

CHAPTER IV.

Of Mrs. Susannah Wesley.

MRS. SUSANNAH WESLEY, the mother of the late Mr. John Wesley, was the youngest daughter of Dr. Samuel Annesley, and a few years younger than her husband. Being educated in a very religious family, she early imbibed a reverence for religion; but having strong understanding, and a great thirst for knowledge, she soon found herself dissatisfied with believing on the authority of her teachers, and was determined, as far as possible, to see what evidence there was for the truth of those things she was required to believe. Before she was thirteen years old, she had examined the whole controversy between the Dissenters and the established church, and from that time became a member of the church of England. And though different men may,

and will, judge variously of the choice she made, yet all must acknowledge that this effort to judge for herself at so early an age, and in so complicated a subject, was singularly great, and showed uncommon resolution and strength of mind. She afterwards examined the evidences of natural and revealed religion with scrupulous attention, and under every article set down the reasons which determined her to believe it. Of these things she speaks thus, in a letter to her son, Samuel Wesley, dated October 11th, 1709.

“ There is nothing I now desire to live for, but to do some small service to my children ; that, as I have brought them into the world, I may, if it please God, be an instrument of doing good to their souls. I had been several years collecting from my little reading, but chiefly from my own observation and experience, some things which I hoped might be useful to you all. I had begun to correct and form all into a little manual : wherein I designed you should have seen what were the particular reasons which prevailed on me to believe the Being of a God, and the grounds of natural religion, together with the motives that induced me to embrace the faith of Jesus Christ ; under which was comprehended my own private reasons for the truth of revealed religion. And because I was educated among the Dissenters, and there was something remarkable in my leaving them at so early an age, not being full thirteen, I had drawn up an account of the whole transaction, under which I had included the main of the controversy between them and the established church, as far as it had come to my knowledge ; and then followed the reasons which had determined my judgment to the preference of the church of England. I had fairly transcribed a great part of it, when, you writing to me for some directions about receiving the sacrament, I began a short discourse on that subject, intending to send them all together ; but before I could finish my design, the flames consumed both this and all my other writings.* I would have you, at your leisure, begin to do something like this for yourself, and write down what are the principles on which you build your faith ; and though I cannot possibly recover all I formerly wrote, yet I will gladly assist you what I can, in explaining any difficulty that may occur.”

In one of her private meditations she reckons the following among the signal mercies which God had bestowed upon her. “ Born in a christian country : early initiated and instructed in the first principles of the christian religion : good examples in parents and several of the family : good books and ingenious conversation : preserved from ill accidents, once from violent death : married to a religious orthodox man : by him first drawn off from the Socinian heresy, and afterwards confirmed and strengthened by Bishop Bull.”†

About the year 1700, she made a resolution to spend one hour

* When their house was burnt down in February, 1709.

† In the manuscript it stands thus, B. B., which I believe is intended for Bishop Bull.

morning and evening in private devotion, in prayer and meditation ; and she religiously kept it ever after, unless sickness hindered, or some absolutely necessary business of her family obliged her to shorten the time. If opportunity offered, she spent some time at noon in this religious and profitable employment. She generally wrote down her thoughts on different subjects at these times ; and great numbers of her meditations have been preserved in her own hand-writing. I shall select a few, and make some extracts from others ; because they show us this excellent woman in her most private retirement, conversing without disguise with him who knows the heart.

NOON. " To know God only as a philosopher ; to have the most sublime and curious speculations concerning his essence, attributes and providence ; to be able to demonstrate his Being from all or any of the works of nature, and to discourse with the greatest propriety and eloquence of his existence and operations ; will avail us nothing, unless at the same time we know him experimentally ; unless the heart know him to be its supreme good, its only happiness ; unless a man feel and acknowledge that he can find no repose, no peace, no joy, but in loving and being beloved by him, and does accordingly rest in him as the centre of his being, the fountain of his pleasures, the origin of all virtue and goodness, his light, his life, his strength, his all ; in a word, his Lord, his God. Thus let me ever know thee, O God ! "

EVENING. " The mind of man is naturally so corrupt, and all the powers thereof so weakened, that we cannot possibly aspire vigorously towards God, or have any clear perception of spiritual things, without his assistance. Nothing less than the same Almighty power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead, can raise our souls from the death of sin to a life of holiness.—To know God experimentally is altogether supernatural, and what we can never attain to, but by the merits and intercession of Jesus Christ. By virtue of what he has done and suffered, and is now doing in heaven for us, we obtain the Holy Spirit, who is the best instructor, the most powerful teacher we can possibly have ; without whose agency, all other means of grace would be ineffectual. How evidently does the Holy Spirit concur with the means of grace ? and how certainly does he assist and strengthen the soul, if it be but sincere and hearty in its endeavors to avoid any evil, or perform any good. To have a good desire, a fervent aspiration towards God shall not pass unregarded. I have found by long experience, that it is of great use to accustom one's self to enter into solemn engagements with God against any particular sin ; but then I would have them never made for a longer time than from morning till night, and from night till morning, that so the impression they make on the mind may be always fresh and lively. This was many years tried with good success in the case of ———. Glory be to thee, O Lord. "

EVENING. "Give God the praise for any well spent day. But I am yet unsatisfied, because I do not enjoy enough of God ; I apprehend myself at too great a distance from him ; I would have my soul united more closely to him by faith and love—I can appeal to his omniscience, that I would love him above all things. He that made me, knows my desires, my expectations, my joys all centre in him, and that it is he himself I desire ; it is his favor, his acceptance, the communications of his grace, that I earnestly wish for more than any thing in the world ; and that I have no relish or delight in any thing when under apprehensions of his displeasure. I rejoice in his essential glory and blessedness : I rejoice in my relation to him, that he is my Father, my Lord, and my God. I rejoice that he has power over me, and desire to live in subjection to him ; that he condescends to punish me when I transgress his laws, as a father chasteneth the son whom he loveth—I thank him that he has brought me so far, and will beware of despairing of his mercy for the time which is yet to come ; but will give God the glory of his free grace."

