

BIOGRAPHY.

REV. THOMAS COKE, LL.D.

[CONCLUDED.]

IN 1805, Dr. Coke entered with Miss Penelope Smith into the "holy estate of matrimony." This lady having an ample fortune left to her own disposal, several years passed away, in the autumn of life, in works of charity, and in deeds of benevolence, which gave daily additional charms to their conjugal felicity. She died in January, 1811, and was interred in the family vault of her husband, in the priory church at Brecon, in Wales.

To the Missions already established, Dr. Coke, soon after his marriage, began to contemplate the expediency of making an addition. This was to send Missionaries into such parts of England as were not included in any regular circuit, and where the inhabitants scarcely ever visited any place of worship. In stating the necessity of establishing this mission, he observes, "When our friends reflect on the vast extent to which the Gospel has been preached through this kingdom within the last twenty years, many of them may be led to wonder why these missions should be thought necessary. But their astonishment will cease when they are informed, that of the eleven thousand parishes which England and Wales contain, perhaps one half of them seldom or never hear the Gospel. In numerous small towns, villages and hamlets, a very considerable part of the inhabitants attend no place of worship whatever, nor once think of entering a religious edifice, except when marriages, baptisms, or funerals occur. It is among people of this description that our Missions have been chiefly established." These home missions were blessed with great spiritual prosperity, and at this day form regular circuits, which have long ceased to be dependent on the Mission Fund.

The history of the Doctor's life in the years 1806, 1807, and 1808, furnishes but few incidents that can claim a place in his biography. He was, however, busily employed during that period in visiting the societies; in attending the Conferences both in England and Ireland; in begging from door to door in behalf of the Wesleyan Missions; and in completing his commentary, &c. &c. His literary labours were suspended in 1808, by an attempt of the Jamaica Legislature to destroy the effect of the mission in that island. Sixteen months was the Doctor detained in London watching the proceedings of colonial influence; and endeavouring to counteract a law, which, if rendered permanent, would exclude the slaves, under severe penalties, from hearing the Gospel. The authorities of the island, aware that so persecuting an enactment would not be sanctioned by the maternal government, delayed as long as possible its transmission, that they might not, till the latest period, be frustrated in their persecuting designs. However, when transmitted, the act was disallowed; and it is with the sincerest pleasure that we remind our fellow subjects, that his late most excellent Majesty George the Third, whose memory is endeared by the most grateful associations to every loyal heart, did ever shew himself the invariable friend of religious toleration, and the noble protector of the persecuted.

Early in 1810, Lord Sidmouth proposed to introduce into Parliament a bill, which, if carried into effect, would have annihilated the plan of itinerant preaching, at a stroke. Anticipating the consequences of this bill, the fears of every religious community were seriously alarmed, especially as its precise object was left undefined, and its principles were not developed. Dr. Coke, however, did not, at first, apprehend the danger which was threatened by this measure. But, in 1811, when its principles were evolved, the whole nation was thrown into such a high state of excitement as to alarm the supporters of the bill. Petitions from all quarters were presented to Parliament, against the odious measure, and it was negatived. Yet, notwithstanding this defeat, certain magistrates, in various parts of the kingdom, gave to the Toleration Act an intolerant interpretation, and endeavoured to make it subservient to all the purposes for which the bill of Lord Sidmouth had been designed. The public mind was again aroused—consultations were held—and, at length, it was determined to petition Parliament

on the subject. Dr. Coke took his share in these consultations; and his readiness to execute the measures proposed, was of considerable service to the general cause; and, through the over-ruling providence of God, a new act was passed by the Imperial Legislature, which not only confirmed, but added new privileges to those formerly guaranteed by the Act of Toleration; and the religious liberty of the subject was thus solemnly confirmed by the national senate.

Though twenty years had now elapsed since the Doctor's attempt to establish a mission in Paris; and the war with France forbade every hope of any early opportunity of repeating the endeavour; yet an opening, ultimately, for the Gospel, to that then morally degraded country, was presented in the case of the French prisoners-of-war, seventy thousands of whom were in the different prison-ships of Britain. On the river Medway there were ten ships, on board of which were confined seven thousand men. The Rev. Mr. Toase, who in 1809 was stationed at Rochester, was invited by the captain of one of these vessels to preach to the prisoners; and conceiving it to be a call of Providence, he went whensoever the duties of his circuit would permit. He was received with thankfulness, and a general desire was expressed in these vessels to have the regular services of the Christian Missionary. The Executive Government, with its usual liberality, gave order, "to permit the Methodist Missionaries to preach to the prisoners;" and this order embraced in its application the various depots throughout the kingdom. The Conference had not, however, the means of providing for so many Missionaries as the circumstances required. Dr. Coke, therefore, offered to become responsible for the whole expense, relying on the divine Providence, and the liberality of a humane and generous public, for reimbursement. From the Medway this mission extended to Portsmouth, to Stapleton, to Norman-cross, to Plymouth, and to Dartmouth; in most of which places the prospects were highly encouraging for the three years it was maintained, until the war ended.

The abolition of the slave-trade, the establishment of a colony at Sierra Leone, and the pressing invitations of some Methodists who resided there, afforded the Doctor another opportunity of extending the Mission cause. He took upon himself the responsibility of the principal part of the first expense of this Mission, namely, to the amount of £600.

