

THE
CHRISTIAN LEADERS
OF
The Last Century;
OR,
ENGLAND A HUNDRED YEARS AGO.

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"Enquire, I pray thee, of the former age, and prepare thyself to the search of
their fathers."—JOB viii. 8.

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John Wesley and his Ministry.

CHAPTER I.

John Wesley—Reason why better known than many of his Contemporaries—Birth-place—Sketch of his Father and Mother—Educated at Charter-House and Oxford—Early Religious History—Ordained, 1725—Lives at Oxford eight Years—Joins the Methodist Club—Sails for Georgia, 1736—Returns to England, 1738—Commences Field-preaching—Continues Working for fifty-three Years—Dies in 1791—Singleness of Eye, Diligence, and Versatility of Mind—Arminianism.

THE second in the list of English Reformers of the 18th century, whose history I propose to consider, is a man of world-wide reputation—the famous John Wesley.

The name of this great evangelist is perhaps better known than that of any of his fellow labourers of this period. This, however, is easily accounted for. He lived to the ripe old age of eighty-eight. For sixty-five years he was continually before the eyes of the public, and doing his Master's work in every part of England. He founded a new religious denomination, remarkable to this very day for its numbers, laboriousness, and success, and justly proud of its great founder. His life has been repeatedly written by his friends and followers, his works constantly reprinted, his precepts and maxims reverentially treasured up and embalmed, like Joseph's bones. In fact, if ever a good Protestant has been practically *canonized*, it has been John Wesley! It would be strange indeed if his name was not well known.

Of such a man as this I cannot pretend to give more than a brief account in the short space of a few pages. The leading facts of his long and well-spent life, and the leading features of his peculiar character, are all that I can possibly compress into the limits of this memoir. Those who want more must look elsewhere.*

John Wesley was born on the 17th of June 1703, at Epworth, in North Lincolnshire, of which parish his father was rector. He was the ninth of a family of at least thirteen children, comprising three sons and ten daughters. Of the daughters, those who grew up made singularly foolish and unhappy marriages. Of the sons, the eldest, Samuel, was for some years usher of Westminster School, and an intimate friend of the famous Bishop Atterbury, and

* The principal lives of Wesley by Methodist hands are those of Whitehead, Moore, and Watson. Southey's well-known life of Wesley is not a fair book, and the unfavourable animus of the writer throughout is painfully manifest. The best, most impartial, and most complete account of Wesley is one published by Seeley in 1856, by an anonymous writer.

finally died head-master of Tiverton School. The second, John, was founder of the Methodist communion; and the third, Charles, was almost throughout life John's companion and fellow-labourer.

John Wesley's father was a man of considerable learning and great activity of mind. As a writer, he was always bringing out something either in prose or in verse, but nothing, unhappily for his pocket, which was ever acceptable to the reading public, or is much cared for in the present day. As a politician, he was a zealous supporter of the Revolution which brought into England the House of Orange; and it was on this account that Queen Mary presented him to the Crown living of Epworth. As a clergyman, he seems to have been a diligent pastor and preacher, of the theological school of Archbishop Tillotson. As a manager of his worldly affairs, he appears to have been most unsuccessful. Though rector of a living now valued at £1000 a-year, he was always in pecuniary difficulties, was once in prison for debt, and finally left his widow and children almost destitute. When I add to this that he was not on good terms with his parishioners, and, poor as he was, insisted on going up to London every year to attend the very unprofitable meetings of Convocation for months at a time, the reader will probably agree with me that, like too many, he was a man of more book-learning and cleverness than good sense.

The mother of John Wesley was evidently a woman of extraordinary power of mind. She was the daughter of Dr. Annesley, a man well known to readers of Puritan theology as one of the chief promoters of the Morning Exercises, and ejected from St. Giles', Cripplegate, in 1662. From him she seems to have inherited the masculine sense and strong decided judgment which distinguished her character. To the influence of his mother's early training and example, John Wesley, doubtless, was indebted for many of his peculiar habits of mind and qualifications.

Her own account of the way in which she educated all her children, in one of her letters to her son John, is enough to show that she was no common woman, and that her sons were not likely to turn out common men. She says, "None of them was taught to read till five years old, except Keziah, in whose case I was over-ruled; and she was more years in learning than any of the rest had been months. The way of teaching was this: the day before a child began to learn, the house was set in order, every one's work appointed them, and a charge given that none should come into the room from nine to twelve, or from two to five, which were our school hours. One day was allowed the child wherein to learn its letters, and each of them did in that time know all its letters, great and small, except Molly and Nancy, who were a day and a half before they knew them perfectly, for which I then thought them very dull; but the reason why I thought them so was because the rest learned so readily, and your brother Samuel, who was the first child I ever taught, learnt

the alphabet in a few hours. He was five years old on the 10th of February; the next day he began to learn, and as soon as he knew the letters, began at the first chapter of Genesis. He was taught to spell the first verse, then to read it over and over till he could read it off-hand without any hesitation; so on to the second, &c., till he took ten verses for a lesson, which he quickly did. Easter fell low that year, and by Whitsuntide he could read a chapter very well, for he read continually, and had such a prodigious memory that I cannot remember ever to have told him the same word twice. What was stranger, any word he had learnt in his lesson he knew wherever he saw it, either in his Bible or any other book, by which means he learned very soon to read an English author well.”

Her energetic and decided conduct, as wife of a parish clergyman, is strikingly illustrated by a correspondence still extant between herself and her husband on a curious occasion. It appears that during Mr. Wesley’s long-protracted absences from home in attending Convocation, Mrs. Wesley, dissatisfied with the state of things at Epworth, began the habit of gathering a few parishioners at the rectory on Sunday evenings and reading to them. As might naturally have been expected, the attendance soon became so large that her husband took alarm at the report he heard, and made some objections to the practice. The letters of Mrs. Wesley on this occasion are a model of strong, hard-headed, Christian good sense, and deserve the perusal of many timid believers in the present day. After defending what she had done by many wise and unanswerable arguments, and beseeching her husband to consider seriously the bad consequences of stopping the meeting, she winds up all with the following remarkable paragraph:—“If you do, after all, think fit to dissolve this assembly, do not tell me that you desire me to do it, for that will not satisfy my conscience. But send me your positive *command* in such full and express terms as may absolve me from all guilt and punishment for neglecting the opportunity of doing good, when you and I shall appear before the great and awful tribunal of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

A mother of this stamp was just the person to leave deep marks and impressions on the minds of her children. Of the old rector of Epworth we can trace little in his sons John and Charles, except, perhaps, their poetical genius. But there is much in John’s career and character throughout life which shows the hand of his mother.

The early years of John Wesley’s life appear to have passed quietly away in his Lincolnshire home. The only remarkable event recorded by his biographers is his marvellous escape from being burnt alive, when Epworth rectory was burned down. This happened in 1709, when he was six years old, and seems to have been vividly impressed on his mind. He was pulled through the bedroom window, at the last moment, by a man who, for want of a ladder, stood on another man’s shoulders. Just at that moment the roof of

the house fell in, but happily fell inward, and the boy and his deliverer escaped unhurt. He says himself, in his description of the event, "When they brought me to the house where my father was, he cried out, 'Come, neighbours, let us kneel down! let us give thanks to God! He has given me all my eight children; let the house go, I am rich enough.'"

In the year 1714, at the age of eleven, John Wesley was placed at the Charter-house School in London. That mighty plunge in life—a boy's first entrance at a public school—seems to have done him no harm. He had probably been well grounded at his father's house in all the rudiments of a classical education, and soon became distinguished for his diligence and progress at school. At the age of sixteen his elder brother, then an usher at Westminster, describes him as "a brave boy, learning Hebrew as fast as he can."

In the year 1720, at the age of seventeen, John Wesley went up to Oxford as an undergraduate, having been elected to Christ Church. Little is known of the first three or four years of his university life, except that he was steady, studious, and remarkable for his classical knowledge and genius for composition. It is evident, however, that he made the best use of his time at college, and picked up as much as he could in a day when honorary class-lists were unknown, and incitements to study were very few. Like most great divines, he found the advantage of university education all his life long. Men might dislike his theology, but they could never say that he was a fool, and had no right to be heard.

