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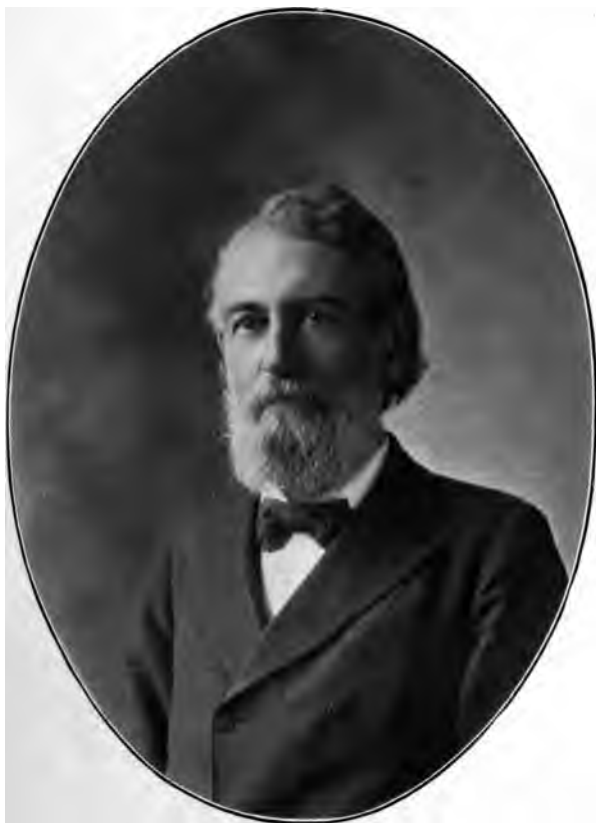
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James E. Gilbert.

**Preparation**  
**for**  
**Church Membership**

**METHODIST PROBATIONERS  
TRAINED**

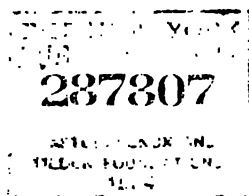
**By**  
**REV. JAMES E. GILBERT, D.D.**  
Secretary of the Spiritual Culture Society

**WITH INTRODUCTION**  
**BY**  
**REV. S. F. UPHAM, D.D., LL.D.**  
Professor in Drew Theological Seminary



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## Episcopal Approval

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DEAR DR. GILBERT:

I am glad you are preparing a book on the care and training of probationers. We greatly need a work on that subject. Our probationers need careful attention, much more than they receive. I hope you will succeed in your work. God bless you.

Affectionately,

THOMAS BOWMAN.

We must continue in some way to test candidates for membership and allow them some preliminary training and experience before assuming the vows of full membership.

S. M. MERRILL.

To care for probationers, to instruct them in the deep things of God, and to prepare them for active duty in the church is to render the highest service to them and to the Master and to his cause as well.

J. N. FITZGERALD.



## Preface

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THIS little book is written from the viewpoint of one who after extensive service in city pastorates has been permitted to travel widely among the churches of Methodism. It is therefore the product of experience modified by observation and reflection. The practical and the theoretical are so woven together that each finds support in the other. If visionary schemes may not be followed it is equally unwise to confine effort to that which has been done. It is always proper to push beyond the actual into the possible.

In the present condition of religious education and life it may not be possible to carry out the plans set forth in chapters iii, vii, and viii, in all their details, except in a few highly favored churches. This plan is intended to represent an ideal toward which all pastors should labor. But let no pastor be discouraged because he may not be able to carry out this

scheme. Excellent results may be secured by organizing probationers into two classes, a junior class and an adult class, and conducting them by applying the suggestions contained herein as far as practicable. In some cases it may be found advisable to organize all probationers into one class, especially in churches where probationers are few. In any case no pastor should forego the advantages of a probationer's class merely because the difficulties in his way prevent him from attaining perfection.

It is proper here to state that the author does not hold with some that children are probationers in the church from the time of their baptism. The Discipline does not so teach. They are rather under "the special care and supervision of the church." They should be organized at ten years of age into a baptized children's class for instruction. That instruction should lead up to the probationer's class and relation. See the author's work, *The Baptized Children of Methodism*.

This book, designed for pastors, will be followed shortly by text-books designed

for probationers. These will cover the course of study presented in the Appendix, three inexpensive pamphlets of eight lessons each, on the subjects Religious Experience, Biblical Doctrine, and American Methodism. The completion of this system will prepare the way for other and more extended works which the author hopes to offer the church should this first venture be received with favor.

Acknowledgment is due to Rev. Lucien Clark, D.D., pastor of Hamline Methodist Episcopal Church, Washington, D. C., for valuable suggestions, and for the critical examination of the manuscript of this book.

**J. E. GILBERT.**

Washington, D. C.,  
November, 1903.



## Introduction

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THE church is the divine society—"the communion of saints." It was founded by Christ himself, for the embodiment, the preservation, and the propagation of his religion. He gave to it two simple but impressive rites; the one the rite of initiation—the other a memorial feast, and a banquet of anticipation. In it we "show the Lord's death till he come."

Indifference to the church on the part of professing Christians is unpardonable. No other organization can take its place. Associations for literary improvement, or social pleasures, or financial benefits, or patriotic purposes are man-made and destined to perish; the church lives "a thousand years the same." So great are the blessings of membership in this society that it has been the custom from the beginning to receive persons seeking fellowship in this enrolled and privileged brotherhood into a preparatory membership.



In the first half of the second century the church established a Christian novitiate. None could be admitted to the full privileges of membership without some training. The baptized children of believers, and also converts from heathenism, were enrolled and trained in Christian doctrine, that they might be "established in the faith."

Methodism from the beginning, following the example of the primitive church, has pursued a similar course. The time of probation was originally two months, but was subsequently extended to six months, which is now the settled rule.

When the class meeting—"the drill corps of the church"—was generally and gladly attended, candidates for membership were carefully instructed in the essential doctrines of the Bible, and their religious emotions guided. What theological seminaries those old class meetings were! Intelligent, stable Christians were thus made, who understood the doctrines of the faith and could give a reason for them.

This decline of the class meeting ren-

ders necessary the use of other methods. The Methodist Episcopal Church enjoins upon every pastor the duty of carefully registering the names of all the children under his pastoral care. They are also to be organized into classes, under the charge of suitable leaders, and are thus placed in introductory relation to the church. That wise provision of our excellent Discipline is too often neglected. There is a lamentable failure in appreciating childhood as an age vastly important and susceptible of the molding power of the church. The child of Christian parents, accustomed to the holy influences of home, and consecrated in holy baptism, ought not to be allowed to wander off in sin, in the hope that he may be brought back by some convulsive effort, but he should be so instructed during the impressible years of early childhood that, by the influences of the Holy Spirit, he may be molded and nourished into a child of God.

Adult persons also, who are seekers of religion, or who have already "found peace in believing," must be "instructed in the way of the Lord," so far, at least,

as to be able to give intelligent answers to the questions of the ritual service for admission into the church after probation.

The pastor's class, therefore, is a necessity. He must himself train the "candidates," showing them upon what a firm foundation our historic faith rests. No duty is more imperative, and in its discharge he will find ample opportunity to exercise the teaching function of his office. These principles are clearly stated and ably defended by Dr. Gilbert in the book which is now sent forth. It is designed primarily for pastors, but laymen as well, will find it very suggestive, stimulating, and helpful.

S. F. UPHAM.

Drew Theological Seminary,  
Madison, N. J.

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# Preparation for Church Membership

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## CHAPTER I

### THE NEED OF PREPARATION

ALL who seek membership in the Methodist Episcopal Church, unless they present letters of dismissal from some other evangelical body, must pass through a period of probation. In the beginning of the denominational history that period was fixed at three months, but five years later it was extended to six months, where it has ever since remained. At the end of the probation the approval of the leaders and stewards must be given before reception into full connection, which must be by a prescribed formula in the presence of the congregation. What has thus been a feature in Methodist economy for more

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than a century is likely to remain, and its purpose and value should be duly considered. A denomination increases in vigor by the proper observance of its own rules, by which it is distinguished from other bodies.

Primarily the Methodist probationary system is intended, as the Discipline declares, "to prevent improper persons from gaining admission into the church." This is the present language, adopted in 1872, but in 1787 the reason for the rule was expressed in these words: "to prevent unworthy persons from insinuating themselves into the society." Evidently the fathers supposed there were some who might seek by deception to gain a relation to which they were not entitled, and that to prevent such abuses delay was deemed necessary. The later expression is to be preferred, for it relates to the fitness of the candidate and does not question his motive. The wisdom of some regulation with this design must be apparent to all.

The door that opens wide to admit the worthy should be closed and barred to exclude the unworthy.

However, six months are not needed merely as a time of trial. A much shorter period, even less than three months, might suffice to determine the fitness of a candidate. Except in rare cases, as of strangers or those in bad repute, who seldom offer themselves, the character is sufficiently known to allow an immediate reception. For this reason some have urged an abandonment of the probationary plan altogether, claiming that it is disrespectful to halt one at the door of the church when the people are prepared at once to admit him to fellowship. This point is well taken if the probation means only a trial. The rule cannot be properly retained unless it is made to serve some other end, thereby promoting the interests of all concerned. What shall that end be?

Probation affords excellent opportunity for preparation for the assumption of



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vows that are to follow, and the time is none too long for that purpose. Every sincere person—and most of them are sincere—who offers himself for church membership is in a state of mind highly favorable for instruction. The relation into which he is to enter is new and important as well as sacred, one that is attractive and is esteemed as valuable, else it would not be sought. He desires to know in advance something of his duties and privileges in that relation, something of the organization in which he will soon find a spiritual home. Moreover, as every pastor knows, the person seldom feels qualified for the duties or worthy of the privileges, and on that ground shrinks from the relation. How easily may such a mind be directed into fields of thought and lines of action preparatory to subsequent entrance into the church!

It may be urged that information may be obtained after probation; that as a member of a great body of believers one

ought to be advanced gradually year by year in all matters pertaining to religion and to the church of his choice, and that therefore the preliminary work here suggested is unnecessary. The church is indeed a school. All its exercises are in a sense educational. The public worship on the Lord's Day, the midweek prayer, and all the other means of grace are intended to edify believers, to build them up in their holy faith. A man carelessly thrust into the stated appliances of the church will receive some benefit. And yet there are some things that need to be done in advance in order that one may easily adjust himself to institutions and customs and derive therefrom the largest good. Some people labor under embarrassment in the church life, misusing what was intended for their highest welfare, all because they did not know better at the beginning.

Moreover, in receiving a probationer the church assumes an obligation to pro-

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vide suitable preparation, and the novitiate may rightly expect and demand it. Church membership is not a one-sided matter of duty and privilege for the individual. If a man is required to make ready he may in turn ask to be made ready. He can do little or nothing except as the course is marked out and he is guided in that course. Did not our Saviour anticipate this obligation when he said to Peter, "Feed my lambs"? And can a Methodist minister find in his flock any who more deserve this title than do those who have just entered the primary department of the church? If ever a man of God should feel solicitude for souls it is when they apply for his oversight. To neglect them then is to be unfaithful to the most solemn trust.

For lack of suitable care and instruction many who enter upon probation are never received into fellowship. They come with good purpose and high hope, but they return to their old places among

the worldly, and they are not likely ever again to knock at the door for admission. The last state of these persons is worse than the first. Their confidence has been abused, their life has been marred, they have been wronged in their dearest interests at the most critical time in their experience. Possibly they are led to think lightly of religion and of the people of God. They may suppose that the feelings and thoughts which prompted their first step were delusions; that the whole subject of religious experience is, after all, a superstition, and that its advocates and promoters are untrustworthy. Who shall measure the influence of such persons as they go out into society?

It is estimated that fully fifty thousand are thus lost every year from the Methodist communion. One who examines church records will find many names on the probationer's list opposite which is written the word "discontinued" or "dropped." That tells the story of a good

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beginning with a bad ending. Many times a revival has swept in fifty or a hundred, and the fact has been announced far and wide with rejoicing—yes, and with credit to the minister or evangelist who was the instrument in the great work. Alas! a few months later and a large part of these cannot be found. This fearful waste may be due to the lack of suitable care; and in that case the pastor must be held responsible. If by his neglect the fruitage of the revival has not been gathered, he must answer, if not to the Conference, then to God.

Besides, the church cannot properly protect itself unless probation is made a preparation time. Church membership means more than a name on the books, more than a form in the pews, more than negative goodness. Men and women are united in the name of Christ in order that they may serve him by advancing his kingdom in the earth. They are required to be a force, an aggregation of

forces, against iniquity and in favor of righteousness. Each one should bring into the body the utmost of his ability and contribute that to the grand designs of the whole. He has no rightful place there if he has any other motive. But that is possible only through preparation. The better that preparation the more truly will the church be helped by each accession, and the church should therefore provide this preparation to insure its own welfare.

A casual glance at actual conditions will emphasize this last point. In every congregation there are many who give nothing and who do nothing. The expenses of the church are met by less than two thirds of its members. Its work is done by less than one fourth of its members. There are those who appear to think they are passengers on a vessel built and managed by others, and that they are to bear no part in the labor and expense of the trip, but to wait patiently and com-

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placently until landed in the harbor. It would be possible to strike from the rolls nearly one third of all those now entered there, and not diminish to any perceptible degree the power of the church. How did the large number find place? Why are they so indifferent to their obligations? The answer is very easy: They entered without suitable preparation.

What a tremendous power would our church be, how enthusiastic, harmonious, and unconquerable, if all our people were prepared when they enter into full connection! Three millions now reported in the Minutes might relieve all embarrassments in the finances of local churches; they might fill the treasuries of our various societies; they might endow our institutions of learning; they might double the force in the mission fields; and they might carry forward such activities in all directions as would mark an epoch in the history of religious progress. O, for such a people let every true heart pray and

every faithful pastor labor. A plan set in motion at once would change the conditions in a quarter of a century when the new church would come into the place of the old.

Methodism owes it to the outside world to prepare its probationers. What is it that wins men to Christ and to a denomination? The preaching has something to do with it, but the sermon is heard only by a small company. Men on the outside judge the church and Christianity by the men inside. What sort of people are these latter? Are they genuinely good and well-informed? Are they able to give a reason for the hope that is in them? The answers to these questions awaken or destroy confidence in an ecclesiastical system that produces the men. Church members are the epistles read by the world, wherever they go. They are the witnesses in the court of public opinion. The church must therefore take good heed to those it receives. It must require of



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them such a preparation that after their entrance they will commend the gospel to all.

