though not infallible, was in most cases excellent. His mind was steadfast and resolved. His elocution was ready and clear, graceful and easy, accurate and unaffected. As a writer, his style, though unstudied and flowing with natural ease, yet for accuracy and perspicuity, was such as may vie with the best writers in the English language. Though his temper was naturally warm, his manners were gentle, simple, and uniform. Never were such happy talents better seconded by an unrelenting perseverance in those courses, which his singular endowments, and his zealous love to the interests of mankind, marked out for him. His constitution was excellent: and never was a constitution less abused, less spared, or more excellently applied, in an exact subservience to the faculties of his mind. His labors and studies were wonderful. The latter were not confined to theology only, but extended to every subject that tended, either to the improvement, or the rational entertainment of the mind. If we consider the reading he discovers by itself, his writings and his other labors by themselves, any one of them will appear sufficient to have kept a person of ordinary application, busy during his whole life. In short, the transactions of his life could never have been performed, without the utmost exertion of two qualities; which depended, not upon his capacity, but on the uniform steadfastness of his resolution. These were, inflexible temperance, and unexampled economy of time. In these he was a pattern to the age he lived in; and an example, to what a surprising extent a man may render himself useful in his generation, by temperance and punctuality. His friends and followers have no reason to be ashamed of the name of Methodist, he has entailed upon them: as, for an uninter-

rupted course of years, he has given the world an instance of the possibility of living without wasting a single hour; and of the advantage of a regular distribution of time, in discharging the important duties and purposes of life. Few ages have more needed such a public testimony to the value of time; and perhaps none have had a more conspicuous example of the perfection, to which the improvement of it may be carried.

“As a minister, his labors were unparalleled, and such as nothing could have supported him under, but the warmest zeal for the doctrine he taught, and for the eternal interests of mankind. He studied to be gentle, yet vigilant and faithful towards all. He possessed himself in patience, and preserved himself unprovoked, nay, even unruffled in the midst of persecution, reproach, and all manner of abuse, both of his person and name. But let his own works praise him. He now enjoys the fruits of his labors, and that praise which he sought not of men, but of God.

“To finish the portrait. Examine the general tenor of his life, and it will be found self-evidently inconsistent with his being a slave to any one passion or pursuit, that can fix a blemish on his character. Of what use were the accumulation of wealth to him, who, through his whole course, never allowed himself to taste the repose of indolence, or even of the common indulgence in the use of the necessaries of life. Free from the partiality of any party, the sketcher of this excellent character, with a friendly tear, pays it as a just tribute to the memory of so great and good a man, who, when alive, was his friend.”

The following, so far as it goes, is an accurate and beautiful picture of this extraordinary man.

“Very lately, I had an opportunity, for some days together, of observing Mr. Wesley with attention. I endeavored to consider him, not so much with the eye of a friend, as with the impartiality of a philosopher: and I must declare, every hour I spent in his company, afforded me fresh reasons for esteem and veneration. So fine an old man I never saw. The happiness of his mind, beamed forth in his countenance. Every look showed how fully he enjoyed ‘The gay remembrance of a life well spent:’ and wherever he went, he diffused a portion of his own felicity. Easy and affable in his demeanor, he accommodated himself to every sort of company, and showed how happily the most finished courtesy may be blended with the most perfect piety. In his conversation, we might be at a loss whether to admire most, his fine classical taste, his extensive knowledge of men and things, or his overflowing goodness of heart. While the grave and serious were charmed with his wisdom, his sportive sallies of innocent mirth delighted even the young and thoughtless; and both saw in his uninterrupted cheerfulness, the excellency of true religion. No cynical remarks on the levity of youth, embittered his

discourse: no applausive retrospect to past times, marked his present discontent. In him, even old age appeared delightful, like an evening without a cloud; and it was impossible to observe him without wishing fervently, 'May my latter end be like his!'

"But I find myself unequal to the task of delineating such a character. What I have said, may to some appear as panegyric; but there are numbers, and those of taste and discernment too, who can bear witness to the truth, though by no means to the perfectness of the sketch I have attempted. With such I have been frequently in his company; and every one of them, I am persuaded, would subscribe to all I have said. For my own part, I never was so happy as while with him, and scarcely ever felt more poignant regret than at parting from him; for well I knew, 'I ne'er should look upon his like again.'"

The following beautiful portrait of Mr. Wesley was drawn by a masterly hand. It appeared soon after his death, in a very respectable publication; and was afterwards inserted in Woodfall's Diary, June 17, 1791; from whence I have taken it; having made one or two trifling alterations.

"His indefatigable zeal in the discharge of his duty has been long witnessed by the world; but as mankind are not always inclined to put a generous construction on the exertion of singular talents, his motives were imputed to the love of popularity, ambition, and lucre. It now appears that he was actuated by a disinterested regard to the immortal interest of mankind. He labored, and studied, and preached, and wrote to propagate, what he believed to be the gospel of Christ. The intervals of these engagements were employed in governing and regulating the concerns of his numerous societies; assisting the necessities, solving the difficulties, and soothing the afflictions of his hearers. He observed so rigid a temperance, and allowed himself so little repose, that he seemed to be above the infirmities of nature, and to act independent of the earthly tenement he occupied. The recital of the occurrences of every day of his life would be the greatest encomium.

