

CHAPTER III.

Of Samuel Wesley Senior.

MR. JOHN Wesley, of whom I have spoken above, left two sons, Matthew and Samuel; of the rest of the children we know nothing. As the family had been greatly reduced by persecution, these two brothers must have experienced some difficulties in their education. Their mother was a niece of Dr. Thomas Fuller;† but it does not appear that they received any assistance from this branch of the family. By industry they surmounted every difficulty that lay before them, and rose to very respectable and useful situations in life. Matthew Wesley, following the example of his grandfather, studied physic, and afterwards made a fortune by his practice.‡ Samuel, the father of the late Mr. John Wesley, was born about the year 1662, or perhaps a little earlier; but he could not, I think, have been more than eight or nine years old when his father died. The first thing that shook his attachment to the Dissenters was, a defence of the death of King Charles the First, and the proceedings of the Calve's Head club.§ These things shocked him; and though it is certain that the Dissenters in general disapproved of the king's death, and that the proceedings of a club ought not to be attributed to a large body of men, who had no connection with the members of it, and

* See Nonconformist's Memorial, vol. ii. p. 238. For the Account of Dr. Annesley, see the Funeral Sermon Dr. Williams preached for him; and Nonconformist's Memorial, vol. i. p. 104.

† Nonconformist's Memorial, vol. i. p. 478. Dr. Thomas Fuller was born in 1608. At twenty-three years of age his merit procured him the fellowship of Sidney College Cambridge, and a prebend in the Cathedral of Salisbury. During the Protectorate, he held the living of Waltham Abbey, and the lecture of St. Bride's Fleet Street. After the restoration he recovered his prebend, and was made chaplain extraordinary to his Majesty. It is said that he had a most uncommon memory. He wrote the Church History of Britain in folio; A Pisgah-sight of Palestine, and several other works. He died in 1661, and his funeral was attended by 200 of his brethren of the ministry.

‡ We shall afterwards see some verses on the death of this gentleman by his niece, Mrs. Wright.

§ Notes of Samuel Wesley to his elegy on his father. For this, and some other original papers, of great use in this work, I am obliged to a private friend.

of Queen Ann's reign, the Dissenters had a very powerful influence in both houses of parliament, and at court; and were now preparing to present a petition to the House of Lords, praying for justice against the authors of several pamphlets written in opposition to them, and against Mr. Wesley in particular; but were dissuaded from taking this step by two members of that house. They had however interest enough to hinder Mr. Wesley from obtaining a prebend; they soon also worked him out of the chaplainship of the regiment, and brought several other very severe sufferings upon him and his family.*

As a pastor, he was indefatigable in the duties of his office: a constant preacher, feeding the flock with the pure doctrines of the gospel, according to his ability; diligent in visiting the sick, and administering such advice as their situations required; and attentive to the conduct of all who were under his care, so that every one in his parish became an object of his attention and concern. No strangers could settle in his parish but he presently knew it, and made himself acquainted with them. We have a proof of this from a letter he wrote to the Bishop of Lincoln, after being absent from home a very short time. "After my return to Epworth, says he, and looking a little among my people, I found there were two strangers come hither, both of whom I have discovered to be papists, though they come to church; and I have hopes of making one or both of them good members of the church of England."

But this conscientious regard to parochial duties, did not divert him from literary pursuits. A man who spends all his time in the most useful manner he can, may diversify his employments, and accomplish by diligence what appears to others impracticable. His favorite study seems to have been the original Scriptures, in which he was indefatigable; a practice which can never be too much commended in a minister of the gospel, when joined with a proper attention to practical duties.

The following extracts from two of his letters to his son, the late Mr. John Wesley, will give some idea of his diligence in this respect; and the second of them will show us his opinion of a subject on which learned men have been much divided.

"JAN. 26, 1725.