The preparation of probationers may be urged, furthermore, on conscientious grounds. See what questions are in the formula of reception: "Do you here, in the presence of God and of this congregation, renew the solemn promise contained in the baptismal covenant? Have you saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? Do you believe in the doctrines of the Holy Scripture, as set forth in the Articles of Religion of the Methodist Episcopal Church? Will you cheerfully be governed by the rules of the Methodist Episcopal Church, hold sacred the ordinances of God, and endeavor, as much as in you lies, to promote the welfare of your brethren and the advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom? Will you contribute of your earthly substance, according to your ability, to the support of the gospel and the various benevolent enter-

prises of the church?" No one without preparation can honestly give an affirmative answer to these searching inquiries.

It is to be feared that some have promised at this public examination without due consideration. The whole performance has been regarded too frequently as a mere form. Some pastors have allowed it to be so. The consequences are extremely serious. He who begins his career with a false profession lightly made cannot be expected afterward to attain to great excellence. The church that admits him in such manner has opened the way for further carelessness, not to say untruthfulness, in all its relations with the new member. A downright honest belief in the truth, a glad surrender to the observance of approved church duties, cannot be had except through a thorough acquaintance with doctrines and government. May we not find here the secret of the unrest of many, of the little regard for church interests on the part of

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some, for the laxity of discipline so justly deplored, for the ready following of all manner of vagaries that float through society?

The church needs more solidity, more strength, more power of endurance, and it should look for these in some measure in those whom it receives. As Drummond put it, "What is wanted is not more of us but a better brand of us." The pernicious custom of taking in those who are not instructed and drilled should be discontinued. When the hand of fellowship is extended by the minister giving welcome it should grasp the hand of one who is ready to take a place among the people of God, who can truthfully make pledges, who will faithfully keep them, who will be an honor to the church, a light to the world, a helper in all good undertakings. Only then will Methodism be able to accomplish its high mission among the evangelical churches.

It may not be improper in this con-

nection to refer to a practice that is too common. In some churches where the system for the care of probationers is very defective there is an earnest and regular effort to secure converts and accessions. Periodically a great meeting is held, perhaps with outside help, and the members are called night after night to attend special services. Under certain conditions this might be desirable and profitable. But, if the church is now full of babes who need care but who do not receive it, good judgment would suggest that the time and strength given to bring in others should be directed to the proper care of present members. It is certainly unwise, one might say dishonorable, to seek souls when there is an inadequate plan to nurture them.

The preparation of Methodist probationers has the approval of ecclesiastical history. Something of similar character exists in the Protestant Episcopal Church, in the Dutch Reformed Church, in the

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Scotch Presbyterian Church, in the Established Church of Great Britain, in the Lutheran and Catholic Churches, and in all the Oriental churches. The early Christians had their catechumen classes and the Jews their careful training first at home and afterward in the synagogue. In all these bodies preparation was deemed to be necessary before one was admitted into the body of believers. The custom may therefore be traced back through thirty centuries. Surely, Methodism ought not to neglect what has been so widely indorsed.

John Wesley, a careful student of church history recognized the value of this universal custom and adapted it to his societies. Thereby he showed his ability to guide the rising movement into wise and good forms. If at any time this preparation might have been omitted it was at the origin of Methodism. For then to a large extent the purpose was to secure a religious experience, and the

development of character was not so prominently as now before the ministers and assistants of Mr. Wesley. Besides, he made no attempt to establish an ecclesiastical system. He was content to remain all his life in the Church of England, and there the training system was in full force. The fact that, notwithstanding all the state church was doing, he deemed it necessary to place his people under preparation is proof that he regarded such preparation a matter of great importance.

It may be thought that the people who come to us will object to any system of preparation, and that any attempt to introduce it will result in the loss of members. That is hardly probable. On the contrary, as already shown, it may be presumed that such a feature will attract many. As a rule Americans desire to know what they are doing; they are reluctant to enter into engagements of which they are ignorant. Besides, the

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chief object of Methodism is not numbers but a high-grade piety. It may be seriously questioned whether we do well to sacrifice quality for quantity. To elevate the standard may be the surest method of gaining and retaining a numerous following.

## CHAPTER II

### THE KIND OF PREPARATION

ASSUMING that the position taken in the former chapter is tenable, a new question arises: What kind of preparation should be given to the probationer? The inquiry is one of great importance. A mistake here would defeat the end to be served in this essay. A correct view at this point may begin a movement whose far-reaching influences will be felt to the remotest bounds of world-wide Methodism. The answer must be in orderly form with reasons that shall have weight with the average minister and layman. It is desired here to outline a general system that may be suited to the great body of our people, one that may be adopted in one section as well as in another. Our connectional spirit compels us to study uniformity when this may be secured



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without sacrificing efficiency. It is expected, however, that any course will be modified in some particulars to meet peculiar needs of localities.

At the outset it must be remembered that there are limitations of two kinds. First, probationers are generally inexperienced persons. The greater part have limited knowledge and limited ability and time to acquire knowledge. It is the glory of Methodism that it reaches the common people; those who heard our Saviour gladly were of the same class. Whatever is done for them must be suited to their condition and capacity. If more is attempted the whole scheme will fail. Again, there are but six months in which to do anything. Much of that time must necessarily be given to secular matters. Those who labor through the day are weary when evening comes, little disposed to exertion of any kind. Those who are in better worldly circumstances have social engagements which they are reluctant

to relinquish. The preparation to be undertaken must therefore be such as can be accomplished by busy people without interfering with the ordinary work of life.

Here let it be borne in mind that one of these difficulties may be overcome by extending the time. In some instances it ought to be extended. There are those who might profitably be in this relation a whole year or longer. The Discipline evidently recognizes such necessity, because it says "at least six months." Pastors should take advantage of this suggestion and advise that there need be no haste, that probation means preparation, and not merely a time regulation. No candidate will be injured by delay, especially as he enjoys all church privileges before full connection. It is vastly better to be made ready, however much time may be consumed. Every added month, properly occupied, will exalt one's conception of the church and make entrance into it more impressive and delightful.

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That is prized most which is gained by protracted and earnest effort.

The very word "preparation" suggests an answer to our question. It points to that which must precede something. The antecedent always conditions what follows. Preparation is the word that meets one in setting out upon every undertaking in life. It implies continuity, the earlier being carried over into the later. Hence, the probationer's preparation should include at least all that will enable him to enter intelligently and honestly into the church, to find there his appropriate place, to begin the work that may legitimately fall to him, that he may permanently abide there, take root and grow, and become a fruit-bearing member of the great body. It is only those who are "planted in the house of the Lord" that "flourish in the courts of our God." Preparation is planting.

With this general view reference may be had to the requirements of the Disci-

pline for a fuller answer, assuming that the governing body of the church had some just conception of what is necessary to admission to its privileges. In the chapter on membership it is declared that the probationer should be made acquainted with the doctrines, rules, and regulations of the Methodist Episcopal Church; that he should keep these rules; that he should give satisfactory evidence of an earnest desire to be saved from his sins and to enjoy the fellowship of God's people. And in the ritual for reception into full connection these items are covered in the questions addressed to the candidate. A more extended account of these requirements may here engage attention under three heads—the spiritual, the doctrinal, and the ecclesiastical.

Without question the spiritual interests of the probationer are first in importance, and they should receive chief attention. Has he truly begun the religious life? Both the church and the candidate should

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be assured on this point, if possible before the first step is taken, but certainly before the reception in full. One might be deceived in this matter and be advanced with very serious consequences to himself and to others. Hence, during the six months tests should be applied, gently but faithfully, so as to leave no room to doubt the real condition. The importance of this can hardly be estimated. Methodism has laid much stress on spirituality all through its history. It cannot afford to admit any who have not so much as made a beginning in the spiritual life.

Various tests may be applied. In the paragraph of the Discipline above quoted two are given—a desire to be saved from sin and a desire for the fellowship of God's people. These two desires are complementary—one is not kindled in any heart without the other. They are satisfactory proofs that the new life has begun. The first is a mark of repentance, the other of incipient faith. He who has

these experiences has been born again, born of the Spirit. This is a most happy mode of expressing the doctrine of regeneration, free from theological distinctions and refinements. He who has such desires has begun a movement away from sin toward holiness. He is anxious to break with old associations that would entangle and injure him, and to form new associations of a higher character, more accordant with his new desires and helpful toward his new resolves. Notice here that the form of expressing the desire is omitted. No emotional state, 'no prescribed profession, is required. Simply this twofold desire is all that is demanded.

Let it not be supposed, however, that it will be easy to determine whether these desires are present, whether they are genuine and likely to be permanent. A course of examination and instruction will be necessary to establish this matter. The speech, thoughts, conduct, and association must be taken into consideration, and

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the whole life must be brought under the searchlight of truth. Men are easily deceived even as to themselves. The states of the mind are complex and fitful. It is important that the trend of the life should be known, that the habits should be carefully scanned, and that the secrets of the heart should be laid bare. Much wisdom will be required in this very difficult and delicate service, so that the unworthy may not escape and the worthy may not be discouraged.

Our Saviour gave one mode of testing which may always be applied with safety. "Ye shall know them by their fruits," he said. The outward life must be taken as an index of the inward life. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." Speech and conduct are therefore the measures of the interior condition. Mr. Wesley, who had a full acquaintance with human nature and who was sternly loyal to Christ, applied the same test. "Wherever this desire is really fixed in

the soul," he said, "it will be shown by its fruits," and then he added, "It is therefore expected of all who continue in these societies that they will continue to evidence their desires," and then followed the General Rules. This wonderful epitome of good living has been considered by some as mandates laid upon church members. Not so; it is the sure test of the genuineness of the desire to be saved from sin. As such the General Rules are immensely helpful for probationers. Let the Rules be explained. If any of them be objectionable the fact may be taken as proof that something is wrong at heart.

The mere determination of his desires is but the beginning of the probationer's spiritual preparation. Those desires should be strengthened and directed, until there is drawn after them other dispositions with which they are intimately related. The unfolding of those desires will be the advancement of the new life which began when they were awakened.



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What is a mere matter of seeking must become a blessed realization. Let no one rest in longing for something—let him be satisfied only with its attainment. The probationer ought to feel that he is saved from sin, that God's people are his people. Feeling thus, he ought to be anxious for the formal recognition of what has already been accomplished. Then he will come gladly to make his confession, to answer questions, and to accept his place in the church. He is spiritually ready.

A new question is now presented. Ought this person to enter the Methodist Episcopal Church? There are other ecclesiastical bodies in which he might find a place. He ought not to come here unless persuaded that this branch of the one church of Christ is adapted to him. It is not enough that he is a child of the church, that he has attended it all his life, that his friends are here, that his associates invite him to come in. These influences generally control, and perhaps they

often indicate what is the proper course. And yet to be a genuine church member, especially a member of a Protestant church in our day, the candidate should approve the doctrines and usages. Further on he may by investigation find himself out of harmony with them and compelled to seek another church home, or he may be asked to explain or defend the church of his choice. Hence, before his entrance he should be well instructed in doctrine and in government.

The doctrinal preparation of the probationer should cover the twenty-five Articles of Religion of the Methodist Episcopal Church. These should be read and pondered until their substance is mastered, each one being carefully examined so that at the end there shall be given a comprehensive survey of the entire field. If at any point there is doubt as to the meaning or truthfulness of any article, explanation and defense should be sought. It might be well also to note wherein

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Methodist doctrine differs from the doctrine of other denominations, and how this difference originated. Special care should be taken, however, to do full justice to other confessions, lest a spirit of antagonism be engendered that will greatly disturb the feeling of fraternity which ought to exist toward all the followers of Christ of every communion. Bigoted Methodism is not that of Wesley, for he desired a league with all followers of Christ.

In this doctrinal preparation the more intelligent might profitably read and study some of the standard works of our denomination in which our beliefs are set forth and defended. In this way may be obtained a more complete indorsement and a fuller view. There are some minds that are never satisfied on any subject until they have covered it broadly and critically, and this is possible in church doctrine only through the leadership of some strong mind accustomed to handle such matters. It is greatly helpful to a

layman to be under the guidance and inspiration of a master, one who thinks clearly, deeply, and vigorously, and puts up his ideas in orderly form. All who receive such instruction will be stronger and better able to act a part as leaders in the church, constituting a class of men greatly needed in our time.

The doctrinal preparation will advance the spiritual to which reference has been made. The man will feel more secure in his positions and commit himself more fully and heartily to the new life. What was before nebulous will now come out into the clearest light. What seemed to be final will be known as preparatory. Much of the earlier experiences of religion, in which converts are liable to rest as complete, are only preliminary to other experiences. The doctrinal view opens up that larger and richer life and incites one to press forward into it. Some people say it does not matter what one believes, but this is far from the truth. To

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believe, to know what and why one believes, is the method of spiritual progress adopted and commended by all spiritual men in all churches. So long as anything is vague and uncertain in the thought realm, so long there will be weakness in the heart's action.

It is a great event in the life of a man who finds himself in accord with the doctrines of a church. The very fact that he is thinking as others do along great lines of truth is ground to believe that he is right in his thinking, and every man is stronger when convinced that he has obtained right views of things. Moreover, this agreement in thought creates a bond of union, subtle yet strong, so that the hearts flow together and the hands are involuntarily clasped. This is one reason why Protestantism is built on creeds, one reason why those creeds should be continued. The probationer who has approved the doctrines of the church has advanced his preparation for entrance.


The church should then be studied historically. How did it originate, under what conditions and by the work of what men? What has since been accomplished by it? What is its present outlook and purpose? In answering these questions there should be a review of English Methodism, of our colonial Methodism, and then of our national Methodism. All this is valuable in two ways. It shows whether the church may justly claim to be divine, a showing immensely important because Christ declared that he would build the church. If there be any organization whose history does not show marks of the divine approval and co-operation no man desiring to become a Christian can honestly commit himself to it. Besides, the successive movements of an ecclesiastical system awaken confidence and create a desire to be connected with its future.

The probationer should next study the government of the church, that system by

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which united action is regulated, by which great causes are promoted. For this purpose the Discipline becomes the handbook. The regulations for the Conferences, for the ministry, for the educational and benevolent institutions, for the order of worship, and for the judicial administration, must pass under review. Here one must not pause with merely considering what now is, for all this may be changed by the lawmaking body at some future time. The essential thing in Methodist government must be sought in the General Conference. Does the candidate approve all this? Can he submit to it and heartily support it? Does he believe that the government of the church is wise and good? An affirmative answer is another forward step toward reception.

