

THE MEN AND TIMES OF THE FIRST METHODIST CONFERENCE.—

BY A NEWFOUNDLAND PROBATIONER. PART I.

(Continued from our last issue.)

We hardly think there was one present at that Conference, who could claim a more noble ancestry than Samuel Taylor, Vicar of Quinton. History tells us that his great, great grandfather, Dr. Rowland Taylor, of Hadleigh, Suffolk, was forcibly ejected from his church, and finally died a martyr at the hands of bloodthirsty papists, by being put into a pitch barrel and burned, on the 9th of February 1555. He died singing amidst the flames "In God have I put my trust, I will not fear what man can do unto me." The vicar of Quinton was worthy of such an ancestor, he lived in a part of the country where persecution was hottest and slander thickest, he shared in the brutal riots of Wednesbury, Darleton, and other places. Yet none of these things moved him, his courage rose to such occasions, they only served to make a man like Taylor more energetic, he traversed those regions with great zeal, and did much good.

Not less heroic was John Meriton, a clergyman of the Isle of Man whose latter days were spent mostly in itinerating the land with the two Wesleys. He accompanied them and Piers, when John Wesley preached the aforementioned sermon at Oxford.

Like other Methodist preachers in those days, he was mobbed and imprisoned for the Gospel's sake. Upon one occasion he and Charles Wesley were mobbed at Devizes, their horses were taken and driven into a pond, where they were found some hours afterwards up to their necks in water. It the midst of an uproar among the mob, the two evangelists made their escape, but not before they encountered two bulldogs, who made "a murderous attack" upon them, they escaped however singing as they went in true Methodist style "Worship and thanks and blessing." On another occasion while Charles Wesley was preaching in a certain church in Cornwall on "harmless diversions," Meriton and two other clergymen were present. "By harmless diversions" exclaimed the preacher, "I was kept asleep in the devil's arms secure in a state of damnation for eighteen years." No sooner were the words uttered, than Meriton responded aloud, "and I for twenty years." Odd to say we have no record left of the place of his death, or his dying hours. He departed this life August 10th, 1753, and Charles Wesley embalmed his memory in an immortal elegy.

PART II.

The remaining four members of the Conference, we have to notice, were laymen, but none the less apostolic for that; nor less successfully because they were unordained. Among the first, if not the first laypreacher Wesley had, was Thomas Maxfield. His introduction to Methodism was characteristic of the man. In Wesley's Journal for May 21st, 1739; we read the following entry, "a young man who stood up behind, fixed his eyes upon him, (a penitent,) and sunk down himself as one dead, but soon began to roar out and beat himself against the ground so that six men could scarcely hold him. His name was Thomas Maxfield." That night he found peace to his soul.

Not long afterwards he proffered his services to Wesley, as a lay-assistant, which were accepted, and during Wesley's absence was left in charge of the desk at the Foundry. Not content as a lay-reader, he took a text and preached, his sermons were accompanied with power, so that sinners were convinced and converted. Wesley who was then at Bristol heard of the affair and hastened to London in order to stop such irregular conduct. His mother was then living at the Foundry; to her he said, "Thomas Maxfield has turned preacher I find," her reply was worthy of the mother of Methodism, "John," she said, "take care what you do with respect to that young man for he is as surely called of God to preach as you are, examine what have been the fruits of his preaching and hear him yourself." Wesley found he had grace, gifts and fruits, which have always been the three essentials of a Methodist Preacher, so Maxfield

continued to preach. He was of poor parentage and moderate education, but talented and useful; like most of Wesley's followers in these days he suffered much for Christ's sake; in Cornwall he with several others was impressed for the army, and thrust into a dungeon where he was illused. While travelling with Wesley in Ireland, he was, through Wesley's instigation, ordained by the Bishop of Londonderry, who in laying hands on Maxfield said, "Sir I ordain you to assist that good man that he may not work himself to death." Shortly afterwards the ordained itinerant married a lady of some wealth, and became very popular as a preacher among the London Methodists. But, alas, he, like Cennick, imbibed Calvinistic doctrines, and did so much mischief, that evidently he took over a hundred of Wesley's society at the Foundry and formed an independent church, he becoming its pastor. Some time afterward Maxfield wanted to re-join Wesley, but the latter insisted on keeping rules that Maxfield wanted to evade. But to the end of life he was always friends to the people of his first love.

