



DR. COKE, FATHER OF METHODIST MISSIONS.

**THE PRINCE OF MISSIONARIES.***Stories of Early Methodists.*

BY DANIEL WISE, D.D.

In the spring of 1763 a dignified old gentleman and his son were seen seeking admission at the gate of Jesus College, in Oxford, England. They had come from the picturesque town of Brecon, Wales, of which place the father was mayor. The son was a lad who had just passed his sixteenth birthday. He was short for his age, but remarkably handsome.

No doubt that venerable father cherished high expectations of his son's future goodness and greatness. He was a Christian gentleman, and his fondest wish was that his handsome boy might become a good minister of the English Church. His proudest hopes were fully realized. His son became a very useful minister of the Gospel, the father of the missions of the great Wesleyan Church, the prince of modern missionaries, and the first Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America. He wrote his name not in water, but in deeds which will never die. It stands high on the roll of immortal worthies whose names will always be cherished by good men on earth, and which are also "written in heaven." Do you ask the name? It is THOMAS COKE, LL.D.

## AT COLLEGE.

Being the son of a rich and honourable gentleman, and being also handsome, lively, and fond of gay companions, Thomas at once found himself surrounded by a set of wealthy young men, who like the unjust judge, "feared not God, neither regarded man." Many, if not most, Oxford students at that time were notoriously wicked. They courted this young student's society, invited him to their midnight carousals, to their dancing and gambling haunts, to the theatre, and tempted him to do deeds which he knew to be both wrong and ruinous. At first these things shocked him, but after giving himself to their practice awhile, his feelings changed, and he found pleasure in deeds which hurt both his body and mind, caused him to neglect his studies and began to corrupt his heart.

Happily for himself, as well as for the world, he did not walk long in that evil direction. When in the midst of his uproarious companions, he could not help thinking of the beautiful lives of his father and mother. When alone, that "still, small voice," which is God's whisper to erring hearts, bade him reflect, and gently

moved him to study that dear old book, the Bible, which contains God's thoughts. His gay fellow students laughed at him, but he had the courage of his opinions and, therefore, despised their ridicule, and stuck nobly to his college duties. Hence in due time he was graduated with honour, and returned to his home in Brecon, crowned with the approval and respect of his instructors.

## A "PRIEST."

He now became very popular in Brecon society. He was elected mayor. He was very active, partly in business and partly in studies suited to his purpose to enter the ministry. After spending three years in this way, he was ordained, first a deacon, and two years later a "priest;" but it was not until he was twenty-eight years old that he entered fully on the work of a minister by becoming curate of the parish of Petherton.

Dr. Coke now began to reap the fruit of his previous studies, which had so filled his mind with Bible knowledge, that his sermons were rich in good thoughts. But his sermons were like sweet music, in that though they charmed men's ears they did not persuade them to lead better lives. Dr. Coke, up to this time, though moral and sincere, and an admirer of our Redeemer, had never taken Christ into his heart as his personal Saviour and King.

But the reading of certain good books, and some conversation with one of Mr. Wesley's preachers, and with a pious peasant who was a Wesleyan, led him to perceive that he ought to seek the forgiveness of his sins through faith in the Son of God. And then his preaching became a thing of power. It startled many, and led some to become children of God through faith in the Lord Jesus.

But others became very angry. They spoke bitter words against him. They plotted for his removal, and when he was dismissed from his church by his rector, they actually rung the bells of the church in token of their joy. Years after, those same men, grown wiser and better, made their bells ring out a joyous welcome when he made a casual visit to Petherton.

## HIS "GRIT."

There was real manly grit, as well as Christian meekness, in Dr. Coke. He showed the latter by speaking kindly of his enemies. He displayed the former, by standing outside the church doors to preach the farewell sermon he was not suffered to deliver from the pulpit. His foes had gathered baskets of stones with which to drive him from his post. But though Coke

had the meekness of a lamb, he also had the courage of a lion. His bravery inspired his friends. They stood by him. His enemies were awed, and he faithfully warned them to "flee from the wrath to come." As viewed by men, the rich, learned, handsome, honourably connected Dr. Coke made a great sacrifice when he turned his back on the honours and emoluments of the Church of England, and devoted himself to the hard toil of an itinerant life.

## HIS HARDSHIPS.

Dr. Coke's preaching was so tender, simple, and rich in good thoughts, that it drew crowds, and won many to better lives. Yet, like Wesley, he was often assailed by vile mobs, which insulted him with hard words, and tried to strike him with sticks and stones. Once they drenched him with a fire-engine. Nothing daunted, however, he went all over England preaching the Gospel. He took no holidays, but filled every fleeting hour with work for his heavenly Master.