It remains now for the candidate to consider denominational usage. There have grown up during the history certain customs that are not prescribed in the Discipline; neither are they, strictly



speaking, in the necessary deductions from denominational doctrines. In their attempts to accomplish certain ends, in their efforts to surmount difficulties, Methodist ministers, and laymen as well, have found what they deem to be the best method of procedure, and they have followed that until it has been commonly adopted throughout the connection. By these our people are distinguished. These things may not be set aside. The probationer must consider whether he can conform to these usages.

One point further demands attention. The fifth article of religion declares that "The Holy Scriptures contain all things necessary to salvation," so that "whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not required of any man that it shall be believed." Is the Methodist Church on a Scriptural basis? Are its doctrines, government, and usage approved by Holy Writ? The probationer must satisfy himself on this point.



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In order to that he must contract habits of Bible study, suited to his years and experiences, and he must determine throughout his entire church life that everything therein shall be submitted to the one infallible standard. A Methodist of this sort will be a spiritual descendant of John Wesley, who said that his mission was "to spread Scriptural holiness."

## CHAPTER III

### THE PERSONS TO BE PREPARED

WHOM should we receive on probation in the Methodist Episcopal Church? It is well to consider the material with which we must deal. The character and quality of the persons to be prepared must determine in large part the method to be pursued. Some will be docile and responsive, yielding readily to every effort made in their behalf. Others will be intractable, dull, and sluggish, proceeding slowly from stage to stage, taxing the wisdom and patience of those in whose care they are placed, and coming at last into an unsatisfactory condition. Reflection on these matters in advance may save many heartaches and prepare for larger success.

In a general way it may be replied that all who offer themselves should be received, provided they meet the terms laid

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down in the Discipline, "There is but one condition previously required of those who desire admission to these societies, a desire to flee from the wrath to come and to be saved from their sins," or, briefly, a desire for salvation. This implies what the theologians term conviction and repentance. Surely, every sin-sick soul should seek the church as one suffering under serious malady may seek the hospital, although the church is more than a hospital. Where else may the sinner go? Where else may he expect a welcome? It would be well-nigh a crime to reject him.

This condition of admission meets the requirements of Scripture under both covenants. The spirit of Judaism was voiced by the old prophet in the cry, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters." The keynote of the gospel was sounded in the invitation of Jesus, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden." To the same import is the par-

able in which the servants are sent into the highways and hedges to find guests for the feast. The ideal church is presented in that brief apostolic account where "the Lord added daily such as should be saved," or, as the Revised Version reads, "those that were being saved," those whose salvation had been begun. The church is to be composed of penitent sinners. Open wide the door for their entrance.

But must those be accepted whose past lives have been notoriously bad? It is not surprising that some are reluctant to bring into fellowship persons who by speech and action have offended the virtuous, who have so polluted themselves as that contact endangers the welfare of all who would be holy, from whom in sheer self-defense good people have withdrawn as from a leper. The old life cannot be easily forgotten. One naturally fears that there may be a return to it in a brief time. And yet, if the desire to be saved is mani-

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fest, such a one must not be refused. It is the business of the church to extend a helping hand to the most degraded and to lift them up to a better state. The drunkard, the thief, the harlot, the murderer, if penitent, must not be refused as a probationer.

A more serious question is presented in the case of another class of persons wholly unlike those just mentioned. They are highly respectable. They have maintained an outward life free from fault, in many respects as good as that of many church members. They have friends in the church among whom they have maintained the closest and most delightful intimacy. Indeed, they love the church and contribute generously to its support and are defenders of its honor. It is the wonder of many that these persons are not members. Perhaps they have been urged many times to join. It has been felt that their enrollment would be a great gain, adding to the social standing and

influence of the church. Shall these persons be held to the above condition?


Certainly. Not respectable, genteel, moral men, but penitent sinners are wanted. Jesus came not to call the righteous, but sinners. Nothing can be done for a man or with him if he thinks that he is already good, made so by inheritance, or training, or reform, or culture. Why should such a man come in? What is he to seek if he has already found all and needs nothing? He is and must remain, until his mental and spiritual attitude is changed, unworthy a place among those who seek salvation. This matter has caused no small trouble in Methodism. By letting down the standard to meet these peculiar cases many have been received who know nothing about the experiences of a new life, and they have given tone to the whole church.

The point must be guarded somewhat. The persons just described must not be held strictly to any prescribed form of

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conviction or confession, or to any mode of expression. It must not be expected that they will have experiences like those of the Philippian jailer, although they may have. They may not come in an excited state of mind asking as he did, "What must I do to be saved?" If such were required of them they would probably stay out. It is enough if the man, however kindly, generous, and respectable, feels that he is a sinner, that there is something in him that is offensive to God, from which he has no power to escape, and if by any method, however gentle, he confesses this. He comes then into probation not because of any goodness which he has already acquired, but because of evil from which he seeks deliverance.

Methodism must be very faithful in these matters with all who seek admission. Three doctrines must be boldly and constantly taught—that all men are sinners, that Jesus Christ is the Saviour



of sinners, that the church is the fellowship of those who trust Christ for salvation. These doctrines leave no room for hypocritical pretension, or for pharisaic boasting, or for conceited morality. They require humility and encourage all those graces that belong to a true spiritual life which is always rooted not in self but in Christ. Make the probationer know all this at his setting out, and half the trouble of his after nurture will be overcome. If he begins as a sinner he may become a saint.

These general statements concerning the conditions of admission prepare for a more particular view of the persons to be received. These may be arranged under three heads, giving them in the order of the numbers belonging to each, and in the order of their importance to the church. By such classification we may best see from what sources the church will derive its most hopeful accessions, and a study of the characteristics of each



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will suggest policies and measures to be adopted in training, as set forth in later chapters of this work.

The first list of probationers should include those who were children and young people in the church.\* That they deserve to be mentioned first is evident from the emphasis laid in the Scriptures upon early piety, and from the fact that the church receives its best recruits from this source. There is a feeling quite common, and by no means improper, that the church has no holier mission than to care for its young, that it would greatly prosper if this care were wisely directed. However one may feel about that matter, certain it is that for the present as for the past much attention must be bestowed upon this most interesting class. The young probationers may be subdivided under several heads.

There are the children of pious parents, given to the Lord in baptism, the children

\* See second paragraph of Preface.

of the covenant. These have been more or less instructed at home according to the faithfulness and ability of their parents or guardians. In this way they have been brought up "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." They have been taught to pray and to attend upon the various means of grace. At a suitable time, if the minister has discharged his duty, they have been assembled for further instruction, the church thereby meeting a measure of the responsibility assumed in baptism. Thus parents and minister, home and church, have combined for the spiritual good of the little ones.

Methodism expects and has so declared in the Discipline that these efforts will be sanctified and used by the Holy Spirit, and that in due time the child will give evidence of piety. Hence, there will be presented at intervals, unless the system is badly conducted, a company of little ones, varying in their ages, but

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worthy to be entered as probationers. It is impossible to lay too much stress on this point. Unfortunate indeed will be the church when its children do not come in this way seeking admission. This is the most natural, the most profitable method of increase. The material so obtained ought to be far better than that obtained in any other way.\*

But probationers of this sort will be unlike any others. They will come in such a gradual and gentle way as scarcely to be aware of any change. Many of them will have been unconsciously renewed by the Holy Spirit at a time so early that memory does not reach back to it. Others, perhaps less favored by endowment or environment, have opened their hearts little by little to "let the dear Saviour come in." And others still, after many precious thoughts and high purposes, have been brought to a decision, passing by a crisis into the kingdom.

\* See the author's work *The Baptized Children of Methodism*.

These traits need all of them to be studied with much care. But, however varied the manifestation, it is safe to bring each and all to the one test already given. Do you feel that there is in you something that is wrong? Do you desire to be rid of that something? Will you seek Christ and the Church for that purpose? These questions addressed to each may be varied, but the substance must not be lost.

There are children and young people other than those from godly homes who become probationers. They are likely to enter at a later age. Whereas, the first company will naturally come at twelve or thirteen, these may be expected at sixteen to eighteen years. Some of these have been in the Sunday school, by which they ought to be led to Christ, but generally they are not converted until some special services are held, as on Decision Day or in a protracted meeting. But these are all the time under the care of the church, and ministers and teachers may properly

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expect large ingathering from this source, and be disappointed if it does not occur. They that are wise will be looking constantly for every indication that the Spirit of God has begun his work, ready to encourage any desire that may arise in the heart.

But probationers of this sort will be unlike the baptized children. The difference will be due in part to the lack of early home influence and in part to the advanced age and experience. Adolescence has many qualities unknown in childhood that give color to the religious life. There will be more conscience and more inquiry, and as a result more conviction and decision. The new life will not begin so easily and gently—it may be ushered in with a storm. Regrets and tears, followed by smiles and peace, may be marks of the new birth. But not always; the temperament, associations, and the conduct in all the preceding years will determine the manner of expression. But



the sense of sin and the desire for salvation, if the life is genuine, will not be lacking.

The second list of probationers should include those who have advanced to maturity and who have been for years, perhaps for most of their lives, attendants upon the church. In general terms they have been already described in a former paragraph. In the main these persons have regarded the ethical requirements of Christianity, and have held themselves amenable to the practices common in their Christian associations. They are outside the church because they have not been moved toward it by a clear putting of sin and salvation. By various means their eyes may be opened to these matters—by some bereavement, temptation, trial, weakness, or sermon—and they take the long-neglected step and ask admission among the people of God.

Probationers of this class will be most thoughtful of all. They have long re-

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flected upon the general truths of the gospel. Concerning some of them they may have had doubts. In the main, however, the Christian system has commended itself to their judgments. But they have looked on from the outside, watching the course of events without including themselves among those who conduct affairs and bring results. There has thus grown up a habit both of thought and act seldom changed. Many look on them after their entrance and see substantially what they saw before. But the great Searcher of hearts and his wise representatives will see in these men that essential and precious thing, the sense of sin and the desire for salvation.

The third list of probationers must include a much smaller number, those who are not regular attendants at church, who are convicted and converted in special meetings. Many of these have fallen into sin, some of them have been known as immoral. All of them have excused their

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wrongdoing by comparisons that have not been just, and they have sought to pacify their consciences by devices of various kinds. Not a few have been hardened in sin, and some of these have despised religion. But the great meeting that made a powerful impression upon the town, aroused and attracted them, and they have after long neglect turned their backs on their past lives and sought the Lord. Their entrance into probation marks an event of tremendous interest to all believers.

These persons come, as a rule, through strong conviction and deep penitence. Their hearts have been moved to the depths. They have trembled under the burden of a guilty conscience. When at last they found peace in Jesus the transition was as from midnight darkness to meridian splendor. Their demonstrations are such as to make a profound impression upon all who hear. Their testimony is clear-cut, direct, and posi-



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tive, carrying with it a conviction of their sincerity. It is possible that some will be deceived by the idea that such conversions are the highest and best forms, after which all should be patterned.

This survey of the lists of probationers needs to be carefully considered by the Methodist pastor, who may thus learn the methods of divine grace and of spiritual unfolding. The baptized children will have many features in common with the adults of the congregation who are converted by the stated services. The young people who had no pious parents will resemble those converted from the outside, in that they will pass through a crisis. But whether, as in one case, there is a gentle and gradual turning, or, in the other, an abrupt arrest and surrender, one must expect always, as the invariable sign of the beginning of spiritual life, a sense of sin and a longing for deliverance.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE FORMAL RECOGNITION OF PROBATIONERS

IN former years people entered into probation in the Methodist Episcopal Church by great variety of methods. In some instances the name was quietly given to a class leader or to the pastor, perhaps at home, or on the street, or in the church, and afterward it was as quietly entered upon the church record. Sometimes the pastor announced the name to the congregation, but that he did not because of any rule or custom, but because it seemed to him proper. Occasionally the person went forward to the altar at the close of the sermon and was formally introduced. In all these cases the candidate said nothing, and there was no general statement concerning the significance of the act.

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It must appear to all that this method was very defective, sadly out of harmony with the importance of the event, and by no means adapted to make suitable impression. Many in the church hardly realized what had transpired. Perhaps some did not even learn the name of the one who had thus taken the first step toward church membership, and hence they were unprepared to give the sympathy which was required. On the other hand, the probationer must generally have regarded with a measure of indifference what he had so lightly begun. There was nothing to awaken his thought or feeling or summon him to a better life. Frequently he was left to consider the act as a very trivial one, and to look forward six months to another act of more importance.

It is probable that this mode of entrance had something to do with the indecision of many and with the subsequent losses so greatly deplored. There has been much surprise expressed, and justly

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so, that many fall out before the six months expire—that the good purpose which was evidently formed was so short-lived. Surely, the people ought to be more stable in a matter of so great concern. In the search for causes we do well to consider the influence of beginnings. What a man will do in any undertaking depends very largely upon the way he starts out. It is well known that many an enterprise is doomed to failure because there was not given to it suitable inspiration and impetus at the first. This fact is worthy of consideration as much in religious as in secular affairs.

These reflections prepare for the consideration of the form introduced into the Discipline by the General Conference of 1896, providing for an appropriate public recognition of probationers in the presence of the church. That form as it now stands completes the ritual which was before imperfect. It rightly follows the order for the administration of baptism and

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precedes the order for the reception into full connection. It is surprising that for a whole century no one discovered that there was a missing link. Its admission at this late date gives a beautiful symmetry to the whole which is of doctrinal as well as practical value. The entire policy of the church is recognized, beginning with the baptized infant and proceeding to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

A brief study of this form will be profitable at this time. It is in two parts, comprising first an address to the people, as is highly appropriate, and closing with questions put to the candidate. In the address it is gratifying to note that the nature of probation is clearly stated—"a preparatory membership on trial." This is a most happy combination of all the ideas involved. A kind of membership it is indeed, and a preparation for another kind of membership. A trial it is also, that "proof may be made of the sincerity and depth of the convictions and of the

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strength of the purposes" of those who offer themselves. No one can estimate the importance of such language addressed to the church whenever new members are offered to fellowship.

Further on in this excellent address the church members are urged to consider their "responsibility, as having previously entered into this holy fellowship." They are also urged "so to order their lives that these new disciples may take no detriment from them, but that it may ever be cause for thanksgiving to God that they were led into this fellowship." In pronouncing these words the pastor may well put his whole soul into them and strive to make all present feel that the occasion is one of profound interest. It is by this process that the heart of the congregation may be enlisted in behalf of the newcomers, and a warm welcome extended which shall go far in making them feel at home. It will be exceedingly strange if some who hear this address do

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not on some proper occasion grasp the hand of the persons so received and give them a personal greeting that will touch their hearts and strengthen their purposes.