"I have some time since designed an edition of the holy Bible in octavo, in the Hebrew, Chaldee, Septuagint, and the Vulgate; and have made some progress in it. What I desire of you on this article is, 1. That you would immediately fall to work, and read diligently the Hebrew text in the Polyglott, and collate it exactly with the Vulgate, writing all, even the least variations or differences between them. 2. To these I would have you add the Samaritan text in the last column but one; which is the very same with the Hebrew,

* Mr. C. Wesley's papers.

except in some very few places, differing only in the Samaritan character, which I think is the true old Hebrew. In twelve months' time, you will get through the Pentateuch; for I have done it four times the last year, and am going over it the fifth, and collating the two Greek versions, the Alexandrian and the Vatican, with what I can get of Symachus and Theodotion," &c.

Mr. John Wesley was in the twenty-second year of his age, not yet ordained, nor had he attained any preferment in the university, when he received this letter from his father. It gives a pleasing view of his progress in biblical learning at this early period of life, and shows his father's confidence in his critical knowledge of the Hebrew Scriptures. The following letter was written in 1731, and very clearly states the old gentleman's opinion of the translation of the Seventy, after a most laborious examination of it.

"I find in your letter an account of a learned friend you have, who has a great veneration for the Septuagint, and thinks that in some instances it corrects the present Hebrew. I do not wonder that he is of that mind; as it is likely he has read Vossius and other learned men, who magnify this translation so as to depreciate the original. When I first began to study the Scriptures in earnest, and had read it over several times, I was inclined to the same opinion. What then increased my respect for it was, 1. That I thought I found many texts in the Scriptures more happily explained than in our own or other versions. 2. That many words and phrases in the New Testament, can hardly be so well understood without having recourse to this translation. 3. That both our Saviour and his apostles so frequently quote it. These considerations held me in a blind admiration of the Septuagint; and though I did not esteem them absolutely infallible, yet I hardly dared to trust my own eyes, or think they were frequently mistaken. But upon reading this translation over very often, and comparing it verbatim with the Hebrew, I was forced by plain evidence of fact to be of another mind. That which led me to it was, some mistakes (I think not less than a thousand) in places indifferent, either occasioned by the ambiguous sense of some Hebrew words, or by the mistake of some letters, as *daleth* for *resh*, and vice versa; which every one knows are very much alike in the old Hebrew character. But what fully determined my judgment was, that I found, or thought I found, very many places which appeared purposely altered for no very justifiable reason. These at last came so thick upon me, in my daily reading, that I began to note them down; not a few instances of which you will see in the dissertation I shall send you in my next packet. I would have you communicate it to your learned friend, with my compliments, earnestly desiring him, as well as you, to peruse it with the greatest prejudice you can; and after you have thoroughly weighed the whole, as I think the subject

deserves, to make the strongest objections you are able against any article of it, where you are not convinced by my observations. For I should not deserve a friend if I did not esteem those my best friends who do their endeavors to set me right, where I may possibly be mistaken, especially in a matter of great moment."

These two extracts give an interesting view of this gentleman's learning, diligent study of the Scriptures, and candor, in each of which he holds forth to us an example highly deserving of imitation.

Mr. Wesley was a voluminous writer, which in most cases is a disadvantage to an author, whatever his abilities may be. His Latin commentary on the book of Job is a most elaborate performance; but the subject of this book, and the language in which the commentary is written, are but ill adapted to the generality of modern readers. As a poet he has been censured by Garth and others; though when he failed, it was perhaps as much owing to the difficulty of the subject, as to want of poetical abilities. In an early edition of the Dunciad, he and Dr. Watts were associated together, and involved in the same censure. But it is well known that the earlier editions of this poem were all surreptitious, in which the blanks were filled up by the mere caprice or envy of the editors, without any regard to the intention of the author. Thus, in a surreptitious edition printed in Ireland, the blank in the 104th verse of the first book was filled up with Dryden instead of Dennis, which, no doubt, was far enough from the intention of Mr. Pope. With the same propriety and good judgment, in the surreptitious editions, the names Wesley and Watts were inserted thus, W—ly, W—s, in the 126th line of the same book, but they never appeared in any edition published by Mr. Pope. The lines originally stood thus :

" A Gothic Vatican! of Greece and Rome,
Well purg'd, and worthy Withers, Quarles, and Blome."

