

was now at an end, and that all power, with respect to religious matters, was vested in him alone.

7. The ministry of the divine Saviour was confined to the Jews; nor while he remained upon earth, did he permit his apostles or disciples to extend their labours beyond this distinguished nation. At the same time, if we consider the illustrious acts of mercy and omnipotence, that were performed by Christ, it will be natural to conclude, that his fame must have been very soon spread abroad in other countries. We learn from writers of no small note, that Abgarus, king of Edessa, being seized with a severe and dangerous illness, wrote to our blessed Lord to implore his assistance; and that Jesus not only sent him a gracious answer, but also accompanied it with his picture, as a mark of his esteem for that pious prince. These letters are still extant. But they are justly looked upon as fictitious by most writers, who also go yet farther, and treat the whole story of Abgarus as entirely fabulous, and unworthy of credit. I will not pretend to assert the genuineness of these letters, but I see no reason of sufficient weight to destroy the credibility of the whole story, which is supposed to give occasion to them.

8. A great number of the Jews, struck with those illustrious marks of a divine authority and power, that shone forth in the ministry and actions of Christ, regarded him as the Son of God, the true Messiah. The rulers of the people, and more especially the chief priests and Pharisees, whose licentiousness and hypocrisy he censured with a noble and generous freedom, laboured with success, by the help of their passions, to extinguish in their breasts the conviction of his celestial mission; or, at least, to suppress the effects it was adapted to produce upon their conduct. Fearing also lest the ministry of Christ should tend to diminish their credit, and to deprive them of the advantages they derived from the impious abuse of their authority in religious matters; they laid snares for his life, which, for a considerable time, were without effect. They succeeded, at length, by the infernal treason of an apostate disciple, by the treachery of Judas, who discovered the retreat which his divine Master had chosen for the purposes of meditation and repose, and thus delivered him into the merciless hands of a brutal soldiery.

9. In consequence of this, Jesus was first brought before the Jewish high priest and sanhedrim, before whom he was accused of having violated the law, and blasphemed the majesty of God. Dragged from thence to the tribunal of Pilate the Roman prætor, he was there charged with seditious enterprises, and with treason against Cæsar. Both these accusations were so evidently false, and destitute even of every appearance of truth, that they must have been rejected by any judge, who acted upon the principles of common equity. But the clamours of an enraged populace, set on by the impious instigations of their priests and rulers, intimidated Pilate, and engaged him, though with the utmost reluctance, and in opposition to the dictates of his conscience, to pronounce a capital sentence against Christ. The divine Saviour behaved with inexpressible dignity under this heavy trial. As the end of his mission was to make expiation for the sins of men, so when all things were ready, and when he had finished the work of his glorious ministry, he placidly submitted to the death of the cross, and with a serene and voluntary resignation, committed his spirit into the hands of the Father.

10. After Jesus had remained three days in the sepulchre, he resumed that life which he had voluntarily laid down; and, rising from the dead, declared to the universe, by that triumphant act, that the divine justice was satisfied, and the paths of salvation and immortality rendered accessible to the human race. He conversed with his disciples during forty days after his resurrection, and employed that time in instructing them more fully concerning the nature of his kingdom. Many wise and important reasons prevented his showing himself publicly at Jerusalem, to confound the malignity and unbelief of his enemies. He contented himself with manifesting the certainty of his glorious resurrection to a sufficient number of faithful and credible witnesses; foreseeing, perhaps, that if he appeared in public, those malicious unbelievers, who had formerly attributed his miracles to the power of magic, would now represent his resurrection, as a phantom or vision, produced by the influence of infernal powers. After having remained upon earth, during the space of time

before mentioned, and given to his disciples a divine commission to preach the glad tidings of salvation and immortality to the human race, he ascended into heaven, in their presence, and resumed the enjoyment of that glory which he was possessed of before the worlds were created.

BIOGRAPHY.

THE LIFE OF THE REV. JOHN WESLEY, A.M.

[CONTINUED.]

The extraordinary manner in which some persons were frequently affected under Mr. Wesley's preaching, as well as that of his coadjutors, now created much discussion, and to many gave great offence. Some were seized with trembling, under a painful conviction of sin; others sunk down and uttered loud and piercing cries; and others fell into a kind of agony. In some instances, while prayer was offered for them, they rose up with a sudden change of feeling, and testified that they had "redemption through the blood of Christ, even the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace." Mr. Samuel Wesley, who denied the possibility of attaining to a knowledge of the forgiveness of sins, treated these things, in a correspondence with his brother, alternately with sarcasm and serious severity, and particularly attacked the doctrine of assurance. In this controversy, Mr. John Wesley attaches no weight whatever to these outward agitations; but contends that he is bound to believe the profession of an inward change made by many, who had been so affected, because that had been confirmed by their subsequent conduct and spirit. On the subject of assurance, both the disputants put forth their logical acuteness; but the result appears to have been, upon the whole, instructive to the elder brother, whose letters soften considerably towards the close of the correspondence. Mr. Samuel Wesley died in the following November.