In the beginning of 1725, at the age of twenty-two, he seems to have gone through much exercise of mind as to the choice of a profession. Naturally enough, he thought of taking orders, but was somewhat daunted by serious reflection on the solemnity of the step. This very reflection, however, appears to have been most useful to him, and to have produced in his mind deeper thoughts about God, his soul, and religion generally, than he had ever entertained before. He began to study divinity, and to go through a regular course of reading for the ministry. He had, probably, no very trustworthy guide in his choice of religious literature at this period. The books which apparently had the greatest influence on him were Jeremy Taylor's "Holy Living and Dying," and Thomas à Kempis's "Imitation of Christ." Devout and well-meaning as these authors are, they certainly were not likely to give him very clear views of scriptural Christianity, or very cheerful and happy views of Christ's service. In short, though they did him good by making him feel that true religion was a serious business, and a concern of the heart, they evidently left him in much darkness and perplexity.

At this stage of John Wesley's life, his correspondence with his father and mother is peculiarly interesting, and highly creditable both to the parents and the son. He evidently opened his mind to them, and told them all his mental and spiritual difficulties. His letters and their replies are well worth

reading. They all show more or less absence of spiritual light and clear views of the gospel. But a singular vein of honesty and conscientiousness runs throughout. One feels “This is just the spirit that God will bless. This is the single eye to which will be given more light.”

Let us hear what his father says about the question, “Which is the best commentary on the Bible?” “I answer, the Bible itself. For the several paraphrases and translations of it in the Polyglot, compared with the original and with one another, are in my opinion, to an honest, devout, industrious, and humble man, infinitely preferable to any comment I ever saw.”

Let us hear what his mother says on the point of taking holy orders:—“The alteration of your temper has occasioned me much speculation. I, who am apt to be sanguine, hope it may proceed from the operation of God’s Holy Spirit, that by taking off your relish for earthly enjoyments he may prepare and dispose your mind for a more serious and close application to things of a more sublime and spiritual nature. If it be so, happy are you if you cherish those dispositions. And now in good earnest resolve to make religion the business of your life; for, after all, that is the one thing that, strictly speaking, is necessary: all things beside are comparatively little to the purposes of life. I heartily wish you would now enter upon a strict examination of yourself, that you may know whether you have a reasonable hope of salvation by Jesus Christ. If you have the satisfaction of knowing, it will abundantly reward your pains; if you have not, you will find a more reasonable occasion for tears than can be met with in a tragedy. This matter deserves great consideration by all, but especially by those designed for the ministry, who ought above all things to make their own calling and election sure, lest, after they have preached to others, they themselves should be cast away.”

Let us hear what his mother says about Thomas a Kempis’s opinion, that all mirth or pleasure is useless, if not sinful. She observes:—“I take Kempis to have been an honest, weak man, that had more zeal than knowledge, by his condemning all mirth or pleasure as sinful or useless, in opposition to so many direct and plain texts of Scripture. Would you judge of the lawfulness or unlawfulness of pleasures? of the innocence or malignity of actions? take this rule,—whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, or takes off the relish of spiritual things; in short, whatever increases the strength and authority of your body over your mind, that thing is sin to you, however innocent it may be in itself.”

Let us hear what John Wesley himself says in a letter on the opinion of Jeremy Taylor—“Whether God has forgiven us or no, we know not; therefore let us be sorrowful for ever having sinned.” He remarks—“Surely the graces of the Holy Ghost are not of so little force as that we cannot perceive whether we have them or not. If we dwell in Christ, and Christ in us, which He will not do unless we be regenerate, certainly we must be sensible of it.

If we never can have any certainty of being in a state of salvation, good reason is it that every moment should be spent, not in joy, but in fear and trembling; and then, undoubtedly, in this life we are of all men most miserable. God deliver us from such a fearful expectation as this.”

Correspondence of this style could hardly fail to do good to a young man in John Wesley’s frame of mind. It led him no doubt to closer study of the Scriptures, deeper self-examination, and more fervent prayer. Whatever scruples he may have had were finally removed, and he was at length ordained deacon on September the 19th, 1725, by Dr. Potter, then Bishop of Oxford, and afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury.

In the year 1726 John Wesley was elected Fellow of Lincoln College, after a contest of more than ordinary severity. His recently adopted seriousness of deportment and general religiousness were used as a handle against him by his adversaries: But his high character carried him triumphantly through all opposition, to the great delight of his father. Tried as he apparently was at the time in his temporal circumstances, he wrote: “Whatever will be my own fate before the summer is over God knows; but, wherever I am, my Jack is Fellow of Lincoln.”

The eight years following John Wesley’s election to his fellowship of Lincoln—from 1726 to 1734—form a remarkable epoch in his life, and certainly gave a tone and colour to all his future history. During the whole of these years he was resident at Oxford, and for some time at any rate acted as tutor and lecturer in his college. Gradually, however, he seems to have laid himself out more and more to try to do good to others, and latterly was entirely taken up with it.

His mode of action was in the highest degree simple and unpretending. Assisted by his brother Charles, then a student of Christ Church, he gathered a small society of like-minded young men, in order to spend some evenings in a week together in the study of the Greek Testament. This was in November 1729. The members of this society were at first four in number; namely, John Wesley, Charles Wesley, Mr. Morgan of Christ Church, and Mr. Kirkman of Merton. At a somewhat later period they were joined by Mr. Ingham of Queen’s, Mr. Broughton of Exeter, Mr. Clayton of Brazenose, the famous George Whitefield of Pembroke, and the well-known James Hervey of Lincoln.

This little band of witnesses, as might reasonably have been expected, soon began to think of doing good to others, as well as getting good themselves. In the summer of 1730 they began to visit prisoners in the castle and poor people in the town, to send neglected children to school, to give temporal aid to the sick and needy, and to distribute Bibles and Prayer-books among those who had not got them. Their first steps were taken very cau-

tiously, and with frequent reference to John Wesley's father for advice. Acting by his advice, they laid all their operations before the Bishop of Oxford and his chaplain, and did nothing without full ecclesiastical sanction.

Cautious, and almost childish, however, as the proceedings of these young men may appear to us in the present day, they were too far in advance of the times to escape notice, hatred, and opposition. A kind of persecution and clamour was raised against Wesley and his companions as enthusiasts, fanatics, and troublers of Israel. They were nicknamed the "Methodists" or "Holy Club," and assailed with a storm of ridicule and abuse. Through this, however, they manfully persevered, and held on their way, being greatly encouraged by the letters of the old Rector of Epworth. In one of them he says, "I hear my son John has the honour of being styled the Father of the Holy Club. If it be so, I am sure I must be the grandfather of it, and I need not say that I had rather any of my sons should be so dignified and distinguished than have the title His Holiness."

The real amount of spiritual good that John Wesley did during these eight years of residence at Oxford is a point that cannot easily be ascertained. With all his devotedness, asceticism, and self-denial, it must be remembered that at this time he knew very little of the pure gospel of Christ. His views of religious truth, to say the least, were very dim, misty, defective, and indistinct. No one was more sensible of this than he afterwards was himself, and no one could be more ready and willing to confess it. Such books as "Law's Serious Call," "Law's Christian Perfection," "Theologia Germanica," and mystical writers, were about the highest pitch of divinity that he had yet attained. But we need not doubt that he learned experience at this period which he found useful in after-life. At any rate he became thoroughly trained in habits of laboriousness, time-redemption, and self-mortification, which he carried with him to the day of his death. God has his own way of tempering and preparing instruments for his work, and, whatever we may think, we may be sure his way is best.

In the year 1734 John Wesley's father died, and the family home was broken up. Just at this time the providence of God opened up to him a new sphere of duty, the acceptance of which had a most important effect on his whole spiritual history. This sphere was the colony of Georgia, in North America. The trustees of that infant settlement were greatly in want of proper clergymen to send out, both to preach the gospel to the Indians and to provide means of grace for the colonists. At this juncture John Wesley and his friends were suggested to their notice, as the most suitable persons they could find, on account of their high character for regular behaviour, attention to religious duties, and readiness to endure hardships. The upshot of the matter was, that an offer was made to John Wesley, and, after conferring with Mr. Law, his mother, his elder brother, and other friends, he accepted the proposal of the

trustees, and, in company with his brother Charles and their common friend Mr. Ingham, set sail for Georgia.