MORNING. "It is too common with me upon receiving any light, or new supply of grace, to think, now I have gained my point, and may say, 'Soul, take thine ease ;' by which means I think not of going any further ; or else fall into dejection of spirit, upon a groundless fear, that I shall soon lose what I have gained, and in a little time be never the better for it. Both these are sins. The first proceeds from immoderate love of present ease and spiritual sloth ; the other from want of faith in the all-sufficiency of my Saviour.

"We must never take up our rest on this side of heaven ; nor think we have enough of grace, or enjoy enough of God till we are perfectly renewed and sanctified in body, soul, and spirit ; till we are admitted into that blessed region of pure and happy spirits, where we shall enjoy the beatific vision according to the measure of our capacities. Nor must we, out of a pretended humility, because we are unworthy of the least mercy, dare to dispute or question the sufficiency of the merits of Jesus Christ. It was impossible for God incarnate to undertake more than he is able to perform."

MORNING. "Though man is born to trouble, yet I believe there is scarce a man to be found upon earth, but, take the whole course of his life, hath more mercies than afflictions, and much more pleasure than pain. I am sure it has been so in my case. I have many years suffered much pain, and great bodily infirmities ; but I have likewise enjoyed great intervals of rest and ease. And those very sufferings have, by the blessing of God, been of excellent use, and proved the most proper means of reclaiming me from a vain and sinful conversation, insomuch, that I cannot say I had better have been without this affliction, this disease, loss, want, contempt, or reproach. All my sufferings, by the admirable management of Omnipotent goodness, have concurred to promote my spiritual and eternal good. And if I

have not reaped that advantage by them which I might have done, it is merely owing to the perverseness of my own will, and frequent lapses into present things, and unfaithfulness to the good Spirit of God; who, notwithstanding all my prevarications, all the stupid opposition I have made, has never totally abandoned me. Eternal glory be to thee, O Lord!"

EVENING. "If to esteem and to have the highest reverence for thee! if constantly and sincerely to acknowledge thee, the supreme, the only desirable good, be to love thee, I do love thee!"

"If comparatively to despise and undervalue all the world contains, which is esteemed great, fair, or good; if earnestly and constantly to desire thee, thy favor, thy acceptance, thyself, rather than any or all things thou hast created, be to love thee, I do love thee!"

"If to rejoice in thy essential majesty and glory! if to feel a vital joy o'erspread and cheer the heart at each perception of thy blessedness, at every thought that thou art God; that all things are in thy power; that there is none superior or equal to thee—be to love thee, I do love thee!"

Notwithstanding Mrs. Wesley allotted two hours in the day for meditation and prayer in private, no woman was ever more diligent in business, or attentive to family affairs than she was. Remarkable for method and good arrangement both in her studies and business, she saved much time, and kept her mind free from perplexity. She had nineteen children, ten of whom, at least, grew up to be educated, and this duty fell upon her; and it was almost impossible for the children to have had a better instructor. From several things which I find in her papers, it appears to me that she had acquired some knowledge of the Latin and Greek languages in her youth, though she never makes any pretensions to it. She had read much and thought deeply, and in general very accurately, on every part of natural and revealed religion, and on the common affairs of life. She had studied human nature well, and knew how to adapt her discourse either to youth or age; and without this no person is properly qualified to instruct others. She had set out in life with a determination to think and judge for herself; and not to be influenced by custom in matters of importance, unless when custom appeared to be founded in reason and truth. It was this principle which governed her in the education of her children; for disapproving of the common methods of governing and instructing youth, she adopted those methods which appeared to her the most rational and proper. Their rising, dressing, eating, exercise, and every thing that related to them was managed by rule, unless when sickness hindered. They were very early taught obedience to their parents, and to wait their decision in every thing they were to have or do. As soon as they could speak, they were taught the Lord's prayer, and made to repeat it at rising and bed time constantly. As they grew bigger, they were

taught a short prayer for their parents, and some collects ; a short catechism, and some portion of scripture, as their memories could bear. They were early made to distinguish the Sabbath from other days ; and were soon taught to be still at family prayers, and to ask a blessing immediately after, which they used to do by signs before they could kneel or speak. Her method of teaching them to read was, I think, peculiar to herself, and deserves to be taken notice of ; I shall give it in her own words, in a letter to Mr. John Wesley. " None of them were taught to read till five years old, except Kezzy, in whose case I was overruled ; 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 till twelve, or from two till 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 them 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 tenth 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 yet 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 learnt very soon to read an English author well.

" The same method was observed with them all. As soon as they knew the letters they were first put to spell, and read one line, then a verse, never leaving till perfect in their lesson, were it shorter or longer. So one or other continued reading at school time without any intermission ; and before we left school, each child read what he had learnt that morning ; and ere we parted in the afternoon, what they had learned that day."

Mr. Wesley observes of his mother, that even she, as well as her father and grandfather, her husband and three sons, had been in her measure, a preacher of righteousness. As this is a remarkable circumstance in her life, and shows her zeal and steadiness in doing good, I shall relate it a little more at large than Mr. Wesley has done, as the original letters are before me.

Her husband usually attended the sittings of convocation; and on these occasions was obliged to reside in London for a length of time that was often injurious to his parish; and at an expense that was inconvenient to himself and family. It was on this business, I apprehend, that he spent so much time in London in the beginning of the year 1712. During his absence, Mrs. Wesley formed a little meeting at her house on a Sunday evening, when she read a sermon, prayed and conversed with the people who came for this purpose. She acquainted her husband of their meeting, who, on account of the newness and singularity of the thing, made some objections against it. Her answer is dated the 6th of February, 1712, in which she says, "I heartily thank you for dealing so plainly and faithfully with me in a matter of no common concern. The main of your objections against our Sunday evening meetings, are, first, that it will look particular; secondly, my sex; and, lastly, your being at present in a public station and character; to all which I shall answer briefly.

"As to its looking particular, I grant it does, and so does almost every thing that is serious, or that may any way advance the glory of God or the salvation of souls, if it be performed out of the pulpit or in the way of common conversation: because, in our corrupt age, the utmost care and diligence has been used to banish all discourse of God or spiritual concerns out of society; as if religion were never to appear out of the closet, and we were to be ashamed of nothing so much as of professing ourselves to be Christians.