"Had he loved wealth, he might have accumulated without bounds. Had he been fond of power, his influence would have been worth courting by any party. I do not say he was without ambition; he had that which Christianity need not blush at, and which virtue is proud to confess. I do not mean, that which is gratified by splendor and large possessions; but that which commands the hearts and affections, the homage and gratitude, of thousands. For him they felt sentiments of veneration, only inferior to those which they paid to heaven: to him they looked as their father, their benefactor, their guide to glory and immortality: for him they fell prostrate before God, with prayers and tears, to spare his doom, and prolong his stay. Such a recompense as this, is sufficient to repay the toils of the long-

est life. Short of this, greatness is contemptible impotence. Before this, lofty prelates bow, and princes hide their diminished heads.

“His zeal was not a transient blaze, but a steady and constant flame. The ardor of his spirit was neither damped by difficulty, nor subdued by age. This was ascribed by himself, to the power of Divine grace; by the world to enthusiasm. Be it what it will, it is what philosophers must envy, and infidels respect: it is that which gives energy to the soul, and without which there can be no greatness or heroism.

“Why should we condemn that in religion, which we applaud in every other profession and pursuit? He had a vigor and elevation of mind, which nothing but the belief of the Divine favor and presence could inspire. This threw a lustre round his infirmities, changed his bed of sickness into a triumphal car, and made his exit resemble an apotheosis rather than a dissolution.

“He was qualified to excel in every branch of literature: he was well versed in the learned tongues, in metaphysics, in oratory, in logic, in criticism, and every requisite of a christian minister. His style was nervous, clear, and manly; his preaching was pathetic and persuasive; his Journals are artless and interesting; and his compositions and compilations to promote knowledge and piety, were almost innumerable.

“I do not say he was without faults, or above mistakes; but they were lost in the multitude of his excellences and virtues.

“To gain the admiration of an ignorant and superstitious age, requires only a little artifice and address; to stand the test of these times, when all pretensions to sanctity are stigmatized as hypocrisy, is a proof of genuine piety, and real usefulness. His great object was, to revive the obsolete doctrines, and extinguished spirit of the Church of England; and they who are its friends, cannot be his enemies. Yet for this he was treated as a fanatic and impostor, and exposed to every species of slander and persecution. Even bishops and dignitaries entered the lists against him; but he never declined the combat, and generally proved victorious. He appealed to the Homilies, the Articles, and the Scriptures, as vouchers for his doctrine; and they who could not decide upon the merits of the controversy, were witnesses of the effects of his labors; and they judged of the tree by its fruit. It is true, he did not succeed much in the higher walks of life; but that impeached his cause no more, than it did the first planters of the gospel. However, if he had been capable of assuming vanity on that score, he might rank among his friends some persons of the first distinction, who would have done honor to any party. After surviving almost all his adversaries, and acquiring respect among those who were the most distant from his principles, he lived to see the plant he had reared, spreading its branches far and wide, and inviting not only these kingdoms, but the Western world,

to repose under its shade. No sect, since the first ages of Christianity, could boast a founder of such extensive talents and endowments. If he had been a candidate for literary fame, he might have succeeded to his utmost wishes; but he sought not the praise of man; he regarded learning only as the instrument of usefulness. The great purpose of his life was doing good. For this he relinquished all honor and preferment; to this he dedicated all the powers of body and mind; at all times and in all places, in season and out of season, by gentleness, by terror, by argument, by persuasion, by reason, by interest, by every motive and every inducement, he strove with unwearied assiduity, to turn men from the error of their ways, and awaken them to virtue and religion. To the bed of sickness, or the couch of prosperity; to the prison, the hospital, the house of mourning, or the house of feasting, wherever there was a friend to serve, or a soul to save, he readily repaired; to administer assistance or advice, reproof or consolation. He thought no office too humiliating, no condescension too low, no undertaking too arduous, to reclaim the meanest of God's offspring. The souls of all men were equally precious in his sight, and the value of an immortal creature beyond all estimation. He penetrated the abodes of wretchedness and ignorance, to rescue the profligate from perdition; and he communicated the light of life to those who sat in darkness and the shadow of death. He changed the outcasts of society, into useful members; civilized even savages, and filled those lips with prayer and praise, that had been accustomed only to oaths and imprecations. But as the strongest religious impressions are apt to become languid, without discipline and practice, he divided his people into classes and bands, according to their attainments. He appointed frequent meetings for prayer and conversation, where they gave an account of their experience, their hopes and fears, their joys and troubles: by which means they were united to each other, and to their common profession. They became sentinels upon each other's conduct, and securities for each other's character. Thus the seeds he sowed sprang up and flourished, bearing the rich fruits of every grace and virtue. Thus he governed and preserved his numerous societies, watching their improvement with a paternal care, and encouraging them to be faithful to the end.

“But I will not attempt to draw his full character, nor to estimate the extent of his labors and services. They will be best known when he shall deliver up his commission into the hand of his great Master.”

The following description of Mr. Wesley's person, will be agreeable to most readers now; and certainly will be more so, when those who personally knew him are removed to their eternal habitations.