In a London edition of the Dunciad, printed in 1729, there is the following note on the last of these lines, " It was printed in the surreptitious editions W—ly, W—s, who were persons eminent for good life; the one writ the life of CHRIST in verse, the other some valuable pieces of the lyric kind on pious subjects. The line is here restored according to its original."

Of Mr. Wesley's larger poetical performances, his son Samuel passes the following candid but impartial judgment, in the elegy above mentioned.

" Whate'er his strains, still glorious was his end,
Faith to assert and virtue to defend.
He sung how God the Saviour deign'd t' expire,
With Vida's piety though not his fire;
Deduc'd his Maker's praise from age to age,
Through the long annals of the sacred page."

Most of his smaller pieces are excellent. I shall insert the following, both for its intrinsic beauty, and as a specimen of his poetical talents.

EUPOLIS'S HYMN TO THE CREATOR.

THE OCCASION.

Part of a (new) dialogue between Plato and Eupolis the Poet—the rest not extant.*

Eupolis. But is it not a little hard, that you should banish all our fraternity from your new commonwealth? What hurt has father Homer done that you dismiss him among the rest?

Plato. Certainly the blind old gentleman lies with the best grace in the world. But a lie handsomely told, debauches the taste and morals of a people. Besides, his tales of the gods are intolerable, and derogate in the highest degree from the dignity of the Divine Nature.

Eupolis. But do you really think that those faults are inseparable from poetry? May not the ONE SUPREME be sung, without any intermixture of them?

Plato. I must own I hardly ever saw any thing of that nature. But I shall be glad to see you, or any other, attempt and succeed in it. On that condition, I will gladly exempt you from the fate of your brother poets.

Eupolis. I am far from pretending to be a standard. But I will do the best I can.

THE HYMN.

Author of Being, source of light,
With unfading beauties bright,
Fulness, goodness, rolling round
Thy own fair orb without a bound:
Whether thee thy suppliants call
Truth or good, or one or all,
Ei, or Jaa; thee we hail
Essence that can never fail,
Grecian or Barbaric name,
Thy steadfast being still the same.

Thee when morning greets the skies
With rosy cheeks and humid eyes;
Thee when sweet declining day
Sinks in purple waves away;
Thee will I sing, O parent Jove,
And teach the world to praise and love.

* EUPOLIS was an Athenian. He is mentioned several times by Horace, and once by Persius; and was in high estimation at Athens for his poetical compositions, though he severely lashed the vices of the age he lived in. He was killed in an engagement at sea between the Athenians and Lacedemonians, and his death was so much lamented at Athens, that they made a law, that no poet should go to battle. He lived about four hundred years before Christ.

Yonder azure vault on high,
 Yonder blue, low, liquid sky,
 Earth, on its firm basis plac'd,
 And with circling waves embrac'd,
 All creating pow'r confess,
 All their mighty Maker bless.
 Thou shak'st all nature with thy nod,
 Sea, earth and air confess the God :
 Yet does thy pow'rful hand sustain
 Both earth and heav'n, both firm and main.
 Scarce can our daring thought arise
 To thy pavilion in the skies ;
 Nor can Plato's self declare
 The bliss, the joy, the rapture there.
 Barren above thou dost not reign,
 But circled with a glorious train :
 The sons of God, the sons of light
 Ever joying in thy sight ;
 (For thee their silver harps are strung)
 Ever beauteous, ever young,
 Angelic forms their voices raise
 And through heav'n's arch resound thy praise.

The feather'd souls that swim the air,
 And bathe in liquid ether there,
 The lark, precentor of the choir,
 Leading them higher still and higher,
 Listen and learn ; th' angelic notes
 Repeating in their warbling throats :
 And ere to soft repose they go
 Teach them to their lords below :
 On the green turf their mossy nest,
 The ev'ning anthem swells their breast.
 Thus like thy golden chain from high
 Thy praise unites the earth and sky.

Source of light, thou bid'st the sun
 On his burning axles run ;
 The stars like dust around him fly
 And strew the area of the sky.
 He drives so swift his race above
 Mortals can't perceive him move,
 So smooth his course, oblique or straight,
 Olympus shakes not with his weight.
 As the queen of solemn night
 Fills at his vase her orbs of light,
 Imparted lustre ; thus we see
 The solar virtue shines by thee.

