

WESLEY, AND SO-CALLED WESLEYANS.

(From the Southern Cross South Africa.)

The *South African Methodist* devotes four columns of one issue to us. A few weeks before it published, of course 'by request,' a sermon which occupied nine columns. This precious production was (also of course) against the Church. The Editor invites us to a perusal of Wesleyan works, so that our ignorance of Methodist matters may be removed. Considering that we quoted John Wesley himself, surely this is playing it somewhat low down. But as we had a very sincere desire to discover what the "well-known works on the subject" can teach us, we have addressed ourselves to such materials as are available to us.

There is no necessity for churchmen to explain the amazing inconsistency of some of John Wesley's actions. The Dr. Coke episode is certainly a very odd one, and seems inexplicable. Wesley appointed him a *Superintendent* in America. Dr. Coke was a priest of the English Church, and Charles Wesley made fun of the transaction thus:

How easy now are bishops made
By man's or woman's whim;
Wesley his hands on Coke hath laid,
But who laid hands on him?

But he wrote that he could hardly believe that his brother should have assumed to do such a thing. "How was he surprised into so rash an action? He certainly persuaded himself he was right. . . . He has left an indelible blot on his name as long as it shall be remembered." To his brother he wrote, "I believe God left you to yourself in this matter, as He left Hezekiah, to show you the secret pride which was in your heart." Yet when Coke proceeded in turn to ordain Ashbury, and not content with the title of *Superintendent*, assumed the name of *Bishop*; John Wesley himself wrote: "How can you, how dare you, suffer yourself to be called 'Bishop'? I shudder, I start at the very thought! . . . For my sake, for God's sake, for Christ's sake put a full end to this." As to what Coke thought of it we may infer from the fact that he subsequently wrote to Bishop Seabury asking that those 'ordained' by himself and Ashbury should be "re-ordained" by the Bishop. He calls himself *Superintendent*, and asks that he and Ashbury should be made *Bishops*, in which case he would return most fully and faithfully into the bosom of the church." The whole affair is a most extraordinary jumble. This, however was the origin of the so-called "American Episcopal Methodist Church." The ceremony with Dr. Coke was not a canonical or public one but was performed secretly in Wesley's own bedchamber at Bristol, so that even his own friend and follower says that the whole thing could never have happened had not "his clear perception of things been rendered feeble and dim by flattery, persuasion and age." It is altogether the very oddest jumble. Either it must be said, Wesley acted with the most extraordinary prevarication and duplicity, or was misled through most culpable weakness. A standard writer speaks of him as "that good man, disturbed with a transient fanaticism." Charles Wesley's letter of August 14th, 1785 closes thus: "If your sons have no regard for you, have some for yourself. Go to your grave in peace; at least suffer me to go first, before this ruin is under your hand. So much, I think, you owe to my father, to my brother, and to me, as to stay till I am taken from the evil. I am on the brink of the grave. Do not push me in, or embitter my last moments. Let us not leave an indelible blot on our memory, but let us leave behind us the name and character of honest men.

This letter is a debt to our parents, and to our brother, as well as to you and your faithful friend."—Charles Wesley.

We have devoted enough to this confusing episode, but after all it has nothing to do with those members of the Wesleyan Methodist Society who pretended to ordain at a recent function. These people talk of ordination by *presbyters*, but they are not *presbyters*. Let us turn to the "well-known works" to which we have been referred. John Wesley writes: "We believe there is, and always was, in every Christian church . . . an outward priesthood ordained by Jesus Christ, and an outward sacrifice offered therein by men authorised to act as ambassadors of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God." "We believe it would not be right for us to administer either Baptism or the Lord's Supper unless we had a commission so to do from those *Bishops* whom we apprehend to be in a *succession* from the *Apostles*." "We believe that the *threefold* order of ministers is not only authorized by its *Apostolical* institution, but also by the *written Word*." We have already in our May number quoted Wesley's injunctions to the preachers of his Society, which they have since disregarded. The year after he died the preachers met together and quoting Proverbs xviii., 18, and xvi., 33, and the election of Matthias, Acts 1., 26, and "committing the matter to God," put it to the lot whether they should administer the Eucharist or not. The lot forbade it during the ensuing year. "They had no doubt," they said, "that God was uncommonly present, and did Himself decide." Wesley's friend and biographer says "having by various arts influenced a few persons in any society to desire to receive the Lord's Supper, they pleaded this circumstance as a reason why the innovation should take place, pretending they only wished to satisfy the desires of the people, not their own restless ambition." It was obvious it would never do to risk the "lot" again, so instead of "committing the matter to God" in that way they simply (under Pawson's presidency) put it to the vote. The numbers were 86 to 48 in favour, and thus they voted themselves into the priesthood.