“The figure of Mr. Wesley was remarkable. His stature was low; his habit of body in every period of life, the reverse of corpulent, and expressive of strict temperance, and continual exercise: and notwith-

standing his small size, his step was firm, and his appearance, till within a few years of his death, vigorous and muscular. His face, for an old man, was one of the finest we have seen. A clear, smooth forehead, an aquiline nose, an eye the brightest and most piercing that can be conceived, and a freshness of complexion scarcely ever to be found at his years, and impressive of the most perfect health, conspired to render him a venerable and interesting figure. Few have seen him without being struck with his appearance: and many, who had been greatly prejudiced against him, have been known to change their opinion the moment they were introduced into his presence. In his countenance and demeanor, there was a cheerfulness mingled with gravity; a sprightliness, which was the natural result of an unusual flow of spirits, and yet was accompanied with every mark of the most serene tranquillity. His aspect, particularly in profile, had a strong character of astuteness and penetration.

“In dress, he was a pattern of neatness and simplicity. A narrow plaited stock, a coat with a small upright collar, no buckles at his knees, no silk or velvet in any part of his apparel, and a head as white as snow gave an idea of something primitive and apostolic: while an air of neatness and cleanliness was diffused over his whole person.”

SECTION II.

A SHORT VIEW OF MR. WESLEY'S WRITINGS AND CONTROVERSIES.

MR. Wesley's writings, like his other labors, in the design and execution correspond with the general review of his character before given. He never wrote merely to please, or to get money. His object constantly was, to inform the understanding, and mend the heart: to discourage vice, and promote virtue. He never published anything with a view to promote a party-spirit. A great degree of candor and liberality runs through all his publications; and in matters of mere speculation, he endeavored to show the necessity of christian love, and mutual forbearance among those who differ in opinion. In his controversies, he combated opinions, not men. And this he did, in general, with great moderation. He maintained, that even right opinions, make but a small part of religion: that, a man may hold the truth in unrighteousness, and therefore perish with the greater condemnation. But, a man whose heart, from a living faith in Christ operating as a practical principle, is influenced to the love of God and man, and whose life is correspondent to it, cannot err dangerously, though he may hold some erroneous opinions. And he thought, that we ought to contend for this christian temper and practice, much more earnestly, than for any speculative notions, not essentially necessary

to obtain them. This made him earnest to contend for practical truth; and had a happy influence on all his writings.

I do not mean to enter into a critical review of Mr. Wesley's writings; this would far exceed my present limits. I intend only to point out the chief of his own works, show his design in publishing them, and how far the execution corresponds with the design. For if an author well and duly accomplishes all he undertakes, it is the utmost that ought to be expected from him.

The following is an abridgment of his own words, in explaining the general design he had in publishing his Notes on the New Testament. "It will be easily discerned—from the Notes themselves, that they were not principally designed for men of learning, who are provided with many other helps; but I write chiefly for plain unlettered men, who understand only their mother-tongue, and yet reverence and love the word of God, and have a desire to save their souls.

"I have endeavored to make the Notes as short as possible, that the Comment may not obscure or swallow up the Text: and as plain as possible in pursuance of my main design, to assist unlearned readers. For this reason I have studiously avoided not only all curious and critical inquiries, and all use of the learned languages, but all such methods of reasoning and modes of expression, as people in common life are unacquainted with. For the same reason, as I rather endeavor to obviate than to propose and answer objections, so I purposely decline going deep into many difficulties, lest I should leave the ordinary reader behind me.

"I once designed to write down, barely what occurred to my own mind—But no sooner was I acquainted with that great light of the christian world, *Bengelius*, than I entirely changed my design, being thoroughly convinced, it might be of more service to the cause of religion, were I barely to translate his *Gnomon Novi Testamenti*, than to write many volumes upon it. Many of his excellent Notes I have therefore translated; many more I have abridged. Those various readings which he has shown to have a vast majority of ancient copies and translations on their side, I have without scruple incorporated with the text; which after his manner, I have divided (though not omitting the common division into the chapters and verses) according to the matter it contains, making a larger or smaller pause, just as the sense requires. And even this, is such an help in many places, as one who has not tried it can scarcely conceive.—I am likewise indebted for some useful observations to Dr. Heylin's Theological Lectures: and for many more to Dr. Guyse, and to the Family Expositor of the late pious and learned Dr. Doddridge.—I cannot flatter myself so far as to imagine that I have fallen into no mistakes in a work of so great difficulty. But my own conscience acquits me of having designedly misrepresented any single passage of Scripture, or of having written one line with a purpose of inflaming the hearts of Chris-

tians against each other. Would to God, that all party names, and unscriptural phrases and forms, which have divided the christian world, were forgot : and that we might all agree to sit down together, as humble, loving disciples, at the feet of our common Master, to hear his word, to imbibe his Spirit, and to transcribe his life in our own."

After such a declaration as this in the Preface, the reader ought not to feel himself disappointed, if he find no deep and learned discussions of abstruse subjects in Mr. Wesley's Notes on the New Testament. They are what he intended they should be, briefly explanatory and practical : but, at the same time, judicious and pertinent. I have sometimes thought, that if most of the very short Notes were inserted in the text by some judicious hand so as to form a paraphrase, and the rest be retained, the work would be more useful to common readers than in its present form.—Mr. Wesley's Notes on the Old Testament, taken chiefly from Henry, and Poole, are not held in the same degree of estimation, as those on the New Testament.

Mr. Wesley's sermons in eight volumes, were written in the same spirit, and with the same benevolent design as the Notes just mentioned. He tells us in the Preface, "I design plain truth for plain people. Therefore, of set purpose I abstain from all nice and philosophical speculations, from all perplexed and intricate reasonings ; and as far as possible from even the show of learning, unless in sometimes citing the original Scripture. Nothing appears here in an elaborate, elegant, or rhetorical dress. I mention this, that curious readers may spare themselves the labor of seeking for what they will not find."—The first four volumes were written in the early part of Methodism : several of the sermons being preached before the University of Oxford, while he held his Fellowship. The subjects are important, and the discourses written with great animation and strength of language.