Wesley landed in Georgia on the 6th of February 1736, after a long stormy voyage of four months, and remained in the colony two years. I shall not take up the reader's time by any detailed account of his proceedings there. It may suffice to say, that, for any good he seems to have done, his mission was almost useless. Partly from the inherent difficulties of an English clergyman's position in a colony—partly from the confused and disorderly condition of the infant settlement where he was stationed—partly from a singular want of tact and discretion in dealing with men and things—partly, above all, from his own very imperfect views of the gospel, Wesley's expedition to Georgia appears to have been a great failure, and he was evidently glad to get away.

The ways of God, however, are not as man's ways. There was a "need be" for the two years' absence in America, just as there was for Philip's journey down the desert road to Gaza, and Paul's sojourn in prison at Caesarea. If Wesley did nothing in Georgia, he certainly gained a great deal. If he taught little to others, he undoubtedly learned much. On the outward voyage he became acquainted with some Moravians on board, and was deeply struck by their deliverance from "the fear of death" in a storm. After landing in Georgia he continued his intercourse with them, and discovered to his astonishment that there was such a thing as personal assurance of forgiveness. These things, combined with the peculiar trials, difficulties, and disappointments of his colonial ministry, worked mightily on his mind, and showed him more of himself and the gospel than he had ever learned before. The result was that he landed at Deal on the 1st of February 1738, a very much humbler, but a much wiser man than he had ever been before. In plain words, he had become the subject of a real inward work of the Holy Ghost.'

Wesley's own accounts of his spiritual experience during these two years of his life are deeply interesting. I will transcribe one or two of them.

On February the 7th, 1736, he records;—"On landing in Georgia I asked the advice of Mr. Spangenberg, one of the German pastors, with regard to my own conduct. He said in reply, 'My brother, I must first ask you one or two questions. Have you the witness within yourself? Does the Spirit of God bear witness with your spirit that you are a child of God?'—I was surprised, and knew not what to answer. He observed it, and asked, 'Do you know Jesus Christ?'—I paused, and said, 'I know he is the Saviour of the world.'—'True,' replied he; 'but do you know he has saved you?'—I answered, 'I hope he has died to save me.'—He only added, 'Do you know yourself?'—I said, 'I do.' But I fear they were vain words."

On January 24th, 1738, on board ship on his homeward voyage, he makes the following record:—"I went to America to convert the Indians; but oh,

who shall convert me? Who, what is he that will deliver me from this evil heart of unbelief? I have a fair summer religion; I can talk well; nay, and believe myself, while no danger is near. But let death look me in the face, and my spirit is troubled, nor can I say to die is gain.”

On February the 1st, 1738, the day that he landed in England, he says: “It is now two years and almost four months since I left my native country in order to teach the Georgian Indians the nature of Christianity; but what have I learned of myself in the meantime? Why, what I least suspected, that I, who went to America to convert others, was myself never converted to God! I am not mad, though I thus speak; but I speak the words of truth and soberness.”

“If it be said that I have faith—for many such things have I heard from miserable comforters—I answer, so have the devils a sort of faith; but still they are strangers to the covenant of promise. . . . The faith I want is a sure trust and confidence in God that through the merits of Christ my sins are forgiven, and I reconciled to the favour of God. I want that faith which St Paul recommends to all the world, especially in his Epistle to the Romans; that faith which makes every one that hath it to cry, ‘I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.’ I want that faith which none can have without knowing that he hath it.”

Records like these are deeply instructive. They teach that important lesson which man is so slow to learn—that we may have a great deal of earnestness and religiousness without any true soul-saving and soul-comforting religion—that we may be diligent in the use of fasting, prayers, forms, ordinances, and the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, without knowing anything of inward joy, peace, or communion with God—and above all, that we may be moral in life, and laborious in good works, without being true believers in Christ, or fit to die and meet God. Well would it be for the churches if truths like these were proclaimed from every pulpit, and pressed on every congregation! Thousands, for lack of such truths, are walking in a vain shadow, and totally ignorant that they are yet dead in sins. If any one wants to know how far a man may go in outward goodness, and yet not be a true Christian, let him carefully study the experience of John Wesley. I am bold to say that it is eminently truth for the times.

A man hungering and thirsting after righteousness, as Wesley was now, was not left long without more light. The good work which the Holy Ghost had begun within him was carried on rapidly after he landed in England, until the sun rose on his mind, and the shadows passed away. Partly by conference with Peter Bohler, a Moravian, and other Moravians in London, partly by study of the Scriptures, partly by special prayer for living, saving, justifying faith as the gift of God, he was brought to a clear view of the gospel, and found out the meaning of joy and peace in simply believing. Let me add—as

an act of justice to one of whom the world was not worthy—that at this period he was, by his own confession, much helped by Martin Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans.

This year, 1738, was beyond doubt the turning-point in Wesley’s spiritual history, and gave a direction to all his subsequent life. It was in the spring of this year that he began a religious society at the Moravian Chapel in Fetter Lane, London, which was the rough type and pattern of all Methodist societies formed afterwards. The rules of this little society are extant still, and with some additions, modifications, and improvements, contain the inward organization of Methodism in the present day. It was at this period also that he began preaching the new truths he had learned, in many of the pulpits in London, and soon found, like Whitefield, that the proclamation of salvation by grace, and justification by faith, was seldom allowed a second time. It was in the winter of this year, after returning from a visit to the Moravian settlement in Germany, that he began aggressive measures on home heathenism, and in the neighbourhood of Bristol followed Whitefield’s example by preaching in the open air, in rooms, or wherever men could be brought together.

We have now reached a point at which John Wesley’s history, like that of his great contemporary Whitefield, becomes one undeviating uniform narrative up to the time of his death. It would be useless to dwell on one year more than another. He was always occupied in one and the same business, always going up and down the land preaching, and always conducting evangelistic measures of some kind and description. For fifty-three years—from 1738 to 1791—he held on his course, always busy, and always busy about one thing—attacking sin and ignorance everywhere, preaching repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ everywhere—awakening open sinners, leading on inquirers, building up saints—never wearied, never swerving from the path he had marked out, and never doubting of success. Those only who read the Journals he kept for fifty years can have any idea of the immense amount of work that he got through. Never perhaps did any man have so many irons in the fire at one time, and yet succeed in keeping so many hot.

Like Whitefield, he justly regarded preaching as God’s chosen instrument for doing good to souls, and hence, wherever he went, his first step was to preach. Like him, too, he was ready to preach anywhere or at any hour—early in the morning or late at night, in church, in chapel, or in room—in streets, in fields, or on commons and greens. Like him, too, he was always preaching more or less the same great truths—sin, Christ, and holiness—ruin, redemption, and regeneration—the blood of Christ and the work of the Spirit—faith, repentance, and conversion—from one end of the year to the other.

Wesley, however, was very unlike Whitefield in one important respect. He did not forget to organize as well as to preach. He was not content with reaping the fields which he found ripe for the harvest. He took care to bind up his sheaves and gather them into the barn. He was as far superior to Whitefield as an administrator and man of method, as he was inferior to him as a mere preacher.* Shut out from the Church of England by the folly of its rulers, he laid the foundation of a new denomination with matchless skill, and with a rare discernment of the wants of human nature. To unite his people as one body—to give every one something to do—to make each one consider his neighbour and seek his edification—to call forth latent talent and utilize it in some direction—to keep “all at it and always at it” (to adopt his quaint saying),—these were his aims and objects. The machinery he called into existence was admirably well adapted to carry out his purposes. His preachers, lay-preachers, class-leaders, band-leaders, circuits, classes, bands, love-feasts, and watch-nights, made up a spiritual engine which stands to this day, and in its own way can hardly be improved. If one thing more than another has given permanence and solidity to Methodism, it was its founder’s masterly talent for organization.