Eiresione,* we'll no more
 Imaginary pow'r adore ;
 Since oil, and wool, and cheerful wine,
 And life-sustaining bread are thine.

* This word signifies a kind of garland composed of a branch of olive, wrapt about with wool, and loaded with all kinds of fruits of the earth, as a token of peace and plenty. The poet says he will no more worship the *imaginary* power, supposed to be the giver of these things ; but the great *Pan*, the creator from whom they all proceed.

Thy herbage, O great Pan, sustains
 The flocks that graze our Attic plains ;
 The olive with fresh verdure crown'd,
 Rises pregnant from the ground ;
 At thy command it shoots and springs,
 And a thousand blessings brings.
 Minerva only is thy mind,
 Wisdom and bounty to mankind.
 The fragrant thyme, the bloomy rose,
 Herb and flow'r, and shrub that grows
 On Thessalian Tempe's plain
 Or where the rich Sabeans reign,
 That treat the taste or smell or sight,
 For food or med'cine, or delight ;
 Planted by thy parent care,
 Spring and smile and flourish there.

O ye nurses of soft dreams,
 Reedy brooks and winding streams,
 Or murmuring o'er the pebbles sheen
 Or sliding through the meadows green,
 Or where through matted sedge you creep,
 Trav'ling to your parent deep :
 Sound his praise by whom you rose,
 That sea which neither ebbs nor flows.

O ye immortal woods and groves,
 Which th' enamor'd student loves ;
 Beneath whose venerable shade,
 For thought and friendly converse made,
 Fam'd Hecadem, old hero lies,
 Whose shrine is shaded from the skies,
 And through the gloom of silent night
 Projects from far its trembling light ;
 You, whose roots descend as low,
 As high in air your branches grow ;
 Your leafy arms to heav'n extend,
 Bend your heads, in homage bend :
 Cedars and pines that wave above,
 And the oak below'd of Jove.

Omen, monster, prodigy,
 Or nothing are, or Jove from thee !
 Whether varied nature play,
 Or re-invers'd thy will obey,
 And to rebel man declare
 Famine, plague, or wasteful war.
 Laugh ye profane, who dare despise
 The threat'ning vengeance of the skies,
 Whilst the pious on his guard,
 Undismay'd is still prepar'd :
 Life or death his mind 's at rest,
 Since what thou send'st must needs be best.

No evil can from thee proceed !
 'T is only suffer'd, not decreed.
 Darkness is not from the sun,
 Nor mount the shades till he is gone :

Then does night obscene arise
 From Erebus, and fill the skies,
 Fantastic forms the air invade,
 Daughters of nothing and of shade.

Can we forget thy guardian care,
 Slow to punish, prone to spare ;
 Thou brak'st the haughty Persian's pride,
 That dar'd old ocean's pow'r deride ;
 Their shipwrecks strew'd the Eubean wave,
 At Marathon they found a grave.
 O ye blest Greeks who there expir'd,
 For Greece with pious ardor fir'd,
 What shrines or altars shall we raise
 To secure your endless praise ?
 Or need we monuments supply,
 To rescue what can never die !

And yet a greater hero far
 (Unless great Socrates could err)
 Shall rise to bless some future day,
 And teach to live, and teach to pray.
 Come, unknown instructor, come !
 Our leaping hearts shall make thee room ;
 Thou with Jove our vows shalt share,
 Of Jove and thee we are the care.

O Father, King, whose heav'nly face
 Shines serene on all thy race,
 We thy magnificence adore,
 And thy well-known aid implore ;
 Nor vainly for thy help we call ;
 Nor can we want—for thou art all.