After this address to the church the ritual form has two sentences, both highly appropriate, spoken to the candidate, in which the motive and source of the decision to enter the church are given. Then follow three questions. The first pertains to the desire to be saved from sin, that initial experience upon which so much emphasis has been laid in Methodism, the only condition previously required of those who seek admission into the society. The second question pertains to conduct which must be conformed to the commandments of God. The third question refers to attendance upon the means of grace. The answer to the first is to be a positive affirmation, and to the second and third a pledge of determination and endeavor.

Thus it appears that this new section



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of our ritual completely covers the whole subject of probation, both as to the church and the individual. It is well suited to its purpose. Its educational value is very great. No pastor should fail to use it in recognizing those who offer themselves on probation. A few suggestions may be made concerning the mode and spirit of employing this new feature.


It is manifestly unwise to introduce probationers frequently by this formula, that is, to do so on almost every Sunday, when perhaps one or two may stand at the altar. For one reason too much time will be consumed in this way, prolonging the service and causing a sense of weariness to some in the congregation. Moreover, the exercise would measurably lose its impressiveness when repeated many times with only a brief interval of a week or so. The mind appreciates more fully that which is of rare occurrence, giving to it an appearance of novelty and freshness. Everything about the church ought



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to be so arranged that no one will tire of it, but all will accept it as proper and edifying.

It would be vastly better if set times were appointed for this purpose. The occasions when probationers are admitted into full connection might be selected, or other times, to be known as probationers' days, might be set down in the church calendar to be known and anticipated by all. These days might be publicly announced by the pastor from the desk. This form would be very proper: "On Sunday, \_\_\_\_\_, at the morning service following the sermon, I shall be pleased to recognize and introduce as probationers any persons who prior to that date will signify to me their desire to enter into this relation. The names may be sent to me by mail, or the persons may call at the parsonage. I trust that any who have been considering this matter will reach a decision and be prepared to enter at that time."



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A notice of this sort will certainly attract attention, especially on the part of any who for some time have been seriously inclined on the subject of religion, and time will be given for sufficient deliberation. It is not too much to affirm that this step should be taken thoughtfully and prayerfully. Frequently men, women, and children have been drawn into the probationary relation by momentary impulses of an unhealthful character awakened by a sermon or a song, and later they have regretted the act. The course here suggested, by giving time for reflection, will avoid all these mistakes and lead to better results.

The pastor should not be content with such an announcement. He should be diligent in seeking those individuals who ought to respond to his invitation. Indeed, at all times he should be in search of such. They may be found in his Sunday school, in the families of his members, and in the congregation. If his

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acquaintance is sufficiently intimate and extended, if he is industrious in seeking souls, if he is clear and forceful in his preaching, if he is systematic in pastoral visitation, there will be no difficulty in collecting a company once a quarter or once in two months to enter into probation.

If this endeavor is conducted with regularity and publicity the congregation itself will become interested in furthering the pastor's designs. Teachers will converse with their pupils, parents with their children, friends with friends, all upon the one purpose of entering the church. And these conversations and efforts will assume a highly religious or spiritual form as all come to realize what has been proposed, and that must be very largely through the sermons and prayers of the pastor. Thus it may come to pass that there will be a perpetual ingathering, a kind of revival all through the year, what has been so greatly desired by many.

### **Formal Recognition of Probationers 63**

Certain it is that by the united efforts of the pastor and people there may come into the church a constant desire for souls, and the church may take up with ease its exalted mission. The time may come when disappointment will be felt by all if the recognition day brings no new members into the flock, and the failure may be just cause for humiliation, confession, and prayer in an earnest attempt to learn and remove the cause.

Suppose now by the processes described a number of persons have been reported to the pastor who propose to present themselves on the Sunday appointed. Each of these ought to be seen and instructed, so that the ceremony may pass with proper decorum. If possible the company should come together, perhaps on a week day or evening, or before the prayer meeting, or on Sunday morning before service. At that time everything should be made plain, the names should be enrolled, the ritual should be placed in their

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hands, and every precaution taken so that no one need be embarrassed or disappointed when called to the altar. An orderly, thoughtful, and reverent conduct of the exercises on Sunday will be impossible without careful arrangement made by the pastor in advance.

Before he begins the words of the ritual the minister should read the names of those who in response to his invitation have presented themselves before the congregation. Unless they are well known there might be a word concerning each, brief, however, lest the exercise be too greatly prolonged, but sufficiently extended to make known the general character of the class, and to awaken interest in the individuals. This part of the ceremony is especially important as it brings the congregation into proper relation with the new members and lays upon the latter a deeper sense of responsibility and opportunity.

The minister may then proceed with

## **Formal Recognition of Probationers 65**

the reading of the address to the congregation, every word of which should be uttered with a clear voice, with emphasis and pause at proper intervals to give the best effect. This reading will be in the highest style only when by the methods previously described the minister has acquired a paternal spirit toward those who are before him, who have been enlisted by him and been brought forward to this interesting hour. Some of the company have been the objects of his prayer, and they have received his advice and been brought to a decision for God and the church. Under such circumstances a man can speak with tenderness.

The questions should be put to the class slowly, plainly, and forcefully, and the answers should be made in concert in such way that the entire audience may hear. A very hasty glance at the form will show how important this is. If, as sometimes occurs, the replies are in an undertone too faint to be heard, all present will be left

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in great uncertainty and the performance will be perfunctory and lifeless—a remark that applies with equal force to all those other parts of our ritual, as in the case of baptisms, where responses are expected but seldom heard.

The form as given in the ritual closes with extempore prayer. At that time the class ought all to kneel about the altar, the pastor within, and the petitions should come from the heart. Simplicity of language, fervor of spirit, and genuine desire should unite in that prayer, and if some pious soul in the congregation, whose life commends him, should say “Amen,” no one would object. After the prayer the pastor’s hand extended to each in welcome completes the exercise.

## CHAPTER V

### THE PERSONS TO CONDUCT THE PREPARATION

WHO shall prepare the probationers for full connection in the church? It will be admitted by all that this difficult task ought not to be committed to the hands of incompetent persons, to be conducted in an unsatisfactory manner with serious consequences to the church and to the candidates. The work demands a very high order of talent. It may not be possible to secure in every congregation just what is needed, in which case there must be selected one who comes nearest to the ideal. To aid in making such selection the following outline of qualifications may be helpful.

First of all, the person should be genuinely spiritual. No other could be of any service whatever in this place. One un-



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acquainted with experimental religion cannot make a correct inquiry into the religious condition of another, ascertain the desires and purposes, inspire with longings after better states, and lead on in the advance movements. And, as the spiritual preparation of probationers, as previously shown, is of paramount importance, the nonspiritual leader would break down at the initial step, utterly unable to proceed or do anything of value. On the other hand, a thoroughly holy man would be a most helpful associate, a blessing to any who come under his direction. It would be better to have this quality alone than all other qualities without it, if such alternative were presented.

The spiritual person ought also to be sympathetic and attractive in manner, as generally he would be. There is a style of spirituality, if that title may be appropriately applied to it, that is extremely repulsive, and never more so than to those just setting out in a religious life. Sancti-



## Persons to Conduct the Preparation 69

moniousness, that is strikingly like egotism and spiritual pride, is an offense in every place. If one of that make-up were in charge of probationers they would find in him nothing to admire. It is probable that they would soon forsake him, but if they continued their association it would be to their injury. On the other hand, one who is humbly good and sweetly kind wins the confidence and good will of those intrusted to his care, and thereby encourages them to pursue the appointed task. The probationer needs a real friend, one who can come into his life and quicken it by the genial influence of his own, and who by his friendship can incite to noble endeavor.

The instructor of probationers should be free from reproach. If there is that in his conduct, speech, disposition, or association which is disapproved by the church the wisdom of his appointment to this service will be doubted, and that doubt will be expressed and the proba-

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tioners will hear it. Then their confidence will be shaken and they will give less response to the things that may be required of them. It is exceedingly unfortunate when officials of the church are criticised; it is most deplorable when that criticism is directed against those who have charge of the beginners in the new life. On the contrary, a probationer is encouraged and helped when he knows that the one appointed to care for him has the undivided approval of the congregation.

It is also desirable that the instructor of probationers should have a good acquaintance with real life. He must feel that he is to prepare persons to live in this world as well as in the next, and he must therefore know much about the relations, duties, trials, sorrows, and joys that enter into the average life. This knowledge may be turned to good account in the progress of his work. It may give color and shape to every exer-

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cise, and cause all things to bear one general aspect of simplicity and good sense that shall secure the favor of all. More and more the demand is for practical everyday men, for those who come with good heart and clear vision into the ordinary obligations that meet them in the routine of daily life. Such persons are most appropriate in the office of an instructor of candidates for church membership.

It need hardly be added, what everyone must admit, that a measure of intelligence and education and much refinement are needed in this instructor. He may not have a liberal training—indeed, that might unfit him for this service; but a mind accustomed to investigate and to devise plans, to determine the causes and consequences of things, is able to do what a mind of a lower grade cannot. There are few who do not instinctively yield themselves to the guidance of intelligence, and shrink from those who display igno-

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rance and weakness. Perhaps there is nothing that can engage the mind as thoroughly as can the subject of religion and the church. Here is a field in which the noblest intellect may roam forever and be continually advancing from glory to glory. Let the probationers be placed under the care of good minds, thereby stimulating them to intellectual activity.

One other qualification to be noted is closely related to the last. The instructor should be well acquainted with the doctrines, history, government, and usages of the Methodist Episcopal Church—the more extensive that acquaintance the better. He should have read and thought until the various subjects have found an abiding place in his memory and drawn out the sympathetic expressions of his heart. In this way he should have come into full harmony with the denomination, so that he may say without reservation, "This is my church, the church of my choice and of my heart." This will give

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him a zeal for the church and a desire to increase its numbers and influence. It will prepare him to do good part by those who are proposing to enter the church. They will catch his inspiration and follow enthusiastically where he leads until they enter the fold rejoicing in all that pertains to it.

Is this standard too high? Who dare set up a lower? Shall we be unable in many churches to attain it? Then we may reach out for the nearest approach to it, and seek constantly to elevate the actual until we attain the ideal. Without doubt, in most congregations if a vigorous attempt were made, through a series of years, rising higher each successive year, the time would not be long before what is here outlined might be had. It is therefore proper to point out a method by which such a desirable state might be reached.

It is probable that there is in every church more than one possessing the

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qualifications first mentioned above—spiritual, humble, sympathetic, winsome, free from reproach, familiar with real life, intelligent. That would be a remarkable society in which some of this sort could not be found. Now let these be gathered together by the pastor for instruction. Let the course cover all the above points thoroughly; then let it be expanded to include the ecclesiastical part. Suppose it require a year to do this, or two years. No amount of time need be considered too great for the proper completion of such a task. At the end the pastor will have a board of leaders, larger or smaller, but better far than can now be found in any church. From that board he may select one to care for the probationers, and the others may be assigned to other positions.

Until this is done the pastor himself might well be the instructor. Indeed, he should be reluctant to turn the work entirely over to another, even after he has

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found one well qualified; and certainly until that time he should take it up and prosecute it with vigor and delight. There are many considerations which point unmistakably to the pastor as the most proper person to have charge of this whole matter.


In the first place, it is preeminently his work. He is appointed to minister to the spiritual needs of his people. He must regard all of them as under his special care. He must look with unusual tenderness and solicitude toward the probationers, anxious that they shall obtain correct ideas and come forward at the proper time to answer the questions and take their places in the church. This matter ought to have a large place in his heart and engage much of his thought and time. For this he was put in charge of the congregation. To be remiss here is to break down at the very point where the largest demand is made upon the pastoral office. There can be no excuse for any



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neglect. No other duty is greater; none ought to come before this.

Again, the pastor knows, or is presumed to know, the phases of the religious life. He has had excellent opportunity to know. He himself passed through those experiences. His conviction, repentance, faith, pardon, and peace are remembered among the most important events of his life. If there had been any doubt concerning them that doubt must have disappeared before he applied for admission to Conference. Afterward he engaged in preaching for the purpose of awakening similar experiences in others. In order to that he selected Scripture for texts and illustrations. Then he was called many times to give counsel to seekers and to believers, and in this way he obtained a more perfect view of the spiritual life. No one in the church, therefore, so well as he can be the instructor of probationers in matters of religion.



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And then, the pastor is acquainted with the history, doctrines, and usages of the denomination. In his four years of study for the ministry he was required to cover these matters, and he was examined by a committee at Conference. It would be a shame for him after all this preparation through which he passed to confess that he did not know about his church, or that he consented to go forth in its name as a minister without heartily approving the church. This knowledge may well be employed by him in the preparation of persons for church membership.

Besides, the pastor needs for his own improvement the work which it is here proposed to give him, and that in many ways. Every lesson he gives in church government will be a review more deeply impressing upon his mind what he formerly learned and more fully enlisting his affections, so increasing his loyalty. That this is desired in the pastor everyone must see. He can do but little for a

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people who proceeds timidly or apologetically, because he is either ignorant of his church or out of harmony with it. To be genuinely committed to it is the first condition of success in it. And that is likely to result from his efforts with probationers.

The pastor will receive great spiritual quickening from this work. His reviews of religious experience, his sympathetic intercourse with those who are seeking information, his study of the Scriptures to meet their needs, will all return a hundredfold upon himself in increased interest and skill in these subjects, in a deepening and broadening of his own life. No theological seminary can do for him what such a class may do, and that in the direction which will furnish him an equipment at the point most needed.

It will be very strange if this work does not make a better pastor and a better preacher out of a man. Themes for conversation and for pulpit discourse without

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number will be suggested—themes that are on the level of the people. There is a tendency as our ministers become educated to withdraw from that contact with men once enjoyed, to find in books rather than in real life the prompting and the range for all meditation and discussion. This tendency will be corrected by the course here proposed. Indeed, a pastor might well come to the probationers, if for no other reason, to keep himself in close touch with the life of his congregation, and that for his own sake.

Finally, see what an opportunity this work offers to unite a pastor with his people. He will win the affection of all those who come under his instruction. By the intimacies enjoyed during six months they will learn his traits and they will admire his devotion. They will pay back all his self-denying labors by their genuine friendship. In the course of a few years they will constitute a considerable force in the church upon which he

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may rely at all times when service is required. Through their family relations his name is carried to a wider circle. Thus he draws about him what will be of incalculable value, a body of men and women who are in full sympathy with him and his plans.