"To your second, I reply, that, as I am a woman, so I am also mistress of a large family. And though the superior charge of the souls contained in it lies upon you, as the head of the family, and as their minister, yet in your absence I cannot but look upon every soul you leave under my care, as a talent committed to me under a trust by the great Lord of all the families of heaven and earth; and if I am unfaithful to him or to you, in neglecting to improve these talents, how shall I answer unto him, when he shall command me to render an account of my stewardship?

"As these and other such like thoughts, made me at first take a more than ordinary care of the souls of my children and servants; so, knowing that our most holy religion requires a strict observation of the Lord's day, and not thinking that we fully answered the end of the institution by only going to church; but that likewise we were obliged to fill up the intermediate spaces of that sacred time by other acts of piety and devotion; I thought it my duty to spend some part of the day in reading to, and instructing my family; especially in your absence, when, having no afternoon service, we have so much leisure for such exercises; and such time I esteemed spent in a way more acceptable to God than if I had retired to my own private devotions.

"This was the beginning of my present practice: other people's coming in and joining with us was purely accidental. Our lad told

his parents; they first desired to be admitted; then others who heard of it begged leave also; so our company increased to about thirty, and seldom exceeded forty last winter; and why it increased since, I leave you to judge after you have read what follows.

“Soon after you went to London, Emily found in your study the account of the Danish Missionaries; which, having never seen, I ordered her to read to me. I was never, I think, more affected with any thing than with the relation of their travels; and was exceedingly pleased with the noble design they were engaged in. Their labors refreshed my soul beyond measure, and I could not forbear spending a good part of that evening in praising and adoring the Divine goodness for inspiring those good men with such an ardent zeal for his glory; that they were willing to hazard their lives and all that is esteemed dear to men in this world, to advance the honor of their Master Jesus! For several days I could think or speak of little else. At last it came into my mind; though I am not a man, nor a minister of the gospel, and so cannot be engaged in such a worthy employment as they were; yet, if my heart were sincerely devoted to God, and if I were inspired with a true zeal for his glory, and did really desire the salvation of souls, I might do somewhat more than I do. I thought I might live in a more exemplary manner in some things; I might pray more for the people, and speak with more warmth to those with whom I have an opportunity of conversing. However, I resolved to begin with my own children; and accordingly I proposed and observed the following method. I take such a proportion of time as I can best spare every night, to discourse with each child by itself, on something that relates to its principal concerns. On Monday I talk with Molly; on Tuesday with Hetty; Wednesday with Nancy; Thursday with Jacky; Friday with Patty; Saturday with Charles; and with Emily and Suky together on Sunday.

“With those few neighbors who then came to me, I discoursed more freely and affectionately than before; I chose the best and most awakening sermons we had, and I spent more time with them in such exercises. Since this our company has increased every night; for I dare deny none who ask admittance. Last Sunday I believe we had above 200, and yet many went away for want of room.

“But I never durst positively presume to hope that God would make use of me as an instrument in doing good; the farthest I ever durst go was, it may be, who can tell? With God all things are possible. I will resign myself to him: Or, as Herbert better expresses it,

“Only, since God doth often make
Of lowly matter, for high uses meet,
I throw me at his feet;
There will I lie, until my Maker seek
For some mean stuff, whereon to show his skill,
Then is my time——”

And thus I rested, without passing any reflection on myself, or forming any judgment about the success or event of this undertaking.

“Your third objection I leave to be answered by your own judgment. We meet not upon any worldly design. We banish all temporal concerns from our society; none is suffered to mingle any discourse about them with our reading or singing. We keep close to the business of the day, and as soon as it is over they all go home. And where is the harm of this? If I and my children went a visiting on Sunday nights, or if we admitted of impertinent visits, as too many do who think themselves good Christians, perhaps it would be thought no scandalous practice, though in truth it would be so; therefore, why any should reflect upon you, let your station be what it will, because your wife endeavors to draw people to church, and to restrain them, by reading and other persuasions, from their profanation of God’s most holy day, I cannot conceive. But if any should be so mad as to do it, I wish you would not regard it. For my part, I value no censure on this account; I have long since shook hands with the world, and I heartily wish I had never given them more reason to speak against me.

“As for your proposal of letting some other person read, alas! you do not consider what a people these are. I do not think one man among them could read a sermon without spelling a good part of it; and how would that edify the rest? Nor has any of our family a voice strong enough to be heard by such a number of people.

“But there is one thing about which I am much dissatisfied; that is, their being present at family prayers. I do not speak of any concern I am under barely because so many are present. For those who have the honor of speaking to the great and holy God, need not be ashamed to speak before the whole world, but because of my sex. I doubt if it be proper for me to present the prayers of the people to God. Last Sunday I would fain have dismissed them before prayers; but they begged so earnestly to stay, I durst not deny them.”

In this, as in every other part of her conduct, Mrs. Wesley acted upon principle, and from mature deliberation. No person, perhaps, ever had a greater regard for the established order of the church of England, than she had; but she considered her conduct in this instance as coinciding with the spirit and intention of that order; to reform the manners of the people, and to beget in them a reverence for the public worship. It is obvious that this consideration alone silenced every objection in her mind, concerning her present proceedings. But, though she was satisfied of the propriety of her own conduct, she thought it her duty to abide by the decision of her husband. He had already written to her on the subject, and though he made some objections, yet upon the whole he seemed to approve of the meeting. But Inman the Curate, and two or three of his companions highly disapproved of it, and wrote to Mr. Wesley, complaining heavily of it, calling