The last four volumes were written chiefly for the Arminian Magazine, and collected and republished in 1788. These are generally more practical than the others ; and have been admired for their composition, and for the simplicity, accuracy, and ease, of the style in which they are written.

His "Appeals to Men of Reason and Religion," have great merit. The pious and learned Dr. Doddridge intimates, that he read them with great emotion ; and tells us, that having gone through them, he wrote on the back, "How forcible are RIGHT WORDS." Mr. Wesley wrote them in the fulness of his heart, viewing and lamenting the wretched state of the world with regard to religion and morality. It is almost impossible for any well-disposed, unprejudiced person to read them, without strongly feeling the force and justness of the observations they contain : and they have been the means of convincing some, even men of learning, who before were utterly opposed to the Methodists.

Mr. Wesley's treatise on "Original Sin," is, perhaps, the most

labored performance that he published. He knew, and respected the abilities and character of Dr. Taylor, his opponent. He bestowed much time and attention in a careful investigation of the subject; but avoided entering into minute metaphysical disquisitions. He knew that nothing could be affirmed in this way of reasoning, however true, but what another might deny with some degree of plausibility. His treatise therefore is, an animated defence of the orthodox doctrine, in a deduction from the actual state of morality in all ages, and under every kind of restraint from evil that has been imposed on mankind: or, as he expresses it, "from Scripture, reason, and experience." And if we may be allowed the same mode of reasoning in morals, which the most approved philosophers have adopted in explaining the system of the world; if, from an uniform series of facts, we may deduce a certain *principle* sufficient to account for them, then Mr. Wesley has proved his point beyond contradiction. It seems as if Dr. Taylor had felt the full force of this way of reasoning, as he never would answer Mr. Wesley, and always spoke of him with respect.

In historical compositions Mr. Wesley did not excel. His general habit of generalizing and reducing to a few heads, every subject of which he treated; and the too great confidence he had, in the *authority* of his own assertions when he himself was convinced, in some degree indisposed him to enter into that detail of evidence from facts, so highly necessary to establish a general principle in history and biography. His works, therefore, of this kind, have not the same merit as his other compositions.

In none of his publications, are instruction and entertainment more happily combined, than in the work entitled, "A Survey of the Wisdom and Goodness of God in the Creation." This was first published in two volumes; and a gentleman, then a student at Oxford, informed me, that taking a few copies with him, as presents to some of the principal persons in the University, they expressed a high degree of satisfaction in the work: and Mr. Wesley received letters from them to the same purpose. This work was afterwards enlarged, and published in five volumes, in 1784. In the fourth volume is a translation of Bonnet's "*Contemplations de la Nature*," a work highly elegant and instructive. Mr. Wesley could not have made a better choice, as it perfectly corresponds with the general design of his own publication. In the fifth volume. Mr. Wesley has given an extract of Mr. Deuten's "*Enquiry into the Origin of the Discoveries attributed to the Moderns*." This work was scarcely known in England, even to the learned, when Mr. Wesley published this extract from it: and is but little known at present. It is certainly ingenious, and contains a great deal of curious matter. But I am astonished that Mr. Wesley could think Mr. Deuten's reasonings and deductions from many passages of the ancients, are at all

admissible. In what relates to my own profession, I must acknowledge, that I find some degree of resolution necessary to read some of them with patience. This extract might have been well spared, as it is not very interesting to common readers; and but ill accords with the design and title of his publication.

Mr. Wesley's *Survey of the Wisdom of God in the Creation*, was not intended as a history of the present state of philosophy; nor as an introduction to the philosophical systems that have prevailed, or do now prevail, though he gives a little sketch of them: but as a general view of the most useful and remarkable things in natural history, and an illustration, for common use, of the wisdom and goodness of the Creator. "Considered in this light, it is well entitled to public approbation: and the moral reflections it contains, are as much distinguished by their justness and elegance, as by their utility." Upon the whole, it is the most useful christian compendium of philosophy in the English language.

He wrote a very great number of pamphlets on various subjects: among the rest was one entitled, "Thoughts on Slavery." He was one of the earliest writers on this subject, which has since undergone so complete an investigation; without, as yet, obtaining for the slaves that redress which justice and mercy demand. He has treated it, as might be expected from his general character, in a moral and religious view; but with great spirit and impartiality, and the pamphlet does him great credit. It has been supposed, that this tract had a powerful influence on some of the American States, in their late regulations concerning the trade to Africa.

In controversy, Mr. Wesley did certainly excel. Few have equalled him, either in skill, freedom from logomachy, or in the moderation and christian temper which every where appeared on these occasions. It does not seem, that he was fond of controversy, at least for more than thirty years before his death. He calls it in one place, if I rightly recollect, "heavy work, yet sometimes necessary to be done." Among his controversial pieces, his "Predestination calmly considered," is of distinguished excellence. "It is a model of controversy, clear and cogent; concise and argumentative; and the most convincing, because the spirit in which it is written, is as amiable as the reasoning is unanswerable. Perhaps there is not in the English language, a treatise which contains in so small a compass, so full and masterly a refutation of the principle it opposes. It does great credit to his judgment, that he so eagerly espoused, and so ably defended the mild and moderate system of Arminius."*

* Few persons among the Calvinists, seem to have any just notion of the opinion of Arminius, on the subject of Free Grace; and therefore continually misrepresent it. Mr Wesley was a true Arminian; and I have shown in the Discourse delivered at his Funeral that he held the doctrine of Free Grace, as fully as any Calvinist, though in a moral and scriptural sense.