It is needless to tell a Christian reader that Wesley had constantly to fight with opposition. The prince of this world will never allow his captives to be rescued from him without a struggle. Sometimes he was in danger of losing his life by the assaults of violent, ignorant, and semi-heathen mobs, as at Wednesbury, Walsall, Colne, Shoreham, and Devizes. Sometimes he was denounced by bishops as an enthusiast, a fanatic, and a sower of dissent. Often—far too often—he was preached against and held up to scorn by the parochial clergy, as a heretic, a mischief-maker, and a meddling troubler of Israel. But none of these things moved the good man. Calmly, resolutely, and

* A writer in the *North British Review* has well and forcibly described the difference between the two great English evangelists of the last century. “Whitefield was soul, and Wesley was system. Whitefield was the summer cloud which burst at morning or noon a fragrant exhalation over an ample track, and took the rest of the day to gather again: Wesley was the polished conduit in the midst of the garden, through which the living water glided in pearly brightness and perennial music, the same vivid stream from day to day. All force and impetus, Whitefield was the powder-blast in the quarry, and by one explosive sermon would shake a district, and detach materials for other men’s long work; deft, neat, and painstaking, Wesley loved to split and trim each fragment into uniform plinths and polished stones. Whitefield was the bargeman or the waggoner who brought the timber of the house, and Wesley was the architect who set it up. Whitefield had no patience for ecclesiastical polity, no aptitude for pastoral details; Wesley, with a leader-like propensity for building, was always constructing societies, and with a king-like craft of ruling, was most at home when presiding over a class or a conference. It was their infelicity that they did not always work together; it was the happiness of the age, and the furtherance of the gospel, that they lived alongside of one another.”

undauntedly he held on his course, and in scores of cases lived down all opposition. His letters in reply to the attacks made upon him are always dignified and sensible, and do equal honour to his heart and head.

I have now probably told the reader enough to give him a general idea of John Wesley's life and history. I dare not go further. Indeed, the last fifty years of his life were so entirely of one complexion, that I know not where I should stop if I went further. When I have said that they were years of constant travelling, preaching, organizing, conferring, writing, arguing, reasoning, counselling, and warring against sin, the world, and the devil, I have just said all that I dare enter upon.

He died at length in 1791, in the eighty-eighth year of his life and the sixty-fifth of his ministry, full of honour and respect, and in the "perfect peace" of the gospel. He had always enjoyed wonderful health, and never hardly knew what it was to feel weariness or pain till he was eighty-two. The weary wheels of life at length stood still, and he died of no disease but sheer old age.

The manner of his dying was in beautiful harmony with his life. He preached within a very few days of his death, and the texts of his two last sermons were curiously characteristic of the man. The last but one was at Chelsea, on February the 18th, on the words, "The king's business requireth haste" (1 Sam. xxi. 8). The last of all was at Leatherhead, on Wednesday the 23rd, on the words, "Seek ye the Lord while he may **be** found" (Isa. lv. 6). After this he gradually sunk, and died on Tuesday the 29th. He retained his senses to the end, and showed clearly where his heart and thoughts were to the very last.

The day but one before he died he slept much and spoke little. Once he said in a low but distinct manner, "There is no way into the holiest but by the blood of Jesus." He afterwards inquired what the words were from which he had preached a little before at Hampstead. Being told they were these, "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (2 Cor. viii. 8); he replied, "That is the foundation, the only foundation; there is no other."

The day before he died, he said suddenly, "I will get up." While they were preparing his clothes, he broke out in a manner which, considering his weakness, astonished all present, in singing,—

"I'll praise my Maker while I've breath,
And when my voice is lost in death,
Praise shall employ my noblest powers;
My days of praise shall ne'er be past,
While life, and thought, and being last,
Or immortality endures."

Not long after, a person coming in, he tried to speak, but could not. Finding they could not understand him, he paused a little, and then with all his remaining strength cried out, "The best of all is, God is with us;" and soon after, lifting up his dying voice in token of victory, and raising his feeble arm with a holy triumph, he again repeated the heart-reviving words, "The best of all is, God is with us." The night following he often attempted to repeat the hymn before mentioned, but could only utter the opening words, "I'll praise; I'll praise." About ten o'clock next morning he was heard to articulate the word "Farewell," and then without a groan fell asleep in Christ and rested from his labours. Truly this was a glorious sunset! "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his."

Wesley was once married. At the age of forty-eight he married a widow lady of the name of Vizelle, of a suitable age, and of some independent property, which she took care to have settled upon herself. The union was a most unhappy one. Whatever good qualities Mrs. Wesley may have had, they were buried and swallowed up in the fiercest and most absurd passion of jealousy. One of his biographers remarks, "Had he searched the whole kingdom, he could hardly have found a woman more unsuitable to him in all important respects." After making her husband as uncomfortable as possible for twenty years, by opening his letters, putting his papers in the hands of his enemies in the vain hope of blasting his character, and even sometimes laying violent hands on him, Mrs. Wesley at length left her home, leaving word that she never intended to return. Wesley simply states the fact in his journal, saying that he knew not the cause, and briefly adding, "I did not forsake her, I did not dismiss her, I will not recall her."

Like Whitefield, John Wesley left no children. But he left behind him a large and influential communion, which he not only saw spring up, but lived to see it attain a vigorous and healthy maturity. The number of Methodist preachers at the time of his death amounted in the British dominions to 313, and in the United States of America to 198. The number of Methodist members in the British dominions was 76,968, and in the United States 57,621. Facts like these need no comment; they speak for themselves. Few labourers for Christ have ever been so successful as Wesley, and to none certainly was it ever given to see so much with his own eyes.

In taking a general view of this great spiritual hero of the 18th century, it may be useful to point out some salient points of his character which demand particular attention. When God puts special honour on any of his servants, it is well to analyze their gifts, and to observe carefully what they were. What, then, were the peculiar qualifications which marked John Wesley?

The first thing which I ask the reader to notice is his extraordinary *singleness of eye and tenacity of purpose*. Once embarked on his evangelistic voyage, he pressed forward, and never flinched for a day. "One thing I do," seemed to be his motto and constraining motive. To preach the gospel, to labour to do good, to endeavour to save souls,—these seemed to become his only objects, and the ruling passion of his life. In pursuit of them he compassed sea and land, putting aside all considerations of ease and rest, and forgetting all earthly feelings. Few men but himself could have gone to Epworth, stood upon their father's tombstone, and preached to an open-air congregation, "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." Few but himself could have seen fellow-labourers, one after another, carried to their graves, till he stood almost alone in his generation, and yet preached on, as he did, with unabated spirit, as if the ranks around him were still full. But his marvellous singleness of eye carried him through all. "Beware of the man of one book," was the advice of an old philosopher to his pupils. The man of "one thing" is the man who in the long run does great things, and shakes the world.

The second thing I ask the reader to notice is his extraordinary *diligence, self denial, and economy of time*. It puts one almost out of breath to read the good man's Journals, and to mark the quantity of work that he crowded into one year. He was to all appearance always working, and never at rest. "Leisure and I," he said, "have taken leave of one another. I propose to be busy as long as I live, if my health is so long indulged to me." This resolution was made in the prime of life; and never was resolution more punctually observed. "Lord, let me not live to be useless," was the prayer which he uttered after seeing one, whom he once knew as an active and useful man, reduced by age to be a picture of human nature in disgrace, feeble in body and mind, slow of speech and understanding. Even the time which he spent in travelling was not lost. "History, poetry, and philosophy," said he, "I commonly read on horseback, having other employment at other times." When you met him in the street of a crowded city, he attracted notice not only by his bands and cassock, and his long silvery hair, but by his pace and manner; both indicating that all his minutes were numbered, and that not one was to be lost. "But though I am always in haste," he said, "I am never in a hurry, because I never undertake any more work than I can go through with perfect calmness of spirit." Here, again, is one secret of great usefulness. We must abhor idleness; we must redeem time. No man knows how much can be done in twelve hours until he tries. It is precisely those who do most work who find that they can do most.