Let it then be repeated with emphasis that the pastor is primarily responsible for the care of probationers. He must do this work or see that it is done. And if another is appointed to it he must be regarded as an assistant through whom the pastor accomplishes his purpose. That assistant, prepared as already suggested, must not displace the principal. At all times the pastor must manifest a lively interest in all that is done, and at proper intervals he should enter for the sake of supervision, or encouragement, or advice. What the assistant does should really be the pastor's doing.

But why engage an assistant? Why not leave all this in the pastor's hands

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alone? Many answers might be given. Two must suffice. In the first place the pastor has many other duties, and his time is too limited for the faithful performance of all. Unless he has more than ordinary strength he would physically fail unless assisted. Besides, it is a wise policy to train laymen and set them to tasks, thus bringing out the talent and increasing the efficiency of the church. Here is a position in which the right man, standing between the pastor on the one hand and the prospective members on the other, might obtain a social, intellectual, and spiritual life not possible otherwise, illustrating the power of the gospel and commending it to men.

Suppose now at the open door of the church by which the probationer enters there stands the pastor and a well-qualified assistant, two persons who are agreed as to policy and methods, who offer a welcome to the newcomer and promise to care for him, who jointly undertake that

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kindly service which shall enable him to enter intelligently and heartily after a few months into the communion he seeks. Will not this be a commendable feature? Will it not give inspiration and hope to the beginner? Will it not be a promise of a better church in the future years?

But can our pastors do this? Have they the ability and disposition? Have not many of them laid such emphasis on their pulpit work and given so much time to it as not only to neglect the pastoral office but to obscure its importance? And, as a result, will they not turn from this as disagreeable or unnecessary, or something for which they are not fitted? If this be so, then there is little prospect of a more spiritual Methodism. But God forbid that any considerable number should assume this attitude or make this pleading. The call to them is imperative; they must not turn a deaf ear. All the future of our Zion depends upon their response.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE FIRST STEPS WITH PROBATIONERS

THE early portion of the probationary period is in many respects most important. Some things may be done at that time which will render all subsequent effort easy and delightful, the neglect of which may make every after task extremely difficult. First impressions are always most influential and lasting. By delay false ideas may be obtained and practices indulged that will be troublesome for months and years to come. Hence, at the earliest convenience after the name is enrolled let the work begin. What is here urged is for the pastor who is alone qualified to do it, who ought not to delegate to another what will bring to him a blessing of incalculable value and prepare him to select some suitable person to conduct the further preparation.



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This early preliminary work of the pastor with the probationer should cover at least three points. He should become thoroughly acquainted with the person, that he may wisely judge what needs to be done, and how it may be best done. He should explain briefly what is signified by church membership and what is designed by the probationary relation in Methodism, that the candidate may have a just conception of the tasks before him and may enter upon those tasks with enthusiasm. He should give a summary view of the method adopted by the Methodist Church in the spiritual nurture of those who come to it. If these three points are rightly treated, seldom in a single interview, there will be accord between the minister and the probationer, and a mutual understanding and confidence will be reached so that they may proceed together with good heart.

The first item mentioned above, that of making acquaintance, will be recognized

by all as highly important. A beginning under this head should be made in an informal social way, by which the hearts of the two will be moved, each toward the other. The manifest regard on the one side will awaken a true reverence on the other. There is a need of mutual esteem without which little can be accomplished but with which almost any good work may be attempted with assurance of success. The minister must make the advance in all this. There is about him ordinarily a measure of dignity by which he is somewhat separated from others, and he must break down all the barriers and win the confidence which will surely be given.

Further acquaintance-making might be conducted somewhat after the order suggested in the questions found in the Appendix of this work. These inquiries pertain to the inheritance, the family, the associations, tastes, occupations, amusements, and tendencies of the person. They

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are designed to lay open the past and present, and to furnish the minister with the information needed in the preparation. They are in the religious realm what the symptoms are to a physician who comes to treat one in sickness. As the latter needs to make a diagnosis in order to serve his patient, so the minister needs to know all about the one whom he undertakes to instruct and guide in heavenly things. Nothing should be taken for granted. Nothing should be esteemed of little importance in the case.

The order of these questions deserves attention. Of what stock did the probationer come? We may be certain that the law of transmission holds. There are elements of weakness or of strength to be expected as derived from certain ancestry. Under what surroundings was the person brought up, and what are his present associations? The law of environment is clearly taught in Scripture and may not be ignored. Evil communications corrupt

good manners. Some things may need to be changed in the private life to secure the spiritual welfare. What is the person now in his habits, dispositions, tastes? Here is a progressive and even scientific handling of the individual. With data so obtained the pastor knows what sort of person is in his hands, what precautions are necessary, what besetments are probable, what achievements possible.

In seeking this information the pastor should be careful to make known his purpose. It must not be thought that he has an inquisitorial spirit, any disposition to pry into secrets. He should clearly state and make it very plain that he only desires to know what may be helpful to him in exercising proper care and nurture; and if the candidate for any reason appears to be unwilling to answer on any matter the question should not be urged. Methodist ministers must not introduce a confessional, but they may become confidential spiritual advisers and friends. In

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order to this they must know enough of the person's history, life, purpose, motives, doubts, and fears to proceed intelligently. It will be a great pity if the probationer finds after weeks have passed that he was not understood.

On prudential grounds it may be advisable when the candidate is of the opposite sex for the pastor to conduct the questioning in the presence of his wife, or, if he has none, then in the presence of some discreet and godly woman of his congregation. This advice is immensely important in the case of young women and girls of a certain age. Besides, it is altogether probable that a woman understands her own sex better than a man can. A minister may therefore wisely call one to aid him in making his preliminary examinations. Of course, part of all this might be transferred to the home, where the mother could answer for her daughter and tell what otherwise would never be known.

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The answers to the questions might well be preserved, perhaps in a book, or, better still, on sheets put away in a strong envelope to be filed among the papers in alphabetical order. This record would be the personal property of the pastor. He would be guilty of a grave offense if he were to divulge those delicately personal points which were given to him in confidence. In his hands they would be ready for reference at any time, and to them might be added the results of other interviews had in subsequent months. By comparing records of individuals he might conduct a process of generalization that would be valuable in many ways.

One matter of special interest too frequently overlooked may here receive attention. It will be found by those who adopt this questionnaire method that in the great majority of cases people are not brought suddenly to the choice of a religious life. This is especially true of those who are brought up in religious families

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as mentioned in a previous chapter. For many years, even from early childhood, they have had good desires and purposes. At heart they have been Christians while the years have come and gone. But they have delayed any declaration, and they have not given themselves into the fellowship of God's people. It is worth while, therefore, for the pastor to have regard to this fact and to study each case with much carefulness. In time he may thus become expert in the examination of spiritual conditions.

Being thus made acquainted with the probationer, the pastor may disclose the great purpose to be served by union with the church. Frequently this is so little understood that some think the relation quite unnecessary. The tendency of our time is toward individualism. The usual mode of presenting the gospel strengthens this spirit. One is told that he must repent and believe on the Lord Jesus Christ in order to salvation. Both re-

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penitance and faith are purely personal experiences. A man all alone may adjust his relations with God without the aid of another. Having repented and believed, he may suppose that the work is done, that the end is reached, and he may inquire with some surprise why he should join the church. He may think very wrongly on this matter, and must be made to think rightly. For example, he may conclude that church membership is only a very appropriate matter, that it introduces one into good society, that it will please friends and possibly bring some gain. This low view will degrade the person and render him liable at any time to a revulsion of feeling. When he fails to find what he seeks, when people are not as attentive as he thinks they should be, when some regulation is imposed that seems to limit his liberty or some duty is required that may not be altogether pleasing, he may hastily withdraw, or if he remains it may be with discontented and



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sullen spirit. There are those who under these mistaken notions have passed from church to church, even from one denomination to another, hoping in vain to find what they had desired in the church life.

Others go to the other extreme, and regard the church with something of that superstitious reverence which is felt by the Roman Catholic. It is thought that there is a church sanctity and authority without which a soul cannot be saved. Under this view a man enters the church as a life-saving institution, expecting nothing except through its ministrations. He seeks the ordinances and the various forms and modes of worship as having in themselves a saving power which may be communicated through these alone. Such a man stands in awe of everything that is churchly, and cares little for anything that has not on it the stamp and approval of the church. He is ready to submit without question to all the church may ask of him.

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It is the business of the pastor at the outset of the probationer's course to disabuse his mind on these points, to deliver him from the error of individual self-seeking and from the other blunder of slavish submission to church regulation. What is the church? What is its mission? What is church membership? Why enter into the church? What is to be gained or done? What are the duties and privileges of such relation? These and similar questions must be answered by the pastor. He might preach upon them with profit, but a private treatment of all these questions with the probationer is needed in order that he may make no mistake. That implies, to be sure, what does not always exist, that the pastor has himself covered these matters, that he has studied his Bible concerning them, and that he is thereby qualified in a simple and attractive way to present them to others.

The more thoroughly this is done the

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more necessary and the less difficult will it be to explain the reason for our probationary system. One who really knows what the church is and why union with the church should be sought will feel the importance of a preparation and desire to know the form and character of it. Thus all the steps taken as outlined in this chapter may lead inevitably to one result when the candidates will gladly listen to an explanation of what is proposed for him in his novitiate. But under those circumstances the pastor must not fail to meet the inquiries of the one intrusted to him. He must announce clearly the course to be attempted, the reasons for the course, and the end to be reached. And that will be possible only as it is held very distinctly in his own mind, as something desirable and even necessary.

The acquaintance having been formed, the reason for entering the church and for a preparation before entrance having been shown, one question of utmost in-

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terest will arise, How does the Methodist Church propose to nurture those who enter into its communion? What are the policies and measures to be adopted? What theory lies back of it all? Every denomination has a way of doing things and a reason for that way. There are different schools of medicine—allopathic, homeopathic, hydropathic, electropathic—each resting in some theory of disease and of its treatment. So a denomination approaches the spiritual life with antecedent convictions concerning it, and proceeds according to certain fundamental principles. It is well to let the probationer know the principles of Methodism.

This will lead to the early consideration of our General Rules, which have been strangely misunderstood by many. The rules are not arbitrary enactments designed to regulate the conduct of church members. The Bible is held by Methodists as the only and sufficient rule of faith and practice, so “that what-

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soever is not read therein nor may be proved thereby is not to be required of any man." The rules are not, as one characterized them, "an unwarranted interference with the right of private judgment, and an encroachment upon personal liberty," but they are a summary of those things which the "Spirit writes on truly awakened hearts," and therefore the test of experience and the condition of spiritual progress. The rules are in three sections, first the avoiding of evil, both of that which is essentially wicked and that which is misleading; second, the doing good to the bodies and souls of men; third, attendance upon the ordinances of God.

The minister may preface the introduction of this subject to the probationer by saying: "The physician directs his patient to abstain from certain articles of food, to take up certain kinds of exercise and bathing, and he does this because he believes that the disease of the body may

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in this way be more quickly overcome. From day to day he also feels the pulse, takes the temperature, and in other ways learns the physical condition. In like manner the church, anxious to do you all the good possible, and convinced that certain matters are prejudicial and certain other matters beneficial, has adopted certain rules and asks your careful observance. I give you these rules at the outset so that you may understand the mode of treatment to be adopted." Some such statement will satisfy most reasonable people and cause them heartily to approve what is afterward given.

When the General Rules are read and explained the pastor should note the response of the candidate. Is he dissatisfied or doubtful concerning any point? If so, the reason should be learned. It may be that some prejudice lies behind the objection, rising out of misrepresentations. It may be that there lingers yet some longing after the ways of the world, not

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to say after its sins, and one must probe very deep to find it. Painstaking, thorough work done at this time may prevent untold trouble in after months and years. It is certainly vain to proceed until all the objections are understood and removed. The theory of the church as expressed in these rules is Scriptural and safe, and must not be abandoned.

So far everything should be in the hands of the pastor. In the discharge of the duties outlined in this chapter he needs wisdom and grace of the highest order. On no subject will he need more to study and to pray. If he does this part well what follows will be comparatively easy, and the outcome will compensate him for all his pains. He will also be prepared to transfer the probationer to the care of another, an assistant, and to give those wise instructions which will enable the assistant to do his duty.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE ORGANIZATION OF A PROBATIONER'S CLASS

THERE are those who claim that probationers should be placed at once in classes with older Christians, with whom they should meet at stated times. They would make no distinction of age or sex, believing that for spiritual purposes the little child of ten and the old man of eighty may profitably associate together. In support of this position they present the conditions of domestic life, where father, mother, and little ones, and sometimes the venerable sire, constitute one family, mingling together with the utmost freedom. These persons deplore the tendency in the churches in recent years to form separate organizations, like the Epworth League, wherein age is the chief consideration.



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It should be remembered that the general fellowship desired by these people is secured by the other stated meetings of the church, such as the public worship on Sunday, the midweek prayer service, and the love feast. In all these the young and the old meet together, and it must be admitted that the intercourse thus enjoyed is both beautiful and profitable, and it ought to be encouraged. In a former day it may be that nothing more was needed. But social customs have greatly changed during the last three or four decades. It is now well known that there are intellectual and spiritual needs in one period of life not found in other periods. No one imagines that all the people may be well cared for in the aggregate. Any attempt to force into one mode of experience would result in serious injury to all.

Besides, instruction requires classification. In the search for truth the method must be adapted to the capacity, and that varies with age and other circumstances.

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The public schools with their grades, and the Sunday schools with their departments, recognize this principle. We sort out the pupils not merely for convenience, but with regard to all the matters that concern their studies, and the thoroughness with which that is done determines the success. But, however important for the school, classification is much more necessary for probationers. They are to be taught and trained, and the process must have respect to their peculiar states, their possibilities, their aspirations, their difficulties. Not to classify is to render preparation superficial, if not impossible.

What was said in the third chapter concerning probationers may serve as a basis for classification, that is, for its general features, as follows: First, those children and youth who come out of godly families having been baptized in infancy; second, those young people who, though they had no religious instruction at home, were led by the Sunday school or young

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people's meeting to give their hearts to God; third, those adults who are members of the congregation, who seek Christ after years of delay; fourth, those outside of the congregation drawn in by special meetings. The peculiarities of these four groups have been mentioned and need not be repeated. As a rule, they should be kept distinct, although in case of a general revival the second, third, and fourth groups may have many things in common and may for a time appear much the same.

