

METHODIST MISSIONARY NOTICES,

APRIL, 1877.

B E R M U D A .

IN 1798 the moral state of these islands became an object of solicitude to that zealous and successful promoter of Missions, the Rev. Dr. Coke. He had received a letter from a Mr. Mackie, an officer on board one of His Majesty's ships, representing the necessity of a Mission being established upon these islands: this was in the palmy days of slavery. In 1799 the Wesleyan Conference acceded to the Doctor's request, and appointed John Stephenson, an Irish preacher, to act as a Missionary and preach the gospel to the black and coloured people. He arrived in New York, on his way to Bermuda, on the 16th of April, 1799.

After his arrival at Bermuda a violent spirit of persecution was aroused by his attentions to the spiritual interests of the slaves. General Beckwith, the Governor, cherished strong prejudices against the persecuted, forlorn Missionary, and in May, 1800, an Act was passed "to prevent persons pretending, or having pretended, to be ministers of the gospel, or Missionaries from any religious society whatever, and not invested with Holy Orders, according to the rites and ceremonies of the Church of England, or the Church of Scotland, from acting as preachers." The penalty for a violation of this atrocious law was "a fine of fifty pounds, and an imprisonment of six months without bail or mainprise." By the authority of this unchristian enactment, Bro. Stephenson was imprisoned six months in the common jail and fined fifty pounds. With his knife he cut the record of his incarceration on the cedar floor of his prison, in which he stated it was "for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ to African blacks and captive negroes." The Mission being thus suppressed, the infant work of God was nipped in the bud, and the few gleams of light that shone upon the poor Bermudian negroes were darkened by the gloomy clouds of persecution, and were followed by a partial night.* Things remained in this state from 1800 until 1808, when the Mission was successfully resumed by the late Rev. Joshua Marsden, and has gradually advanced to its present maturity and fruitfulness. When the Conference of Eastern British America was formed in 1855,

* Marsden's Narrative.