Mr. Wesley entered the list of controversy against Dr. Lavington, bishop of Exeter, Dr. Warburton, bishop of Gloucester, Dr. Middleton, Dr. Free, Dr. Taylor, of Norwich; and several others: in all of which he acquitted himself with honor, and gained credit to his cause. But the most virulent, vulgar, and abusive of his opponents, were some of the defenders of Calvinism; at the head of whom stood Mr. Toplady: a man, not wholly destitute of abilities, but, in his opposition to Mr. Wesley, greatly deficient in the christian temper, and the manners of a gentleman. Not content with writing against him in the most scurrilous language, he assiduously collected anecdotes and stories to the prejudice of Mr. Wesley's character; and not only mentioned them in private, but committed them to paper, and circulated them among his friends. I am informed, there are letters now in the hands of his friends in London, which contain some of these *sweet morsels* of scandal, and that his friends intend to publish them. But if the public consider the bitterness with which Mr. Toplady collected these stories, and how easy it is for a man of his temper to collect as many as he wants, manufactured according to his own taste, against any man living (when the authors are secure against any legal prosecution,) they certainly will not think that any charges coming from so suspicious a quarter and in so questionable a shape, against a man who lived and died as Mr. Wesley did, deserve the least degree of credit. I understand, indeed, that some charges in these letters, are as improbable on the face of them, as they are false in fact: and if Mr. Toplady's friends have any regard for his memory, they will totally suppress them; as it surely is sufficient for a man to propagate slander with zeal and diligence while he lives, without his friends, by a mistaken zeal, making him do so after he is dead.

After Mr. Toplady's death, a woman came to Mr. Wesley, and related several things, as from her own personal knowledge, injurious to his character; she said some unpleasant things concerning the manner of his death, which, as appears since on good authority, were false. Mr. Wesley, very imprudently, related in private conversation some things she had told him, supposing them to be true. What he had said, was soon reported to Mr. Toplady's friends, who publicly called on Mr. Wesley for the proof of his assertions. Mr. Wesley made no reply: and the Calvinists immediately charged him with *inventing* the story, as well as propagating it. But of this Mr. Wesley was incapable. Mr. Pawson, the present Assistant in London, was with Mr. Wesley when the woman came and told him what he afterwards imprudently related. Mr. Pawson's public and private character for more than thirty years, will not admit a doubt concerning the truth of his testimony. Mr. Wesley is not to be justified in reporting to others, the story he was told; but he was not so guilty as the Calvinists wished him to appear to the world. This

affair shows us, how easily stories injurious to public characters may be propagated; and should lessen our confidence in them. Let us suppose that Mr. Wesley and Mr. Toplady, have both obtained mercy: and let us not keep alive their differences here; while we may charitably hope, that they, now above, are both praising and adoring their Creator and Redeemer together in harmony and love!

Mr. Wesley as an author, has been blamed for his numerous extracts from the writings of others. The fact is true: but the blame supposed, does not, I apprehend, attach to it. He supposed that the works from which he made extracts were the property of the public and that the extracts he made might be useful to the Methodists, who probably would never see the originals. And further, he did not make his extracts in any clandestine way, or for the sake of lucre. All the profits of his books only passed through his hands to the relief of the poor. The Rev. Mr. Jones, in his memoirs of the late pious and excellent Dr. Horne, has charged Mr. Wesley with selling a work of his: I suppose he means his tract on the Trinity. But this is a mistake. Mr. Wesley recommended that tract, because he approved of it; but he never reprinted, or sold it in any form. Mr. Charles Wesley composed some hymns on the Trinity, in which he made use of some texts of Scripture quoted by Mr. Jones in the work above mentioned: but surely this was not reprinting his pamphlet, in any sense whatever. I was sorry to see in so respectable a writer as Mr. Jones, a sourness and disposition to find fault, every now and then break out, in spite of all his endeavors to appear candid and liberal.

Mr. Wesley's works were printed together in 1774, in thirty-two volumes,* but very incorrectly. He was a laborious and useful writer; and his name will descend to posterity, with no small share of respectability and applause. I shall conclude this section in the words of a writer of his life; "If usefulness be excellence; if public good is the chief object of attention in public characters; and if the greatest benefactors to mankind are most estimable, Mr. John Wesley will long be remembered as one of the best of men, as he was for more than fifty years, the most diligent and indefatigable."

* Not including his Philosophy, or Notes on the Old and New Testament.

SECTION III.

STATING MR. WESLEY'S NOTIONS OF THE RELATIVE SITUATION OF HIS SOCIETIES, TO OTHER RELIGIOUS BODIES OF PEOPLE IN THIS KINGDOM; AND OF THE TRUE CHARACTER AND OFFICE OF THE METHODIST PREACHERS.