These four groups of probationers ought to exist most of the time in every healthy church, for they represent the four methods by which souls are gathered into the church. The first witnesses to the excellence of family religion; the second, to the ability of the Sunday school teacher; the third, to the faithfulness of the pastor; the fourth, to the spiritual power of the church to reach beyond itself to the outlying multitude. Moreover, the individuals composing these groups

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should be diligently studied with the view to learn the nature of the spiritual life when produced by these particular methods, and to learn also how these methods may be rendered more effective.

It might be necessary in some instances to subdivide a group. As a rule, the number in a class should not exceed fifteen; few men are able to care for more. And there may be peculiar circumstances and conditions that should influence the pastor in making a smaller class. It may be conceived that in a few cases three or four persons only, joined together in one company, would receive better attention than if they were associated with a larger number. Those brought in during a revival deserve most careful treatment. Having more abruptly begun the religious life, they are liable afterward to impulses not felt by those of other groups, and there must be a good mingling of kindness with firmness to give them stability. They should be associated with that view.

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In the organization of a probationer's class the effort should be to bring the members into the fullest accord and sympathy. There should be a class spirit, and, in one sense, a class pride, meaning by that the laudable desire that all so associated may successfully prosecute the work before them and come to the end well prepared for the advancement into full communion. It is not too much to say that such a union of hearts and hands may be formed as will greatly strengthen the good purpose of the members and project its influence into the after years. To be sure, there are natural affinities which may not be ignored. Some will come together by the power of their mutual attraction, and others will be quite formal and distant, although not repellent. In a general way all may be animated by a common spirit and purpose.

The probationer's class might be made a kind of miniature church, not to render the larger and later relation undesirable,

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but to suggest it and make ready for it. For that purpose there may be brought into its organization all those features which are in the church organization, and they may become the means of communication between the church and the class. In this way the class spirit and life will be the church spirit and life, and every day in the one will witness a steady growth toward the other. Some particulars will make this clear.

First of all, let it be kept constantly in mind that the pastor of the church is the pastor of the probationer's class. All the members are part of his flock, under his spiritual guidance. His name and presence as well as sympathy and advice must be given to make this not only an organic but a vital fact. Into whatever enterprise the class may enter the pastor should be mentioned and esteemed as the rightful head and leader, and no one ought to think it possible to proceed in any measure without him. Of course that implies

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that he is discreet, that he will not arbitrarily exercise authority, but that with self-sacrificing devotion he will regard the welfare of the little company.

Next, it must be remembered that the leader of the class is a subpastor, appointed to assist the pastor in this particular part of the church work. As such he must faithfully cherish and reflect the sentiments and wishes of his principal. If he cannot do this he is not worthy of his place, and another should be chosen. It is certain that when pastor and leader maintain such relations and cooperate fully and heartily the organism of the class will be suited to convey the life of the church to all the members who will feel that they are parts of a great whole. They will then be ready for certain internal arrangements by which activities may be guided to spiritual profit.

A secretary of the class should be appointed by the leader; an appointment is better than an election and is in harmony

## Organization of a Probationer's Class 107

with the episcopal character of the denomination. The secretary should be a good penman, affable, prompt, methodical, attentive to details, not given to much speech, not easily discouraged. He should keep in good form a roll of members, showing the name, residence, date of entrance, and other necessary items, together with the attendance at the meetings of the class. He should also preserve a record of all important events in the class history, and be ready at any time to serve the pastor and leader, or members of the class, in any clerical way. This record, preserved with care, should become the permanent property of the church, to be laid up among its archives.

There should be a treasurer of the class. The secretary might fill this office, but generally it would be better to appoint another, and in that case the two ought to cooperate. A probationer's class ought to introduce the money element at



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once. Benevolence is so highly commended in Scripture as essential to the spiritual life that no organization would be complete that had no one to handle its funds. These should be precisely what are required in the church, namely, contributions to the support of the local church, to the benevolent causes, and to the poor. And they should be placed where the Discipline leaves them—as gifts according to ability. No pressure should be brought upon any except that educational influence that will promote glad and habitual giving.

The organization of the class would not be complete without the appointment of standing committees in which all the members might be enlisted, so that everyone should have something to do. If these committees were changed once a month or once in two months each individual would have opportunity to serve on each committee. In this way a valuable educational work could be carried

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steadily forward covering every interest and advancing the members toward the great end proposed in probation.

There ought to be a committee on the welfare of the members who are liable to come into difficulty and require sympathy and assistance. They might be sick or in worldly trouble. They might lose interest in the subject of religion and fail to attend the means of grace. They might even fall into sin and bring reproach upon the cause of Christ. In any of these cases such a committee would be highly useful, working with the pastor or leader, and gaining experience that will be valuable in their own history. No one can be indifferent to the approaches of a class associate in an hour of peculiar trial.

There ought to be a committee on literature, that will look up suitable reading and present it to the class in manner described hereafter. This reading may cover a range of topics limited to the requirements of the probationary pe-

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riod, or it may go out into a much broader realm. The precise work to be done must be determined by the needs of the class, and those must be studied in connection with the pastor and leader, or at least under their guidance. It is evident that a good committee could serve the class with much acceptability and profit, without occupying a great amount of time.

There ought to be a good committee on missions, one that will study the whole question in all its bearings, and present the results at appointed times to the class. What is the Bible idea and spirit and method? Why are missions enjoined in Scripture? What have been the great missionary periods? What is the mission field of the Methodist Church? What is our mission policy? What missionary societies are there in Methodism, and what are they doing? What conspicuous missionaries have appeared in our history? What are the present needs in the mission

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cause? These and other questions deserve thorough treatment at the hands of the committee.

There ought to be a committee on benevolence that would take up the subject in its threefold aspect given above. What is benevolence? By what is it enjoined? How does it advance the spiritual life? What promises are made to the exercise of benevolence? Many other questions will arise, and the committee has opportunity to widen its investigations in every direction. To some extent but with great caution the committee could inquire concerning the gifts of the members and even make solicitations. That, however, would be a delicate business, and it might be attended by evil consequences, as when some who are unable are embarrassed by such approach.

If the class numbered twelve and each committee three the reappointment could be made every month and each member could have a place on each committee in

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four months. During the time the subjects could be carefully studied and the reports could be read. The other two months could be left free for a more general survey of the ground of all the committees, or for items suggested by them and related somewhat to the themes presented.

It is quite probable that some on reading this chapter will cry out, "Too much machinery." It is surprising to note that many hide behind that utterance and do absolutely nothing. Life manifests itself in activity, and that requires an organism. Nothing can be accomplished without a plan. It was the methodical way of the Wesleys that led to the reproachful title of Methodists. Our people throughout their entire history have had success only when they have had a well-laid and well-executed method of doing things. A thoroughly organized probationer's class, as described above, is a thousand times better than an unorganized and miscella-

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neous company doing little or nothing for lack of a method and falling to pieces for want of activity and life.

At the same time it is well to admit that organization should not be effected for its own sake. It is a mistake to make the organism a finality. It should be the means to an end, and that end should be nothing less than the good of the persons who enter into it, the profit of the church into which they will be admitted, and the glory of God in whose service they are enlisted. It is praiseworthy in a high degree to do good by a method, to effect a system by which many may work together with a noble purpose under the blessing of God. At every step let the probationer's class be organized with a design whose influence shall be felt upon all, in every after endeavor.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE CONDUCT OF A PROBATIONER'S CLASS

THE probationers having been formed into a class and assigned to a leader, several important matters demand attention. The leader may be capable in every respect and yet through inattention to details he may lamentably fail. The little company committed to him may be very sincere and earnest at the beginning, but for lack of suitable management they may be gradually disheartened and ultimately dispersed and lost to the church. All who have had experience either as pastors or leaders know that it is no easy task to maintain the interest and to bring a class in good condition to the end of the course. The suggestions in this chapter are intended to help toward that desirable result.

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First of all, the probationer's class must be regarded not as a meeting merely, but as a company of individuals. There might be a class without a meeting, that is, without a stated meeting. This distinction is very important. If chief attention is directed to the assemblage one may be unduly elated or discouraged according as the attendance is large or small, and the effort may be given principally to maintain regularity and promptness; whereas, the planning and labor should have reference to the welfare of the persons, who should be much in the thought and prayer of the leader. "I have a company of souls under my care," he should say; not, "I have a meeting to conduct." By the concern for the individuals the meeting will assume its rightful place as one of the many means employed for the good of persons.

This interest in the individuals of his class should prompt the leader to regard every item that in any way affects each



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of them. He should be a genuine friend and counselor upon all subjects, accessible at all times, ready to render assistance in every hour of need. The home life, the business engagements, the social relations, and the intellectual activities of each member should be duly considered, and at times they should be made the subject of confidential interviews. If sickness or misfortune or poverty come the leader should be the first to extend sympathy, and that in a substantial way. If the member is overtaken in a fault the leader should strive to restore him. If some blessing is granted, either of a spiritual or temporal character, the leader should extend congratulations.

This friendly relation can be successfully maintained only through visits to the homes of the members. Such visits ought to be most frequent where the need is greatest, as in case of humble station, or much temptation, or social obscurity. It is possible for a leader to call at least once

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a month on each of a class of fifteen. Sunday afternoons might be so occupied. A good evening walk might be arranged occasionally, arm in arm. The two might agree to attend church or prayer meeting together or they might attend a lecture or a concert or some matter of public interest. There are many engagements that might be made to cover nearly all the relations of life, so arranged as to touch on all sides of the character and secure insight to motives and principles otherwise concealed. The power of such associations cannot be measured.

Whenever the leader seeks the company of a member he should have some profitable theme for conversation, and that should be conducted in an easy and friendly manner. That conversation might be upon some aspect of religious experience, or some work of the church, or some of the many great questions that agitate the community or the nation. To think and talk upon these with his own

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spiritual adviser will be of incalculable profit to the probationer, introducing him into a larger world and leading him to see the relations sustained by him to all institutions. It is for want of such intercourse that so many people live on a low intellectual and social plane, and imagine that because they are Christians they may ignore the events of the work-day world.

Nor should the leader forget to introduce the element of recreation. He must know that a life stripped of all amusement becomes morbid. A religion that perpetually deals with the grave concerns of this life and the next is destitute of the sweetness that belongs to Christianity. A good laugh, a pure story, an innocent anecdote may save one from coldness and sourness, and hence they may be introduced at times as means of grace. No rule can be given on this subject—none is needed. The genuine life, flowing on in natural channels, will reveal itself in a healthful way, and there will be in it

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something of mirth. The leader may therefore properly indulge, and indeed cultivate, these things. He will thus find new avenues to the heart, new disclosures of dispositions, and new methods of influence.

This suggests the appropriateness of an occasional class social, perhaps two or three in the six months, held generally at the leader's house and greatly varied in form. There might be some musical and literary exercises, and there should be brief devotions. There could be no objection to some form of pleasure—riddles, conundrums, stories, innocent games might be had. By all means let such socials observe reasonable hours. One of the most objectionable practices in modern society is that of assembling people at such late hours as give a taste for the follies of the world. Christian people ought to discourage such customs and introduce into their gatherings that which will tend to physical and social health.

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The leader may easily regulate this matter with his class, causing them to distinguish between holy and unholy pleasure.

Is it too much to urge that the leader set apart a season for private prayer each day, and that then the members of his class become the subjects of his petitions? Let him remember each one as made known by the methods described above. Let the peculiarities of each pass under review, and let a blessing be sought suited to each. It was the commendable habit of the saintly Carvosso, the ideal leader, in his daily devotions to lay before God the open pages of his class book, and as he read the names, one by one, to invite the scrutiny of the Omniscient Eye and the help of the Almighty Hand.

Thus far the interests of individuals have been mainly considered in the management of the class. And yet the members must not be allowed to go apart and become indifferent to each other. They must be made to feel that they need each

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other, and they must be brought together to supply that need which cannot be met in any other way. As Mr. Wesley says, "The Scriptures know nothing of solitary piety." Every expression of the spiritual life is highest and best in association. Every experience involves relations with others. Besides, religious people have many things in common which may be promoted best when they are together. Hence, after all that has been said of the work among individual members attention may be given to the meetings of probationers.

These ought to be regular, if possible once a week, in a place of comfort, made cozy and attractive, suited to all, a dear spot indeed to the members. Usually a room in the church will be set apart for these purposes, one of the smaller rooms, what used to be called a class room in the days when churches were built with the class meeting in view. But, unless the right kind of a place can be had in the

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church it would be best to repair to some private house, if one can be had possessed of the general elements of hospitality. Of all things to be avoided is a meeting in a cheerless place where the company will ever be uncomfortable.

The first and second classes mentioned in the last chapter—the children of religious families and the youth of the congregation—might form two section meetings at the Sunday school hour. They would prosper best in a separate room, but there would be no objection to giving them seats in the main room. Their exercises might be so conducted as to begin and end with the school lesson, and they could take on the general habit and appearance of students, for such they should be. Perhaps an arrangement of this sort would be helpful in awakening in the minds of other pupils proper thoughts of the church and of their relation to the church.

These classes would have their own



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regular lesson, studied and taught with as much care as is now bestowed upon the ordinary lesson of the school. They would be expected to do much of their work at home and to come to the session for review and examination by the leader. If the time was not quite adequate for this purpose, or if a general survey at the end of a term were desired, an extra session might be held at some convenient time on Sunday afternoon or on some day or evening in the week. By this method the ordinary appointments of the church may be made to cover the probationer's work, and that is always desirable in order to avoid multiplicity of engagements.

If the course of lessons outlined in the Appendix be used a plan might be adopted that would easily accomplish the purpose of a gradual ingathering. Suppose twelve persons form the class beginning May 1st. In two months they will complete the text-book on Religious Experience. When the next text-book is be-



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gun, on Biblical Doctrine, let another group, say twelve, be brought in making twenty-four. In two months, on beginning the third book, on American Methodism, let another group be added. In six months the first group will complete its course, and be received into the church, and then another group might enter the class. So on perpetually every two months some would begin and others would finish, and the increase of the church would be healthfully established.

This method is not offered purely on a mechanical basis. It is not designed to push forward into the probationary relation those who are unfitted for it, merely to keep tally with the almanac. There should be a constant care to place everything on a spiritual basis, and to admit no one who does not meet the conditions prescribed in the Discipline. But, as already remarked, pastor, parents, and teachers may be constantly on the alert to find those who are worthy. Names may be

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taken and conversations may be had with this end in view, and all may work with reference to the fact that a new group of probationers will be formed on a certain date if only the proper material may be found. This will bring some to decision who might otherwise hesitate. The practice will not be unlike that of the Presbyterian Church that announces the communion as a season of this sort. Why should not all labor and pray for definite results at a specified time?

