

THE
American Episcopal Church;

OR,

THE CLAIMS AND MISSION OF METHODISM
CONSIDERED.

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PREFACE.

THE author of the following Lectures prepared and delivered them to meet a want which he found among the people of whom he was pastor ; a want which, in his judgment, called for a brief and careful comparison of the prominent historical features of Methodism with the essential elements of a true Church. His hope was that he might not only fortify the minds of many against certain forms of error, but also stimulate to a more thorough study of the history of our Church. He now offers them to the public, thinking that they may be of further use in the promotion of the same ends.

CONTENTS.



CHAPTER	PAGE
FIRST LECTURE	7
SECOND LECTURE.....	35
THIRD LECTURE	61

WE HAVE HEARD WITH OUR EARS, O GOD, OUR FATHERS
HAVE TOLD US, WHAT WORK THOU DIDST IN THEIR DAYS,
IN THE TIMES OF OLD.—PSA. XLIV, I.

THE
AMERICAN EPISCOPAL CHURCH.

FIRST LECTURE.

THE CRITERIA OF A TRUE CHURCH.

THE Christian, above all others, should be a student of the past. He is a disciple of Him “which is and which *was*, and which is to come;” of the “Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the ending.” It becomes him to revere the providence of the great Head of the Church, and, when he would institute or encourage changes and revolutions, gather his views of duty and ecclesiastical polity not from a narrow observation of the present, but from the works which God hath wrought “in the times of old.” He only belies his profession of faithful discipleship when he hastily lays hands on those Church organizations into which God has thrown the results of his providential supervision.

It is, of course, conceded that changes are at times needed, and that God himself raises up reformers ; but it must, I think, be admitted that those men who, upon the field of religious activities, have fully attested their Divine commission to the work of revolution and reconstruction, have been men in whom God has united an enlightened reverential conservatism to an intelligent, but almost impatient, love of truth and progress. No universal unqualified permission to break in pieces, or even replace the old by the new, has ever been granted. We cannot prove that simply by a law of unlimited license all things new receive Divine approval, or exist by Divine direction.

Assuming this position, we still behold denominationalism as one of the prominent facts of this age, and see that its history is one of change, revolution, and division. How, then, shall this fact be approved—by what rule shall it be adjudged as receiving Divine sanction? "*In no way whatever,*" answer those who claim for the Church an external form of unity consisting in a hierarchal establishment, and a universal successional form of government. On the other hand, this same fact stands approved by the vast majority of Protestant Christendom, including no contemptible proportion of the

wisest and most godly of men. Most of you present to-day approve it. You look upon denominational variety as the result of adaptive *formation* rather than of division. You do not feel yourself separated from the visible Church of Christ by your connection with some particular organization of its members. But still it may with propriety be asked : What evidence do you produce that your chosen denomination, *as a distinct association of Christians, having its peculiar form of government, and maintaining its separate ministry and modes of labor,* should be reckoned as a Church? This question, as well as that of the Divine sanction of denominationalism in general, requires us to examine the criteria of a true Church, or the rule by which the ecclesiastical claims of a body of men may be tested. In this examination I proceed upon the assumption simply that the Church is *divinely instituted*, and that the integrity and perpetuity of the Divine institution require that a body of Christians, claiming recognition as a distinct organic Church, should establish its claim *by evidence that its distinct existence receives Divine approval.*

I. Insufficient Rules Examined.

There are some principles which, while they may (some of them, at least) be found among these criteria, are to be noted as, in themselves, *insufficient*; taken alone, as they sometimes are, they do not constitute a perfect rule of approval.

1. The plea of "liberty" is not sufficient. You may affirm truthfully that Christ never gave to his people an unalterable form of government; that he did not make his Church one by binding all generations together as by a chain of externalities, not to be broken or bent in a single link; that, agreeably to the lessons of apostolic times, changes may *come* as the result or outgrowth of unforeseen combinations, or be *determined upon* as requisite measures for meeting new demands; you may see that the consequent variety is consistent with the unity of the Church in himself, for which Christ prayed, and with the perpetuity which he foretold; but you are not therefrom to infer that full license is given to divide and subdivide the Church to suit all varieties of belief and preference, for so all strength would soon disappear in the process of disintegration, and all organization might give place to individual independence. **Liberty alone** is not God's law of order.

To require that this liberty be curtailed only by an unrestricted judgment of expediency would not secure us against the same results. Expediency should itself be divinely indicated. At least some law should be ascertained by which it may be determined.

2. Nor is it enough that an association of Christians be able to point to its pure scriptural doctrines—to the correctness of its distinctive teachings. Correct doctrines may be believed, formulated into a creed, and taught, even by those who have no vital connection with Christ and little respect for God's order. I here speak of what is possible rather than of what is of frequent occurrence; but the admitted possibility is enough to destroy the sufficiency of the rule. The history of the Church, however, is not destitute of instances, modern as well as ancient, illustrative of a natural inclination to cover up, by great carefulness in respect to doctrine, those unworthy motives to division which have been found in the jealousy of classes, or in the bitterness engendered by minor controversies.

3. Nor, again, is it enough that a denomination, calling itself a Church, be composed of good and pious people. Piety is not an absolute security against even *great* weakness of

judgment. Good and pious people may have very erroneous views of duty and policy ; and if piety alone be a sufficient justification of a distinct denominational existence, then we must approve whatever movement *ignorant* or *mistaken* piety may institute. The piety of any number of men is no evidence whatever that *God* has commissioned them to the work of founding a denominational Church. If they attempt it their vindication must rest on other grounds.