The last thing which I ask the reader to notice is his marvellous *versatility of mind and capacity for a variety of things*. No one perhaps can fully realize this who does not read the large biographies which record all his doings, or

study his wonderful Journals. Things the most opposite and unlike—things the most petty and trifling—things the most thoroughly secular—things most thoroughly spiritual,—all are alike mastered by his omnivorous mind. He finds time for all, and gives directions about all. One day we find him condensing old divinity, and publishing fifty volumes of theology, called the “Christian Library;”—another day we find him writing a complete commentary on the whole Bible;—another day we find him composing hymns, which live to this day in the praises of many a congregation;—another day we find him drawing up minute directions for his preachers, forbidding them to shout and scream and preach too long, insisting on their reading regularly lest their sermons became threadbare, requiring them not to drink spirits, and charging them to get up early in the morning;—another day we find him calmly reviewing the current literature of the day, and criticizing all the new books with cool and shrewd remarks, as if he had nothing else to do. Like Napoleon, nothing seems too small or too great for his mind to attend to; like Calvin, he writes as if he had nothing to do but write, preaches as if he had nothing to do but preach, and administers as if he had nothing to do but administer. A versatility like this is one mighty secret of power, and is a striking characteristic of most men who leave their mark on the world. To be a steam-engine and a penknife, a telescope and a microscope, at the same time, is probably one of the highest attainments of the human mind.

I should think my sketch of Wesley incomplete if I did not notice the objection continually made against him—that he was an Arminian in doctrine. I fully admit the seriousness of the objection. I do not pretend either to explain the charge away, or to defend his objectionable opinions. Personally, I feel unable to account for any well-instructed Christian holding such doctrines as perfection and the defectibility of grace, or denying such as election and the imputed righteousness of Christ.

But, after all, we must beware that we do not condemn men too strongly for not seeing all things in our point of view, or excommunicate and anathematize them because they do not pronounce our shibboleth. It is written in God’s Word, “Why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother?” We must think and let think. We must learn to distinguish between things that are of the *essence* of the gospel and things which are of the *perfection of* gospel. We may think that a man preaches an imperfect gospel who denies election, considers justification to be nothing more than forgiveness, and tells believers in one sermon that they may attain perfection in this life, and in another sermon that they may entirely fall away from grace. But if the same man strongly and boldly exposes and denounces sin, clearly and fully lifts up Christ, distinctly and openly invites men to believe and repent, shall we dare to say that the man does not preach the gospel at all? Shall we dare to say that he will do no good? I, for one, cannot say so,

at any rate. If I am asked whether I prefer Whitefield's gospel or Wesley's, I answer at once that I prefer Whitefield's: I am a Calvinist, and not an Arminian. But if I am asked to go further, and to say that Wesley preached no gospel at all, and did no real good, I answer at once that I cannot do so. That Wesley would have done better if he could have thrown off his Arminianism, I have not the least doubt; but that he preached the gospel, honoured Christ, and did extensive good, I no more doubt than I doubt my own existence.

Let those who depreciate Wesley as an Arminian, read his own words in the funeral sermon which he preached on the occasion of Whitefield's death. He says of his great fellow labourer and brother:—

“His fundamental point was to give God all the glory of whatever is good in man. In the business of salvation he set Christ as high and man as low as possible. With this point he and his friends at Oxford—the original Methodists so-called—set out. Their grand principle was, there is no power by nature, and no merit in man. They insisted, ‘all grace to speak, think, or act right, is in and from the Spirit of Christ; and all merit is not in man, how high soever in grace, but merely in the blood of Christ.’ So he and they taught. There is no power in man, till it is given him from above, to do one good work, to speak one good word, or to form one good desire. For it is not enough to say all men are sick of sin: no, we are all *dead* in trespasses and sins.

“And we are all helpless, both with regard to the power and the guilt of sin. For who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? None less than the Almighty. Who can raise those that are dead, spiritually dead, in sin? None but he who raised us from the dust of the earth. But on what consideration will he do this? Not for works of righteousness that we have done. The dead cannot praise thee, O Lord, nor can they do anything for which they should be raised to life. Whatever, therefore, God does, he does it merely for the sake of his well-beloved Son. ‘He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities. He himself bore all our sins in his own body on the tree. He was delivered for our offences, and rose again for our justification.’ Here, then, is the sole meritorious cause of every blessing we can or do enjoy, and, in particular, of our pardon and acceptance with God, of our full and free justification. But by what means do we become interested in what Christ has done and suffered? ‘Not by works, lest any man should boast, but by faith alone.’ ‘We conclude,’ says the apostle, ‘that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.’ And ‘to as many as receive Christ he gives power to become sons of God; even to them which believe in his name, who are born not of the will of man but of God.’

“Except a man be thus born again he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. But all who are thus born of the Spirit have the kingdom of God within them. Christ sets up his kingdom in their hearts—righteousness, peace, and

joy in the Holy Ghost. That mind is in them which was in Christ Jesus, enabling them to walk as Christ walked. His indwelling Spirit makes them holy in mind, and holy in all manner of conversation. But still, seeing all this is a free gift through the blood and righteousness of Christ, there is eternally the same reason to remember—he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

“You are not ignorant that these are the fundamental doctrines which Mr. Whitefield everywhere insisted on; and may they not be summed up, as it were, in two words—’the new birth, and justification by faith?’ These let us insist upon with all boldness, and at all times, in all places, in public and in private. Let us keep close to these good old unfashionable doctrines, how many soever contradict and blaspheme.”

Such were the words of the Arminian, John Wesley. I make no comment on them. I only say, before any one despises this great man because he was an Arminian, let him take care that he really knows what Wesley’s opinions were. Above all, let him take care that he thoroughly understands what kind of doctrines he used to preach in England a hundred years ago.

CHAPTER II.

Wesley's Preaching—Preface to Published Volume of Sermons—Extracts from Sermons Preached before the University of Oxford—Rules for the Guidance of his Helpers—Advice to his Preachers—Letter to the Bishop of Lincoln—General Estimate of Wesley's Merits.

ENGLAND a hundred years ago received such deep impressions from John Wesley, that I should not feel I did him justice if I did not give my readers a few select specimens of his writings. Before we turn away from the father of Methodism, let us try to get some distinct idea of his style of thought and his mode of expressing himself. Let us see how his mind worked.

The man who could leave his mark so indelibly on his fellow-countrymen as John Wesley did, we must all feel could have been no ordinary man. The man who could keep his hold on assemblies till he was between eighty and ninety years old, and produce effects second only to those produced by Whitefield, must evidently have possessed peculiar gifts. Two or three extracts from his sermons and other writings will probably be thought interesting and instructive by most Christian readers.

The materials for forming a judgment in this matter are happily abundant, and easily accessible. A volume of fifty-seven sermons lies before me at this moment, prepared for publication by Wesley's own hands, and first published in 1771. It is a volume that deserves far more attention than it generally receives in the present day. The doctrine of some of the discourses, I must honestly confess, is sometimes very defective. Nevertheless, the volume contains many noble passages; and there are not a few pages in it which, for clearness, terseness, pointedness, vigour, and pure Saxon phraseology, are perfect models of good style.

Wesley's preface to his volume of sermons is of itself very remarkable. I will begin by giving a few extracts from it. He says,—

“I design plain truth for plain people. Therefore, of set purpose, I abstain from all nice and philosophical speculations; from all perplexed and intricate reasonings; and, as far as possible, from even the show of learning, unless in sometimes citing the original Scriptures. I labour to avoid all words which are not easy to be understood—all which are not used in common life; and in particular those technical terms that so frequently occur in Bodies of divinity—those modes of speaking which men of reading are intimately acquainted with, but which to common people are an unknown tongue. Yet I am not assured that I do not sometimes slide into them unawares; it is so extremely natural to imagine that a word which is familiar to ourselves is so to all the world.

“Nay, my design is, in some sense, to forget all that ever I have read in my life. I mean to speak in the general, as if I had never read one author, ancient or modern, always excepting the inspired. I am persuaded that, on the one hand, this may be a means of enabling me more clearly to express the sentiments of my heart, while I simply follow the chain of my own thoughts without entangling myself with those of other men; and that, on the other, I shall come with fewer weights upon my mind,

with less of prejudice and prepossession, either to search for myself or to deliver to others the naked truth of the gospel.

