

town. But, yearning to live a life of active service to God, he entered the humble rank of a village curate. Yet his heart was ill at ease, for he felt that the Saviour whom he was called to preach was to himself unknown. His church became crowded, and to accommodate the increased congregation, he erected a gallery at his own expense. During this time he made the acquaintance of Thomas Maxfield, Wesley's first lay preacher, and by him was led to more spiritual views of religion. He met one day a humble Methodist farm-labourer, who, unlettered in the learning of schools, was wise in the knowledge of God. From this rustic teacher the Oxford scholar gained a clearer acquaintance with the way of salvation by faith than from the learned divines and bishops of the first university of Europe.

#### HIS PREACHING.

The zeal of the young curate soon began to exceed the bounds of clerical decorum, as regarded in the Church established by law. He preached with increasing fervour, and without the "regulation manuscript." He held special religious services out of church hours, and on week-evenings, in remote parts of his parish. He introduced the singing of the soul-stirring hymns of Watts and Wesley. He was no longer the easy-going card-playing parson, but a "dangorous fanatic," righteous over-much, and, in fact, infected with the pestilent heresy of Methodism, whose doctrines of free grace he proclaimed from the parish pulpit. The over-earnest curate was soon dismissed by his rector, admonished for his "irregularities" by the Bishop of Bath and Wells, and soon expelled from his Church. To receive himself, the hated name of a Methodist was particularly distasteful. He had just obtained his highest degree—that of Doctor of Civil Law. Preference was proffered him by a nobleman of powerful influence. But the authority of conscience was supreme, and he faltered not for a moment in his loyalty to the convictions of his soul. Neither worldly hopes nor ignoble fears could make him swerve from what he deemed the path of duty.

An interview with John Wesley convinced Dr. Coke that for scholarship and saintliness the despised Methodists possessed the very pattern of clergymen. Mr. Wesley thus records his impressions of the Doctor of Law:—"I have had much conversation with him, and a union then began which, I trust, shall never end."

#### HIS PERSECUTIONS.

The zealous curate soon experienced the brunt of persecution. The sentence of his expulsion from the parish church was announced at the close of the morning service in the presence of the congregation; and, as he passed out of the door the bells rang out a sort of rogue's march—by way of a parting salute to the expelled pastor. Cider barrels were broached, and a general rejoicing took place. To a man of his keen sensitiveness the indignity must have been keenly felt.

But the expelled pastor could not be restrained from proclaiming the message of salvation. The next Sunday he preached in the street near the church, immediately after the morning service, and announced that he would preach again the following Sunday. He was warned that it would be at the peril of

his life if he did. "Sundry hampers of stones were brought to the spot, like a park of artillery drawn up on a field marked out for battle." But the Doctor, with that heroic courage which characterized him to the end of his life, was not to be daunted by an exhibition of brute force. He was sustained also by the presence of friends, who stood by him in this hour of peril. Among these were a Miss Edmunds and her brother whose hearts had been touched by the preaching of the persecuted pastor. The brave girl stood on one side of him and the brother on the other. Their bold daring cowed the intended mob, who shrank from their assault and possible murder; and, like Paul before Felix, the feeble unarmed man spoke words of power which made his persecutors tremble.

Notwithstanding this rude treatment Dr. Coke not for a moment hesitated in his purpose. He resolved to cast in his lot with the despised and persecuted Methodists and to espouse the toils and hardships of the life of an itinerant preacher. He was soon preaching in the Old Foundry, London, and to immense multitudes of eager listeners in the public squares. God was opening for him a wider career than addressing a few rustics in an obscure hamlet. He was to become a mighty missionary whose influence was to be felt on earth's remotest shores to the end of time.

Wesley was now in his eighty-first year, and the care of all the churches and his vast correspondence was a burden which he gladly shared with this son in the Gospel, now in the vigour of his thirtieth year. He used to say that Dr. Coke was his right hand. The zealous preaching of the young evangelist often provoked the attacks of mobs. As he stood in a public square, he was assailed with sticks and stones, and his gown torn to shreds. The vicar of the parish, who headed the riot, thought of a more ingenious expedient. "Bring out the fire-engine," he shouted; and the preacher and congregation were soon dispersed by a few volleys of "liquid artillery." It was noticed as a remarkable fact, that within a fortnight that very engine proved powerless to suppress a fire which destroyed a great part of the village.

In the course of his journeys, Dr. Coke revisited his former friends, from which he had been so heartlessly expelled. But the simple rustics found that they had lost their best friend, and welcomed him back with joy. The bells that rang him out chimed merrily at his return. He preached to two thousand people, who flocked to hear him from all the neighbouring villages, and wept over them, as the Saviour wept over Jerusalem. From that day the despised Methodists had a foothold in the parish, and soon after the Doctor had the pleasure of building a Methodist chapel where he had been cast out of the Established Church.

#### HIS JOURNEYINGS.

Dr. Coke was soon to enter upon what might be called his foreign missionary work. On the second day of September, 1784, John Wesley, feeling himself called of God thereto, solemnly set apart Dr. Thomas Coke, to be Superintendent of the Methodist Societies in that country. In three weeks Coke, with two companions, were on their way to America. The voyage

was stormy and tedious, but he redeemed the time by study. He laboured zealously for the conversion of the sailors, on shipboard, and believed that God had given him at least one soul as his reward.

