

THE MEN AND TIMES OF THE FIRST METHODIST CONFERENCE.—

By a NEWFOUNDLAND PROBATIONER. PART I.

In the year 1744 Methodism was passing through a severe ordeal. Within its pale, were men who would have speedily ruined the cause, had there not been more judicious men at the helm. While outside, there were enemies on every side, who were determined to exterminate the entire sect. Nor were they without hope; because everything seemed to conspire towards success. Bishops and clergy, mayors and mobs, pens and cudgels, missiles from the press and the gutter, were all united in an unholy alliance, in order to put down "this sect everywhere spoken against."

At that time, the country was in a general commotion, owing to the threatened invasion. Charles Edward Stuart, son of the old Pretender to the throne of England, was about to make a desperate effort to regain the crown, his ancestor, James the second, had lost. On the 15th of February King George II. sent a message to both houses of Parliament, informing them, that he had been certified on good authority, that great preparations were being made to invade the country. Great excitement followed; military officers were ordered to their posts of duty. An Earl was arrested, under charge of having enlisted men for the invaders. A Proclamation forbade Papists and reputed Papists remaining within ten miles of the metropolis. Everybody was loud in expressing their loyalty to the church and state.

The enemies of Methodism did not fail to make good use of these circumstances. Was not Wesley a Papist? Were not the Methodist Preachers on good terms with the Papal Stuart? Nay, had not Wesley been seen in France in company with the Pretender? Were questions asked by men ever ready to answer in the affirmative.

In Yorkshire Charles Wesley appeared before the magistrate to prove his innocence to a charge, established by five witnesses, that he had in public used treasonable words, praying that the Lord would bring back the banished ones—meaning the Stuarts of course—whereas they only heard him pray that "the Lord would bring home his banished ones." The words having purely a spiritual meaning.

A few days later, John Wesley received a summons to appear before the Surrey Magistrates, at the court of St. Margaret's Hill. But when the brave man appeared, all were silent; when he asked, "Has anyone anything to lay to my charge?" No one replied, until at length one on the bench asked, "Sir are you willing to take the oaths to his Majesty; and sign the declaration against Popery?" "I am," replied Wesley; he did so, and went away in peace.

Nor were the Wesleys alone in their trials; scenes were enacted, under the patronage of men in high positions, that were shameful to relate. The riots at Wednesbury, Walsce, and Darlaston form a chapter in the History of early Methodism, that reads like a tragedy. Yet "the people took with joy the spoiling of their goods." When asked to sign a pledge, never to invite a Methodist preacher, they said, "We have already lost all our goods, and nothing can follow but the loss of our lives, which we will lose also, rather than wrong our consciences."

The Preachers fared no better. John Slocomb, one of Wesley's itinerants in Cornwall, was impressed for the army, kept in prison, where he was ill-used, from whence he was let go after much threatenings. Two others, John Healey and Thomas Westoll, were similarly arrested and treated at Nottingham. The immortal John Nelson was taken likewise and impressed for the army, he suffered much in prison and other places, but after serving three months as a soldier he was let go, by friends interceding for him. Thomas Beard, who was Nelson's companion in arms as a soldier, and as an itinerant, was torn from his family and home, for no other crime than calling miners to repentance. While the regiment was at Newcastle, he took a fever and was put into the hospital, where they bled his arm in

order to relieve the fever, the wound festered and mortified, the limb was amputated, but in a few days he succumbed to his sufferings, when he made a glorious exchange from earth to heaven, leaving a good testimony. Such sufferings and subterfuges and the above are only samples; might well induce Wesley to call together his fellow labourers in Conference.

But we are led to believe there were other reasons which induced him to do so. When the good work commenced, the Wesleys and the Moravians commingled much; but some of the London brethren held peculiar ideas on certain points of doctrine and practice, which resulted in a separation, causing no small commotion among the London societies. The tumult had hardly subsided, for such it was, when one of Wesley's helpers proved recreant. John Cennick who had charge of the Kingswood Societies, began to preach Calvinistic doctrines. He also said things about Wesley that were unworthy of his position. The result was Cennick and fifty Kingswood members were expelled by Wesley and the majority of the society, who still adhered to the founder. It was necessary that a clear understanding should be arrived at in dealing with such cases when they occurred; a Conference would facilitate that.