“To candid, reasonable men I am not afraid to lay open what have been the inmost thoughts of my heart. I have thought, ‘I am a creature of a day, passing through life as an arrow through the air. I am a spirit come from God, and returning to God, just hovering over the great gulf, till a few moments hence I am no more seen! I drop into an unchangeable eternity! I want to know one thing,—the way to heaven—how to land safe on that happy shore. God himself has condescended to teach the way; for this very end he came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book. Oh, give me that book! At any price give me the book of God! I have it: here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be a man of one book. Here, then, I am free from the busy ways of men. I sit down alone: only God is here. In his presence I open, I read his book; for this end—to find the way to heaven. Is there a doubt concerning the meaning of what I read?—does anything appear dark and intricate?—I lift up my heart to the Father of lights: Lord, is it not thy word, “If any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God thou givest liberally, and upbraidest not. Thou hast said, if any be willing to do thy will he shall know. I am willing to do; let me know thy will. I then search after and consider parallel passages of Scripture, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. I meditate thereon with all the earnestness and attention of which my mind is capable. If any doubt still remains, I consult those who are experienced in the ways of God; and then the writings whereby, being dead, they yet speak. And what I thus learn that I teach.’

“But some may say, I have mistaken the way myself, although I have undertaken to teach it to others. It is probable that many will think this, and it is very possible that I have. But I trust, whereinsoever I have mistaken, my mind is open to conviction. I sincerely desire to be better informed. I say to God and man, ‘What I know not teach thou me.’

“Are you persuaded you see more clearly than me? It is not unlikely that you may. Then treat me as you would desire to be treated yourself upon a change of circumstances. Point me out a better way than I have yet known. Show me it is so by plain proof of Scripture. And if I linger in the path I have been accustomed to tread, and therefore I am unwilling to leave it, labour with me a little; take me by the hand and lead me as I am able to bear. But be not discouraged if I entreat you not to beat me down in order to quicken my pace: I can go but feebly and slowly at best: *then* I should not be able to go at all. May I not request you, further, not to give me hard names, in order to bring me into the right way. Suppose I was ever so much in the wrong, I doubt this would not set me right. Rather it would make me run so much the further from you, and so get more and more out of the way.

“Nay! perhaps if you are angry, so shall I be too; and then there will be small hopes of finding the truth. If once anger arises, its smoke will so dim the eyes of my soul that I shall be able to see nothing clearly. For God’s sake, if it be possible to avoid it, let us not provoke one another to wrath. Let us not kindle in each other this fire of hell; much less blow it up into a flame. If we could discern truth by that dreadful light, would it not be loss rather than gain? For how far is love, even with many wrong opinions, to be preferred before truth itself without love! We may die

without the knowledge of many truths, and yet be carried into Abraham's bosom. But if we die without love, what will knowledge avail? Just as much as it avails the devil and his angels!"

The next specimen of John Wesley's mind shall be an extract from a sermon preached by him at St. Mary's, Oxford, before the University, on June 18, 1738, from the words, "By grace ye are saved through faith" (Ephes, ii. 8). It concludes with the following passages:—

"At this time more especially will we speak, that *by grace ye are saved through faith*, because never was the maintaining this doctrine more seasonable than it is at this day. Nothing but this can effectually prevent the increase of the Romish delusion among us. It is endless to attack one by one all the errors of that Church. But salvation by faith strikes at the root, and all fall at once when this is established. It was this doctrine, which our Church justly calls the strong rock and foundation of the Christian religion, that first drove Popery out of these kingdoms, and it is this alone can keep it out. Nothing but this can give a check to that immorality which hath overspread the land as a flood. Can you empty the great deep drop by drop? Then you may reform us by dissuasion from particular vices. But let the righteousness which is of God by faith be brought in, and so shall its proud waves be stayed. Nothing but this can stop the mouths of those who glory in their shame, and openly 'deny the Lord that bought them.' They can talk as sublimely of the law as he that hath it written by God in his heart. To hear them speak on this head might incline one to think they were not far from the kingdom of God. But take them out of the law into the gospel; begin with the righteousness of faith, with *Christ the end of the law to every one that believeth*; and those who but now appeared almost if not altogether Christians, stand confessed the sons of perdition, as far from life and salvation (God be merciful unto them) as the depth of hell from the height of heaven.

"For this cause the adversary so rages whenever salvation by faith is declared to the world. For this reason did he stir up earth and hell to destroy those who preached it. And for the same reason, knowing that faith alone could overturn the foundation of his kingdom, did he call forth all his forces, and employ all his arts of lies and calumny, to affright that champion of the Lord of hosts, Martin Luther, from reviving it. Nor can we wonder thereat; for as that man of God observes, How would it enrage a proud, strong man, armed, to be stopped and set at nought by a little child coming against him with a reed in his hand? Especially when he knew that little child would surely overthrow him and tread him under foot. Even so, Lord Jesus! thus hath thy strength been even made perfect in weakness! Go forth then, thou little child that believest in Him, and his right hand shall teach thee terrible things. Though thou art helpless and weak as an infant of days, the strong man shall not be able to stand before thee. Thou shalt prevail over him, and subdue him, and overthrow him, and trample him under thy feet. Thou shalt march on with the great Captain of thy salvation, conquering and to conquer, until all thine enemies are destroyed, and death is swallowed up in victory."

The next specimen that I will give of John Wesley's preaching is the conclusion of his sermon on justification by faith. It ends with the following striking paragraph. The text is Romans iv. 5:—

“Thou ungodly one who hearest or readest these words, thou vile, helpless, miserable sinner, I charge thee before God, the judge of all, go straight unto Jesus with all thy ungodliness. Take heed thou destroy not thine own soul by pleading thy righteousness more or less. Go as altogether ungodly, guilty, lost, destroyed, deserving and dropping into hell; and thus shalt thou find favour in his sight, and know that he justifieth the ungodly. As such thou shalt be brought unto the blood of sprinkling, as an undone, helpless, damned sinner. Thus look unto Jesus! There is the Lamb of God, who taketh away thy sins! Plead thou no works, no righteousness of thine own! no humility, contrition, sincerity. In no wise. That were, in very deed, to deny the Lord that bought thee. No! Plead thou singly the blood of the covenant, the ransom paid for thy proud, stubborn, sinful soul. Who art thou that now seest and feelest both thine inward and outward ungodliness! Thou art the man! I want thee for my Lord. I challenge thee for a child of God by faith. The Lord hath need of thee. Thou who feelest thou art just fit for hell art just fit to advance his glory, the glory of free grace, justifying the ungodly and him that worketh not. Oh, come quickly! Believe in the Lord Jesus; and thou, even thou, art reconciled to God.”

The last example of John Wesley’s preaching that I will bring before the reader, is a portion of a sermon preached by him at St. Mary’s, Oxford, before the University, in 1744. The text is Acts iv. 31, and the title of the sermon is “Scriptural Christianity.” After asking the question, “Where does Scriptural Christianity exist?” he proceeds to address his hearers in the following manner.—These hearers, we must remember, were the University of Oxford, Heads of Houses, Professors, Fellows, Tutors, and other residents:—

“I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, if ye do account me a madman or a fool, yet as a fool bear with me. It is utterly needful that some one should use great plainness of speech towards you. It is more especially needful at this time; for who knoweth but it may be the last. Who knoweth how soon the righteous Judge may say: ‘I will no more be entreated for this people. Though Noah, Daniel, and Job were in this land, they should but deliver their own souls.’ And who will use this plainness if I do not? Therefore I, even I, will speak. And I adjure you, by the living God, that ye steel not your hearts against receiving a blessing at my hands. Do not say in your hearts, ‘*non persuadebis etiamsi persuaseris;*’ or, in other words, ‘Lord, thou shalt not send by whom thou wilt send. Let me rather perish in my blood than be saved by this man.’