4. We must go one step further—even into the face of some of those arguments which have sometimes been relied on for the defense of Methodism—and assert the insufficiency of the fact of *great revivals, and continued success in winning souls to Christ*. Seed will grow and produce fruit, though it be sown by the hand of a trespasser or a thief. The harvest is not to the credit of the trespass or the theft, but of the seed, the soil, the sunshine, and the showers. So God honors his truth, sometimes even though it be proclaimed by a hypocrite, and much more when proclaimed in sincerity and love. He that hears it, “and in a good and honest heart keeps it,” will bring forth fruit, perhaps a “hundred fold ;” but this fruitfulness proves nothing as to the validity or

Divine sanction of that Church *organization* to which the preacher belongs. Success may attend the word, and yet God's disapprobation rest upon a division of his people, and the absorption of their means in peculiar and expensive modes of labor.

Concerning these elements already noticed—scriptural teachings, piety, and fruitfulness—it may further be said that they are indeed indispensable; they may be admitted among the criteria since they *characterize* a true Church; combined they are conclusive evidence of a vital union with Christ; but if they are invariably to be regarded as sufficient to justify the assumption of ecclesiastical prerogatives—the maintaining of a distinct ecclesiastical organization—then we can set no limits to division and impose no law upon revolution. Any man who has a notion or preference of his own may step out and gather about him a handful of followers; and if he only be pious, and preach the truth, and bring men to Christ, may command recognition, not only of Christian character, but as standing at the head of a valid ecclesiastical body; and this body, *as such*, may plead its own needs, and base its demand for sympathy and support upon the ground that the community and the world need the influence

of the Church, and none can question the rightfulness of its claim. By this principle the Divine institution may become the legitimate means of its own destruction !

If any objector would here refer me to our *Articles of Religion*, one of which says, "The visible Church of Christ is a congregation of faithful men, in which the pure word of God is preached, and the sacraments are duly administered, according to Christ's ordinance, in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same," I reply, that I regard this language as descriptive, rather than definitive ; or if the latter, the definition does not claim to point out the evidences that the Church was divinely instituted, and therefore does not point out the criteria by which its prerogatives are to be tested. Again, if the highest significance is placed on the term "faithful," and the extremest inferences are drawn from it in this connection, we make the "Church" the *result* of a *Divine administration* among men recognizing a Divine leadership.

5. But let us notice still another insufficient rule.

There are some who, as I have suggested, would apply, as the only effectual preventive to a schismatic tendency, the doctrine of one

organic Church, under a form of government and visible headship descended in an unbroken succession from Christ and his apostles. But it is presumptive evidence against the Divine origin of this remedy that it is "worse than the disease." If it prevent one evil, it gives rise to others which are fatal. It holds up in the way of progress the terror of "excommunication," and virtual, if not declared, "anathema," at least the anathema of exclusion and contempt. It is, therefore, fatal to reform after corruption and error have once crept into the Church; fatal to that freedom of thought which is so necessary either to reaction or advancement. It paralyzes aggression, and puts strength into the arm and authority into the voice of bigotry. It puffs men up with arrogance, and fills them with the madness of persecution. It stimulates the lust of power, and culminates in the blasphemy which claims the proprietorship of truth, the lordship of the world, the "keys" of heaven and hell, and throws back over a history of corruption and murder the declaration of "*infallibility!*" Or, if I need not cite its worse developments, take its milder, in which it blinds men to their spiritual needs, satisfies them with a little round of forms, and cramps them up in the spirit of exclusiveness.

Its tendency is from its small, but bad beginnings, to its worse ending.* This will appear evident to the merest tyro of Church history if he will but inquire candidly ;—what would have been the result to the Church and the world had no counteracting influence been brought to bear from opposing sources, or, what would now be the result if the “*One Church*,” or “*The Church*,” theory were to become dominant ?

But leaving the natural and injurious influence of this supposed remedy out of the account, it is still a very unreliable one. To introduce into this discourse even the briefest summary of historical evidence as against the doctrine of apostolic succession would be too much for its

* Says Neander, the great Church historian : “When, however, the doctrine is, as it gradually gained currency in the third century, that the Bishops are by divine right the head of the Church, and invested with the government of the same ; that they are the successors of the apostles, and by this succession inherit apostolical authority ; that they are the medium through which, in consequence of that ordination which they have received merely in an outward manner, the Holy Ghost, in all time to come, must be transmitted to the Church—when this becomes the doctrine we certainly must perceive in these assumptions a great corruption of the Christian system. . . . This entire perversion of the original view of the Christian Church was itself the origin of the whole system of the Roman Catholic religion, the germ from which sprung the Popery of the Dark Ages.”—*Introduction to Coleman's Apostolical and Primitive Church.*

limits ; nor is it necessary to my purpose. It is enough for us to know that some of the most important features in the organization and methods of the apostolic Church are matters of doubt and dispute. The greatest of biblical scholars are here divided. Besides, could we determine accurately all the characteristics of that Church, the chain which, to save apostolic succession, should connect it with our times, has never been satisfactorily traced : some of its supposed links are rejected by men of the greatest piety and learning—*even by members of the Church of England and the ablest advocates of episcopacy.**

*The impression is easily made in America among those who are not familiar with the literature of this subject, and who receive their information as it is gratuitously offered through the channels of the Protestant Episcopal Church, that the great scholars of the Church of England are *unanimous in support* of the doctrine, that the episcopacy, as a distinct and superior order in the ministry, descending in unbroken line from the apostles, is essential to the existence of a true Church, a regular ministry, and valid ordinances. This impression is as erroneous as it is mischievous. The truth is, only a small proportion of the great names in the Anglican Church can be arrayed in support of such a position. Among those who have rejected it are Archbishops ;—Craumer, Tillotson, Usher, and others ; Bishops ;—Hall, Hoadley, Leighton, Burnet, Tomline, and many more ; learned Divines and Authors ;—Stillingfleet, King, Paley, and others of equal authority. Some of these believed that the episcopacy was *not* apostolic,