Nor should we forget that the Methodist Societies were getting somewhat unwieldy; when they were confined to London, Bristol and Kingswood, the Wesleys could superintend them without much difficulty. But now the good work was spreading; the north was about to give up, the south did not keep back; in most of the principal towns throughout the land, from Newcastle upon Tyne to St. Ives in Cornwall, Methodists were to be found, and societies were being formed; those societies were divided into classes and band meetings. There were some forty-five itinerants in the field beside a host of local preachers. If Methodism was to leave the country and the church, these societies must be superintended, the preachers must be directed, the entire work must be consolidated. Here was a want felt, and the sagacious mind of Wesley, saw it was expedient to supply that want by calling a Conference.

On Monday the 25th of June 1744, the "First Methodist Conference" assembled at the Old Foundry, London, not a large gathering it is true, but not the less auspicious. In reference to it Wesley writes "In 1744 I wrote to several clergymen, and to all who then served me as sons in the Gospel, desiring them to meet me in London and give me their advice concerning the best method of carrying on the work of God." To that invitation beside the two Wesleys four clergymen responded—namely, John Hodges, Henry Piers, Samuel Taylor and John Meriton; also four itinerants, Thomas Maxfield, John Bennett, Thomas Richards and John Downes.

As Wesley defined a Conference at that time, to be "not so much the conversation we had together as the persons that conferred, namely those whom I invited to confer with me." It would not be amiss to just glance at "the persons" who met that memorable morning at the Old Foundry.

If we attempt to describe the leader of that group, we get into difficulties. Wesley's character has baffled better men than the writer, because it was beautifully simple, yet magnificently grand, broad and majestic like the Thames, yet clear and beautiful like a rivulet that runs down the hillside. We see him at this "First Conference" in the prime of his manhood; that week he reaches his forty-second year; the busy Conference week is only a cessation from the busier work of preaching two, three and sometimes four sermons a day, and travelling from place to place, meeting persecution, that was only equaled by his courage and success.

By way of quotation from a recent biographer, we give a good description of his physique. "In person Wesley was rather below the middle size, but beautifully proportioned, without an atom of superfluous flesh, yet muscular and strong; with a forehead clear and smooth, a bright penetrating eye, and a lovely face which retained the fresh-

ness of its complexion to the latest period of his life." To this we may add Lord Macaulay's estimation of him otherwise "he was a man," says he, "whose eloquence and logical acuteness might have rendered him eminent in literature; whose genius for government was not inferior to that of Richelieu; and who devoted all his powers, in defiance of obloquy and derision, to what he sincerely considered the highest good of his species." As much and more might be said of his intense piety, but we must desist lest we grow prolix; yet the world will never get tired of thinking and speaking of the noble Founder of Methodism.

Not as great a man, yet as great a genius, was his brother Charles Wesley, who was also present upon that occasion. He was some five years younger than John, but the first of the two who found peace through believing; during the early days of the movement, he was equally earnest in the work, meeting the hottest persecutions and bitterest calumny as bravely as any.

As a preacher he was more pathetic than his brother; where John's powerful logic was irresistible, Charles' pathos was overwhelming, oftentimes he preached with tears streaming down his cheeks; he was more refined than Whitefield, yet not so dramatic. Whitefield's was the eloquence of an orator, Charles Wesley's was that of a poet. In fact it was as a poet he excelled, it is estimated that during his lifetime he penned some six thousand hymns. Nor do we want a better index to his piety than those hymns; they portray every phase of Christian experience. But we must pass on—there are men of note in that godly band. The first we notice is one who has left his rival parishoners among the hills, John Hodges the rector of Wenvo, Wales. From the first he was friendly towards Methodism, oftentimes accompanying the Wesley's while they travelled over the rugged hills of the Principality scattering the good seed. His church was always free to Wesley, and filled with attentive listeners whenever the great man preached there. Hodges was present at three or four of the first Conferences.