He began ranging through the continent from Massachusetts to Georgia, a true bishop of souls, feeding the flock scattered through the wilderness. He was often exposed to the perils of fording swollen rivers, or crossing rugged mountains. Some of his escapes from danger were very narrow. He met with opposition in the western wilds as well as in an English parish, and records being excluded from an old church to which, nevertheless, cattle and hogs had free access. He bore his testimony boldly against the sin of slavery, and provoked thereby much persecution. One lady offered a mob fifty pounds if they would give the Doctor a hundred lashes. In company with Asbury he visited General Washington at Mount Vernon, to seek his influence in favour of the negroes. But, their Master's business requiring haste, they could not accept an invitation to lodge under the President's roof.

The importance of foreign missions was not then felt in the Churches of Christendom. When Carey, at a meeting of ministers, urged the duty of giving the Gospel to the heathen, the President exclaimed, "sit down, young man, sit down. When God pleases to convert the heathen He will do it without your aid or mine." But already Coke was meditating the vast missionary enterprises which are the glory of Methodism. The first field for the extension of the Gospel, however, that seemed indicated by Providence was Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and Canada. Thither in 1768, Dr. Coke and three fellow-preachers were sent by the English Conference. The voyage lasted thirteen weeks and was almost one continued tempest. The sails were rent, the timbers strained, and, half a wreck, the vessel sprung a leak, and falling on her beam-ends, threatened instant death to all on board. The superstitious captain, attributed his disasters to the presence of the black-coats, and exclaimed, "There is a Jonah on board, a Jonah on board." Rushing to Dr. Coke's cabin, he threw into the sea his books and papers, and seizing the little Doctor, threatened to throw him after them if he were caught praying again. The passengers were put on short rations, and worst of all, the Doctor thought, the supply of candles gave out, so that his hours of study were curtailed. He solaced himself till he lost his books, with reading French, Virgil, and "every day a canto of the English Virgil, Spencer." "With such company," he continues, "I could live comfortably in a tub."

#### IN THE WEST INDIES.

The project of reaching Halifax had to be abandoned, and running before the storm, they reached, on Christmas Day, the port of Antigua, in the West Indies. It was indeed a happy day for the poor blacks of those islands, for it brought them a glad message of redemption—of peace on earth and good-will to men. As Dr. Coke walked up the street of the town, he met a ship-carpenter and local preacher, John Baxter by name, who had under his care a Methodist Society of near two thousand souls, all blacks but ten. How came this native Church in this

far-off tropic isle? Twenty-eight years before, an Antigua planter, Nathaniel Gilbert, heard John Wesley preach in England. The good seed took root in his heart and he brought the precious germs to his island home, where they became the source of West India Methodism. On the death of Gilbert, a pious shipwright took charge of the native Church, which eight years later was found so flourishing.

Dr. Coke ranged from island to island, sowing the seed of the Kingdom in the good and honest ground of those faithful African hearts. On every side the evidence of the quickening power of the leaven of Methodism conveyed by strange means to those scattered islands—by converted soldiers and sailors, by pious freed negroes, and at St. Eustatius by a fugitive slave whose ministry was a marvel of spiritual success. Under the preaching of this black apostle, many of his hearers fell down like dead men to the earth, and multitudes were converted from their idol worship to an intelligent piety. The Dutch officials of the island, however, scourged and imprisoned Black Harry, and passed an edict inflicting thirty-nine lashes on any negro found praying. With a fidelity worthy of the martyr ages, these sable confessors continued steadfast amid these cruel persecutions. Dr. Coke subsequently interceded at the Court of Holland for the religious liberty of the blacks, but, for the time, in vain. Yet he lived to see St. Eustatius a flourishing Wesleyan Mission, and, ten years after, met Harry Black a freed and happy man.

Again and again the zealous evangelist revisited those sunny islands, which seem to have possessed a strange fascination to his mind. And well they might, for no where has the success of missionary effort been more glorious. At Barbadoes, an Irish soldier recognized one of the missionaries as an old pastor, and in a transport of delight threw his arms about his neck. At Jamaica, Dr. Coke received some insults from a number of drunken "gentlemen," but persisted in his labour of preaching the Gospel. Persecution here, as elsewhere, fostered the growth of the Church. The chapel was attacked by a mob, the Bible was hanged to a gibbet, and the Methodists were hooted at by the nickname of "Hallelujahs" in the street. In Bermuda, John Stephenson, for preaching the Gospel to the negroes, was imprisoned six months and fined fifty pounds.

Amid privations, pestilence, shipwrecks, and sometimes bitter persecution, the missionaries toiled on till a free Christian civilization took the place of slavery, superstition, cruelty, and barbarism. Among the devoted labourers in these interesting fields have been our own Dr. Wood, Dr. Douglas, Mr. Cheeseborough, and others well known in Canada. As a result of the work thus inauspiciously begun, Methodism now numbers in those islands twenty-seven missionaries and nearly twenty thousand members.

(To be Continued.)

FIVE THOUSAND two hundred and twenty Sunday-school conventions and institutes and assemblies were held in America during the past year—an average of about 100 a week, or fourteen each day.