No man could understand the nature and design of the Methodist societies so well as Mr. Wesley; as he was the chief instrument in raising them, and governed them for more than forty years by rules which he himself made for that purpose. He has declared again and again, in the most express terms, that the design was not to form a new party in the nation; not to form the societies into independent churches, or to draw away those who became Methodists, from their former religious connexions. The only intention was, to rouse all parties, the members of the church in particular, to an holy jealousy and a spiritual emulation; and to assist them as far as possible, in promoting christian experience, and practical religion through the land. The design was disinterested and noble; and every part of the Methodist economy exactly corresponded with the professed design, which showed the sincerity of Mr. Wesley's declarations. The preachers were itinerant, which rendered them incapable, had they been otherwise qualified, of performing the duties of settled pastors to the societies; the times of preaching, and of other meetings, were so ordered, as not to interfere with the times of public worship in the church, or among the Dissenters. The whole economy was formed, with wonderful consistency in all its parts, to be a blessing indiscriminately to all parties. While this economy remained inviolate, it was of wonderful use. It was highly pleasing to see rigid Churchmen, and equally rigid Dissenters of all denominations, assembled together in a Methodist preaching-house; hearing the truths of the gospel preached, and each feeling the beneficial influence of them on their own hearts. This tended gradually to lessen their prejudices against each other; and however they might still differ, as to modes of worship, it brought them nearer together in christian charity and brotherly love. And every candid man must acknowledge, that since the Methodists have generally prevailed, the violence of party spirit, in matters of religion, has, in equal proportion, been diminished. I sincerely pray God, that the Methodists may continue in their *original* situation, and never become the means of re-kindling the flame of party zeal. This relative situation of the societies, the members of which still held their former religious connexions, Mr. Wesley calls their *peculiar* glory. "It is a new thing," says he, "upon the earth. Revolve all the histories of the church from the earliest ages, and you will find, whenever there was a great work of God in any particular city or nation, the subjects of that work, soon said to their

neighbors, 'Stand by yourselves, for we are holier than you.' As soon as ever they separated themselves, either they retired into deserts, or at least formed parties, into which none were admitted but such as subscribed both to their judgment and practice. But with the Methodists, it is quite otherwise. They are not a sect or party. They do not separate from the religious community to which they at first belonged. And I believe one reason why God is pleased to continue my life so long, is to confirm them in their present purpose; not to separate from the Church." See the *Arminian Magazine* for 1790.

Mr. Wesley has very explicitly described, both the character and office of a Methodist preacher, in a sermon which he sometimes preached at the Conference, before the preachers then assembled. His text was Hebrews v. iv. "No man taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron." In this discourse he has clearly shown, that the office of a priest, was totally distinct and separate from the office of a preacher or expounder of God's word and will, sometimes called a prophet. That from Adam to Noah, and from Noah to Moses, the first-born in every family was the priest, by virtue of his primogeniture: but any other of the family might be a prophet, or expounder of God's will to the people. In the time of Moses, the priesthood was restricted to the tribe of Levi; while the preachers or expounders of God's law might be, and afterwards were of different tribes. In the New Testament, these expounders of the law, are called *γραμματοί*, or scribes: but few, if any of them, were priests.

The Lord Jesus Christ, the great High Priest of our profession, sent out Apostles and Evangelists, to proclaim the glad-tidings of peace to all the world. Afterwards, pastors were appointed to preside over, and to build up in the faith, the churches that were formed. "But," says Mr. Wesley, "I do not find, that ever the office of an evangelist, was the same with that of a pastor frequently called a bishop. I cannot prove from any part of the New Testament, or from any author of the three first centuries, that the office of an evangelist, gave any man a right to act as a pastor or bishop. I believe these offices were considered as quite distinct from each other, till the time of Constantine."

Mr. Wesley then goes on to observe, that among the Presbyterians; in the Church of England, and even among the Roman Catholics, the office of an evangelist or teacher, does not imply that of a pastor, to whom peculiarly belongs the administration of the sacraments. All Presbyterian churches, that of Scotland in particular, license men to preach throughout the whole kingdom, before they are ordained. And it is never understood that this appointment to preach, gives them any right to administer the sacraments. "Likewise," says he, "in our own church, persons may be authorized to preach, yea, may be Doctors in Divinity, as Dr. Atwood, at Oxford, was when I resided

there, who are not ordained at all : and consequently have no right to administer the Lord's supper. Yea, even in the Church of Rome itself, if a lay-brother believes 'he is called to go a mission, as it is termed, he is sent out, though neither priest nor deacon, to execute *that* office, and not the other." And Mr. Wesley declares that he and his brother considered the lay-preachers in the light of evangelists, or preachers only, when they received them as helpers in the work, or they never should have admitted them.

That there were itinerant preachers in the primitive church, who travelled from place to place preaching the gospel without interfering with the duties of the established pastors, does not admit of much doubt. We may venture to say, that one part of the Methodist economy approached nearer to this primitive practice, than any thing which has taken place in the christian church since the days of the Apostles. I have long been persuaded, that no religious establishment, whether national or otherwise, ever did, or ever will, keep up the original spirit of its institution without an itinerant ministry connected with it. This however is certain, that the Church of England, of which most of the Methodists are members, might have received a vast accession of strength from the labors of the Methodist preachers among the middling and lower orders of the people, had the rulers of that church understood in time, how to have estimated them. At present it is not probable, that either the bishops, or the clergy in general, will know or believe what advantages they might have gained from the labors of the Methodist preachers (if numbers of pious people be an advantage) till their losses have fully convinced them.