it a conventicle, &c. It is always painful to see a clergyman among the foremost to oppose every thing that may tend to diffuse knowledge among the common people, and impress their minds with a serious sense of religion, and the duties it enjoins. This was evidently the case in the present instance; and the representations made to Mr. Wesley had such an effect upon his mind, that he wrote to his wife in a tone of disapprobation which he had not used before. Her answer, which is dated 25th of February, is worthy of herself, and of the cause in which she was engaged. "Some few days since," says she, "I received a letter from you, I suppose dated the 16th instant, which I made no great haste to answer; because I judged it necessary for both of us to take some time to consider, before you determine in a matter of such great importance. I shall not enquire how it was possible that you should be prevailed on, by the senseless clamors of two or three of the worst of your parish, to condemn what you so very lately approved; but I shall tell you my thoughts, in as few words as possible. I do not hear of more than three or four persons who are against our meeting, of whom Inman is the chief. He and Whitely, I believe, may call it a conventicle; but we hear no outcry here, nor has any one said a word against it to me. And what does their calling it a conventicle signify? does it alter the nature of the thing? or do you think that what they say is a sufficient reason to forbear a thing that has already done much good, and by the blessing of God may do much more? If its being called a conventicle by those who know in their conscience they misrepresent it, did really make it one, what you say would be somewhat to the purpose: but it is plain in fact, that this one thing has brought more people to church than ever any thing did in so short a time. We used not to have above twenty or twenty-five at evening service, whereas now we have between two and three hundred; which are more than ever came before to hear Inman in the morning.

"Besides the constant attendance on the public worship of God, our meeting has wonderfully conciliated the minds of this people towards us, so that we now live in the greatest amity imaginable; and what is still better, they are very much reformed in their behavior on the Lord's day; and those who used to be playing in the streets, now come to hear a good sermon read, which is surely more acceptable to Almighty God.

"Another reason for what I do, is, that I have no other way of conversing with this people, and therefore have no other way of doing them good; but by this I have an opportunity of exercising the greatest and noblest charity, that is, charity to their souls.

"Some families who seldom went to church, now go constantly; and one person who has not been there for seven years, is now prevailed upon to go with the rest.

"There are many other good consequences of this meeting which I have not time to mention. Now I beseech you weigh all things in

an impartial balance: on the one side, the honor of Almighty God, the doing much good to many souls, and the friendship of the best among whom we live; on the other (if folly, impiety, and vanity may abide in the scale against so ponderous a weight) the senseless objections of a few scandalous persons, laughing at us, and censuring us as precise and hypocritical; and when you have duly considered all things, let me know your positive determination.

“I need not tell you the consequences, if you determine to put an end to our meeting. You may easily foresee what prejudices it may raise in the minds of these people against Inman especially, who has had so little wit as to speak publicly against it. I can now keep them to the church, but if it be laid aside, I doubt they will never go to hear him more, at least those who come from the lower end of the town; but if this be continued till you return, which now will not be long, it may please God that their hearts may be so changed by that time, that they may love and delight in his public worship so as never to neglect it more.

“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 this opportunity of doing good, when you and I shall appear before the great and awful tribunal of our LORD JESUS CHRIST.”

The meeting, I believe, was continued until Mr. Wesley returned to Epworth.

Mrs. Wesley continued to discharge the duties of a wife and parent with the greatest diligence and punctuality. The letters she wrote to her sons, when at Oxford, and after they had left it, show her in the most amiable light, both for knowledge and piety. In 1735 she lost her husband, and afterwards divided her time between her children, till about the year 1739; after which, I believe, she resided chiefly in London.

It appears from all we have seen of Mrs. Wesley, that she was a woman of real experience in the things of God. But it does not appear that she had a clear notion of justification as distinct from sanctification; on the contrary, she seems to have confounded them together. The consequence was, that her knowledge of the doctrine of justification by faith alone, without the deeds of the law, was not so clear as it might have been; and this hindered her from enjoying that full assurance of her state, and the peace and joy consequent upon it, which otherwise she would have had. When her two sons, Mr. John and Charles Wesley, began to preach the doctrine of justification by faith in 1738, and many professed to be so justified, and to know the time when this change in their state took place, she mentions their notions as new, in a letter she wrote to her son Samuel in

November this year;* though it must be acknowledged that she had not then conversed with them on the subject, and therefore did not know what doctrines they taught, except by report. It has indeed been said that she “lived long enough to deplore the extravagance of her sons;” and this assertion was founded on the letter above mentioned. But what she says on this subject has only a reference to dreams, visions, or some extraordinary revelation, which some persons pretended to have had, and in which they had received the knowledge of their justification, at least this was reported of several; but she no where charges her sons with teaching this as the way of justification. But the author of the assertion above mentioned has made several assertions concerning some of this family, which have not the least foundation in any fact, and could have originated no where but in his own mistaken fancy; so little credit is generally due to an author, even of character and ability, when he speaks of religious persons, against whom he has imbibed some prejudice.

The following extracts from three of her letters to Mr. Charles Wesley,† will show us her opinion of the doctrine and conduct of her sons, more clearly than any thing which has yet appeared in print.

“October 19, 1738.

“It is with much pleasure I find your mind is somewhat easier than formerly, and I heartily thank God for it. The spirit of man may sustain his infirmity, but a wounded spirit who can bear. If this hath been your case, it has been sad indeed. But blessed be God who gave you convictions of the evil of sin, as contrary to the purity of the divine nature, and the perfect goodness of his law. Blessed be God who showed you the necessity you were in of a Saviour to deliver you from the power of sin and Satan (for Christ will be no Saviour to such as see not their need of one) and directed you by faith to lay hold of that stupendous mercy offered us by redeeming love! Jesus is the only physician of souls; his blood the only salve which can heal a wounded conscience. It is not in wealth, or honor, or sensual pleasures, to relieve a spirit heavy laden and weary of the burden of sin; these things have power to increase our guilt, by alienating our hearts from God, but none to make our peace with him; to reconcile God to man, and man to God, and to renew the union between the divine and human nature. No, there is none but CHRIST, none but CHRIST, who is sufficient for these things—But blessed be God, he is an all-sufficient Saviour! and blessed be his holy name, that thou hast found him a Saviour to thee, my son—O! let us love him much, for we have much to be forgiven.

“I would gladly know what your notion is of justifying faith; because you speak of it as a thing you have but lately obtained.”

* Printed in Dr. Priestley's collection.

† For these letters, and some other papers of importance in this work, I am under great obligations to the Rev. Mr. L—y.

