

began, not only quite independently of the revival of religion then taking place in England—those concerned in either movement having no knowledge for a time of each others work—but also without any connection of these men with each other. Thus in the three counties of Brecon, Cardigan, and Pembroke, where these three were then respectively resident, “there sprang up simultaneously three distinct streams of the water of life, the confluence of which formed that mighty river which watered the whole Principality and made it blossom as the garden of the Lord.” The opening of these refreshing and fertilising springs was noiseless and gentle, but it was manifestly done by the touch of the finger of God.

The subsequent history of the movement as strikingly evidences the presence of the Spirit as does its origin. The rapidity with which it spread, the openings made for it, its permanence;—the evangelistic zeal of the converts, their gifts, their meekness and stability amid the opposition, the loss of worldly goods, imprisonment, and many other sorts of persecution they suffered;—the sobriety and faithfulness of those who controlled the movement, afford constant proofs that He who began the good work took special charge of it as it went on.

Like Wesleyan Methodism, between whose history and its own there are many points of resemblance, the movement began within the Established Church of England, and from the first it enjoyed the countenance and fostering care of some few of its ministers, though the great mass of these were determinedly opposed to it, and indeed were the instigators of the fiercest persecutions it encountered.

From the centres in which these ministers and the early fathers lived, the movement rapidly spread outwards. By-and-by its progress was greatly furthered by the itinerancy of the preachers;—by the gathering of earnest people from the remote distances to the places where these steadily laboured or happened for the time to be visiting, and their return home—a striking itinerancy of the people, which, if it roused the hostility of some must have awakened the serious thoughts of others in the towns passed through; by the ejections of some of the faithful from their farms and homesteads, by which they were driven from place to place; and by the good conversation in Christ by which the converts were generally distinguished.

It soon became necessary to form some kind of organisation for the numerous converts. But the relation which these earnest Christians wished to sustain to the Established Church created some difficulty. Regarding themselves, and wishing to be regarded by others, as belonging to the Church of England they were careful in all

the measures they took to avoid as far as possible giving offence to Church susceptibilities. Thus those who preached without Episcopal ordination were not designated preachers but “exhorters.” The local communities of Christians that were gathered together were not designated Churches but “societies.” Those who were placed in charge of them were not “ministers,” nor yet “pastors”; and the men who discharged the duties devolving upon the *deacons* of the present day were “private exhorters,” and sometimes “stewards of societies.” The quarterly gatherings of the representatives of the whole body were not synods but “Associations.” Their first place of worship was not erected till 1747, twelve years after the beginning of the movement, and it was called “a house for religious purposes.” For many years they continued to communicate in the Established Church, the Association enjoining this course on those who solicited advice. And though the Act of Toleration had long been in force, and gave ample protection to Nonconformists, they endured persecution, suffered fines and imprisonment and all manner of bodily abuse rather than avail themselves of its shelter at the cost of being called “Dissenters.”

The organization devised was of this nature:—A society was formed in each locality where a few disciples could be brought together, and each society was placed under the charge of an exhorter. A number of these societies were grouped into districts, and each district was placed under the care of an overseer. Over these overseers, every district had its moderator, while over all these was the general moderator of the body. These moderators were simply chairmen of meetings. Even the general moderator had no more authority than the rest of his brethren, though he might hold office—as we gather Whitfield did, who was first chosen to this honour—several successive years. A rudimentary Presbyterianism was thus unwittingly established.

The wisdom and strictness of the discipline exercised strike us as very remarkable in the circumstances. The overseers were required to furnish a minute and periodical report to the Association of the spiritual condition of the districts or sub-districts under their charge. No one was permitted to preach in public until he had been authorised to do so by the Association, and license was never given but after the most careful inquiry into the character and qualifications of each candidate. Those authorised to exhort were kept under strict supervision. The overseers were required to keep their eyes on their private character and public ministry, and to report to the Association. Purity of doctrine and blame-