There are few of Wesley's preachers who became so distinguished, we had almost said notorious, in the History of Methodism, as John Bennett. It was he who became Wesley's rival as the lover of Grace Murray. Perhaps there is no passage in "Tyerman's Life of Wesley" more romantic than that episode in which John Wesley, John Bennett and Grace Murray are the chief actors, with Charles Wesley bringing up the rear in his own peculiar manner. It is said of Bennett, "he was almost the only one of Wesley's itinerants who was a man of education and property." He was trained for the Episcopal ministry, but found horse-racing more congenial to his tastes. While at Sheffield races he heard Daniel Taylor, Lady Huntington's servant, preaching, and through him was converted, his race horses were sold, he became an itinerant, and shortly afterwards met with Wesley, and joined the regular ranks as a preacher. Without doubt he was an able man, and was very useful in those days. Wesley seems to have had great confidence in him, and some estimation of his abilities, but Bennett like many others would rather rule than be ruled, Wesley's discipline did not agree with his ideas, and like Maxfield he receded, while on the Bolton circuit, taking with him nearly all the society, out of one hundred and twenty-seven only nineteen were left, who still clung to Wesley most tenaciously. The remainder of Bennett's life was spent as an independent minister, but he was always friendly towards Wesley's preachers. His latter end was glorious; shortly before he breathed his last he prayed for his wife, his children, and the church of which he was pastor, after which he said, "I long to be gone—I am full—my cup runneth over. Sing, sing, yea shout for joy," and with the words "Sing, sing, sing," on his lips he changed his life for a more glorious one of immortality and light, in the forty-sixth year of his pilgrimage, on the 24th of May, 1759.

The next who claims our notice is Thomas Richards—he never held a prominent position among the men whom Wesley had under his command—and his memory is well nigh passed into oblivion. The first we find of him is when he offers his services to Wesley as a lay-assistant when Maxfield did, or shortly afterward. He labored hard during the first few years of the great movement—and suffered much—his name appears among those who attended some of the earlier Conferences—but eventually he left the connexion, and became an independent minister.

Of the four laymen who attended the First Conference as we have seen, three afterwards left the connexion, and became ministers of other churches, each one mainly owing to points of doctrine and discipline. The only one who lived and died a Methodist Preacher was John Downes. His early days were spent in Newcastle upon Tyne, he was a man of superior talent and average education, and was but twenty-one years of age when he began his course as a Methodist itinerant. Like Nelson, Beard and others, he suffered much persecution, and was im-

pressed for the army while at Epworth, from whence he was sent to Lincoln jail, where he was ill-treated. He traversed the country with John Wesley, but his weak constitution would not permit him to continue. In 1751 he was obliged to desist altogether, but Wesley could not let such a man remain idle, therefore he had him in London to superintend the publications that were issued from the Book Room. Of his abilities Wesley had a very high estimation, and writes, "I suppose he was by nature full as great a genius as Sir Isaac Newton." Once during 1744 while Mr. Wesley was shaving, John Downes was present—he beguiled the time by taking a model of Wesley's face on the top of a stick, with his knife. Afterwards he made his own tools and engraved Wesley's portrait from that model on copper plate, thus producing a truthful likeness of Wesley—which was prefixed to the first editions of the "Notes on the New Testament." In more respects than as a man of genius Downes was a model preacher, his latter end was as remarkable as his piety and his talents.

On the afternoon of November 4th 1774 he said, "I feel such a love to the people of West Street, (London,) that I could be content to die with them this evening." He went there that evening to preach, and took for his text, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." "After speaking ten or twelve minutes," says Wesley, "he sank down and spoke no more." We do not wonder that Charles Wesley should write, "Oh for an end like his, it is the most enviable, the most desirable I ever heard of." For some time previous he had enjoyed much of God's presence, and his heart seemed full of love, he often exclaimed, "I am so happy that I scarce know how to live." "Blessed are the pure in heart."

After having travelled in most parts of the United Kingdom and spending thirty-one years of his life amidst much poverty, sickness and labor as a preacher, he gloriously rested from his labors and entered into the joy of his Lord in the fifty-second year of his life.

It is a significant fact that he left behind him a widow and sixpence worth of property, such was the affluence of Wesley's preachers in the "good old times."