More conspicuous as a worker in the great movement was Henry Piers, vicar of Bexley. He was converted through the instrumentality of Charles Wesley, on the 10th of June, 1738. He at once began with great fidelity to preach the Scriptural method of salvation, relates a great writer "and such was his success that in August 1739 Whitefield assisted him in administering the sacrament in Bexley church to nearly six hundred communicants."

In 1742 he was appointed to preach a visitation sermon before the "Dean of the Arches and the reverend the clergy" of the deanery of Shoreham." The sermon was delivered so earnestly and contained so much Wesleyan theology, that it caused quite a consternation among the reverend listeners, some remarked aloud during its delivery, "Piers is mad, crazy, and a fool." Henry Piers was one of the very few clergymen who sided with Wesley at Oxford, when he preached his last but memorial sermon before the University. It was he who first introduced Wesley to the Rev. Vincent Perrot the pious vicar of Shoreham, thus creating a triple friendship only broken in death. We need hardly add the Wesleys always found in Piers parsonage and church a home and a pulpit.

To be continued. THE GREAT TEACHER.

HIS ORIGINALITY. An original and important part of the Saviour's teaching concerning himself is that which relates to his office of intercession. Perhaps no part of the Jewish ceremonial was more impressive, or calculated to fill the imagination, than the scene in which the high priest passed within the veil on the great day of atonement. Every attendant circumstance—the inviolable sanctity of the veil, which the people dared not to approach, nor even the priests dared not to touch—the fact that only one man of all the human race was permitted to lift that veil, and pass within—the rareness of that occurrence, for to him it was accessible once a year—and the awful Being, the ineffable mys-

tery, that resided there—all conspired to fill the mind with emotions of the profoundest awe. On the morning of the appointed day, what must his feelings have been, when, having presented the sin-offerings for himself and the people, he took the blood of the sacrifice, and the incense, and, followed by the anxious eyes of the breathless congregation, he proceeded towards the awful recess—when he reflected that every step took him to the visible presence of the incomprehensible God—when he lifted up the veil with fear and trembling—when the veil closed on him and left him alone with God—when his eye glanced at the mercy-seat, and saw the glory resting on it—when he advanced up to it—and instantly began to wave the incense before it, that it might forthwith be enveloped in a cloud, lest he should gaze on it, and perish—when he sprinkled the ark with the blood which he had brought in, and remembered the purity of the Being who commanded it, and the sinfulness of the beings which rendered it necessary—what a responsible office, at that moment he filled! and what vivid, solemn and lasting impressions must the scene have left on every thoughtful worshipper!

This must have been true, even of that majority whose views terminated on the passing ceremony, and who did "not look unto the end of that which is abolished." But how much more affecting must it have been to those who remembered that the scene they beheld "was only a figure for the time then present;" and that, solemn as it was, it would eventually give place to a reality inconceivably more glorious. Let any one make the mental effort of transporting himself back into their circumstances, and we will find how impossible it was for the believers of that economy to conceive what the substance of that shadow the reality of that figure was likely to be; and he may also apprehend how much more impressive the sign must have been from the very circumstances of their inability to decipher it. Doubtless "they searched it diligently," and pondered deeply, the meaning of the enigma; and numerous and splendid may have been their conjectures of what would possibly be the reality. Of that reality it is our privilege to have been informed: and so stupendous is its nature, that we feel assured the sublimest preconceptions of man could not have come within an infinite distance of it. "We have a great High Priest who is passed into the heavens, Jesus the 'Son of God.'" "Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us." "By his own blood entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us."

The most copious account, indeed, of his divine intercession is to be found in the inspired epistles; but the announcement of the doctrine came originally and directly from his own lips. "I will pray the Father," said He, "and He shall give you another comforter that he may abide with you for ever." Concerning the mode of his intercession in heaven, it would be relevant he re to enlarge. But, unless the whole doctrine be a mere fiction of mercy (an idea at which every feeling of piety revolts), the first appearance of Jesus there, in His new capacity, must have been as invigorating to the worship of heaven as it is encouraging to the devotion of believers on earth. When he went from the place of sacrifice, and stood in the presence of God for us,—when he arrived there, to find that the incense of his offering had preceded him, and had filled the entire temple with its odours—that, as if impatient for his arrival, his throne was prepared, the hosts and orders of heaven marshalled for his reception, the splendid ranks and hierarchies destined for his future state and retinue waiting to do him homage, and even the eternal Father himself waiting, with this grant of the world, this burst of infinite love on his lips, "Ask of me, and I will give the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. From that triumphant moment in the history of grace, the services of heaven must have proceeded with vigour, and every worshipper there have become conscious of a fresh motive, a crowning incentive to obedience.—Harris.