“Brethren, I am persuaded better things of you, though I thus speak. Let me ask you then, in tender love, and in the spirit of meekness, is this city of Oxford a Christian city? Is Christianity, Scriptural Christianity, found here? Are we, as a community of men, so *filled with the Holy Ghost* as to enjoy in our hearts, and show forth in our lives, the genuine fruits of the Spirit? Are all the magistrates, all heads and governors of colleges and halls, and their respective societies (not to speak of inhabitants of the town), of one heart and one soul? Is the love of God shed abroad in our hearts? Are our tempers the same that were in Him? Are our lives agreeable thereto? Are we holy, as He who hath called us is holy, in all manner of conversation?

“In the fear, and in the presence of the great God before whom both you and I shall shortly appear, I pray you that are in authority over us (whom I reverence for your office’s sake), to consider not after the manner of dissemblers with God. Are you filled with the Holy Ghost? Are you lively portraitures of him whom ye are appointed to represent among men? *I have said, ye are gods, ye magistrates and rulers; ye are by office so nearly allied to the God of heaven.* In your several stations and degrees ye are to show forth to us the Lord our Governor. Are all the thoughts of your hearts, all your tempers and desires, suitable to your high calling? Are all your words like unto those which come out of the mouth of God? Is there in all your actions dignity and love, a greatness which words cannot express, which can flow only from a heart full of God, and yet consistent with the character of man that is a worm, and the son of man that is a worm?

“Ye venerable men, who are more especially called to form the tender minds of youth, to dispel therein the shades of ignorance and error, and train them up to be heirs unto salvation, are you filled with the Holy Ghost, and with those fruits of the Spirit which your important office so indispensably requires? Is your heart whole with God, and full of love and zeal to set up his kingdom on earth? Do you continually remind those under your care that the one rational end of all our studies is to know, love, and serve the only true God and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent? Do you inculcate upon them day by day that love alone never faileth, and that without love all learning is but splendid ignorance, pompous folly, vexation of spirit? Has all you teach an actual tendency to the love of God, and of all mankind for his sake? Have you an eye to this end, in whatever you prescribe, touching the kind, manner, and measure of their studies, desiring and labouring that wherever the lot of these young soldiers of Christ is cast, they may be so many burning and shining lights, adorning the gospel of Christ in all things? And, permit me to ask, do you put forth all your strength in the vast work you have undertaken? Do you labour herein with all your might, exerting every faculty of your souls, using every talent which God hath lent you, and that to the uttermost of your power?

“Let it not be said that I speak here as if all under your care were intended to be clergymen. Not so; I only speak as if they were all intended to be Christians. But what example is set them by us who enjoy the beneficence of our forefathers, by fellows, students, scholars, more especially those who are of some rank and eminence? Do ye, brethren, abound in the fruits of the Spirit, in lowliness of mind, in self-denial and mortification, in tenderness and composure of spirit, in patience, meekness, sobriety, temperance, and in unwearied, restless endeavours to do good unto all men, to relieve their outward wants and to bring their souls to the true knowledge and love of God? Is this the general character of Fellows of colleges? I fear it is not. Rather, have not pride and haughtiness of spirit, impatience and peevishness, sloth and indolence, gluttony and sensuality, and even a proverbial uselessness, been objected to us, perhaps not always by our enemies nor wholly without ground? Oh! that God would roll away this reproach from us, that the very memory of it might perish for ever!

“Many of us are men immediately consecrated to God, called to minister in holy things. Are we, then, patterns to the rest, in word, in conversation, in charity, in

spirit, in faith, in purity? Is there written on our foreheads and on our hearts, Holiness to the Lord? From what motive did we enter upon the office? Was it indeed with a single eye to serve God, trusting that we were inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon us this ministration for the promotion of his glory, and the edifying of his people? And have we clearly determined, by God's grace, to give ourselves wholly to this office? Do we forsake and set aside, as much as in us lies, all worldly cares and studies? Do we apply ourselves wholly to this one thing, and draw all our cares and studies this way? Are we apt to teach? Are we taught of God, that we may be able to teach others also? Do we know God? Do we know Jesus Christ? Hath God revealed his Son in us? And hath he made us able ministers of the new covenant? Where, then, are the seals of our apostleship? Who that were dead in trespasses and sins, have been quickened by our word? Have we a burning zeal to save souls from death, so that for their sakes we often forget even to eat our bread? Do we speak plainly, by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience? Are we dead to the world, and the things of the world, laying up all our treasure in heaven? Do we lord it over God's heritage, or are we the least, the servants of all? When we bear the reproach of Christ does it sit heavy on us, or do we rejoice therein? When we are smitten on the one cheek, do we resent it? Are we impatient of affronts? or do we turn the other cheek also, not resisting evil, but overcoming evil with good? Have we a bitter zeal, inciting us to strive sharply and passionately with them that are out of the way? or, is our zeal the flame of love, so as to direct all our words with sweetness, lowliness, and meekness of wisdom?

“Once more, what shall we say concerning the youth of this place?—Have you either the form or the power of Christian godliness? Are you humble, teachable, advisable; or stubborn, self-willed, heady, and high-minded? Are you obedient to your superiors as to parents, or do you despise those to whom ye owe the tenderest reverence? Are you diligent in your every business, pursuing your studies with all your strength? Do you redeem the time, crowding as much work into every day as it can contain? Rather are ye not conscious to yourselves that you waste away day after day, either in reading what has no tendency to Christianity, or in gambling, or in—you know not what? Are you better managers of your fortune than of your time? Do you, out of principle, take care to owe no man anything? Do you remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy, to spend it in the more immediate worship of God! When you are in his house, do you consider God is there? do you behave as seeing him that is invisible? Do you know how to possess your bodies in sanctification and honour? Are not drunkenness and uncleanness found among you? Yea, are there not a multitude of you who glory in their shame? Do not many of you take the name of God in vain, perhaps habitually, without either remorse or fear? Yea, are there not a multitude among you that are forsworn? I fear a swiftly-increasing multitude? Be not surprised, brethren. Before God and this congregation I own myself to have been of this number, solemnly swearing to observe all those customs which I then knew nothing of, and those statutes which I did not so much as read over, either then or for some years after. What is perjury if this is not? But if it be, oh, what a weight of sin, yea, sin of no common dye, lieth upon us! And doth not the Most High regard it?

“May it not be one of the consequences of this that so many of you are a generation of triflers, triflers with God, with one another, and with your own souls? For how few of you spend, from one week to another, a single hour in private prayer? How few of you have any thought of God in the general tenor of your conversation? Who of you is in any degree acquainted with the work of his Spirit, his supernatural work in the souls of men? Can you hear, unless now and then in a church, any talk of the Holy Spirit? Would you not take it for granted, if one began such a conversation, that it was either hypocrisy or enthusiasm? In the name of the Lord God Almighty, I ask what religion are you of? Even the talk of Christianity, ye cannot, will not bear. Oh, my brethren, what a Christian city is this! It is time for thee, Lord, to lay to thine hand.

“For, indeed, what probability—what possibility rather, speaking after the manner of men—is there that Christianity, Scriptural Christianity, should be again the religion of this place, and that all orders of men among us should speak and live as men filled with the Holy Spirit? By whom should this Christianity be restored? By those of you that are in authority? Are you convinced, then, that this is Scriptural Christianity? Are you desirous it should be restored? Do you count your fortune, liberty, life, not dear unto yourselves so you may be instrumental in restoring of it? But suppose you have the desire, who hath any power proportioned to effect? Perhaps some of you have made a few vain attempts, but with how small success! Shall Christianity, then, be restored by young, unknown, inconsiderable men? I know not whether ye yourselves would suffer it. Would not some of you cry out, ‘Young man, in so doing thou reproachest us!’ But there is no danger of your being put to the proof; so hath iniquity overspread us like a flood. Whom then, shall God send? The famine, the pestilence (God’s last messengers to a guilty land), or the sword? the armies of Romish aliens to reform us into our first love? Nay, rather let us fall into thy hand, O Lord; and let us not fall into the hand of man.

“Lord, save, or we perish! Take us out of the mire, that we sink not! Oh, help us against these enemies, for vain is the help of man. Unto thee all things are possible. According to the greatness of thy power, preserve then those that are appointed to die, and preserve us in the manner that seemeth to thee good; not as we will, but as thou wilt.”