The place of meeting deserves a passing notice, at least. The Old Foundry was the head-centre of Methodism at that time. For over forty years its dwelling house and stable, its band room and preaching room surrounded by a modest belfry, did good service to Wesley and his followers. It was there during that time, in answer to the tolling of a little bell, the faithful assembled every morning at five o'clock to hear a sermon from a pulpit made of "rough deal boards." It was there the first Methodist Book Room was commenced. It was there that the sainted Susannah Wesley left this world for the land of eternal glory. To thousands of souls it proved a Bethel. But never did it witness such a day as the one preceding the Conference. That Sabbath was a memorable day at the Old Foundry, besides the usual services they had two services, such as have always been prized by the Methodists; the first was a love feast, attended by the London Society which then numbered some two thousand members, who had the pleasure of seeing six clergymen present, a sight worth seeing even in those eventful days; the other service was likewise numerously attended, at which the said clergymen administered the Sacrament of the Lord's supper. It may be truly said that it was a day of fat things for the London Methodists.

The following morning Conference was opened by Charles Wesley, who preached a sermon at the usual five o'clock service, when an adult was baptized, who found peace to his soul during that service. After some time was spent in prayer and examining their own souls, they decided upon a programme for debate which comprised the following points, "(1) What to teach, (2) How to teach (3) How to regulate doctrine, discipline, and practice." Five days were spent in deliberating on those three items. The Minutes of that First Conference tell us

that the doctrines and practices of Methodism then were identical to what they have been always. The doctrines of Original sin, Repentance, Justification by Faith, Witness of the Spirit, and Christian Perfection were defined with the utmost precision. The rules laid down for the conduct of preachers, leaders of bands, and class meetings, and for the members in general were precise and rigid. They contained the very elements of Methodism, all the progress that has ever been made in Methodist polity is only a development of the first principle of our forefathers. Even at this early period the question of separation from the Established Church was mooted. "We believe," said they, "that the Methodists will either be thrust out or will leave the whole church." Time has long since decided that question. They even anticipated future results, when they said, "they must not neglect the present opportunities of saving souls, for fear of consequences which might possibly or probably happen after they were dead." The Bishops were to be obeyed, "In all things indifferent," and the Canons of the Church as far "as we can with a safe conscience." These brave men had but one object in view namely to save their own souls and those that heard them, this they meant to do at all hazards come what might.

One interesting event took place during that memorable week worthy of notice. The Conference was received at Lady Huntington's mansion in London, while there they held service, it was the first of a series of many memorable ones held afterwards by Wesley, Whitefield, and others, giving her ladyship's London mansion the character of a chapel. Piers and Hodges took part in the service, while the four worthy itinerants sat near, recognized as true ambassadors of Christ. Wesley preached the sermon from a very suitable text, "What hath God wrought."

On Friday the noble band dispersed to different parts of the kingdom, every one intent on scattering the precious seed, sowing beside all waters, meeting oftentimes with rough receptions, but the meanwhile laying the foundation of a church of which, after one hundred and thirty years of unparalleled success, Luke Tyerman could boldly write, "Methodism is the greatest fact in the history of the Church of Christ."

Do not keep the alabaster boxes of your love and tenderness sealed up until your friends are dead. Fill their lives with sweetness. Speak approving, cheering words, while their ears can hear them and while their hearts can be thrilled by them. The things you mean to say when they are gone, say before they go. The flowers you mean to send for their coffins, send to brighten and sweeten their homes before they leave them.

It has been calculated that for every pound sterling England expends in missions she receives ten in trade, and the same ratio will hold in the United States.

OBITUARY.

JEAN LUANA TAYLOR, AGED 15 YEARS.

For the third time within seven months death has entered our abode and borne away in succession three members of our family. Aggie in December, Eleanor, in April; and to-day, 3rd July, Jean, She fell asleep a few minutes ago—is numbered with "the dead in Christ" with Him, her Lord, her spirit has her longed-for rest. She was born in Annapolis, 13th of April, 1862. Until March last her health was good. She seemed destined for long life; this together with her domestic habits and thoroughness, led to a thought, occasionally spoken in hearing, that she might cheer our declining years in days to come, and afterward follow us to the eternal home.