Again, grant that this succession could be traced, and that a Church could be found whose constitution has descended essentially unchanged from the time of Christ,—*what proof have we that it ought not to have been changed long ago?* Is there any evidence that the apostles, who modified their own modes of labor as exigencies required, and allowed the Church to receive such organic form as would spring from the circumstances and demands of their age, intended to anticipate the demands of coming ages and institute regulations for all the future? Is there any reason to suppose that those students of providence intended in any degree to relieve coming generations from the duty of studying its teachings? None whatever. The opinion that the institutions and regulations of the apostolic Church, beyond their conformity to the few simple and explicit directions of Christ, are binding upon all succeeding ages, is a naked assumption, without any respectable scriptural evidence in its support. It is an opinion not only unfavorable to progress, but diverting men from the great broad *lessons of* but yet is admissible wherever deemed expedient; others that it was apostolic *because then expedient*, but that it may be rejected whenever deemed otherwise; others still, that it is *always expedient* and therefore desirable for the *perfection* of the Church, but not *essential* to its existence.

faith and providential guidance taught us by apostolic example. I repeat, then, could a denomination of Christians be found to-day whose organic form had descended in an unbroken line of succession and without alteration from the time of the apostles, this feature of its history would not prove its continued harmony with the order of God : on the contrary, it would rather be presumptive evidence that it had been a poor student in the school of providence, and that it is now vastly unlike what it would have been had the apostles themselves lived to wisely change it, from time to time, in harmony with changing demands and providential indications.

II. The Correct Rule Stated.

What, then, shall we say ? By what rule shall we determine whether God sanctions the separate existence or distinctive features of a particular denominational Church ? Having discarded the rule of liberty ; having seen the insufficiency of piety, of scriptural creeds and teaching, of works and fruitfulness ; and having rejected apostolic succession as worthless for our purpose, what have we left us ? Are we adrift at sea without chart or compass, sun or star ?

No ! We have the same grand principle on which the apostles themselves rested—*the*

ever-working providence of the great Head of the Church, of which every devoted disciple may be a student, and whose guidance is marked by the influences which control the obedient.

The rule, then, and the only adequate rule which we can accept, is, *Evident Providential Guidance*.

Let me state this rule more fully, or point out the principles which it involves.

First, it assumes that a Church is not a man-made institution, and that its varieties of form are not the mere result of man's various views of expediency. Although it has been built up through human agencies, yet it is God's building, and so it must appear. In all that is essential, absolutely, to the assertion of this principle, I would not hesitate to enter into company with the most rigid Churchman and travel with him as far as he could require.

On the other hand, this rule implies that the servants of Christ, to whom the care of the Church is committed, may make changes, discarding the old and introducing the new. Here we accept the language of Pressensé: "The Church has the right—and sometimes the right becomes a duty—to modify its organization in the course of time, and to depart in more than one point of detail from the type of the apostolic

Churches, subject only to this condition, that it remain faithful to the general principles of their constitution ; for those principles are unchangeable, and rest upon eternal truths."

But between these two positions the rule suggested introduces a third principle which connects them both : the continued and superintending presence of the Master, so indicating his will that his servants, heeding his calls, will receive his guidance and perform a work of which the thoughtful and unprejudiced must say, "It is of the Lord."

By this rule, as thus explained, you do not require that the temple which the Lord hath builded should, in order to remain his, remain unchanged. You only seek to ascertain whether the original Architect has ordered and superintended every process of alteration and reconstruction. Nor, on the other hand, do you seek to preserve the liberty of judgment (even with respect to expediency) in the form of irresponsible license, but only to place judgment under a sufficient guide, and make it accountable to such laws as both ennoble its offices and determine its responsibilities. It is the rule which requires that Christ's presence and direction should always appear.

III. The Correct Rule Illustrated.

Do not the lessons which we should learn from the spirit and practice of the apostles—the general and enduring principles which we discover at the foundation of their work, beneath the developing and changing superstructure—*illustrate* and *enforce* this rule?

1. Let us go back to the close of Christ's earthly ministry, and witness his *commission to his apostles*. To whom does he speak—what is their office, or what the relations which they sustain? Let us not suppose that they are priests, or candidates for investiture in any office of mediation, analogous to the old Levitical priesthood. That office was typical, and Christ is the end of all such types "to him that believeth." His saved people are now "a royal priesthood," empowered to come boldly through him to the throne of grace. Each may now take Christ as his high priest, and come to the mercy-seat for himself. They are *apostles*, or messengers, with a peculiarity of office dependent upon their peculiar relation to Christ; yet, in an important sense, they stand as the representatives of Christ's witnessing people. Their number, twelve, corresponding to that of the tribes of Israel, suggests that they are the ideal

representatives, not of the priestly tribe, but of all the tribes, of the people of God as a whole—in other words, that they are the *nucleus* of the Christian Church.* And the language in which Christ addresses them, referring to their work as extending through all the world and all the future, implies their representative position. In speaking to them, therefore, he speaks to his Church.

Now observe the *duty* enjoined ;† and you will notice that, while it is this duty which characterizes their office and is therefore indicated in their title, it does not rest solely upon the conferment of authority, nor alone upon their *judgment* of the extent to which their knowledge of Christ places them under obligation to him or furnishes them with power to benefit the world, but upon Christ's own acts, upon what he has done and promises to do. The command directs them to the duty, but he leaves his life to explain and enforce it, and promises his future providence to guide them in it. This will appear the more evident if we notice the *special features* of this duty.

As messengers they should be furnished with a message, as teachers with the truth. But he

* Pressensé's "Early Years of Christianity," vol. i, p. 50.