The second letter is dated December 6th, 1738. In it she says, "I think you are fallen into an odd way of thinking. You say, that, till within a few months, you had no spiritual life, nor any justifying faith. Now this is, as if a man should affirm he was not alive in his infancy, because when an infant he did not know he was alive. All then that I can gather from your letter is, that till a little while ago you were not so well satisfied of your being a Christian as you are now. I heartily rejoice that you have now attained to a strong and lively hope in God's mercy through Christ. Not that I can think you were totally without saving faith before; but it is one thing to have faith, and another thing to be sensible we have it. Faith is the fruit of the spirit, and is the gift of God; but to feel, or be inwardly sensible that we have true faith, requires a further operation of God's Holy Spirit. You say you have peace, but not joy, in believing; blessed be God for peace; may this peace rest with you. Joy will follow, perhaps not very closely, but it will follow faith and love. God's promises are sealed to us, but not dated. Therefore patiently attend his pleasure; he will give you joy in believing. Amen."

From these letters we see, that Mrs. Wesley was so far from "deploring the extravagance of her sons," that she rejoiced in their christian experience, and praised God for it. She thought them mistaken in judging of their former state, but not in their notions of justifying faith itself; for she says in the letter last mentioned, "my notion of justifying faith is the same with yours; for that trusting in Jesus Christ, or the promises made in him, is that special act of faith to which our justification or acceptance is so frequently ascribed in the gospel. This faith is certainly the gift of God, wrought in the mind of man by His Holy Spirit." The two Mr. Wesleys professed to know the time when they received justifying faith, and they taught that others might know the time of their justification: on this head she observes, "I do not judge it necessary for us to know the precise time of our conversion;" from which it appears that she did not think this part of their doctrine erroneous or extravagant; she was only afraid lest this circumstance should be made a necessary criterion of conversion which she thought might hurt the minds of weaker Christians. These letters, therefore, are a full confutation of Mr. Badcock's assertion.

The third letter is dated December 27th, 1739, after she had come to reside chiefly in London. Here she enjoyed the conversation of her sons alternately, the one being always in town while the other was in the country. She now attended on their ministry, conversed with the people of the society, and became more perfectly acquainted with their whole doctrine, and seems heartily to have embraced it. Charles was in Bristol when she wrote this letter to him. She observes, "You cannot more desire to see me, than I do to see you. Your brother, whom I shall henceforward call son Wesley, since my

dear Samuel is gone home—has just been with me, and much revived my spirits. Indeed I have often found that he never speaks in my hearing without my receiving some spiritual benefit. But his visits are seldom and short; for which I never blame him, because I know he is well employed; and blessed be God, hath great success in his ministry.

“But my dear Charles, still I want either him or you. For indeed, in the most literal sense, I am become a little child, and want continual succor. ‘As iron sharpeneth iron, so doth the countenance of a man his friend.’ I feel much comfort and support from religious conversation when I can obtain it. Formerly I rejoiced in the absence of company, and found, the less I had of creature comforts, the more I had from God. But alas! I am fallen from that spiritual converse I once enjoyed; and why is it so? because I want faith. God is an omnipresent unchangeable good, ‘in whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.’ The fault is in myself; and I attribute all mistakes in judgment, all errors in practice, to want of faith in the blessed Jesus. O! my dear, when I consider the dignity of his person, the perfection of his purity, the greatness of his sufferings; but above all, his boundless love, I am astonished and utterly confounded: I am lost in thought; I fall into nothing before him! O how inexcusable is that person who has knowledge of these things, and yet remains poor and low in faith and love. I speak as one guilty in this matter.

“I have been prevented from finishing my letter. I complained I had none to converse with me on spiritual things; but for these several days I have had the conversation of many good Christians, who have refreshed in some measure my fainting spirits. And though they hindered my writing, yet it was a pleasing, and I hope not an unprofitable interruption they gave me. I hope we shall shortly speak face to face, and I shall then, if God permit, impart my thoughts more fully. But then, alas! when you come, your brother leaves me—yet that is the will of God, in whose blessed service you are engaged; who hath hitherto blessed your labors, and preserved your persons. That he may continue so to prosper your work, and protect you both from evil, and give you strength and courage to preach the true gospel, in opposition to the united powers of evil men and evil angels, is the hearty prayer of, dear Charles, your loving mother,
“S. W.”

This letter gives full evidence that Mrs. Wesley cordially approved of the conduct of her sons, and was animated with zeal for the success of their labors. She continued in the most perfect harmony with them till her death; attending on their ministry, and walking in the light of God’s countenance, she rejoiced in the happy experience of the truths she heard them preach. In the first attempts of a Layman

to preach, it is said she heard his discourses. Mr. John Wesley was at this time absent from London; but the thing being quite new, and appearing extraordinary, he was immediately acquainted with it. He hastened up to London, with a full determination to put a stop to so glaring an irregularity. He conversed with his mother on the subject, and told her his intention. She said, "I charge you before God, take care what you do, for that man is as much called to preach the gospel as ever you were." This kept him from a hasty execution of his purpose; and it being found upon enquiry that good was done to the people, the practice was suffered to continue.

Mr. Wesley gives the following account of his mother's death: * "I left Bristol in the evening of Sunday the 18th (July, 1742), and on Tuesday came to London. I found my mother on the borders of eternity. But she had no doubt or fear; nor any desire, but as soon as God should call, to depart and be with Christ.

"Friday the 23d, about three in the afternoon, I went to my mother, and found her change was near. She was in her last conflict; unable to speak, but I believe quite sensible. Her look was calm and serene, and her eyes fixed upward, while we commended her soul to God. From three to four the silver cord was loosing, and the wheel breaking at the cistern: and then, without any struggle or sigh or groan, the soul was set at liberty! We stood round the bed, and fulfilled her last request, uttered a little before she lost her speech; 'Children, as soon as I am released, sing a psalm of praise to God.'

"Sunday, August 1st. Almost an innumerable company of people being gathered together, about five in the afternoon, I committed to the earth the body of my mother, to sleep with her fathers. The portion of scripture from which I afterwards spoke, was, 'I saw a great white throne and him that sat on it; from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away, and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and the books were opened—and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.' It was one of the most solemn assemblies I ever saw, or expect to see, on this side eternity.

