

METHODISM.

EXTRACT FROM A PAPER ON METHODISM READ BEFORE "THE CLERICUS CLUB," OF HALIFAX,

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It was not ancestry, it was not Oxford, it was not ordination, it was not self-forgetting, self-crucifying zeal that gave birth to Methodism; it was the touch divine that "strangely warmed" the heart of Wesley in that obscure little meeting in Aldersgate Street in London. For Methodism is a divine dynamic. That is its only being, that is its only reason for being. True to that it succeeds, and in the nature of things its success is inevitable; false to that, or neglectful of that, it fails and must fail, just as inevitably. For in the last analysis it does not exist to provide for any particular church order or to emphasize any particular church rite; it exists simply and solely to spread holiness, to spread scriptural holiness through the land; to be a dynamo charged with and diffusive of the divine power—the power of God unto salvation. Those who read English History know the conditions in church and social life when Methodism thus came to birth; they know that it was in the very fulness of time, at the very psychological moment to save the people and the church and the nation from the ruin that was imminent, and that but for its coming and influence would have been inevitable. And what was it? Why it was a re-entrance of God into human life, a revelation of God's will not in doctrines, not in creeds, not in ceremonies, but in character and life. It was God, first, last, midst, it was God; God proclaiming Himself Saviour and sanctifier of sinful men and women. Thomas Chalmers, greatest of Presbyterian divines, gave Methodism its completest definition when he called it Christianity in earnest. Christianity is not a system of theology, or a rubric of ceremony, it is a life. It is God in individual human life, transforming, transfiguring their lives into lives that are divine. And, like electricity, the life divine seeks the line of least resistance, the line of fullest, freest, conductivity, in its seeking to vitalize humanity in the individual and in the mass. John Wesley became full of, he became surcharged with the life of God; those associated with him became in similar manner surcharged. Conversion is an old word, long a scorned and misunderstood and maligned word, but now coming to its own, through the influence of Methodism chiefly, in the vocabulary and in the emphasis of the "universal Church." Conversion—the turning of the individual soul to God, the regeneration of that soul through the direct agency of the Spirit of God—that is the touchstone of Methodist life. Not baptism, not church membership, not attendance at the Lord's Table, not being what is commonly called a "church worker," not any one or all of these together, but the contact and connection between God and the individual soul; to promote that, to intensify that, that is what Methodism stands for.

What that, too, and following it, Methodism seeks in every case to urge its people to the attainment of holiness. John Wesley called the doctrine of entire sanctification the "grand depositum" of Methodism—scriptural holiness, not impossible perfectionism, not a perfectionism that excludes possibility of error in judgment or moral lapse, but perfect love that casteth out fear and sin.

And so Methodism stands for a joyous religion, a witnessing religion, a social religion. Its church machinery and policy took form from its life, and had their object in giving that life room and scope for developing and

expanding. Hence its fellowship meetings, its class meetings, its systems innumerable for getting men, keeping men, developing men and setting men to work.

To embody, to experience, to evidence the contact, the concord, the communion of the Holy and Omnipotent God with sinful men and women, justifying them, regenerating them, sanctifying them, lifting their commonplace lives and activities into the lofty place of conscious sonship, of conscious co-partnership with Himself, that was what early Methodism stood for, that is what Methodism stands for to-day. It is Christianity in earnest. It is that or it is nothing. Wherever and whenever it is that it succeeds, phenomenally succeeds. Wherever and whenever it is not that it fails, egregiously fails, fails all the more disastrously and ignominiously because it essays to succeed by something other, lesser, lower, than its unique, its divine, its omnipotent dynamic.

Samson wanted with Delilah and lost his strength—for it was divine strength and given only for divine ends. I believe with all my heart that Almighty God called out the Methodist Church in the fulness of time and at the psychological moment to do a work that makes men marvel. But I also believe that should Methodism wanton with any Delilah—and there are many subtle and snaky sins that may tempt her—sins of society, sins of wealth, sins of snug content and ease in Zion, sins of intellectual pride and neglect of the perpetual and cumulative call to bear the daily cross for God and men—I believe, I say, that "Ichabod" will be written on her altars, and some other agency, simpler, sincerer, more self-sacrificing, will become God's dynamo, to receive and to distribute the electric power of incorporated divine life, and spread Scriptural holiness throughout the lands.