OBITUARY.

MRS. STEPHEN BENT, OF BENTVILLE, BRIDGETOWN CIRCUIT.

On the 12th of April last, Mary Beth, the beloved wife of Stephen E. Bent, Esq., passed peacefully away to the bosom of the blessed in her 41st year, leaving an afflicted partner, and large family of circle of friends to sorrow, not indeed those without hope; yet sincerely and deeply.

Our beloved sister was brought up in the form of worship, and principles of religion as taught by John Wesley. In her youth she was lively and social; at the same time she was ever influenced by strict integrity of principle, and the fear of God. About 16 years ago under the affectionate and faithful superintendance of the late Rev. Michael Pickles, she was led to come out from the world and show herself on the Lord's side. This was shortly after her marriage. As a follower of the Lord, like others, she doubtless had and felt her trials and infirmities. But throughout simplicity and Godly sincerity have been evident traits in her life. In all her social and Christian relationships, constant and faithful—we doubt not her spirit is with the Lord.

Her course was for the most part one of affliction, and she suffered much; which with the care of a large family often rendered it difficult for her to attend the house of God. But her solicitude lest other matters should take the precedence of religion—her manifest love to the agencies and interests of Christ's cause—and her genial spirit and bearing showed that her heart was right with God, and that she was seeking to lay up treasure in heaven. About the former part of February special religious services were commenced, in which, at the beginning and throughout to the time of her death she took a lively interest. These to her as well as to many others proved a great blessing. In the services, and elsewhere she testified this: and it was a great satisfaction to her that God was blessing her children however young, with others.

For her to be weakly and brought low was no new thing, and it was known that her case (it being inflammation) was somewhat critical. She had manifested great physical uneasiness in the afternoon, but only for an hour or two was there time for serious apprehension. Her mind however was perfectly calm. As she could she spoke to her distressed partner and children and others—and signified her entire reliance upon the great Redeemer, and about eight o'clock in the evening, calmly resigned her spirit into His hands who gave it—who redeemed it by and washed it in his blood. May the sympathy and blessing of Christ be afforded her bereaved husband and children, and may we be followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promise. J. F. B.

Bentville, July 9, 1877.

ELIAS PUFFER, ESQ., OF BENTVILLE, BRIDGETOWN CIRCUIT.

On the 19th of April last, then in his 78th year, after a very short illness, our beloved friend and brother was not, for God took him. Blessed with parental religious instruction and influence, he feared the Lord from his youth. Nearly forty years ago, however, in an extensive work of God, he obtained that experience of the work of grace which in the last weeks of his life, in our revival service he testified he had never lost. During all that period as a member of the Church, he pursued a very even course. God having taken his former partner to himself, he had again entered into the marriage state with her who now, together with the affectionate members of his former family and other friends, mourn his removal. He was distinguished for Christian kindness; but for some time past it appeared evident that God was more fully fitting him for the company of heaven. During the late revival services he was wont to refer to the work of God in his own heart, and it was very observable that he was getting a deeper work of grace. During the last three or four days of his last illness he was much engaged in prayer and praise and seemed quite on the verge of the heavenly world until at God's bidding and through the worth and efficacy of that precious blood by which alone we have boldness to enter into the Holiest, he was absent from the body and present with the Lord. May his God be, in life and in death, the God of his children and grand-children and of his surviving partner. May we that remain feel the force of Bro. Craig's text and subject on the occasion, "Let me die the death of the righteous and let my last end be like his." "Truly godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." J. F. B.

Men talk of Christ by the book and tongue, and no more; but to come nigh Christ is another thing. Our Rock doth not ebb and flow, though your sea doth.