Every good judge, I apprehend, will readily allow that the author of these verses did not want talents for poetry. But wherever we fix his standing in the scale of learning and abilities, he still rises higher in our view of genuine piety, and a firm attachment to justice, mercy and truth, in various trying situations of life. His integrity was conspicuous, and his conduct uniform. As he had chosen God and his service for his own portion, he chose the same for his children also. When two of his sons were pursuing a course of piety at Oxford, which threw their future prospects of preferment into a cloud not likely to be dissipated, he encouraged them in it, choosing rather that he and his children should suffer affliction with the people of God, than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. Few men have been so diligent in the pastoral office as he was ; none perhaps more so. Though his income may be called small, and his family large, he had always something to give to those in distress. In conversation he was grave, yet instructive, lively, and full of anecdote ; and this talent the late Mr. Wesley possessed in a high degree. His last moments were as conspicuous for resignation and christian fortitude, as his life had been for zeal and diligence. His two sons, Mr. John

and Charles Wesley, were both with him when he died, and Mr. Charles has given the following interesting account of his death, in a letter to his brother Samuel, dated April 30, 1735.

DEAR BROTHER,

After all your desire of seeing my father alive, you are at last assured you must see his face no more till he is raised in incorruption. You have reason to envy us who could attend him in the last stage of his illness. The few words he could utter I saved, and hope never to forget. Some of them were, "Nothing is too much to suffer for Heaven. The weaker I am in body, the stronger and more sensible support I feel from God. There is but a step between me and death; to-morrow I would see you all with me round this table, that we may once more drink of the cup of blessing, before we drink it new in the kingdom of God. With desire have I desired to eat this passover with you before I die." The morning he was to communicate, he was so exceeding weak and full of pain, that he could not without the utmost difficulty receive the elements, often repeating, "Thou shakest me, thou shakest me;" but immediately after receiving, there followed the most visible alteration. He appeared full of faith and peace, which extended even to his body; for he was so much better, that we almost hoped he would have recovered. The fear of death he entirely conquered, and at last gave up his latest human desires of finishing Job, paying his debts, and seeing you. He often laid his hand upon my head, and said, "Be steady! The christian faith will surely revive in this kingdom; you shall see it, though I shall not." To my sister Emily he said, "Do not be concerned at my death, God will then begin to manifest himself to my family." When we were met about him, his usual expression was, "Now let me hear you talk of heaven." On my asking him whether he did not find himself worse, he replied, "O my Charles, I feel a great deal; God chastens me with strong pain, but I praise him for it, I thank him for it, I love him for it." On the 25th his voice failed him, and nature seemed entirely spent, when, on my brother's asking, whether he was not near heaven, he answered distinctly, and with the most of hope and triumph that could be expressed in sounds, "Yes, I am." He spoke once more, just after my brother had used the commendatory prayer; his last words were, "Now you have done all!" This was about half an hour after six, from which time till sunset, he made signs of offering up himself, till my brother again having used the commendatory prayer, the very moment it was finished he expired. His passage was so smooth and insensible, that notwithstanding the stopping of his pulse, and ceasing of all sign of life and motion, we continued over him a considerable time, in doubt whether the soul was departed or no. My mother, who for several days before he died, hardly ever went into his chamber but she was carried out again in a fit, was

far less shocked at the news than we expected, and told us that now she was heard, in his having so easy a death, and her being strengthened so to bear it."

In going through this work, let the reader consider himself as travelling slowly on a pleasant road where a variety of objects, highly worthy of his attention and regard, present themselves to his view. In passing along this little distance, we have as it were stood by, and seen two ministers of the gospel die ; the one a Nonconformist, and the other an High Churchman. As we see them approach the entrance on eternity, the scene becomes interesting, and will suggest to the reader many important reflections. Dropping their singularities of opinion, and all party distinctions, we now view them coalescing, and becoming one in Christ Jesus. Animated with the same spirit of devotion, they look up to God as their common Father through the same Mediator and Saviour ; they praise him for the same mercies, and looking forward to his kingdom and glory with the same humble confidence, both triumph over death as he draws nigh to them : they give satisfactory evidence, that they were united to Christ, belonged to the same family, and were heirs of the same heavenly inheritance, notwithstanding the external differences in their mode of worship. These considerations should teach us to be careful, not to over-value the external differences among Christians, nor to exalt the discriminating distinctions of parties into the rank of fundamental articles of christianity. As long as we lay the same foundation, and endeavor to build upon it gold, silver, and precious stones, we ought to have fellowship with each other as brethren, notwithstanding the different manner in which we manage the materials, and give a varied appearance to the building.