"We set up a plain stone at the head of her grave, inscribed with the following words:

"Here lies the body of Mrs. Susannah Wesley, the youngest and last surviving daughter of Dr. Samuel Annesley.

"In sure and steadfast hope to rise,
And claim her mansion in the skies,
A Christian here her flesh laid down,
The cross exchanging for a crown," &c.

* Wesley's Works, vol. xxviii, p. 83. N. B. The date in the printed journal is erroneous.

Mrs. Wesley had taken great pains with all her children, to furnish their minds with useful knowledge, and to instil into them the principles of religion and virtue. The daughters were by no means neglected, they shared their mother's care with the sons. I have many of their letters by me, in which there is much strong sense, clean wit, and accurate language; though they were written on trifling subjects, and without any expectation that they would be preserved. Most of them had a fine genius for poetry; but Mrs. Wright shone the brightest in this walk of elegant amusement, and to her I shall chiefly confine my observations in speaking of the daughters of these venerable parents.

Mrs. Wright was her mother's tenth or eleventh child; and it has been said, that when she was eight years old, she could read the Greek Testament. From her infancy she was gay and sprightly; and extremely addicted to wit and humor. As she grew up, she indulged herself in these dispositions so far, as to give great uneasiness to her parents, and was often betrayed into little inadvertences, which contributed, at least, to her future unhappiness in life. About the year 1724, or the beginning of 1725, a gentleman, respectable, so far as I can find, both for his abilities and situation in life, paid his addresses to her, and she had a sincere regard for him. But, from some circumstance or other, he and her father disagreed, and the affair was broken off. From a concurrence of circumstances in the end of the year 1725, she was induced to marry a person no way adapted to make her happy; being low and rude in address, and much inferior to her in understanding; and he proved unkind to her. Her situation preyed upon her mind, her health and strength gradually wasted away, and at length she sunk into a degree of melancholy that made her truly wretched. Most of her verses which have been preserved, though beautiful, and written in the true spirit of poetry, are saddened with an air of deep distress, which strongly marks this state of body and mind. The following address to her husband will give us some notion of his character, and show us the true cause of her wretchedness.

MRS. MEHETABEL WRIGHT TO HER HUSBAND.

The ardent lover cannot find
 A coldness in his fair unkind,
 But blaming what he cannot hate
 He mildly chides the dear ingrate;
 And though despairing of relief,
 In soft complaining vents his grief.

Then what should hinder but that I,
 Impatient of my wrongs, may try,
 By saddest, softest strains, to move
 My wedded, latest, dearest love?

To throw his cold neglect aside
And cheer once more his injur'd bride.

O! thou whom sacred rites design'd,
My guide and husband ever kind ;
My sov'reign master, best of friends,
On whom my earthly bliss depends ;
If e'er thou didst in Hetty see
Aught fair, or good, or dear to thee ;
If gentle speech can ever move
The cold remains of former love,
Turn thee at last—my bosom ease,
Or tell me why I cease to please.

Is it because revolving years,
Heart-breaking sighs, and fruitless tears,
Have quite depriv'd this form of mine
Of all that once thou fanci'dst fine ?
Ah no! what once allur'd thy sight,
Is still in its meridian height :
These eyes their usual lustre show,
When un-eclips'd by flowing woe.
Old age and wrinkles in this face
As yet could never find a place ;
A youthful grace adorns the lines,
Where still the purple current shines ;
Unless by thy ungentle art,
It flies to aid my wretched heart :
Nor does this slighted bosom show
The thousand hours it spends in woe.

Or is it that oppress'd with care
I stun with loud complaints thine ear.
And make thy home, for quiet meant,
The seat of noise and discontent ?
Oh no! those ears were ever free
From matrimonial melody,
For though thine absence I lament,
When half the lonely night is spent ;
Yet when the watch or early morn,
Has brought me hopes of thy return,
I oft have wip'd these watchful eyes,
Conceal'd my cares, and curb'd my sighs,
In spite of grief, to let thee see
I wore an endless smile for thee.

Had I not practis'd ev'ry art
T' oblige, divert, and cheer thy heart,
To make me pleasing in thine eyes,
And turn thy home to paradise,
I had not ask'd, why dost thou shun
These faithful arms, and eager run
To some obscure, unclean retreat,
With fiends incarnate glad to meet,
The vile companions of thy mirth,
The scum and refuse of the earth ?
Who when inspir'd with beer can grin
At witless oaths, and jests obscene ;

Till the most learned of the throng
 Begin a tale of ten hours long,
 Whilst thou in raptures, with stretch'd jaws,
 Crownest each joke with loud applause.

Depriv'd of freedom, health, and ease,
 And rival'd by such things as these,
 This latest effort will I try,
 Or to regain thine heart, or die :
 Soft as I am, I'll make thee see,
 I will not brook contempt from thee.
 Then quit the shuffling doubtful sense,
 Nor hold me longer in suspense.
 Unkind, ungrateful as thou art,
 Say, must I ne'er regain thy heart?
 Must all attempts to please thee prove
 Unable to regain thy love?
 If so, by truth itself I swear,
 The sad reverse I cannot bear ;
 No rest, no pleasure will I see,
 My whole of bliss is lost with thee.
 I'll give all thought of patience o'er,
 (A gift I never lost before)
 Indulge at once my rage and grief,
 Mourn obstinate, disdain relief ;
 And call that wretch my mortal foe,
 Who tries to mitigate my woe ;
 Till life, on terms severe as these,
 Shall ebbing leave my heart at ease ;
 To thee thy liberty restore,
 To laugh when Hetty is no more.

The following beautiful lines seem to have been a mere extempore effusion poured out from the fulness of her heart on the occasion, and sharpened with the keen distress of her hopeless situation.

HER ADDRESS TO HER DYING INFANT,* SEPTEMBER, 1728.

Tender softness! infant mild!
 Perfect, sweetest, loveliest child!
 Transient lustre! beauteous clay!
 Smiling wonder of a day!
 Ere the last convulsive start
 Rend thy unresisting heart,
 Ere the long enduring swoon
 Weigh thy precious eye-lids down ;
 Ah, regard a mother's moan ;
 Anguish deeper than thy own.