That spiritual life, so free, so full, so joyous, when first realized as a personal possession and experience by Wesley, had to find expression. It is in the nature of satisfaction and joy to be eager to communicate themselves. The secret of the Lord revealed to men is not for self-gratification, it is for self-expression. The sad-hearted, struggling, sore perplexed, but always sincere and saintly Wesley, relieved of the terrible incubus of conscious sin and failure and rejoicing in the liberty wherewith Christ had made him free, had as a fire in his bones the longing to tell to all around what a dear Saviour he had found. Preaching the Gospel was to him "no longer the giving of good advice, but the telling of good news," the good news of pardon and peace, and power through Christ's Atonement offered on terms of simple faith; and of that good news and its efficacy he was now not only a minister, but a witness. He could say, he did say, "The mercy I feel to others I show.—*From the Wesleyan.*"

The report of the Fort Fairfield meeting closed last week has failed to reach us for this issue; but bits of news reveal the fact that it was a successful and blessed meeting.

"Happiness is nothing but that sweet inward delight that will arise from the harmonious agreement between our will and God's will."

A revival visitation will not only increase the number of new Bibles sold, but will shed much fresh light on the old book we have had so long.

"Everybody should be busy, but no one should be a busybody."

A SAFE HIDING-PLACE.

A parson who paid more attention to the pleasures of life than to his sermons, was taken to task for his worldliness by a Quaker friend. The rebuke, says the New York Tribune, was none the less effective for being tactful.

"Friend," said the Quaker, "I understand thee's clever at fox-catching."

"I have few equals and no superiors at that sport," the parson replied, complacently.

"Nevertheless, friend," said the Quaker, "if I were a fox I could hide where thee would never find me."

"Where would you hide?" asked the parson with a frown.

"Friend," said the Quaker, "I would hide in thy study."

GUIDANCE.

There is much confusion among Christians as to the question of divine guidance. Many are the errors into which the good people have fallen by following divers "leadings." In all questions requiring patient and prayerful waiting beware of being rushed into a decision. It is one of the tricks of the enemy to bring a strange pressure upon God's children to force them to hasty and hurtful actions. The Lord does not want His people to act until they have had sufficient time and light to ascertain His will. The Overcomer, in commenting on the subject, says:

"Up to the time of receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the Christian obeys God from principle—that is, from a sense of right and wrong; but when he is baptized by the Holy Spirit, he is conscious that he has come into contact with a Person, and begins to obey a Person. It is then that the evil spirits begin to counterfeit that Person, and the soul is liable to be misled unless he is forearmed by knowing their existence, and the methods of their workings.

"Immediately after the Baptism with the Holy Ghost, all temptations may seem to cease, and it seems as if there is 'no devil,' or that he is unable to touch the believer, but the enemy was never so busy, for now he is planning a counterfeit of the divine workings. The temptation to sin appears to cease, but the enemy has only ceased to tempt with a view to getting the soul blinded to its own condition, and to the counterfeit of the Divine with which he is planning to deceive him.

"Believers who are baptized with the Spirit must realize that there are two spiritual forces in the supernatural realm, and know how to discern between them. They must realize that there are evil spirits, and know that there is a possible counterfeit of the Divine workings. They say, 'I am afraid I will grieve God, if I question the manifestation,' but in accepting that which they have a doubt about they will also grieve God. If God wants them to accept what is Divine, then let God make it quite clear to them, so that they have no doubt of it, for 'whatsoever is not of faith is sin.' You say you think it is Divine! But you must know—you must test your tests, and prove your proofs. 'Thinking' is not knowledge! Make sure of the source from which all supernatural workings come, and trust God to make you sure—until then, wait. Test your tests! Prove your proofs. Make sure, and wait until you know for yourself as you watch, and pray for light."—*Heart and Life.*