† See Matt. xxviii, 19; xvi, 15; Acts i, 8.

gives them no formulated system of doctrine, no prescribed proclamation of good news. He has, however, given to them, and the world, HIMSELF—the one great fact which shall appeal to the moral consciousness of men, and respond to the deepest wants of the soul—the manifestation of God “full of grace and truth”—the Logos “made flesh and dwelling among us”—“the way, the truth, and the life.” Men shall behold him in the purity of his life, in the matchless beauty of his character, in the radiance of his love; and *he*, not theories nor definitions, will be “the truth” which shall bring them to repentance, and reveal the nature of holiness. Men in their conscious and deplored sinfulness shall behold him, and he shall be “the truth,” revealing to them that God can be just and the justifier of him that believeth. In their searchings and gropings after a Divine Father shall men behold him, and he shall be their “way” to God; trusting him they shall feel themselves enfolded to the bosom of Divine love. And anxious spirits—mourning, burdened souls—following the living to life’s verge and standing there at the confines of impenetrable night, waiting in vain for some ray of light to come up from the deep darkness of the unknown to reveal to them the place and fate of

the spirit, and writing "despair" over the dark horrid portals, shall behold him ; and he shall be "the truth" which shall bring "life and immortality to light!" The Spirit is, henceforth, to have his office distinguished by his relation to Christ, and, in that relation, to be "another Comforter," leading men into "the way of all truth,"—"taking of the things of Christ," and revealing them to men. Now, these "messengers" who are receiving their commission, have been the favored companions of this Christ ; they have *seen* his glory, "the glory as of the only begotten of the Father," and Christ, therefore, says to them, "Go ye into all the world, *proclaim the glad tidings!*" No prescribed message, Christ is truth enough ; no form of external unity, his people are to be one in him ; no ceremonial, except his simple sacraments, and these are but the symbols of himself, and the signs of men's faith in a Saviour. We see, then, the substance of their message : it is *Christ*. Him they are to "preach, warning every man, teaching every man," that they may present every man perfect in him. We see, too, that while this duty is *enjoined* by *command*, it is *explained* by *facts*.

Another duty pertaining to their office will be that of leadership, control, and organization.

But observe, they receive no constitution, no prescribed mode of government. Indeed, this duty will be *discovered* to them, not by the words of the commission, but by indications of necessity. But what!—are they to be left in the dark here, with no help, no guide? Has Christ not provided for the emergency? Are they to be self-dependent, and governed by naught but their judgment? No! Christ says, “Lo, *I am with you alway!*” Enough, then, *Christ is better than a constitution!* let him govern. As the Church was founded in what he had done, let it be perpetuated by his doing. They have not only Christ’s truth to preach, and Christ’s sacraments to administer, but Christ’s *providence* as their guide.

Here we have the primitive type of the Church—a people believing in Christ, loving Christ, preaching Christ, and following Christ’s immediate providential guidance. This type presents Christ’s Church as his kingdom, over which he rules personally—not by a vicar or any form of vicegerency—and in which *he* is to have “glory and dominion for ever and ever.” The characteristics which this type embraces, especially the last, Christ evidently intended should be perpetual; for he says, “I am with you *alway*, even unto *the end of the world*”—

with all his people in all ages ; with them in all the prerogatives of his divinity, including the unrestricted providential government—for, “all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.” *

Now, in this view of the apostles' commission, is it not possible for men to unchurch themselves by becoming too churchly—to lose an essential element of the Church, by chaining themselves and Christ to the effete forms of a by-gone age? May not the Church that boasts of being *founded* in the Christ that “*was*,” cease to *abide* in the Christ that “*is*?” Providence implies the *continued* exercise of Divine power. Let us, then, while shunning the extreme of individual independence which Providence does not approve, avoid the slavery of conservatism which Providence condemns.

2. Let us now, for the purpose of further illustration, refer to some facts in the *actual development and working of the apostolic Church*.

Christ commanded them to tarry at Jerusalem, and promised that they should “receive

* See Matt. xxviii, 18, where these words must be regarded not only as an assertion of that Divine authority which gave Christ the right to commission his apostles, but also of that *Divine providence* which gave him the right to promise his presence and guidance.

the Holy Ghost," and be "endued with power from on high." They obey, and the promise is fulfilled. This outpouring of the Spirit was not upon the apostles more than upon others, and therefore could not have been designed especially to qualify them for their office. But they act in harmony with that office; because they act in harmony with the relations in which, and circumstances under which, God had placed them. Those who were leaders before are leaders now, and, *as might be expected*, Peter is the first speaker of the occasion—first, not because he has been invested with primacy, but because, in comparison with the rest, God made him to be first. It was natural that he should be first. Indeed, although the inspiration was so overwhelming, so absorbing, yet the freedom of the disciples does not disappear. They exercise their judgment with reference to the indications of prophecy, history, and present needs. Nothing seems official; every thing (except the miracle itself) perfectly natural. One effect upon the disciples of the fulfillment of Christ's promise—an effect which should here be noticed as having an important influence upon them as the students of Providence—is the *confirmation of their faith in him as an omnipresent hearer of prayer*. From this moment on, their whole

work evinces how fully they grasp, and rest in, the promise of his presence, and how effective have been his efforts, between the resurrection and the ascension, to transfer their faith from a present visible to a present invisible Messiah.

The baptism of the Spirit is followed by marvelous success ; three thousand converts in one day, and five thousand in another a few weeks later, are “added to the Church.” The *Church* ? Indeed, there was a veritable Church already of three thousand souls, and daily increasing, before the apostles had time to recover from their first surprise, and when they had only uttered a few prayers and preached a few sermons !* What constituted it ? No outward conditions of membership have been prescribed, no constitution formed. Baptism, which they all receive, only marks adherence on one side and recognition on the other : and nothing more is needed ; their common attachment and love grows quickly into a *spontaneity* of oneness. No external marks of unity are attempted, none are necessary. The “line of light which marked the boundaries which separated the Church from the kingdom of darkness,” and which “all saw,” and “none mistook,” was not, as Bishop

* And even before this, for it was a pre-existing number that was “added” to. See Acts ii, 41.