Notwithstanding Mr. Wesley's ordinations, it is manifest that he had no intention or wish, that the great body of the people should separate from the church or change their relative situation to other denominations of Christians in the land. This appears evident from the following paper which he wrote in December, 1789 ; and from the extracts from his last Journal, which I shall subjoin.

"1. From a child I was taught to love and reverence the Scripture, the oracles of God : and next to these, to esteem the primitive fathers, the writers of the three first centuries. Next after the primitive church, I esteemed our own, the Church of England, as the most scriptural national church in the world. I therefore, not only assented to all the doctrines, but observed all the rubric in the liturgy : and that with all possible exactness, even at the peril of my life.

"2. In this judgment, and with this spirit, I went to America, strongly attached to the Bible, the primitive church, and the Church of England, from which I would not vary in one jot or tittle on any account whatever. In this spirit I returned as regular a clergyman as any in the three kingdoms : till after not being permitted to preach in the churches, I was constrained to preach in the open air.

"3. Here was my first *irregularity*. And it was not voluntary,

but constrained. The second was *extemporary* prayer. This likewise I believed to be my bounden duty, for the sake of those who desired me to watch over their souls. I could not in conscience refrain from it: neither from accepting those, who desired to serve me as sons in the gospel.

“ 4. When the people joined together, simply to help each other to heaven, increased by hundreds and thousands, still they had no more thought of leaving the Church than of leaving the kingdom. Nay, I continually and earnestly cautioned them against it: reminding them, that we were a part of the Church of England, whom God had raised up, not only to save our own souls, but to enliven our neighbors, those of the Church in particular. And at the first meeting of all our preachers in Conference, in June, 1744, I exhorted them to keep to the Church, observing, that this was our peculiar glory, not to form any new sect, but abiding in our own Church, to do to all men all the good we possibly could.

“ 5. But as more Dissenters joined with us, many of whom were much prejudiced against the Church, these, with or without design, were continually infusing their own prejudices into their brethren. I saw this, and gave warning of it from time to time, both in private and in public. And in the year 1758, I resolved to bring the matter to a fair issue. So I desired the point might be considered at large whether it was expedient for the Methodists to leave the Church? The arguments on both sides were discussed for several days; and at length we agreed, without a dissenting voice, ‘It is by no means expedient, that the Methodists should leave the Church of England.’”

“ 6. Nevertheless, the same leaven continued to work in various parts of the kingdom. The grand argument (which in some particular cases must be acknowledged to have weight) was this: ‘The minister of the parish wherein we dwell, neither lives nor preaches the gospel. He walks in the way to hell himself, and teaches his flock to do the same. Can you advise them to attend his preaching?’ I cannot advise them to it. ‘What then can they do, on the Lord’s day, suppose no other Church be near? Do you advise them to go to a Dissenting meeting? or to meet in their own preaching-house?’ Where this is really the case, I cannot blame them if they do. Although therefore I earnestly oppose the general separation of the Methodists from the Church, yet I cannot condemn such a partial separation, in this particular case. I believe to separate thus far from these miserable wretches, who are the scandal of our Church and nation, would be for the honor of our Church, as well as to the glory of God.

“ 7. And this is no way contrary to the profession which I have made above these fifty years. I never had any design of separating from the Church. I have no such design now. I do not believe the Methodists in general design it, when I am no more seen. I do and

will do all that is in my power to prevent such an event. Nevertheless, in spite of all I can do, many of them will separate from it: (although I am apt to think not one half, perhaps not a third of them.) These will be so bold and injudicious as to form a separate party, which consequently will dwindle away into a dry, dull, separate party. In flat opposition to these, I declare once more, that I live and die a member of the Church of England: and that none who regard my judgment or advice will ever separate from it.

JOHN WESLEY.”

Extracts from the late Reverend John Wesley's last Journal.

1786—July 25—Page 9. “Our Conference began at Bristol; about eighty preachers attended. On Tuesday, in the afternoon, we permitted any of the society to be present: and weighed what was said about separating from the Church. But we all determined to continue therein, without one dissenting voice. And I doubt not but this determination will stand, at least till I am removed into a better world.

1786—August 25—Page 21. “I went to Brentford, but had little comfort there. The society is almost dwindled to nothing. What have we gained by separating from the Church here? Is not this a good lesson for others?

1787—January 2—Page 26. “I went over to Deptford; but, it seemed, I was got into a den of lions. Most of the leading men of the society were mad for separating from the Church. I endeavored to reason with them, but in vain; they had neither sense nor even good manners left. At length, after meeting the whole society, I told them, ‘If you are resolved, you may have your services in Church hours. But remember! From that time you will see my face no more.’ This struck deep; and from that hour I have heard no more of separating from the Church.

1787—November 4—Page 85. “London: The congregation was, as usual, large and serious. But there is no increase in the society. So that we have profited nothing by having our services in Church hours; which some imagined would have done wonders. I do not know that it has done more good any where in England. In Scotland, I believe it has.

1788—August 4—Page 122. “London. One of the most important points considered at this Conference was, that of leaving the Church. The sum of a long conversation was, That, in a course of fifty years, we had, neither premeditatedly nor willingly, varied from it in one article, either of doctrine or discipline. 2d. That we were not yet conscious of varying from it in any point of doctrine. 3d. That we have, in a course of years, out of necessity, not choice, slowly and warily varied in some points of discipline, by preaching in the fields, by extempore prayer, by employing lay-preachers, by forming and regulating societies, and by holding yearly Conferences.