The classes of the third and fourth kind, composed of adults, enlisted by the ordinary or special services, ought to have a different kind of meeting from that just described. They ought to assemble for an hour either in an evening, which is preferable, or on the Sabbath. They ought to be by themselves with no relation whatever to any other meeting or person. They need such separation and privacy because of their greater age and their general thoughtfulness. They have

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a larger task before them in preparing for the church, and they must approach that task in the spirit of earnest inquiry and of long-continued and patient seeking. Many of them have contracted habits which must be overcome; others of them have doubts and fears that must be removed; and all of them are to find the secrets of a new life to which they are measurably strangers. All this was different with the young whose past has been under religious influences, whose future is lighted up by the spirit of hope.

Adult probationers must give more attention to experience. They must have time for its relation and examination. This is evident from the fact that when one begins the religious life in maturity he has had some encounters with evil peculiar to his years, unlike those had by the young. To get the victory over these and to understand the secret of grace by which that victory is achieved is a matter of no little difficulty. The class is the

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place where this is to be well done, so well done that its influence will be projected into all the coming years, and for that reason the time and place of the class meeting must be determined with the utmost care.

The adult probationers must give more time to the lines of study. The greater mental power will provoke more thorough investigation. Matters lodged easily without question with the young may be rejected altogether or received with hesitation by many seniors. But these studies are so important that no one can afford to dismiss them hastily, half learned. We must carry with us the good judgment of the adult in order to win his fullest confidence. He must go slowly enough over the ground to come to the end without any mental reservation, and to commit himself completely to the conclusions presented in what he has learned.

If a whole evening, or an hour or even an hour and a half, were given to the

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adult probationer's class it would be none too much. During that time the emotions might be kindled as they need to be, the thought might be directed, the judgment might be formed, the truth might be stored, and lasting impressions for good might be made. Everyone knows the value of the time element in all mental and spiritual processes. It is impossible to do some things quickly. There must be a graduated onward movement to secure the proper results. Hence, this plea for a longer session with adults than with the young. The latter are warmer, more responsive, more vivacious, ready at the beginning, and they weary of long-continued exercises. Not so the adult who holds himself with reserve and yields only as he is wrought upon.

The adult probationer's class may have an order of exercises something like the following: 1. Devotional—singing, prayer, Scripture reading; 2. Roll call with opportunity to learn the causes of

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absence; 3. The lesson in the course, conducted thoroughly with the privilege of questions; 4. Reports of standing committees mentioned in last chapter; 5. Relations of experience, specially of temptations and trials, not in a dry and formal way, but so as to cover the real things of everyday life; 6. Closing prayer; 7. Cordial hand-shaking, each greeting each other in the most friendly manner, leaving upon all minds the feeling of mutual regard. It would be impossible to do all this in less than an hour, and everyone at the close would depart stronger and richer than when he came.

Those who are brought into the class in the time of revival must receive most careful attention. The earnest prayers and exhortations, the stirring music and the manifested enthusiasm that marked that occasion awakened in them emotions which are not likely to continue, which generally ought to pass away. But when they enter into the normal state again,

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characterized by less feeling, especially when they observe that the fires burn less brightly upon the altars of the church, they are liable to peculiar temptation. It may be whispered to them that religious experience is a delusion, or that they have lost what they obtained in the revival. The class must instruct these people and carry them through these perils. They must be made to know the nature and value of the emotions through which they passed, and the reality and soundness of the life upon which they have entered.

What was suggested concerning the accessions among the young every two months may not be possible among adults, although there could be no impropriety in it if the cautions there given are observed here. Let no one be enrolled who does not meet the Disciplinary condition. Let no striving for numbers tempt any into loose administration at this point. The adult probationer, as stated before, must be penitent. His enrollment on any other

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ground is a grievous mistake resulting in injury to him and to the church. But if the minister in his daily work is ever looking for burdened ones seeking the way of life he ought to find some every two months and introduce them as candidates for membership in the church.



## CHAPTER IX

### THE DANGERS OF PROBATIONERS

EVERY period of the religious life has its peculiar trials. To meet these rightly and even to turn them to profit, as is possible, one must be forewarned and forearmed. The careful mother, anticipating the physical conditions that prevail in infancy, boyhood, and adolescence guards her children against the diseases to which they are liable. Many young lives are saved by the timely advice and kindly service of parents and guardians. In like manner the pastor ought to know the difficulties which his people must encounter because of their age, temperament, and surroundings, and to warn them of evils to which they will be exposed. This is one of the chief designs of the pastoral office which cannot be neglected without breach of trust.

The time passed in probation is attended by temptations that do not come at any subsequent period in the history of a church member. Many of these are so subtle as scarcely to be recognized, while others are so sudden and violent as to be resisted only with difficulty. It is well known that some abandon their faith through besetments at this time which are wholly unknown in after years. Seemingly the great adversary makes his fiercest attacks upon those who are least able to resist them. How necessary is it for the minister with wise foresight to deal tenderly with those committed to his care, watching over them with solicitude during these critical months until the danger is past. Happy indeed will he be if able afterward to say with the Master, "Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none."

There is room here for only a hasty and hence superficial treatment of this interesting subject. To present it with the

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fullness and thoroughness demanded by its evident importance would require a volume of many pages and involve the discussion of other themes with which it is closely related. However, attention may be profitably directed to a few of the chief points whose consideration will awaken reflection upon the principles of the spiritual life. If the secret of steadfastness and growth can be shown in connection with the things that menace the soul's welfare, then the danger will be exposed and may be easily avoided. This is what is most needed, as it points out the only sure course of safety for all.

It must be remembered at the outset that all new relations and experiences bring more or less of strain and peril. It is never easy to break away from that with which one has been familiar and engage in that which is strange and unusual. Old habits are disturbed and new ones must be formed. This involves restraint which is generally disagreeable and may

be difficult and painful. The curbing of desires and choices involves a struggle that requires the utmost power of the will. This is particularly true in religious matters, because old associates are ever ready to recall one to former scenes and practices, and every advance in the new life is a step into an unknown realm, an act of faith and not of sight. There will come up at times serious questions to be answered, and doubts and fears will arise.

Hence, at a very early time in his career the probationer's relation and attitude toward the world must be adjusted, toward the great mass of unbelievers, some of whom may be personal friends. This difficult task should not be long delayed, for until it is effected there will be vacillation, compromise, and mistakes, attended by serious consequences. The probationer has come out from the world, he has professed to lay it aside, to be distinguished thereafter from it, so that he will no longer be regarded as part of it

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but as a part of another company. In what sense and to what extent should this separation be made? In what spirit and by what method should it be effected? It may not occur to some that these are important questions. There will be much peril until they are answered, and the very mode and form of the answer may be injurious.

It may be thought that the answer will come spontaneously from the renewed heart. To a great extent this is true, especially with those whose conversion has been of that marked character which was so common in a former generation. Many persons in a brief space of time have been known to lose their relish for things that once were sources of great delight, and to abandon forever the company of persons with whom they were on terms of intimacy. These feelings have been regarded by many as the early product of the Spirit's influence upon the heart, the evidence of a genuine new



birth, and such they certainly are. It is indeed a happy day when the follies and sins once loved are hated, and the interests of religion, once regarded with indifference, are loved—when old things have passed away and all things have become new.

But these feelings do not come with equal force to all who are born of the Spirit, nor do they remain permanently with all to whom they do come, nor are they all that is needed while they are present. The work of grace proceeds by so many different processes in different persons that emotional states are not reliable tests of experience or standards of action. Probationers have made many mistakes at this point, acting or refusing to act simply because their hearts prompted or failed to prompt. It is exceedingly difficult to analyze one's feelings, to separate what is of purely selfish origin or of conventional bias from that which is divine in its beginning and godly

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in its tendency. However strong may be the impulse of the newborn soul to abandon what it formerly allowed, and however valuable and helpful that impulse may be, it must be fortified in order to the best results.

Nor is it prudent to adjust one's self to the world by an external rule. There is a tendency among Methodists, less marked now than in former years, to draw a dividing line between church members and those outside, proscribing and forbidding to the former the practices of the latter. Probationers have been made to think that their conformity to a standard thus set up has been a proof of their goodness, and they have formed a habit of seclusion and exclusion receiving the approval of the church. Some persons may need such restraints in order to maintain the simplicity of their faith and the purity of their love. The distinguishing characteristics of the spiritual life cannot be preserved without an application in

some form of the principle of separation. A legal separation is better than none at all. Regard to church rules is vastly preferable to worldly conformity.

The probationer must know that he is called to make a protest more or less frequently and more or less distinctly, but always with firmness and boldness, against the evil that is in the world. Not to do this would be to betray his Master. But he must not indulge in denunciation or bitterness. He must not be troublesome and censorious, for then would he alienate those whom he might influence for good. It is possible in a gentle and loving spirit to adhere to principles and policies in one's daily life and yet to win the respect and admiration of those of contrary opinion and practice. A Christian may condemn in others a course of life and at the same time compel them to admit his sincerity. Such a one bears double testimony, each part confirming the other.



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This means more than a surrender to a rule. It is not enough for the probationer to say that the church into which he is soon to enter has forbidden certain things. No one will respect him in this attitude, for it indicates his weakness and servility, and brings in question the wisdom and the rightfulness of the prohibition. No one can long maintain his self-respect who makes such an answer, for he transfers to the church a decision which ought to be made by himself. In the great majority of cases under such circumstances there will begin in the mind a series of questionings that will subsequently disturb the church life. The man who feels that his liberty has been invaded, that human authority has attempted to settle for him matters which are of a purely personal character, will after a time seek to break the bonds or lie down in submission.

From the foregoing it is evident that the probationer must himself determine

what is right and proper in his relation with the world. In order to this he must study with much care the spirit and tendencies of the world, and he must regard the maxims that are current and the practices that are common. He must endeavor to know the influence of all these upon the new life into which he has entered. This must be done not merely under the promptings of his own heart, nor yet with a desire to establish some previously formed opinion. He must bring all to the light of the sacred volume as the one only sufficient rule of faith and practice. This may prove an exceedingly difficult task, requiring the utmost use of the best talent. But the time and effort so employed will be well spent. No one can pass through such examinations without rising to a higher plane. The judgment will be formed, the will will be strengthened, a clearer apprehension of what is good will result, and every element of the noblest character will receive

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a quickening. This is that process of spiritual upbuilding upon which one having entered in the early years should continue until the latest age.

In these considerations the probationer may well take counsel of the pastor, a godly friend, a leader, or a parent. A disposition to reject or neglect such counsel will be in itself evidence of great weakness, and may be just cause for fear that the person will soon go astray. He is in great peril who does not welcome the wisdom of his superiors in determining the duties of life. No person's judgment may be trusted fully in the decision of matters that involve character and destiny. And yet all advice must be taken and wrought over by the person to whom it is given. It must enter into the very structure of the mind and form part of the aggregate of influences by which the decision is reached. This may be a slow and tedious process, sometimes conducted with much uncertainty, but by means of it

the probationer reaches what he needs, principles for the government of life.

The attainment of this result will well repay all the labor that has been bestowed, all the study and prayer and sacrifice required. There is no grander spectacle than that of one standing erect in the midst of the ungodly, choosing his own lines of activity, rejecting what is deemed to be unworthy or unholy, and doing all this under the prompting of a good heart and the approval of his own best judgment. One may then look the world steadily in the face, able if need be to give reason for his position and to maintain himself in that position whatever influence may be exerted upon him. He is also in a condition to grow, having solved the primary problem of the religious life. He may expect the approval of his own heart and that of his fellow-men, and the smile and blessing of God.

Hardly less important than the attitude toward the world and its sins and follies

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is the probationer's attitude toward the church and the religious life. The former will be greatly helpful to the latter. Having cast off an old relation, it will be found comparatively easy to adjust one's self to a new relation. Indeed, nearly all the failures of men to make the most out of their membership with the church, and nearly all misconceptions and disappointments in Christian living, are due to the fact that the heart is divided, and that one is looking backward with more or less of desire to that which should have been abandoned. Hence the separation herein described will generally put an end to doubts and fears, to hesitation and indifference, and lead to that consistent and energetic course so essential to success. There are, however, some dangers with respect to the church which ought to receive attention.

A probationer is liable to disappointment with the church members. See this thought treated in Chapter V. He may



think they lack warmth and cordiality, that they are formal and indifferent. He may contrast their greetings with what they were when he first gave himself as a candidate for membership. He may even suppose that they have lost interest in him, and if extremely sensitive this may result in much discomfort. Some persons have been known under these influences to neglect the means of grace, to withdraw themselves from contact with the membership, and to indulge in harsh criticisms that are greatly prejudicial to the religious life. This is more likely to occur with those who are somewhat deficient in social qualities, who seldom make advances, and who wait for others to show attention first. What shall be done in such cases?

Frequently the church is at fault in this matter. There is a tendency in many congregations to separate into little groups, whereby persons are brought together who are of the same social station or who

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are drawn by affinities. Sometimes these circles are composed of those who appear to have no concern for those of other circles, who move in their little round of privileged intercourse quite unmindful of the larger body of which they are a part. There have been some aggravating cases of this sort, resulting at times in jealousies, rivalries, and antagonisms. Fortunately, combinations of this sort are recognized by the best people in the church as contrary to the spirit of the gospel. One is to be pitied who commits himself to a church where these things exist, and as a rule such churches do not win probationers.

The thoughtful minister who finds these circles in his congregation has a plain duty to perform, but one that will be attended with much difficulty. It may not be possible for him to break up this class spirit, and it may be extremely unwise to touch it or to seem to recognize it. But he should labor for a

broader and richer fraternity, seeking to make all feel that all members of the church are brethren, entitled to sympathetic recognition. There are various expedients which may be adopted to this end. In a quiet way he may secure some relation of friendship and of possible intimacy between older members and those who are on probation. It is not too much to hope that a man who has been twenty years in the church may be made to feel it to be not less a privilege than a duty to invite to his home one who united a few weeks ago and who is under preparation.