Randall affirms, "the ministry and the sacraments." That line was only the border of the kingdom of light itself. The Church shone *throughout*, for the glory of the Lord had risen upon her. All saw it, none mistook it; but, I ask again, *How was it formed?* We do not find a single instance in which Church-membership was defined or recognized by a signified relation to the ministry, but always by a *manifested spiritual relation to Christ*. It was this which made the apostles themselves members of the Church, and now they appear to regard themselves as the favored *instruments of providence for its increase*, rather than the authoritative agents in its construction.

There soon occurs an instance of unfaithfulness and hypocrisy, in the case of Ananias and Sapphira, but there is no formal trial and expulsion, but the swift judgment of God following the reproof of Peter. It is a singular event, *a lesson for the times*, not to be made a precedent.

For more than three years after the pentecost, the apostles remained at Jerusalem, not preaching the Gospel abroad; and yet somebody preached it. Those who were driven from Jerusalem by the Stephanic persecution, unordained men—men without any *special* commis-

sion from Christ or his apostles—proclaimed the glad tidings in the cities and among the strangers. Missionaries precede the apostles! Do the latter complain of disorder? No, they take heed to this indication of God's will, and get broader views of his plans; and from this they go on, learning that Christ can direct much better than they, and frequently finding their own views surprised and overthrown by his providence. Peter, for instance, being called upon to explain his strange course on one occasion, (Acts xi, 4-17,) proceeded to rehearse the leadings of providence in the case, and closed with the appeal, "What was I, that I could withstand God?" His explanation was accepted, in spite of their deep-seated prejudices, and so the whole body of the apostles learned another lesson.

Occasions arose at different times for consultation and agreement on disputed or misunderstood matters, yet there was no regular periodical assembling, no uniformity of method: at one time the apostles and elders acting by themselves; at another, with the concurrence of the body of the Church, sometimes for local and sometimes for general purposes, but on each occasion proceeding as circumstances might require, in other words, as providence might direct.

The division in labor and distinction in office came about slowly, to meet demand, and in the most unpremeditated manner. It became necessary to have men to assist in the ministration of alms ; seven were chosen—later they were called deacons. We know that some of these men preached, but not that preaching was a part of their *official* duty ; for aught we know, they preached before they were deacons. Subsequently, it became necessary to have men for the local ministration of the word and the care of local Churches. They met the demand in the most simple manner. The old modes of the synagogues furnished the suggestion—the example and the title—so they copied its eldership. We cannot now discuss the distinction between the orders of the ministry. We only observe that they were not pre-arranged from the beginning ; they were not *planned* and *fixed* for the future ; nor can we say positively that they were any more than *adopted* as *expédients* to meet the necessities that were then upon them ; and yet, when once adopted, they would not be done away until providence should so direct.

We cannot trace the history further. One fact should suffice—that no evidence appears that the apostles, in their plans and efforts to

give the Church an organic form, ever contemplated the distant future. They left Christ to do that. They lived and worked for their own age, believing that the same Lord who led them would live to lead his people in time to come. In none of their sermons, councils, or letters, do we find words, such as we would expect from men purposely shaping and settling the organism of Christ's Church for all time to come. No prayer for guidance in such a work is recorded; no counsel offered in grave deliberation for such an end; nothing which indicates that they recognized any such responsibility. They believed in Christ, "the Alpha and Omega," him who lived then, and would be alive for evermore. Their trust for present guidance was such that it went deeply into their personal experience, involving the office and work of the Spirit. They were not the men to surrender their own faculties and yield to unreasoning impulses, and yet their sensitive souls were ever hearing the voice of the Spirit calling them to present duties, and guiding them in the work of the hour.

None will doubt that the apostles, with the great company of believers gathered through their instrumentality—*being thus providentially guided*—were a true Church. The same will

any body of Christians be if thus led—their obedience implying their guidance, and their guidance requiring the full and free exercise of their judgment. It will not suffice for us that we be connected through the ages, through the errors and the darkness of the past, back to even Christ himself, by a chain whose links are only forms. As the Church was not founded in authority *conferred*, so it has not been perpetuated by authority *transferred*. As Christ's "kingdom" it stands in his perpetual reign. It will not answer to fall back composedly upon the modes and usages of a distant age, and let our reverence for the past override our faith in a living, working Christ; nor, on the other hand, must we allow liberty to sink into license, and trust to human judgment regardless of the pointings of God's hand; but, by listening intently to God's voice, by seeking Divine guidance, by running with quick obedience at the Divine call, by trusting with implicit faith in a reigning Christ, we should show that we are of the people *among whom God dwelleth on the earth*.

In my next discourse I will apply the rule, which I have thus stated and illustrated, to Methodism.

SECOND LECTURE.

APPLICATION OF THE CRITERIA TO METHODISM.

IN my discourse last Sabbath I endeavored to state and illustrate the rule, or standard, by which we may judge whether the history of any particular denomination of Christians is in harmony with the essential elements of a true Christian Church.

It was shown that the *Church*, as defined by the commission of Christ to his apostles, and illustrated by the history of the apostolic times, was a body or congregation of men, believing in Christ and receiving his spiritual quickening, preaching Christ and obedient to his immediate providential direction. This last characteristic was distinctly set forth as an inference from the commission, from the promise of Christ's continual presence, and the spirit and practice of the apostles ; and it was regarded as consistent with a *multiform* and *changing*, more than with a perpetual and unvarying, organization.

1. The Conditions of Applicability Restricted.

The rule, therefore, by which we are to test the ecclesiastical claims of any denomination, requires, in addition to the piety of its members, its scriptural creed and teachings, its works and good fruits, that its history be characterized by its evident *providential origin, guidance, and development*. Such is the requirement as stated in general terms. But if I were to seek the most convincing proof that any religious establishment, or any institution whatever, had such an origin or could point to such a history, I would *divide* the question as follows :

1. Did it evidently rise to meet a pressing and wide-spread demand—presenting in its rise and development those peculiarities of power and organism which were adapted to the character and prevalence of that demand ?