But we did none of these things till we were convinced we could no longer omit them but at the peril of our souls.

1789—July 3—Page 162. “Our little Conference began in Dublin, and ended Tuesday the 7th. On this I observe, 1st. I never had between forty and fifty such preachers together in Ireland before: all of them we had reason to hope alive to God, and earnestly devoted to his service. 2d. I never saw such a number of preachers before, so unanimous in all points, particularly as to leaving the Church, which none of them had the least thought of. It is no wonder that there has been this year so large an increase of the society.”

SECTION IV.

A VIEW OF THE INCREASE OF THE METHODISTS IN GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND, FOR THE LAST THIRTY YEARS: WITH A FEW OBSERVATIONS ON THE INFLUENCE OF METHODISM.

It has already been observed, that the minutes of Conference have been printed every year: but it was not, so far as I can find, till 1765, that the stations of the preachers were inserted in them. And it does not appear, that any regular account of the number of people in the societies through the three kingdoms, was obtained till 1767. From the Minutes of the yearly Conference since these dates, I have been enabled to draw up the following table; showing the increase of the itinerant preachers, and of the members of the Methodist societies, till the last Conference in 1795.

| Years. | No. of itinerant Preachers. | People in the Societies. |
|----------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1765 | 92 | |
| 1767 | 104 | 25,911. |
| 1770 | 122 | 29,046. |
| 1775 | 138 | 38,150. |
| 1780 | 172 | 43,830. |
| 1785 | 206 | 52,433. |
| 1790 | 293 | 71,568. |
| 1795 | 357 | 83,368. |

This increase of the Methodists, is, I apprehend, much beyond the increase of any other denomination of Christians, which have ever appeared in this or any other country, since the days of the Apostles, not immediately supported by the state or civil power. Prudence would direct, that in every large associated body of Christians, the number of people should increase in a greater proportion than the preachers among them: because one man may preach to a congregation of a thousand persons, as well, or better, than if it consisted only of one hundred. But we may observe among the Methodists,

that the preachers have increased in a greater proportion than the people. The reason of this is evident enough, to those who have carefully attended to the governing principles of the ruling preachers among them. They have been afraid lest the local preachers should acquire any great degree of influence in the societies where they reside; and have increased the number of itinerants, that the local preachers might be thrown into the shade, and be kept as much as possible from preaching in the principal congregations. This, in my opinion, is both unjust, and bad policy. The local preachers are a useful body of people: the work could never have been carried on among the Methodists to the extent it has, without them. Nor could the societies at present, be regularly supplied with preaching without their assistance, not to mention, that the itinerants themselves are taken from this body. And if any of the local preachers have superior talents to command a congregation, or to acquire influence by their usefulness, who receives the benefit? Certainly not the local preachers, whose labor is gratis; but the itinerants. It is indeed evident, that if this practice of the itinerants be pushed much further, the head will become too heavy for the body to carry.

Curiosity has led many persons to conjecture, what could be the reasons of the rapid increase of Methodism. No doubt but several circumstances, by which the Methodists have been peculiarly distinguished from all other denominations of Christians, have had a considerable influence on their increase. Their being of no party, but holding a friendly relation to all: the itinerancy of the preachers: their times of preaching: their class and band meetings, &c. &c. But the artless simplicity, the zeal and integrity, of the preachers at their setting out to travel; and their manner of preaching, have, under the blessing of God, had the most extensive influence on their affairs.— They not only preached the grand truths of the gospel, but they brought them home to every man's actual state and condition, however ignorant or wretched. They showed the necessity of repentance to prepare the heart for Christ; the necessity of faith in him, to be personally interested in the benefits of his death; and then urge the necessity of going on to purity of heart, and holiness in all manner of conversation. They constantly spoke of these things in this order, and almost in every discourse. The people rapidly emerged out of darkness into light, learned how to judge of their own spiritual state, and of the degrees of christian experience; and by the influence of Divine grace, were happily led on through the different stages of the christian life.

It is not necessary to add much on the general tendency of Methodism. This will appear evident, from what has already been said in this volume. Methodism has had some influence in meliorating the spirit of controversy; it has diffused knowledge, and promoted industry and good order among the lower classes of the people: it has

enlightened the most ignorant, and reformed the most wicked. These effects, through the blessing of God on the labors of the preachers, have been so conspicuous in many parts of the kingdom, that the bitterest enemies of Methodism, have been forced to acknowledge them. It has had a happy influence on the temporal concerns of the Methodists themselves; many, who before were in want, can now afford to contribute liberally for the relief of others. In judging of the tendency of Methodism, we are not to look at the conduct of two or three preachers, or of a few individuals in the societies, but at its general influence on the great body of the people. Thousands and tens of thousands of these, have been ornaments of their christian profession: and have died rejoicing in God their Saviour: many tens of thousands are now running the christian race set before them, endeavoring to be followers of the humble, holy Jesus. The Methodists are not angels, but they are in general what they profess to be, pious Christians, striving to escape the pollutions that are in the world, and to save their own souls.—May Methodism be preserved in its *original* integrity: may what is wrong in the general system, be corrected; and what is praiseworthy be established and improved: and may its beneficial influence on the people, extend wider and wider, till, “the whole earth be filled with His glory,” who is the Author of all our mercies. Amen.

THE END.

