

sacred customs and worship; and profound, philosophical and splendid as was the spirit of its laws, its religion, and its language. The storm, that was to sweep away Paganism, gathered in Judæa; but it hung there, like the storm of the prophet, "a cloud no bigger than a man's hand." It came with Christianity, suddenly covered the horizon, and at once fixed every eye of the pagan world in wrath or terror.

Judaism and Paganism were hostile powers kept from conflict by a great intermediate desert; Christianity and Paganism were hostile powers standing upon the same soil, and committed by their nature in a struggle which was to end but by the extinction of either. There was an utter incapability of alliance between them. The idols, the pompous and mystic ceremonial, the still darker practices of the heathen worship, were all profanation to the Christian. The converts shrank from them, the apostles denounced them as things irrational, criminal, and devoted to speedy ruin. But idolatry was still upon the throne; and the whole rage of a despotic government, alarmed by the novelty of resistance; the frenzy of a powerful and superstitious priesthood, inflamed by the open revolt from its ritual; and the headlong self-interest of the thousands and tens of thousands, dependent on the costly expenditure of the temples; rolled in one fiery stream of persecution against the people of God.

A. D. 68. The first persecution closed only with the death of Nero. The slaughter which had shocked even Rome, accustomed as it was to the gladiatorial shows, lasted four years. It has been idly doubted whether this suffering extended beyond the city. The popular mind was already infuriated. There must have been multitudes who waited only for the imperial nod to strike down the church. When Nero held games, and drove his chariot by the light of the burning Christians, the populace in the remote and half barbarian dependencies must have claimed their privilege of imitating the master of the empire. Christianity once branded in Rome, must have borne its mark for popular contumely wherever it wandered through the Roman world.

A. D. 96. During the brief interval between the death of Nero and the last year of Domitian, the Church enjoyed comparative peace. The Jews, her sleepless persecutors, had been stricken down by the long threatened vengeance, and were now an outcast people. Even the proverbial cruelty of Domitian was too busy with senatorial slaughter to have leisure for pursuit of peasant blood. But he was at last roused by the rumour that his throne was to be seized by some new sovereign, of the kindred of our Lord. Persecution instantly burst out; but after a year's continuance, it subsided on the death of the tyrant. In the former persecution, St. Peter and St. Paul are presumed to have been slain. In this, St. John was banished to Patmos, where the Apocalypse was given.

A. D. 98. The death of Nerva, the successor of Domitian, gave the throne to Trajan, a brave soldier, and a vigorous king, but infected with the double prejudices of the Roman and the idolator. Popular violence had continued to disturb the Church in the provinces; and when the younger Pliny was, in the third year of Trajan, sent as proconsul to Asia, he found it the object of general severity. His celebrated letter gives equal proof of the innocence of the Christians, the fury of their enemies, and the singular ignorance of even the most philosophic and inquiring Romans on the Christian doctrines. Trajan's answer to the letter established the law for the empire:—"That the Christians were not to be officiously sought after, but that such as were accused and convicted of an adherence to Christianity, were to be put to death, as wicked citizens, if they did not return to the religion of their ancestors." Such was the legislation of Paganism. It is clear that this law left the Christians exposed to the most extensive and continued suffering. It made the mere profession of Christianity a crime. It opened the power of accusing to all, and it left no alternative but apostasy or death.

The Asiatic churches, powerful and distinguished from the beginning, had, in a few years, become almost the only establishment of Christianity. The Church in Jerusalem had been scattered in the general ruin of the Jews. The Church in Rome had been broken down by the persecution under Nero. The little Christian communi-

ties, dispersed at wide intervals through the empire, carried on their solitary work of holiness almost unknown. Asia, the greatest of all the provinces, and at length the favoured seat of the Emperors, exhibited the faith in its grandeur. Through the whole period of future persecution, the weight of the storm was turned upon Asia. The feebler and more distant communities felt the visitation from age to age, but on Asia fell the perpetual thunder.

The decree of Trajan was the first direct and formal rule, the statute against Christianity. It was made the principle of all legislation on the subject of the Church; and, however modified by the character of successive sovereigns, it established persecution as the law of the empire.