Fairest eyes, whose dawning light
 Late with rapture bless'd my sight ;
 Ere your orbs extinguish'd be,
 Bend their trembling beams on me!
 Drooping sweetness! verdant flower!
 Blooming, with'ring in an hour!

* The child died the third day after it was born. Private papers.

Ere thy gentle breast sustains
 Latest, fiercest, mortal pains,
 Hear a suppliant! let me be
 Partner in thy destiny!

That whene'er the fatal cloud
 Must thy radiant temples shroud;
 When deadly damps (impending now)
 Shall hover round thy destin'd brow;
 Diffusive may their influence be,
 And with the blossom blast the tree!

In this state of mind, and declining fast in health, she wrote the following Epitaph for herself:

“Destin'd while living, to sustain
 An equal share of grief and pain!
 All various ills of human race
 Within this breast had once a place.
 Without complaint she learn'd to bear
 A living death, a long despair;
 Till hard oppress'd by adverse fate
 O'ercharg'd, she sunk beneath the weight,
 And to this peaceful tomb retir'd,
 So much esteem'd, so long desir'd!
 The painful, mortal conflict 's o'er:
 A broken heart can bleed no more.”

Mrs. Wright however lived many years after this; and at length religion coming to her aid, it soothed the anguish of her mind, and gave her peace, though she never recovered her health.

The first religious letter she wrote to Mr. Wesley was in 1743; she says, “Some years ago I told my brother Charles, I could not be of his way of thinking then, but that if ever I was, I would as freely own it. After I was convinced of sin—and of your opinion as far as I had examined your principles, I still forbore declaring my sentiments so openly as I had inclination to do, fearing I should relapse into my former state. When I was delivered from this fear, and had a blessed hope, that he who had begun, would finish his work, I never confessed, so fully as I ought, how entirely I was of your mind; because I was taxed with insincerity and hypocrisy whenever I opened my mouth in favor of religion, or owned how great things God had done for me. This discouraged me utterly, and prevented me from making my change as public as my folly and vanity had formerly been. But now my health is gone, I cannot be easy without declaring that I have long desired to know but one thing; that is Jesus Christ and him crucified; and this desire prevails above all others. And though I am cut off from all human help or ministry, I am not without assistance; though I have no spiritual friend, nor ever had one yet, except perhaps once in a year or two, when I have seen one of my brothers, or some other religious person, by stealth:

yet (no thanks to me) I am enabled to seek him still, and to be satisfied with nothing less than God, in whose presence I affirm this truth. I dare not desire health, only patience, resignation, and the spirit of an healthful mind—I have been so long weak, that I know not how long my trial may last; but I have a firm persuasion and blessed hope (though no full assurance) that in the country I am going to, I shall not sing hallelujah, and holy, holy, holy, without company, as I have done in this. Dear brother, I am unused to speak or write on these things—I only speak my plain thoughts as they occur. Adieu. If you have time from better business, to send a line to Stanmore, so great a comfort would be as welcome as it is wanted.”

In July, 1744, she wrote to her brother from Bristol, where it seems she then resided, at least for some time. She speaks of herself in the most humiliating terms. She highly commends the christian friendship of Mrs. Vigor, Miss Stafford, and some others. She now enjoyed the means of grace, and the benefit of conversation with the people of the society, and continued to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Mrs. Wright persevered in a religious course of life, patient in her sufferings, resigned to her weakness, and waiting for full salvation in a deliverance from this mortal state, till 1751. In March this year, Mr. Charles Wesley speaks thus of her—“Prayed by my sister Wright, a gracious, tender, trembling soul; a bruised reed, which the Lord will not break.” She died on the 21st of the same month, and Mr. Charles preached her funeral sermon. He observes that he had sweet fellowship with her in explaining those words, “Thy sun shall no more go down, neither shall thy moon withdraw itself; for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended.” He adds, “All present seemed partakers both of my sorrow and my joy.”

From this authentic account of Mrs. Wright, taken from original letters, we may correct an error of Mr. Duncombe concerning her. This gentleman has insinuated in his *Feminead*, that her pungent distress and gloomy despair, originated from mistaken and superstitious views of religion: it appears, on the contrary, that they arose from a very different cause, and that religion was the thing that restored her to peace and happiness; and indeed the only thing that could do it. Mr. Duncombe’s words are,

“But ah! why heaves my breast this pensive sigh?
 Why starts this tear unbidden from my eye?
 What breast from sighs, what eye from tears refrains,
 When sweetly, mournful hapless Wright complains?
 And who but grieves to see her gen’rous mind,
 For nobler views, and worthier guests design’d,
 Amidst the hateful form of black despair,
 Wan with the gloom of superstitious care?”

In pity-moving lays, with earnest cries,
 She call'd on heaven to close her weary eyes,
 And long on earth by heart-felt woes oppress,
 Was borne by friendly death to welcome rest ! ”*

It is grievous to see authors, whose works are likely to be read, take every opportunity to dress out religion in the most ugly forms they can invent, to deter young people from embracing it, and attributing to it the calamities of life which religion alone is able to alleviate and redress.

The following among other poetical compositions, were written by Mrs. Wright; but at what period of her life I do not know.

TO THE MEMORY OF HER UNCLE. A PHYSICIAN.† HE DIED IN 1737.‡

How can the muse attempt the string,
 Forsaken by her guardian power :
 Ah me ! that she survives to sing,
 Her friend and patron, now no more !
 Yet private grief she might suppress,
 Since Clío bears no selfish mind ;
 But oh ! she mourns to wild excess
 The friend and patron of mankind.

Alas ! the sovereign healing art,
 Which rescu'd thousands from the grave,
 Unaided left the gentlest heart,
 Nor could its skilful master save.
 Who shall the helpless sex sustain,
 Now Varo's lenient hand is gone ?
 Which knew so well to soften pain,
 And ward all dangers but his own.

His darling muse, his Clío dear,
 Whom first his favor rais'd to fame,
 His gentle voice vouchsaf'd to cheer ;
 His art upheld her tender frame.
 Pale envy durst not show her teeth,
 Above contempt she gaily shone
 Chief favorite ; till the hand of death
 Endanger'd both by striking one.