The reader will probably agree with me that this is a remarkable sermon, and one of a class that is not frequently heard in University pulpits. What was thought of it in 1744 by the Vice-chancellor, the Heads of Houses, and the Fellows and Tutors of Colleges, we have little means of knowing. In his journal, Wesley only remarks: “I preached this day for the last time, I suppose, at St. Mary’s. Be it so. I am now clear of the blood of these men. I have fully delivered my own soul. The beadle came to me afterwards, and told me, ‘that the Vice-chancellor had sent him for my notes.’ I sent them without delay, not without admiring the wise providence of God. Perhaps few men of note would have given a sermon of mine the reading, if I had put it in their hands. But by this reason it came to be read, probably more than once, by every man of eminence in the University.” Many, perhaps, will agree with me that, if Oxford had heard more of such plain preaching during the last one hundred and fifty years, it would have been well for the Church of England.

Turning away from Wesley's preaching, I will now give a specimen of his mind of a very different description. I will give the twelve rules which he laid down for the guidance of his helpers in evangelistic work in the Methodist communion. They serve to illustrate, I think, in a very striking manner, the great shrewdness and good sense of the man, and are also good examples of his terse, pithy style of composition. He says to his helpers:—

"1. Be diligent. Never be unemployed for a moment; never be triflingly employed. Never while away time; neither spend any more time at any place than is strictly necessary.

"2. Be serious. Let your motto be, Holiness to the Lord. Avoid all lightness, jesting, and foolish talking.

"3. Converse sparingly and cautiously with women, particularly with young women in private.

"4. Take no step towards marriage without first acquainting me with your design.

"5. Believe evil of no one; unless you see it done, take heed how you credit it. Put the best construction on everything: you know the judge is always supposed to be on the prisoner's side.

"6. Speak evil of no one; else your words especially would eat as doth a canker. Keep your thoughts within your own breast till you come to the person concerned.

"7. Tell every one what you think wrong in him, and that plainly, and as soon as may be, else it will fester in your heart. Make all haste to cast the fire out of your bosom.

"8. Do not *affect* the gentleman. You have no more to do with this character than with that of a dancing-master. A preacher of the gospel is the servant of all.

"9. Be ashamed of nothing but sin; not of fetching wood (if time permit), or of drawing water; not of cleaning your own shoes, or your neighbour's.

"10. Be punctual. Do everything exactly at the time; and, in general, do not mend our rules, but keep them; not for wrath, but for conscience's sake.

"11. You have nothing to do but to save souls. Therefore spend and be spent in this work. And go always not to those who want you, but to those who want you most.

"12. Act in all things, not according to your own will, but as a son in the gospel. As such, it is your part to employ your time in the manner which we direct, partly in preaching and visiting the flock from house to house; partly in reading, meditation, and prayer. Above all, if you labour with us in the Lord's vineyard, it is needful that you should do that part of the work which we advise, at those times and places which we judge most for his glory."

Comment on these rules is needless. They speak for themselves. Though originally drawn up with a special view to the wants of the Methodist helpers, they contain wisdom for all bodies of Christians. Happy would it be for all the churches of Christ, if all the ministers of the gospel would carry out the spirit of these rules, and remember their wise suggestions far more than they do.

Let us next take an illustration of the manner in which he used to advise his preachers individually. To one who was in danger of becoming a noisy, clamorous

preacher, he writes:—

“Scream no more at peril of your soul. God now warns you by me, whom he has set over you. Speak as earnestly as you can, but do not scream. Speak with all your heart, but with a moderate voice. It was said of our Lord, ‘He shall not *cry*.’ The word means properly, he shall not *scream*. Herein be a follower of me, as I am of Christ. I often speak loud, often vehemently; but I never scream; I never strain myself; I dare not; I know it would be a sin against God and my own soul.”

To one who neglected the duty of private reading and regular study, he wrote as follows:—

“Hence your talent in preaching does not increase; it is just the same as it was seven years ago. It is lively, but not deep; there is little variety; there is no compass of thought. Reading only can supply this, with daily meditation and daily prayer. You wrong yourself greatly by omitting this; you never can be a deep preacher without it, any more than a thorough Christian. Oh begin! Fix some part of every day for private exercises. You may acquire the taste which you have not; what is tedious at first will afterwards be pleasant. Whether you like it or not, read and pray daily. It is for your life! There is no other way; else you will be a trifler all your days, and a pretty superficial preacher. Do justice to your own soul; give it time and means to grow: do not starve yourself any longer.”

The last specimen of John Wesley’s mind that I will give, is an extract from a letter which he wrote to the Bishop of Lincoln, by way of public protest, on account of the disgraceful persecution which some intolerant magistrates carried on against the Lincolnshire Methodists. It is an interesting letter, not only on account of the holy boldness of its style, but also on account of the age of the writer. He says:—

“My Lord, I am a dying man, having already one foot in the grave. Humanly speaking, I cannot long creep upon the earth, being now nearer ninety than eighty years of age. But I cannot die in peace before I have discharged this office of Christian love to your Lordship. I write without ceremony, as neither hoping nor fearing anything from your Lordship or from any man living. And I ask, in the name and in the presence of Him, to whom both you and I are shortly to give an account, why do you trouble those that are quiet in the land, those that fear God and work righteousness? Does your Lordship know what the Methodists are—that many thousands of them are zealous members of the Church of England, and strongly attached, not only to His Majesty, but to his present ministry? Why should your Lordship, setting religion out of the question, throw away such a body of respectable friends? Is it for their religious sentiments? Alas, my Lord, is this a time to persecute any man for conscience’s sake? I beseech you, my Lord, do as you would be done to. You are a man of sense; you are a man of learning; nay, I verily believe (what is of infinitely more value), you are a man of piety. Then think, and let think. I pray God to bless you with the choicest of his blessings.”

With this letter I conclude my illustrations of John Wesley’s mind and its working. It would be easy to add to the extracts I have given from the large stock of materials which are still within reach of all who choose to look for them. But there is such a thing as overloading a subject, and injuring it by over-quotation. I believe I have said enough to supply my readers with the means of forming a judgment of John Wesley’s mental calibre.

Has any one been accustomed to regard the father of Methodism as a mere fanatic, as a man of moderate abilities and superficial education, as a successful popular preacher and leader of an ignorant sect, but nothing more? I ask such a one to examine carefully the specimens I have given of Wesley's mind, and to reconsider his opinion. Whether men like Methodist doctrine or not, I think they must honestly concede that the old Fellow of Lincoln was a scholar and a sensible man. The world, which always sneers at evangelical religion, may please itself by saying that the men who shook England a hundred years ago were weak-minded, hot-headed enthusiasts, and unlearned and ignorant men. The Jews said the same of the apostles in early days. But the world cannot get over facts. The founder of Methodism was a man of no mean reputation in Oxford, and his writings show him to have been a well-read, logical-minded, and intelligent man. Let the children of this world deny this if they can.

Finally, has any one been accustomed to regard Wesley with dislike on account of his Arminian opinions? Is any one in the habit of turning away from his name with prejudice, and refusing to believe that such an imperfect preacher of the gospel could do any good? I ask such a one to remould his opinion, to take a more kindly view of the old soldier of the cross, and to give him the honour he deserves.

What though John Wesley did not use all the weapons of truth which our great Captain has provided? What though he often said things which you and I feel we could not say, and left unsaid things which we feel ought to be said? Still, notwithstanding this, he was a bold fighter on Christ's side, a fearless warrior against sin, the world, and the devil, and an unflinching adherent of the Lord Jesus Christ in a very dark day. He honoured the Bible. He cried down sin. He made much of Christ's blood. He exalted holiness. He taught the absolute need of repentance, faith, and conversion. Surely these things ought not to be forgotten. Surely there is a deep lesson in those words of our Master, "Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is on our part" (Mark ix. 39, 40).

Then let us thank God for what John Wesley *was*, and not keep poring over his deficiencies, and only talking of what he *was not*. Whether we like it or not, John Wesley was a mighty instrument in God's hand for good; and, next to George Whitefield was the first and foremost evangelist of England in the 18th century.