

This year is memorable in the history of Methodism, for having given birth to a long and very ardent controversy on the doctrines of Calvinism. It took its rise from the publication of the Minutes of the Conference, in which it was determined, that, in some particulars then pointed out, the Preachers had "leaned too much to Calvinism." The fact was, that Messrs. Whitefield and Howell Harris, the early co-adjutors of Mr. Wesley, had become Calvinists; but the affection subsisting between this little band was so strong, that they all agreed in preaching what was at the time most needed, the doctrine of salvation by faith; avoiding all peculiarities of opinion as much as possible in their sermons. And Mr. Wesley's anxiety to maintain unity of effort as well as affection with Mr. Whitefield, led him also in 1743 to concede to his calvinistic views as far as possible. When the leaders had approached so near 'the very edge of Calvinism' on one side, and 'of Antinomianism' also, with safety, it was not to be wondered at that others should overstep the line. A strong tide of Antinomianism had set in, and threatened great injury to practical godliness. The subject was one of importance and in consequence was brought before his conference of Preachers as meriting their attention. The publication of these Minutes awakened a great outcry, and much bad feeling among those of the Geneva confession. The Hon. and Rev. Walter Shirley, Chaplain to the Countess of Huntingdon, issued a Circular calling upon all the serious clergy and several others, to go in a body to the ensuing Conference, and "insist upon a formal recantation of the said Minutes, and, in case of a refusal, to sign and publish, their protest against them." Mr. Fletcher, undertook a defence of the Minutes; but not content with evangelizing the apparently *legal* Minutes, and vindicating the doctrinal consistency and orthodoxy of Mr. Wesley, he incidentally discussed various other points of the quin-quarticular controversy; when he as well as Mr. Wesley, was quickly assailed by a number of replies not couched in the most courteous style. Mr. Fletcher's skill and admirable temper so fully fitted him to conduct the dispute which had arisen, that Mr. Wesley left the contest chiefly to him, and calmly pursued his labours, and the whole issued in a series of publications from the pen of the Vicar of Madeley, which as a whole, can scarcely be too highly praised or valued.

In the midst of these controversies and cares, the societies continued to spread and flourish under the influence of the zeal and piety of the Preachers, animated by the ceaseless activity and regular visits of Mr. Wesley, who, though now upwards of seventy years of age, seemed to possess his natural strength unabated. His thoughts however frequently turned with anxiety to some arrangement for the government of the Connexion after his death, and not being satisfied that the plan he had sketched out a few years before, would provide for a case of so much consequence he directed his attention to Mr. Fletcher, and warmly invited him to come forth into the work and to allow himself to be introduced by him as the future head of the connexion. Mr. Fletcher could not be prevailed upon to undertake so great a responsibility,