When Coke was thirty-seven years old, Wesley ordained him superintendent or bishop for America. He came to this country, and with the consent of the American preachers, ordained Mr. Asbury as joint superintendent or bishop, with himself, of the Methodist Episcopal Church, which was organized by the Conference which met at Christmas, in 1784. He then made a grand missionary tour of several thousand miles in the United States; after which he returned to England to renew his labours in our fatherland.

## HIS JOURNEYS.

The story of Coke's remarkable labours during the next thirty years is very, even intensely, interesting, but cannot be told in this brief sketch. You must be content at present to know that he made eighteen voyages across the Atlantic, not in immense steam palaces, such as float on the ocean to-day, but in small vessels with wretched accommodations, and often commanded by captains who hated every good thing. One such commander actually threatened to throw him overboard, as the Jonah who brought them stormy and contrary winds! But nothing could daunt his noble mind, or keep him from toiling for the good of men. Hence, when driven from stress of weather to the West Indies, he found a mission among the poor negroes of those islands. He planted the Wesleyan banner in Nova Scotia. He also sent missionaries to Africa, to Wales, and to some of the wildest parts of Ireland. During twenty-eight years, the missions of the Wesleyan Conference were principally managed by him, and his great soul lives to-day in the missionary spirit of that powerful body, which knows him as the father of its grand missionary work, which now covers many lands.

When Coke was sixty-five years of age, he set his heart on going to India to found a mission among its swartly millions. Most men at that age desire rest; but his heroic soul was eager to crown its earthly career with a great act of self-denial. His brethren at first declined to consent, chiefly because they dare not add such an expensive mission to their list. But standing before them with tears in his eyes, he said:

"If the Connexion cannot furnish means, I will gladly defray the expenses of an outfit to the extent of \$30,000!"

This act of sublime self-devotion won the Conference to his plans. Six young ministers were given him as assistants. On the last day of the year 1814, he set sail with his devoted little band, full of exultant hope that his voyage might result in great blessing to thousands of the dusky sons of India. His hope was realized; but he did not live to see it. On the morning of the third of May following, when his attendant entered his cabin, he found the venerable missionary stretched lifeless on the floor. The next day he was buried in the sea; but such men as Dr. Coke never die. They live in their work. The words they speak, the books they write—and Dr. Coke wrote several—the missions they found, the churches they build, and the converts they make, are like seeds which grow and multiply, and spread from age to age. Think of what evil such a man as Coke would have done, and could have still been doing if, instead of turning away from his wicked fellow students at college, he had spent his life in self-indulgence, in

doing wicked deeds, in setting a bad example. And while you think of this difference, let young Coke's example nerve you to put away evil from your life, and resolve to be, first, a disciple of the adorable Jesus, and then a benefactor to your race. Such a resolve will be sure to make you happy, and it may lead to your becoming a blessing unto thousands!

**LESSON NOTES.**

## THIRD QUARTER.

## LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF PAUL.

A.D. 61.] LESSON XI. [Sept. 10.

## PAUL AT ROME.

Acts 28. 20-31.] [Memory verses, 28-31.

## GOLDEN TEXT.

I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.—Rom. 1. 16.

## OUTLINE.

1. Paul to the Jews, v. 20-27.
2. Paul to the Gentiles, v. 28-31.

PLACE.—A private house in Rome.

## CONNECTING LINKS.

In due time Paul, with his guard, reached Rome, where he was heartily greeted by the Christian brethren, and thoughtfully listened to by the Jews.

## EXPLANATIONS.

"This cause"—"The fact of his being a true brother Jew in undeserved bonds." "Saying"—In thus quoting, the apostle places those rejecting on the same footing with the fathers who rejected Isaiah and other prophets. "Therefore"—Because the Jews were so obdurate and irrecoverable. "Departed"—Making a formal separation between them and the apostle. "Own hired house"—To procure the means, Paul was, doubtless, aided by brethren in Rome and at a distance (Phil. 4. 10, etc).

## PRACTICAL TEACHINGS.

- Where in this lesson do we learn—
1. That bonds cannot prevent the preaching of the Gospel?
  2. That a doctrine which is unpopular may yet be true?
  3. That not all who hear the Gospel are saved?

## THE LESSON CATECHISM.

1. Whom did Paul call to speak with concerning his imprisonment? "The chief men of the Jews." 2. What did they say? "We have heard no harm of thee." 3. What did they desire? "To hear him concerning Jesus." 4. What was the result of Paul's preaching to them? "Some believed, and some believed not." 5. Unto whom, besides the Jews, is the salvation of God sent? "Unto the Gentiles." 6. What did Paul testify? Golden Text: "I am not ashamed," etc.

DOCTRINAL SUGGESTION.—The freedom of the will.

## CATECHISM QUESTIONS.

In what else is your soul different from your body?

"My soul is that within me which thinks, and knows, desires and wills, rejoices and is sorry, which my body cannot do."

Is not your soul, then, of great value?

"Yes; because it is myself."

Did God create you?

"Yes; he made me, both body and soul."

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