But frequently the probationer is at fault. He expects too much, more than can be realized. This is largely the result of temperament. There are those who see in every enterprise and relation vastly more than is real and possible. They are so constituted that new things are highly colored. These people are sure to be disappointed. They come with the same



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spirit into the church, and in a very short time it is apparent to all who regard them carefully that they have fallen into a censorious and gloomy state of mind, and nothing suits them. They are in danger of dropping out altogether, or, if they go forward, of swelling the number of complainers, already too large, becoming thus an annoyance to the church.

It is by no means easy to adjust people of this sort and to keep them happy. Some pastors have abandoned all hope in such cases and suffered things to take their course. There is a little apology for this treatment, but it is never wise. Granted that the probationer is at fault, that he ought to have a better disposition, it is plainly the duty of some one to undertake in his case. Only after the most resolute attempt, prolonged to the limit of hope, should the case be abandoned. But what may be done?

The best course will be a plain and loving conversation. Show the proba-

tioner that he is mistaken, but do this in a kindly spirit so as not to give offense. Avoid criticism or censure, always dangerous weapons, not to be allowed in this case. One who has fallen into this disagreeable state will be made worse if any fault is found with him. Already sensitive and sore because of fancied neglect, he would be confirmed in his modes of thinking and acting, and would suppose that even the pastor or good friend who came to talk with him was also turned against him. But there is a spirit and there are words that can win one if only the heart of the counselor is sufficiently tender.

The probationer is in further danger of improper views on the subject of religion, and that in two particulars. If he was converted at a time of great religious interest he may suppose that the deep feeling awakened at that time was essential to a genuine experience. As a result he may morbidly seek to reproduce those emo-

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tions and measure himself by the ability to reach a certain state. This effort may engage much of his time, causing him to feel a measure of dissatisfaction with all those meetings and exercises that do not minister to his enjoyment. And when he is no longer able to produce what he once experienced he may conclude that his religious life has departed or declined.

There is perhaps a more common danger. When the probationer has come into the church in a time of great quietness, he may look with little favor upon all demonstration, regarding it as unwholesome excitement. He may relapse into a cold formalism, supposing that the religious life is one of routine performance, and losing thus what has been a characteristic of Methodists through all their history, namely, a hearty and joyous service. It will be necessary in all these cases to show that the joy of salvation is a genuine experience whose expression at certain times is both proper and profitable.

CHAPTER X  
THE RECEPTION INTO FULL CONNEC-  
TION

THE admission of a probationer into full connection after completing his preparation, ought to be made exceedingly impressive. It is the first and probably it will be the last ceremony of the kind in which he will be a participant. It signifies or ought to signify his separation from the world of the ungodly and his union with the followers of Christ. He is to make a public declaration, the parts of which are most solemn, and he is to assume a vow by which the purposes and plans of his life are to be announced. To come to such an occasion thoughtlessly would be positive proof of unfitness. That he may come in a proper spirit the minister should arrange all details with utmost care. Every part of the cere-

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mony of induction should be fully explained, that it may be intelligently and reverently performed.

The reception means much to the congregation into which the candidate enters. Here is another member of the household who needs sympathy, advice, and assistance, who may be a blessing or an annoyance. The church must approve him and give him a cordial welcome. That welcome, and not the enrollment of the name or the grasp of the pastor's hand, is the true reception. Pity will it be if one comes in and discovers in a short time that he is still really outside, that the hearts of other members have not been given to him. What the pastor does in the ceremony he does in the name of the church, and every word of his should find a hearty response with each of them. In order that it may be so the congregation should be made ready for the occasion. This will require a series of important acts all leading up to the great event.

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The first of these will be the recommendation of the leaders and stewards' meeting as required by the Discipline. Too frequently that is given hastily and without knowledge. Perhaps the pastor reads a number of names of persons who have been six months on probation, and as no one knows anything against them they are voted in. It is not enough that there should be no evil report; something positive ought to be given. To provide for this the Discipline requires that the probationer should have been under the care of a leader at least six months, who would be able to represent him. In many churches this formality has been discontinued and no other method has been substituted. If the arrangements herein suggested are followed the leader who conducts the preparation could perform this important service. But by some method every candidate should be faithfully represented before the leaders and stewards vote.

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The custom in the Presbyterian Church is worthy of consideration at this point. Everyone before entering the church on profession of faith appears in the presence of the session. There various questions are asked, and the general appearance and spirit are properly considered as they should be. Why might not the probationers in like manner come before the leaders and stewards' meeting? If nothing else were gained it would be to the advantage of all that the class is at least seen by the officary. In such case the pastor and the leader might make representations of the course pursued, and the interview might be preceded or closed with prayer. The indorsement then given would be with knowledge, and would be received with greater favor by the congregation.

After the vote of the leaders and stewards, and in some cases before, it would be well to read the names of the class in prayer meeting, urging all the probation-

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ers to be present, and on the same evening the pastor might speak concerning the privileges and duties of church membership. This address might be followed by prayers for the divine blessing upon those who are to be received, and upon the whole church that the accession of new members may be a blessing to all. Such a prayer meeting, if conducted in the right spirit, would impress all for good and increase the feeling of brotherhood in the church. It ought to be a time of thanksgiving and rejoicing, one of the most delightful and profitable services of the church.

The day for the reception, a Sabbath morning occasion, ought to be announced in advance, that all may expect it and prepare for it. It argues great carelessness when a pastor without notice to anyone steps in front of the pulpit and informs the audience that probationers will be received. Perhaps even they are not aware of it until that moment; they came



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to church with no thought of any unusual exercise. It is plain that a reception in this form will be destitute of all those elements that might render it impressive. But if an announcement were given a week or two in advance, and if every probationer were notified by letter or in person (the latter being the better method), all would come with expectancy and the ceremony would be deeply interesting.

Here let it be noted that set times in the year are desirable for the receptions, once every quarter or once in two months. With as much regularity as the Lord's Supper is administered let the new members be introduced. In order to that there might be, as elsewhere suggested, a regular formation of a probationer's class, who would then look forward through two quarters for the completion of their course. Suppose in this way regularity were secured, all would come to expect what otherwise occurs at indefinite times. The Protestant Episcopal



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Church in its confirmation classes sets a worthy example in this regard, and the patristic church in its catechumen classes had the same general feature, a set time for entrance.

In all these suggestions it is assumed that the probationer is the central figure, that his preparation has been properly conducted, that he has been steadily advanced along all lines, looking constantly to the time when he shall be received. As that time approaches the one in whose charge he may be should be increasingly faithful, watching and advising that no point be overlooked. The probationer should be found much in prayer in private, and his attendance upon all the means of grace should be prompt. When the day comes he should be hopeful and joyous, ready to enter into his new relations and find there his spiritual home.

The form of reception, as laid down in the ritual, should be familiar to all. The minister ought to know it so well that his

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eyes need not rest constantly upon the printed page. An occasional glance of manifested interest directed toward the candidates or the congregation will relieve the reading of its dull monotony and put a soul into the words. Every probationer should have a book and know precisely what is expected of him, and how. It is painful to see, as sometimes occurs, a confused search for a place, resulting in a feeble response or in dead silence. The questions and answers ought to be deliberately and audibly read. There is no occasion for any haste. Let every word have its full meaning, and let that meaning be grasped by all.

In executing the above with becoming decorum it might be well in the discretion of the pastor for the entire class to provide themselves with books in advance and then to sit together on entering the church. After their names are called they might advance in a body to an appointed position before the altar, book in hand,

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open at the proper place. This method would be much better than that generally adopted wherein individuals rise in different parts of the house and go to the front separately. The feeling of fraternity is kindled by the plan here suggested, and the hearts of the congregation respond more quickly toward a company of individuals. Besides, there will be an order and quietness impossible on the individual plan, all tending to make the occasion beautiful and impressive.

When the class stands before the altar, some leader—if possible the one who has conducted the preparation—standing within the altar, might present the company to the minister in words something like the following: “These persons standing before you, having been recommended by the leaders and stewards, are presented to you for reception into full connection with the church.” Let the leader after these words remain near at hand until the ceremony is completed, to render any fur-

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their assistance to the pastor or the class as may be desired.

When the pastor gives the closing words prescribed in the Discipline, beginning, "We welcome you," etc., and extends the right hand of fellowship, the congregation should stand and the leader might appropriately follow the minister with the same sign of welcome, while all present should consider that the act of the two is the act of all. The words uttered should be accompanied by the silent prayer and sympathy that would make them effective. In this way the hearts of all may be opened and the newcomers may feel that there is sincerity and cordiality in the form through which they are passing.

The ceremony according to the ritual concludes with extemporary prayer by the pastor. This ought to be spoken out of a warm heart. It ought to be a petition that would lift up all present to the throne of grace and bring down a blessing upon

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each. No minister without preparation can properly offer this prayer. Everyone ought to feel the deep solemnity of the hour and come to it with earnest longings after God. If, after the custom of former years, the whole congregation should kneel, it would be a most appropriate and beautiful ending of this ceremony not soon forgotten.

After the prayer certificates of reception should be presented to the new members. These should show the name, the church, the town, and bear the pastor's signature. They will be greatly prized by all as the years pass, mementoes of early associations, testimonials to all of a completed task and a perfected relation. After the certificates are delivered the pastor should again read the names and announce the leader or leaders under whose further care they are placed. This plan will go far to check the tendency in Methodism to abandon the class system. It will be held in high esteem when those

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who enter into the church are immediately committed to subpastoral oversight.

On the day of the reception, either before or after the ceremony, a sermon on some phase of church life would be highly proper. If, as suggested above, there are four to six receptions in a year, this would be none too frequent to bring before the congregation the nature, meaning, value, duty, and privilege of this relation. Sermons of this kind ought to be delivered at intervals, and this is one of the best seasons to be so employed. In a pastorate of a few years a minister might thus cover a broad field of thought, instructing his people on matters of great concern, promoting loyalty to the church and unity of action. If the discourses were planned, following in a natural order, one theme preparing for another, the effect would be all the better.

It has been suggested, perhaps practiced in a few instances, that the church

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might be decorated on reception day. Something may be said on both sides of this subject. There might be in it a tendency toward formalism, always to be deplored in a Methodist society, but on the other hand there would be an expression of interest on the part of all, saving the ceremony from its cold and naked character, which is ever depressing. If any decorations are introduced they should be very simple and inexpensive, requiring but little time and thought for their arrangement. The best decoration will be an orderly, thoughtful, and devout service, enlisting all in its various parts.

In all the ceremony, first and last, let all concerned remember that its grand design is to receive persons into the church, to give them a real place among the people of God, to make them feel at home there, to introduce them to fellowship and deepen in them those purposes cherished and cultivated throughout the probation. Whatever is helpful to that is proper;



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whatever operates against it should be excluded. Thought and prayer are necessary on the part of all to insure this result. Therefore, let all be done as in the very presence of God, and with a dominant purpose to please and serve him.

In some churches it is customary to have the Lord's Supper in connection with the ceremony of reception. This is highly proper as an expression of the fellowship into which the new members have entered, and it ought to be made to them a season of great profit. In that case let the class kneel at the altar together, the officary of the church possibly uniting at the same table if there is room. The ordinance would mean more if this were the first communion, but as the privilege is accorded in our church to probationers probably all have several times celebrated the death of Christ. And yet as an initial rite on this special occasion it would have great significance, awakening new emotions in the hearts of the participants and

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drawing them with peculiar tenderness to the entire church.

If the ceremony of reception be conducted in right form and spirit the new members ought to feel at the close that they are a part of the body. They ought in the language employed to hear a welcome, and they ought to know, what no language can express, that sympathetic persons have gathered about them, to whom thereafter they will be bound by strong though invisible ties. Nothing can exceed in sweetness the holy fellowship of God's people. He who finds it obtains even here a foretaste of that hallowed bliss that awaits the saints in the celestial home. Moreover, this fellowship is the wholesome atmosphere in which grow the noblest virtues, without which the soul turns to seek in the world what never satisfies while it tempts with flattering promises.

The incoming of new members to the church should not be regarded so much as

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an increase in numbers and financial ability, which items so frequently attract attention. It means also, or ought to mean, an increase of talent, of life, of power. As the small rivulets flowing into the river give it greater momentum as well as volume, so the souls added to the church make it a larger institution with abilities to accomplish a larger mission. There ought to be by all accessions the throbbings of new impulses, the outlook upon grander possibilities, and the plannings for nobler endeavors.

What a supreme hour, then, is this time of reception into full connection! How the prayers, studies, watchings, and longings of the months are all summarized and concentrated! How full of opportunity and duty! How necessary that all should come to it with hopes not to be disappointed, with resolves not to be broken! May the names then entered on the register be written in the Lamb's book of life, never to be erased, never to be stained!

## Appendix

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### A. QUESTIONS

To be put by pastors to probationers soon after their enrollment. See page 85. The first 12 are for young children religiously raised; the first 20 are for young people fifteen to twenty years of age; the entire list for adults:

1. Give your name.
2. Give date and place of birth.
3. Give date if baptized.
4. Name of father.
5. Name of mother.
6. Of what churches were your parents members?

Father .....

Mother .....

7. Have you practiced prayer in private?
8. What instruction have you received in religious matters; by whom?
9. What religious and biblical matter have you committed to memory?
10. Do you feel that you are a sinner?
11. Do you wish to be saved from your sins?
12. How do you think Jesus saves from sin?

13. What awakened your desire to enter the church?
14. In what forms of amusement do you indulge?
15. Do you keep the Sabbath?
16. Do you regularly attend the Sunday school and the church?
17. Have you any pleasure in doing good?
18. What company do you keep?
19. What books do you read?
20. Do you read your Bible?
21. Of what nationality are you?
22. Have you been addicted to the use of tobacco or alcoholic beverages?
23. What is your occupation?
24. Do you retaliate when injured?
25. What is the value of church membership?

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**H**OLD the book with its back on a smooth or covered table; let the front board down, then the other, holding the leaves in one hand while you open a few leaves at the back, then a few at the front, and so go on, alternately opening back and front, **gently** pressing open the sections till you reach the center of the Volume. Do this two or three times, and you will obtain the best results. Open the Volume violently or carelessly in any one place, and you will likely break the back, and cause a start in the leaves.

**Never force the back.** If it does not yield to gently opening, rely upon it the back is too tightly or strongly lined.

A connoisseur, many years ago, an excellent customer of mine, who thought he knew perfectly how to handle books, came into my office when I had an expensive binding just brought from the bindery, ready to be sent home; he, before my eyes, took hold of the Volume, and, **tightly holding** the leaves in each hand, instead of allowing them **free play**, violently opened it in the center and exclaimed, "How beautifully your bindings open!" I almost fainted. He had broken the back of the Volume and it had to be rebound.

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