During prevailing easterly winds in March she took a cold which obliged her to discontinue her studies at the academy in town. Rapid consumption hurried her to early death. When in Charlottetown five years ago, Jean made religion her early happy choice; was made conscious of her interest in the Saviour's blood. The immediate human agency which led her to this sense of acceptance in the Beloved was her Sabbath school teacher; the amiable and excellent Jane Butcher—now I believe with her brother the Rev. George Butcher, the WESLEYAN'S English correspondent "B." Well do I remember when Miss B. acquainted me with Jean's gladness in Jesus. A sweet satisfaction glowed in every feature as she said: "Mr. Taylor, Jean says she has found peace." This zealous, modest, self-depreciated effort of this faithful teacher has my gra-

tude to-day; in the recompense of the reward she will not wear a starless crown. From the time of Jean's acceptance of the covenant it seemed that "holiness unto the Lord" was written upon her heart. Of a very retiring disposition, and remarkably reticent, there were no outburst demonstrations of piety—her testimony for Christ was of the quietest character,—yet thirty years of a pastoral and pastoral work have not brought my notice a more beautiful Christian spirit or consistent life. "The ornament of a meek and quiet spirit which is in the sight of God of great price," was pre-eminently manifested.

Having for weeks previous watched her wasting form, and knowing her sickness was unto death, I spent only a few days at the Conference and hurried home. The few days had wrought a marked change in the mortal parts of our child; we knew and she knew the immortal was not far from the better land. O how she longed to be there. "Pa," she said, "O how I wanted you to come"—she feared the day before that I would not be home to see her alive. Each day and night of the week after my return, she would ask: "Do you think I will die to-day," or "to-night." I want to go—I am so tired waiting." She suffered very much; was weary and distressed—yet peaceful and patient; trustful and hopeful in the merits of Jesus and the prospect of death.

This morning, as I took her cold hand she said: "Is there any pulse, pa. Yes, a little, not much," I replied. "O how I wish it would stop now," she rejoined. Perfectly sensible to the last she could speak in loud whispers distinctly until a few minutes of her death. The last five minutes she spent in rapid earnest speech, but so indistinctly that we could only catch a word or two—she seemed to be in prayer; of the words, which we thought were not meant for us, we heard "Amen." I said: "You will soon be with Aggie, with baby, and with Jesus." In a little while, gazing upward with lustrous eyes, a smile lit up her features and we heard the words which accompanied it—not as if addressed to us watchers, or in reply to our words; but as if spoken to beings beyond our ken—"in a minute," "in a minute"—a gasp or two and the "minute" space was passed—and dear Jean was with the happy spirits of the blest who waited for her "over there," and with Jesus the Mediator.

The brethren Cassidy and Thos. Rogers left Yarmouth at 10 a. m. on Saturday. Knowing, as the former said, that the angel of death was at our threshold, they drove through to Shelburne that night, and kindly relieved me on Sabbath of the three services which otherwise I should have undertaken. The Lord graciously reward them for this great kindness to an afflicted brother. The prayer of Bro. Cassidy at the dying bed of our dear daughter can never be forgotten.

HER FATHER.

Shelburne, Tuesday, July 3, 1877.

MRS. CARD.

Died May 27th, at Summerville, Hants Co., Margaret Hannah, wife of Jeremiah Card. Greatly beloved by all who knew her on account of the sterling qualities of her heart and life. She was a loving and extremely thoughtful wife, a devoted mother and a generous donor. It is only the hope of the gospel that will reconcile the family to their loss. She was a beneficent giver, her hands was ever open when she knew the wants of others that were in need, and even anticipating their need. She was a generous supporter of God's cause, and the writer had abundant proof of her generosity through the year he has been upon the circuit. She was converted to God under the ministrations of the Rev. Henry Pope, one of the fathers of Methodism in this county. For thirty-six years her life was exemplary, having ever the clear evidence of her acceptance with God—that communion that ariseth from faith in Christ.

Her faith was firm through all the years of her religious life. And she did not reflect upon the ways of God although suffering for twenty years from an incurable disease, and also her children taken from her by death. These things coming down upon her as an avalanche yet they did not cause her to find fault with His providence, but drew her closer to the side of Christ, so that she was enabled by grace to place the hands of her children spiritually in that of Christ's who had led her so faithfully. Her love for divine things was intensified towards the close of life, and her constant conversation was the power of God to console and keep that which she had committed to Him. The only tie that bound her to life was her family on earth, but then she remembered that a portion of the family was on high with Christ, waiting to welcome her to the land of the blessed, and her desire became strong to depart and be with Christ. In the quiet of the Sabbath evening she breathed her last, and entered upon that eternal Sabbath without darkness or cloud or any such thing.

G. F. D.