About this time a disagreement of opinion took place between Mr. Wesley and Mr. Whitefield. Mr. Wesley, being impressed with the strong tendency of the Calvinistic doctrines to produce Antinomianism, published a sermon against absolute predestination, at which Mr. Whitefield, who had some time previously embraced that notion, took offence. A controversy between them, embracing some other points, ensued, which issued in a temporary estrangement, and they laboured from this time independently of each other; their societies in London, Kingswood, and other places, being kept quite separate. A reconciliation, however, took place between Mr. Wesley and Mr. Whitefield some years afterwards, so that they preached in each other's chapels, and Mr. Wesley preached the funeral sermon on Mr. Whitefield's death, at the chapel in Tottenham-court-road, and also at the Tabernacle in Moorfields.

Several preachers, not episcopally ordained, were now employed by Mr. Wesley to assist in the growing work, which already had swelled beyond even his and his brother's active powers suitably to supply with the ministrations of the word of God. Mr. Charles Wesley had discouraged this from the beginning, and even he himself hesitated; but, with John, the promotion of religion was the first concern, and church-order the second, although inferior in consideration to that only. With Charles these views were often reversed. Mr. Wesley, in the year 1741, had to caution his brother against joining the Moravians, after the example of Mr. Gambold, to which he was at that time inclined; and adds, "I am not clear, that brother Maxfield should not expound at Greyhound-lane; nor can I as yet do without him. Our clergymen have increased full as much as the preachers." Mr. Maxfield's preaching had the strong sanction of the Countess of Huntingdon; but so little of design, with reference to the forming of a sect, had Mr. Wesley, in the employment of Mr. Maxfield, that, in his own absence from London, he had only authorized him to pray with the society, and to advise them, as might be needful; and upon his beginning to preach, he hastened back to silence him. On this his mother addressed him: "John, you know what my sentiments have been. You cannot suspect me of favouring readily any thing of this kind. But take care what you do with respect to that young man; for he is as surely called of God to preach, as you are. Examine what have been the fruits

of his preaching, and hear him also yourself." He took advice, and could not venture to forbid him.

His defence of himself on this point may be pronounced irrefutable, and turns upon the disappointment of the hope which he had ever cherished that the parochial clergy would take the charge of those who in different places had been turned to God by his ministry, and that of his fellow-labourers.

"It pleased God," says Mr. Wesley, "by two or three ministers of the Church of England, to call many sinners to repentance, who, in several parts, were undeniably turned from a course of sin to a course of holiness.

"The ministers of the places where this was done ought to have received those ministers with open arms; and to have taken those persons who had just begun to serve God into their particular care; watching over them in tender love, lest they should fall back into the snare of the devil.

"Instead of this, the greater part spoke of these ministers, as if the devil, not God, had sent them. Some repelled them from the Lord's table; others stirred up the people against them, representing them, even in their public discourses, as fellows not fit to live; papists, heretics, traitors; conspirators against their King and country.

"And how did they watch over the sinners lately reformed? Even as a leopard watcheth over his prey. They drove some of them from the Lord's table; to which, till now, they had no desire to approach. They preached all manner of evil concerning them, openly cursing them in the name of the Lord. They turned many out of their work, persuaded others to do so too, and harassed them in all manner of ways.

"The event was, that some were wearied out, and so turned back to the vomit again; and then these good pastors gloried over them, and endeavoured to shake others by their example.

"When the ministers, by whom God had helped them before, came again to those places, great part of their work was to begin again, if it could be begun again; but the relapsers were often so hardened in sin, that no impression could be made upon them.

"What could they do in a case of so extreme necessity, where so many souls lay at stake?

"No clergymen would assist at all. The expedient remained was, to find some one among themselves who was upright of heart, and of sound judgment in the things of God; and to desire him to meet the rest as often as he could, in order to confirm them, as he was able, in the ways of God, either by reading to them, or by prayer, or by exhortation."

This statement may indeed be considered as affording the key to all that, with respect to church-order, may be called irregularity in Mr. Wesley's future proceedings. God had given him large fruits of his ministry in various places; when he was absent from them, the people were "as sheep having no shepherd," or were rather persecuted by their natural pastors, the clergy; he was reduced, therefore, to the necessity of leaving them without religious care, or of providing it for them. He wisely chose the latter; but, true to his own principles, and even prejudices, he carried this no farther than the necessity of the case: the hours of service were in no instance to interfere with those of the Establishment, and at the parish church the members were exhorted to communicate. Thus a religious society was raised up within the national Church, and with this anomaly, that as to all its interior arrangements, as a society, it was independent of its ecclesiastical authority. The irregularity was, in principle, as great when the first step was taken as at any future time. It was a form of practical and partial separation, though not of theoretical dissent; but it arose out of a moral necessity, and existed for some years in such a state, that, had the clergy been disposed to co-operate in this evident revival and spread of true religion, and had the heads of the Church been willing to sanction itinerant labours among its ministers, and private religious meetings among the serious part of the people for mutual edification, the great body of Methodists might have been retained in strict communion with the Church of England.

We have now to follow these apostolic men into still more extended fields of labour, and to contests more formidable. They had sustained many attacks from the press; and some frowns from the authorities of the Church. By mobs they had