A. D. 303. This law continued during two centuries. The violence of Paganism had alternately burst out and subsided, like the flashes of a great conflagration, broader or feebler from time to time, but continually burning. The name of Christian was, throughout the whole period, a source of hazard, often of plunder, often of death. The habitual heathen love of blood, the proverbial avarice of the Roman governors, the personal revenge of individuals, the roused and merciless jealousy of the Pagan priesthood, were principles that no moderation of the Emperors could have extinguished. But, when a tyrant or a bigot ascended the throne, he found in them an exhaustless and wild power of desolation. Multitudes of Christians had been sacrificed; their noblest leaders, their wise, their pure, their aged, had been, from year to year, flung into a dishonoured grave before their eyes; matrons and maidens had been tortured in the midst of barbarian riot, and the haughty and insulting scandals of the officials of Rome; no Christian could be secure of his property, his freedom, or his life, beyond the hour. In this tremendous struggle the Church was not destroyed, but it was deeply bruised and wounded, and nothing but the hand, which touched the dead and they arose, could have sustained it in that day of terror. What deeper earthly misery can there be than that of a condition in which every man might be an accuser, and every accuser carried death upon his lips!—where the whole power of a great public body, including the first ranks of the empire, was sullenly fixed on blood; where the empire was a despotism, in the hands of a fool or a madman, himself in the hands of a profligate and fierce soldiery, who hurried despot after despot up the steps of the throne, to fling them from it with the rapidity of criminals from the scaffold; and where the perpetual cloud of burning and massacre, that hung over Rome, threw its broad coverture over the rapines and cruelties of governors and people to the borders of the empire. Within one hundred and forty-three years, from the death of Antoninus the philosopher to the accession of Constantine, Rome saw no less than thirty-eight emperors and partners of the empire, almost the entire of whom were slain in popular convulsions, or rebellions of the soldiery. The whole ponderous fabric of the state had been for ages tumbling, beam by beam; and what must have been the sufferings of those sure to be stricken down, whoever escaped, and with no hope of exemption from public fury, but in the sweeping ruin, which left all alike sufferers, naked to every wind of heaven, exiles or slaves, without an altar, and without a country!

BIOGRAPHY.

THE LIFE OF THE REV. JOHN WESLEY, A.M.

[CONCLUDED.]

The state in which the separation of the United States from the mother country left the Methodist American societies, had become a matter of serious concern to Mr. Wesley, and presented to him a new case, for which it was imperative to make some provision. This, however, could not be done but by a proceeding which he foresaw would lay him open to much remark, and some censure, from the rigid English Episcopalians. But with him, the principle of making every thing indifferent give place to the necessity of doing good or preventing evil, was paramount; and when that necessity was clearly made out, he was not a man to hesitate. The mission of Messrs. Boardman and Pilmoor to America has been already men-

tioned. Two years afterward, in 1771, Mr. Wesley sent out Messrs. Asbury and Wright; and in 1773, Messrs. Rankin and Shadford. In 1777, the preachers in the different circuits in America had amounted to forty, and the societies had also greatly increased. These were scattered in towns and settlements so distant, that it required constant and extensive travelling from the preachers, to supply them with the Word of God. The two last-mentioned preachers returned, after employing themselves on the mission for about five years; and Mr. Asbury, a true itinerant, who, in this respect, followed in America the unwearied example of Mr. Wesley, gradually acquired a great and deserved influence, which, supported as it was by his excellent sense, moderating temper, and entire devotedness to the service of God, increased rather than diminished to the end of a protracted life. The American preachers, like those in England, were at first restrained by Mr. Wesley from administering either of the sacraments; but when, through the war, and the acquisition of independence by the States, most of the clergy of the Church of England had left the country, neither the children of the members of the Methodist societies could be baptized, nor the Lord's Supper administered among them, without a change of the original plan. Mr. Asbury's predilections for the former order of things, prevented him from listening to the request of the American societies, to be formed into a regular church, and furnished with all its spiritual privileges; and a division had already taken place among them. This breach, however, Mr. Asbury had the address to heal; and at the peace, he laid the whole case before Mr. Wesley. The result will be seen by the following extract from his letter to Dr. Coke, Mr. Asbury, and the brethren in America, dated Bristol, Sept. 10, 1784:—

"By a very uncommon train of providences, many of the provinces of North America are totally disjoined from their mother country, and erected into independent States. The English Government has no authority over them, either civil or ecclesiastical, any more than over the States of Holland. A civil authority is exercised over them, partly by the Congress, partly by the Provincial Assemblies. But no one either exercises or claims any ecclesiastical authority at all. In this peculiar situation, some thousands of the inhabitants of these States desire my advice; and, in compliance with their desire, I have drawn up a little sketch.

"Lord King's account of the primitive church convinced me, many years ago, that Bishops and Presbyters are the same order, and consequently have the same right to ordain. For many years I have been importuned, from time to time, to exercise this right, by ordaining part of our travelling preachers; but I have still refused, not only for peace sake, but because I was determined, as little as possible to violate the established order of the national church to which I belonged.

"But the case is widely different between England and North America. Here there are bishops who have a legal jurisdiction. In America there are none, neither any parish ministers. So that, for some hundred miles together, there is none either to baptize or to administer the Lord's Supper. Here, therefore, my scruples are at an end; and I conceive myself at full liberty, as I violate no order, and invade no man's right, by appointing and sending labourers into the harvest.

"I have accordingly appointed Dr. Coke and Mr. Francis Asbury to be joint Superintendants over our brethren in North America, as also Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey to act as Elders among them, by baptizing and administering the Lord's Supper. And I have prepared a Liturgy, little differing from that of the Church of England, (I think the best constituted national church in the world,) which I advise all the travelling preachers to use on the Lord's day, in all the congregations, reading the Litany only on Wednesdays and Fridays, and praying extempore on all other days. I also advise the Elders to administer the Supper of the Lord on every Lord's day."

Two persons were thus appointed as Superintendants or Bishops, and two as Elders, with power to administer the sacraments; and the American Methodists were formed into a church, because they could no longer remain a society attached to a colonial establishment which had then ceased to exist.