In December, 1811, Dr. Coke once more entered upon the marriage state, with a lady of great piety—who, however, was spared to him but twelve months. Deprived of this earthly solace in his declining years, he, at the commencement of 1813, made a solemn pause, and, from an insulated eminence, reviewed those periods of his existence which were gone. He had lived to behold Missions in Ireland, in Wales, in the uncultivated parts of England, in America, in the West Indies, at Gibraltar, and at Sierra Leone. In all he had seen, prosperity attended the word which he had been thus instrumental in planting. But they no longer needed that fostering care, which their infant state had rendered necessary; and, consequently, he found himself prepared to project further plans for the spiritual benefit of the human family.

India, in the early part of his life, Dr. Coke had considered as a region which afforded an ample field for Missionary exertions; and, in 1782, he had actually written a letter to a gentleman in that country, inquiring into the state of morals, the influence of idolatry, the difficulties to be encountered, the probable amount of expense, the prospect of success, and the best plan of procedure, in case the establishment of a Mission were attempted in Asia. Difficulties in the way of such a Mission, then accounted insuperable, gave, under the controul of Providence, another direction to his benevolence and zeal; and fully engaged in the oversight of the different Missions he had originated, India could obtain but a passing, though frequent consideration. Now, however, Providence, whose instrument he was, had, by inscrutable agency, cleared his path. He opened a correspondence with the late Dr. Buchanan, whose valuable remarks on India have made the Christian world his debtor, from whom he received such information as which, in addition to that which he received from other intelligent persons, determined him on making the at-

tempt; and to commence in Ceylon, as the most suitable place: the obstacles to the introduction of Christianity there being fewer, and more easily encountered; than in any other part of India.

Preliminaries being settled, and all the preparation made, Dr. Coke, with Rev. Messrs. Jas. Lynch, William Ault, George Erskine, Wm. M. Harvard, (now of Quebec,) Thomas Squance, Benjamin Clough, and John M-Kenny; and Messrs. James Harvard and Ault, sailed in the Cabalva and Lady Melville, with a fleet of Indiamen and other vessels, under convoy of a line-of-battleship, two frigates, and a sloop of war, on the 30th December, 1813. On February 9th, Mrs. Ault departed this life, in the joyful hope of a glorious resurrection. Dr. Coke writes: "February 10. As we were all at breakfast, an officer of our ship came in, and informed us that several ships had hoisted their flag half-mast high, as a signal of death. Our signal was immediately hoisted; while our company, who had previously known of Mrs. Ault's illness, concluded that the signals were raised on account of her death. This proved to be the case. The signals all continued half-mast high till about half an hour before sunset, when the Lady Melville lifted up her death-signal topmast high, which was followed by all the fleet. This was the signal that the officiating minister (who was Mr. Squance) had begun to read the fifteenth chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians. And when the Lady Melville dropped her signal, the rest of the fleet followed her example, and thus ended the ceremony."

In less than three months from the above date, a similar occasion occurred; but it was in the case of the Doctor himself. The fleet had passed the Cape of Good Hope on the 20th of March, and on the 27th the Isle of France, making their way for Bombay,—when, on the 3d of May, the Doctor's servant, going to call him, as usual, at half-past five o'clock, A.M., he found the mortal remains of this indefatigable and useful servant of the Lord, lifeless, cold, and nearly stiff. The Doctor had complained somewhat a day or two before; but neither himself nor attendants anticipated any serious indisposition, although offers were sincerely made to sit up with him; when, therefore, his death was made known, it paralyzed not only the Missionaries, but the officers of the ship in which they sailed. Apoplexy appears to have been the occasion of his death.

Mysterious, indeed, are the dispensations of Providence; yet time, even, unravels some of them. When intelligence of the justly lamented event reached England, astonishment and grief, largely impregnated with dismaying apprehensions, appeared to pervade the connexion. Perhaps God never more explicitly said to his church than in this instance, "Cease ye from man." Particular instruments are not essential to the promotion of his purposes. He makes one as effectual as another. When, therefore, he had so far graciously employed his servant, he took him to himself, and raised up other instrumentality for the accomplishment of his designs, giving a greater success thereto than was ever anticipated, had the Doctor been spared personally to introduce the work. To Him, as is rightly due, be all the praise and all the glory. Amen.

Of his genuine piety and devotedness to God, Dr. Coke furnished all the evidence which either reason or revelation has taught us to expect in this region of mortality. This was not an evidence arising from a momentary gust of rapture, or from the imposing glare of voluntary humility. It is to be found in all his writings—it is to be discovered in all his letters—it was to be gathered from the spirit which enlivened all his public discourses—and it is recorded in various parts of his journals, in those incidental expressions which register his deep and uninterrupted communion with God. A constant sense of the divine favour supported him under all the trials, the dangers, and the afflictions of life; and prompted him, on almost all occasions, to recommend to others an experimental knowledge of an indwelling God. This was one of the glorious topics on which his soul delighted to dwell. Here he was always at home; and his eloquence never appeared to such advantage as when his tongue expatiated on the love of God, and Christ in us the hope of glory. Through a long and laborious life, he gave ample proof of the power of divine grace to renew the heart; and although removed suddenly, and so far as his work was apparently concerned, myste-