2. Did the motives of its founders, and the spirit which controlled them, appear as a kind of *heavenly inspiration*, or, at least, in perfect harmony with the well-known methods in which God leads and assists his obedient agents ?

3. Have the various steps in its progress, and changes in its polity, from its beginning to its

completion, been *necessary*, or imperatively demanded to meet recognized wants ?

4. Have its good results been wider and greater than those at first designed or expected ?

If these questions can be convincingly answered in the affirmative, then we discover *adaptation of means to ends*, (which proves design,) and trace the origin and employment of those means to a superhuman source. We discover also an *inspiration*, which men did not impart but only received ; a *system*, which men did not contrive ; the *force of necessity*, which men did not control, but simply recognized and obeyed ; and *results*, which men did not contemplate.

This fourfold test is, it seems to me, the severest that can be employed to prove that any institution is from the Lord—exists by Divine design, and has received its development under Divine control. It is even severer than necessary, and yet, for this reason, if borne by any denomination, becomes, in connection with its Christian character and fruits, the more convincing evidence that it possesses the elements and qualification of a true Church.

That this test can be borne by other Churches than our own, I gladly acknowledge. At the present, however, let us make it our task to find

the proof that it can be borne by the *Methodist Episcopal* Church.

II. Proof of Applicability Produced.

In presenting this proof it will be necessary to trace the history of Methodism simply in its *general features*, and only so far as to discover the principles which the proposed test requires. All reference to a multitude of convincing facts concerning the un contemplated success of Methodism, which might be presented in answer to the *fourth* requirement of the test, may be omitted, since these facts are known to all my hearers. There are *two periods* from which the historical proof must be gathered: 1. The incipient; and, 2. The progressive and organical.

THE INCIPIENT PERIOD TO 1739.

I first, then, ask your attention to the *demand* in answer to which, and the *influences* under which, Methodism *arose*. This will carry us back to a period some years previous to the generally accepted date of its origin. This date has, by common consent, been fixed in the year 1739, when Whitefield and the Wesleys instituted field-preaching, and organized "societies;" but, for several years previous to this, we trace the influences which were leading to this

result, and in which appear those forces which, in their tendency, were antagonistic to the spirit of the times, and, in their gradual development, were a prophecy of a sweeping and most glorious reformation. We should go as far back as the year 1729. At this time, and down through the whole incipient period of Methodism, the condition of the established and dissenting Churches was, according to the testimony of their own witnesses, deplorable, and waxing worse.

Some of the most worthy men of the time, bishops and archbishops—such men as Burnet, Butler, and Secker—bear testimony to the fearful ignorance of the common people ; to the indolence, lightness, and even immorality, of the clergy, and their neglect of the masses, who were still blinded by the relics of Romish superstition ; to the prevalence of infidelity ; to the displacement of revealed by natural religion ; to the neglect of theology, and even the Bible, by men in orders ; to “ the dissoluteness and contempt of principle ” which characterized “ the higher part of the world ; ” to the ridicule which it “ visited upon Christianity with but little reserve, and upon its teachers with none at all.” Leighton had described the Church as a “ fair carcass without a spirit ; ” Burnet, in his seventieth year, utters his fatherly warning in the

words of a most sorrowful lamentation; and Watts calls upon all "to save *dying religion* in the world."

Now search, if you will, amid all the *prevailing* elements of power which controlled the thought and feeling of the times, which had been developed in the history of the past or lived in the combinations and tendencies of the present, for those *forces which were requisite for the work of reformation*. You search in vain. Those forces, to which the different classes of society were then *accustomed to yield*, had combined into deep, broad rivers whose currents were bearing men *away* from Christ. The power of the Reformation, as a reactionary force, had ceased to be felt, and the tide of superstition was flowing in again upon the people. Its work in England had, at best, been incomplete. It had, indeed, checked the encroachments of Popery, but it had not brought to the people a religion of the soul—not given them the joy and power of a personal living faith in the Saviour. It had resisted some demands, denounced some errors, thrown off some yokes, but it had left weary souls still to bear the worthless burden of externalism, and to return by one road to those very errors from which it professed to lead them by another. Puritanism had quarreled away its

virtues, and was now under the lead of its vices. The affairs and failures of the Commonwealth had long since given strength to the reaction. The restoration of Charles II. had enthroned vice, discouraged no error, encouraged no truth ; and from his day to the time of the Wesleys the throne had given its favor, sometimes to Popery, sometimes to Protestantism, but never had it so governed as to change the *tendency* of events, or bring into existence any force or combination of forces sufficient, in themselves, to turn the tide back toward truth and holiness. In vain would men heed the call of Watts, to "save dying religion in the world ;" for what effort of *man* could avail. He might rise up, in his indignation and noble, heroic zeal, and say, "*I will lead on to the battle ;*" but, alas ! there are no instruments on which his hands can be laid, no sword to wield, no elements of power *existing in the times* which he can combine and direct. We look back to those days, through the light of continued revival, which has illustrated the promise, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven," and the truth that this kingdom is "within" men ; and we see most clearly that the stream of heavenly life, which only could be sufficient to turn back the tide of corruption, must have

its rise among the fountains that should gush forth in the valley of personal humility, where God meets mourning souls and puts power into broken and contrite hearts. A dying to all self-righteousness and self-dependence, and the implicit faith of broken hearts, followed by a Divine quickening and yielding to a Divine guidance, must recover to the world the glory of apostolic times, and cause the power and success of a true Church to destroy the errors, and rebuke the weakness, of a false one.