Perceiving well, devoid of fear,
 His latest fatal conflict nigh,
 Reclin'd on her he held most dear,
 Whose breast receiv'd his parting sigh ;
 With every art and grace adorn'd,
 By man admir'd, by heaven approv'd,
 Good Varo died—applauded, mourn'd,
 And honor'd by the muse he lov'd.

* See Christian Magazine, vol. iii. p. 523.

† Christian Magazine, vol. iii. p. 284. See above, page 25.

‡ Mr. Charles Wesley's Journal.

TO THE MEMORY OF HER SISTER.

If happy spirits are allowed to know,
 And hover round what once they lov'd below,
 Maria, gentlest excellence, attend,
 To one who glories to have call'd thee friend!
 Remote in merit, though allied in blood,
 Though worthless I, and thou divinely good;
 Accept, dear shade, from me these artless lays,
 Who never durst unjustly blame or praise.

With business and devotion never cloy'd,
 No moment of thy life pass'd unemploy'd:
 Well-natur'd mirth, matur'd discretion join'd,
 Constant attendants on the virtuous mind:
 Ah me! that heav'n has from this bosom torn
 The dearest friend whom I must ever mourn,
 Ere Stella could discharge the smallest part
 Of what she ow'd to such immense desert.

Pleasing thy face and form, though heav'n confin'd
 To scanty limits thy extensive mind:
 Witness the taintless lustre of thy skin,
 Bright emblem of the brighter soul within;
 That soul which easy, unaffected, mild,
 Through jetty eyes with pleasing sweetness smil'd.

To soundest prudence, life's unerring guide,
 To love sincere, religion void of pride;
 To friendship, perfect in a female mind,
 Which I can never hope again to find:
 To mirth, the balm of care, from lightness free,
 To steadfast truth, unwearied industry,
 To every charm and grace, compris'd in you,
 Sister and friend, a long and last adieu!

A FAREWELL TO THE WORLD.

While sickness rends this tenement of clay,
 Th' approaching change with pleasure I survey,
 O'erjoyed to reach the goal with eager pace,
 Ere my slow life has measur'd half its race.
 No longer shall I bear, my friends to please,
 The hard constraint of seeming much at ease,
 Wearing an outward smile, a look serene,
 While piercing racks and tortures lurk within.
 Yet let me not, ungrateful to my God,
 Record the evil, and forget the good.
 For both I humble adoration pay,
 And bless the power who gives and takes away:
 Long shall my faithful memory retain,
 And oft recall each interval of pain.
 Nay to high heav'n for greater gifts I bend,
 Health I've enjoyed, and I had once a friend
 Our labor sweet, if labor it may seem,
 Allow'd the sportive and instructive scene:

Yet here no lewd or useless wit was found,
 We pois'd the wav'ring sail with ballast sound.
 Learning here plac'd her richer stores in view,
 Or, wing'd with love, the minutes gaily flew.

Nay, yet sublimer joys our bosoms prov'd,
 Divine benevolence, by heav'n below'd :
 Wan meagre forms, torn from impending death,
 Exulting, bless'd us with reviving breath.
 The shiv'ring wretch we cloth'd, the mourner cheer'd,
 And sickness ceas'd to groan when we appear'd.
 Unask'd, our care assists with tender art
 Their bodies, nor neglects th' immortal part.

Sometimes, in shades impierc'd by Cynthia's beam,
 Whose lustre glimmer'd on the dimpled stream ;
 We led the sprightly dance through sylvan scenes,
 Or tripp'd like fairies o'er the level greens ;
 In ev'ry breast a gen'rous fervor glows,
 Soft bliss, which innocence alone bestows !
 From fragrant herbage, deck'd with pearly dew,
 And flow'rets of a thousand various hues,
 By wafting gales the mingling odors fly,
 And round our heads in whisp'ring breezes sigh.
 Whole nature seems to heighten and improve
 The holier hours of innocence and love.
 Youth, wit, good nature, candor, sense, combin'd,
 To serve, delight, and civilize mankind ;
 In wisdom's lore we ev'ry heart engage,
 And triumph to restore the golden age !

Now close the blissful scene, exhausted muse,
 The latest blissful scene which thou shalt choose ;
 Sate with life, what joys for me remain,
 Save one dear wish, to balance ev'ry pain ;
 To bow my head, with grief and toil oppress,
 Till borne by angel-bands to everlasting rest.

Miss Kezzy Wesley was addressed by Mr. Hall, a young gentleman of a good understanding, agreeable in his person, and engaging in his address. He was entered at Lincoln College as Mr. Wesley's pupil, on the 22d of January, 1731 ; but Mr. Wesley was totally ignorant of the matter when he first paid his addresses to his sister.* Mr. Hall, I think, entered into orders while he was at Oxford ; and though most of the family thought highly of him in every respect as a religious character, yet Samuel Wesley strongly doubted his sincerity. Mr. John Wesley believed him sincere and pious, but in a letter written to his mother, when Mr. Hall was at Oxford, he speaks of him as highly enthusiastic and superstitious. After he had gained the affections of the young lady he quitted her, and paid his addresses to her elder sister. The family opposed this conduct with

* This appears from a letter Mr. Wesley wrote to Mr. Hall, in which he mentions this circumstance.

great vehemence, especially the three brothers. But the marriage, notwithstanding, took place, and the future conduct of Mr. Hall by no means corresponded to the expectations they at first formed of him. After some years he quitted his wife, and afterwards lived in the most loose and scandalous manner. Mrs. Hall bore her trials with remarkable patience and resignation. Indeed in this respect she was a pattern to all Christians; for I do not remember, that I ever heard her speak ill of any person, whatever injuries she might have received.—Miss Kezzy Wesley died on the 9th of March, 1741, and Mr. Charles gives the following account of her death in a letter to his brother.

“Yesterday morning sister Kezzy died in the Lord Jesus. He finished his work, and cut it short in mercy—full of thankfulness, resignation and love, without pain or trouble, she commended her spirit into the hands of Jesus, and fell asleep.” Mrs. Hall survived all her brothers and sisters, and died in peace, July 12th, 1791.