With regard to ordination, they said "We resolved that all distinctions between ordained and unordained preachers should cease, and that the being received into full connection by the Conference, and appointed by them to administer the Ordinances, should be considered a sufficient ordination without the imposition of hands." Further, "the title of Reverend shall not be used by us towards each other in future."

Forty years passed away. Up to 1836 the office of a Christian minister was supposed to be conferred by being in full connection with, and sanctioned by, the Conference. But even then the ordainers were not *Presbyters*. Jabez Bunting, Richard Reece and Robert Newton—all were preachers who had themselves received no ordination with laying on of hands from anybody whatever. They had no Orders, Episcopal or Presbyterian. Dr. Bunting, the chief ordainer, said so as regarded himself. Dr. Adam Clark, the most learned Methodist after the Wesleys, wrote in 1826: "I would greatly have preferred the hands of the Bishop, but not having gone through the regular course, I could not claim it.—I could not with my faith and feeling receive any kind of dissenting Orders, so here I am without any Holy Orders—without pretended Holy Orders, and without pretending to Holy Orders." It is obvious that if the President, and his associates, were what they were without Ordination, those on whom they laid their hands were in no need of it. If they did require it, then the 'Ordainer' were not *Presbyters* without it.

Why should the preachers assume the priestly power and not give to local preachers? The latter possess whatever spiritual commission

the other possess. The Conference of 1793 says, "There is no distinction." In the so-called "Ecumenical Conference" of 1881 a claim was made for the local preachers to administer the Sacrament. Mr. Waddy, Q. C., after stating that the local preachers were as much "the regular ministry" as itinerants, said: "Until the year 1822, when somebody chose to alter that tablet to the memory of John Wesley, and to substitute a new one, the words upon it were these—that he was 'the patron and friend of the lay preachers, by whose aid he extended the plan of itinerant preaching.'"

In the view of Wesley, and in the Church view of us, your status is still the same.

You are not made a bit more respectable, and you are not more respected because of all the M.B. waistcoats and stiff collars that ever were worn. And I venture to say that what we want now is not that more difference should be made, but that less difference should be made between the two." Charles Wesley, speaking of King Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin by making priests of "whosoever would," says—

"But kings may spare their labour vain,
For in such happy times as these
The vulgar can themselves ordain,
And priest commence whoever please."

John Wesley said that a church is not constituted by preachers or evangelists "taking upon themselves to administer the sacraments—an honour peculiar to the *priests of God*." He indeed regarded his preachers as laymen, authorised by him to preach, but devoid of any authority whatsoever to minister the Sacraments of Christ, or to ordain. "Let our preachers go to Church . . . Warn them against calling our society 'a Church' or 'the Church'; against calling our Preachers 'Ministers,' our houses 'Meeting-houses.' Call them plainly Preaching-houses: licence yourselves as a Methodist Preacher." "They no more take upon, themselves to be Priests than to be Kings. They take not upon them to administer the Sacraments—an honour peculiar to the *Priests of God*." "Some of our preachers, who are not ordained, think it quite right to administer the Lord's Supper, and believe it would do much good.—I verily believe it to be a sin, which, consequently, I dare not tolerate." "We believe it would not be right for us to administer either Baptism or the Lord's Supper, unless we had a commission so to do from those *Bishops* whom we apprehend to be in succession from the *Apostles*." "Ministers should be authorised to execute that office by those who are empowered to convey that authority; I believe *Bishops* are empowered to do this, and have been from the *Apostolic age*."

The simple fact is that the present Wesleyan Methodist 'Ministry' is after the order of Jabez Bunting, and ought to be called *Buntingite* rather than *Wesleyan*. Thomas Jackson, twice President of Conference, whose book is published by Conference, after telling how a certain 'godly washerwoman' several years ago contrived to stop the proposed sale of the Preaching House at Boston, proceeds to exhort the Methodists of that town thus: "While they rejoice in the respectability and success of their cause, let them not forget that godly washerwoman who was a means of saving it from extinction and thus became a golden link in their chain of Apostolical Succession." There are less burdensome strains on belief in the Apostolical Succession of Bishops than in that of the washerwomen.

Our study of Wesleyan 'works' to which we have been exhorted and to which we have consequently given ourselves would land us in a more lengthy series of quotations than even this in which we have involved ourselves. We cannot give a titho of the matter, which bristles with exposures of the absurdity of the position taken by modern Wesleyan Methodists in the face of the statements of these "Works."