While a few noble spirits were deploring the condition of the Church and of society in general, and were uttering gloomy prophecies, two young men, John and Charles Wesley, came prominently into notice. These young men were not moved by the spirit of ambition, nor suspected of having any far-reaching plans. Their training had been such as to induce habits of the most rigid self-examination, and lead to the closest scrutiny of their spirit and motives. The influence of their father—an exceptionally godly rector in the Church of England—had been salutary, that of their remarkably devoted and prudent mother the more *potent* and *formative*. She felt especially obligated by certain providences concerning John—such as his narrow escape from the flames of their

burning dwelling—which made a deep impression on her mind, to care for his religious culture. Her recorded endeavors for their religious welfare, her earnest prayers for Divine assistance, her affectionate letters of advice, admonition, and entreaty to them while at college, all bear witness to her tender solicitude, and her prudent, tireless efforts to instill into their minds the “principles of religion and virtue.”

It was undoubtedly, in great measure, the result of her influence that John and Charles, moved by the same desire, met together, while at Oxford, for the study of the Bible and for mutual instruction and spiritual profit.

They now reached a point at which the fuller and more direct influence of God’s word was added to that of wise parental instruction. John says: “In 1729 my brother and I read the Bible, and found inward and outward holiness therein”—not holiness in any special sense, but as the general spirit and demand of the Christian religion. “We followed after it,” he says, “and incited others to do so.” This was a full statement of their design.

While pursuing this end they were joined by a few others of like mind, and continued to hold meetings for consultation. They adopted a

system of charitable labor among the prisoners and the poor, which course received the warm commendation of the bishop. With this purpose, and by these methods, they proceeded until their company increased, their labors enlarged, and their influence was felt. Their *method* in all their endeavors secured to them the title of Methodists. Thus Methodism was born and named without an ambitious dream. And yet we observe in it an *incipient movement* which, from its very nature, must become *distinct*. Founded in the deepest consciousness of the soul's want, the spirit of inquiry and careful obedience, it contained those elements of power which the demands of the times could but call out, and combine into activity and permanence.

Now, if you trace the influence to which these young men yielded in coming to this point you can find nothing to condemn, unless you condemn a mother's love and prayers, a father's godly admonition and counsel, the Bible's precious light, the soul's ardent longings, and love's self-denial ; and yet here is a power essentially reformatory—not born of the times, but of God. It is a “power from on high.” God is meeting the demand by giving more abundantly to those that have. He is calling upon his humble,

prayerful, inquiring children, and they who now feel "*inwardly moved*," to preach his truth—that he "*thrusts them out* to raise up a holy people." Ten years, however, pass before we come to the recognized epoch of Methodism. We trace the course of the Wesleys, in the mean time, with much interest, through labors, and trials, and doubts, and still unsatisfied longings, until the light rises upon their vision in the fullness of its glory, and we find the same irreproachableness of motive, the same evidence of Divine guidance. *The movement* of which they are the leaders is now taking firm hold of the masses, and thousands are flocking to their standard. The clergy find fault with them, denounce them, persecute them, close the doors of the Churches against them; but still the movement goes on, *divinely* inspired, divinely sustained. It seems to me that if there be such a thing as "apostolic succession," here we have an instance.

PROGRESSIVE AND ORGANICAL PERIOD, FROM
1739.

Thus far we have considered Methodism only with reference to its origin. We see that it was a *revival* movement. *But it could not be that this revival should long remain without organism.* God seems to have ordained that all

life shall be organic, and he evidently never intended that such a mind as Wesley's should be at the head of disorder—certainly it did not long remain in the midst of chaos. From the very beginning he had been, under God, the *methodizer* of the Methodists, never admitting confusion, orderly to a fault.

In 1739 a more extended organization than had before existed became necessary, and, being formed, passed under the name of *United Society*. From this point let us trace the general *course of progress, change, and development*, and note the events and influences which shaped and controlled it.

One remarkable coincidence is closely connected with the *philosophy* of the movement through its entire history, and prominent among the indications of Divine design. I refer to that wonderful combination of talents which the leaders of Methodism never sought, and which formed a prophecy which they were *too unambitious to interpret*. John Wesley stood at the head, foremost among leaders. His powers of quick discernment, of orderly arrangement, of calm and effective discipline, qualified him for a place among the greatest of organizers and commanders. Charles was the "sweet singer of Israel"—the poet, whose songs were

to be the key with which Truth would unlock the heart, the lovely garb in which she would pass every sentinel of prejudice and come into communion with the soul, the breath on which the incense of universal praise would be wafted up to God.

Whitefield was the most eloquent of preachers—whose voice was a marvel of sweetness and power, and whose speech was the charm with which he drew and held spell-bound the innumerable multitudes, while into their minds he poured the truth of Christ. Fletcher, coming in later, but in time for his work, was chief among polemicists, mighty in the field of controversy, defending truth against the attacks of sophistry, and clearing from its pathway the rubbish of venerated falsehood. This combination of powers, so well adapted to the wants of the time, would appear as the part of a well-planned system; but *who designed it?* Let him who would say that in all this God was not, tell us where God is.

It is equally in harmony with the criteria of a true Church, to which the work of these leaders was unconsciously conformed, that this primitive organization in 1739 *was not the intentional founding of a sect.* No thought of schism entered the mind of Wesley or his co-workers.

No one who knows any thing of the history can fail to see that, at this time, as for many years succeeding, it was within the power of the Established Church to absorb all the precious fruit of this great revival, and that to this it would have been led simply by the exercise of a Christian spirit. Its own ordained ministers were the instruments whom God had honored in the great work ; most of the converts would have gone to its fold from choice had they been sought and nourished by its watch-care. But no ! these " fanatics " should be silenced ; they are threatened, persecuted, and mobbed ; the churches are closed against them, and the fruits of their labor are spurned. What shall now be done ? The thousands who wait eagerly on their ministry must not be turned away untaught. Disappointed and sad, these messengers of Christ *accept the alternative of field-preaching*. They do it *reluctantly*—to meet a *necessity* thrust upon them. But what more ? The multitude of new-born converts must not be left without the benefits of association and communion. "*Societies*" are *therefore formed, and chapels are erected*, both as necessary provisions to meet the emergencies of the hour, and not as steps in the formation of a Church or sect.

Every succeeding step toward the independence of these societies, or their separation from the Church of England, came about through the demands of necessity on the one hand, and the unfriendliness of the Church on the other. It is well known that John Wesley was always extremely reluctant to depart from established usage, and that he never did it, only as he felt that he was compelled so to do. A lover of order, he could not despise or ignore it where it already existed. We have previously referred to the reluctance with which he resorted to field-preaching. The next instance of necessary violence to his prejudices was *the employment of lay preachers*. Here he could hardly get the consent of his conscience; but two things decided him: first, the *pressing demand* for their employment, which existed, while ordination was denied them and ordained ministers would not come to their assistance; and, second, *God had already thrust them into the field*, and honored their labors. If he now refused to employ them, he must, in face of the Divine approval, *silence* them. Had he been a little more apostolic at this point, the decision would have caused him less pain; but true apostolicity gains the day, and laymen are allowed to preach.

So unpretentious and natural a step as the

convening of a few of his co-laborers in this work of revival, for the purpose of consultation, was taken very reluctantly for fear of giving any appearance of disorder or insubordination ; but this step was demanded by the needs of the work ; such meetings were therefore held, and called *Conferences*.

After a time, when the work had greatly enlarged, and societies had been formed, and chapels erected in various cities and villages, Mr. Wesley began to meet with the *desire on the part of the Societies to have the sacraments administered in their own places of worship, and by their own preachers*. This request, wherever he met it, he severely rebuked. He was greatly pained that it should exist, for he was a staunch Churchman, and at this period of his life was *taking for granted* the doctrine of apostolic succession. But the demand, year by year, became more urgent, and was supported, in some instances, by the conscientious scruples of his people against receiving the sacraments from the hands of an ungodly priest ; and yet, though Mr. Wesley's views of Church government became at length so changed- that he saw in this demand nothing unscriptural, he continued to resist it as "inexpedient and not for the glory of God." He directed the people to the

“Church” for the sacraments, and refused to allow services in their chapels during its regular hours of worship. He labored hard to make his people and ministers of one mind on this point, and, as far as possible, silenced all agitation of the subject. He came, however, before his death, to see that this opposition would in the end be unavailing. Reluctantly he began to recognize the finger of God *pointing to separation*. After a visit to Epworth, in 1788, and after a vain endeavor to induce the Methodists at that place to attend the Church and receive its sacraments, he recorded in his Journal: “If I cannot carry this point while I live, who, then, can do it when I die. The case of Epworth is the case of every Church where the minister neither loves nor preaches the Gospel.”*

The feeling which Mr. Wesley and his co-laborers now had, and which had been maintained among them during the whole fifty years through which this tendency to separation had been growing, is sufficiently indicated by his record of the Conference of this same year, 1788. He says: “One of the most important points considered at this Conference was that

* See also extract from a letter by Pawson, quoted in Tyerman's “Life and Times of Wesley,” p. 443, and Stevens's “History of Methodism,” vol. iii, p. 51.

of leaving the Church. The sum of a long conversation was, 1. That, in the course of fifty years, we had neither premeditatedly nor willingly varied from it in one article either of doctrine or discipline. 2. That we were not *yet* conscious of varying from it in one point of doctrine. 3. That we have in the course of fifty years, out of necessity, not choice, slowly and warily varied in some points of discipline, by preaching in the fields, by extemporaneous prayer, by employing lay preachers, by forming and regulating societies, and by holding yearly Conferences. But we did none of these things till we were convinced that we could no longer omit them but at the peril of our souls." The *spirit* here manifested always characterized them, but the *necessity* here indicated absolutely compelled them. And the same force of necessity operated after Mr. Wesley's death, counteracting and slowly overcoming the spirit of conservative fidelity to the Established Church, until, in 1797, measures were carried which fully met the demand, now generally recognized, and completed the distinct organization of the Wesleyan Church. Fifty-eight years of vain waiting at the door of the Church of England was long enough for a justification of self-assertion and independence.

I have thus traced, in outline, the history of Methodism in England, in order to illustrate the spirit of which *Episcopal* Methodism was born. The circumstances of its origin, however, must be briefly noticed.

The Methodist societies in America did not, previous to the Revolution, assume the character and rights of a distinct Church. They received the sacraments at the hands of the Episcopal, or English, clergymen, and at their altars. But, in consequence of the Revolution, the Church of England ceased to exist here, and the vast number of American Methodists *were without a shepherd*. There were none to administer the sacraments. Dissatisfaction prevailed. Some advised waiting; others called for action. Division arose; utter disorganization was threatened.* An agreement was effected, that further action should be postponed until Mr. Wesley, whom they still revered as their father and counselor, could be consulted, and his decision obtained. *He applied to the Bishop of London for at least one ordained minister for America, but was refused*. What could he do? What could he be *expected* to do consistently with his past course other than what he did do? Having long since been led to abandon the doctrine

* See Emory's "Defense of Our Fathers," § v, p. 21.

of apostolic succession, as a "fable which no man could prove," and being convinced that "elders and bishops were (essentially) the same order," and that he was himself "as truly an '*episcopus*' as any man in England, having the ecclesiastical *power* and the providential *right* to ordain, he called together for counsel a number of presbyters, and, after grave deliberation, in conjunction with them, set apart Thomas Coke as "superintendent," and recommended him "as a fit person to preside over the flock of Christ" in America. To this act, Wesley expressly certifies to "all men" that he felt himself providentially called ;" and those who interpret him by his previous faithfulness as a student of providence, will be very slow to believe that at *this* time he mistook his calling. But this act *professedly, and in fact*, conferred on Mr. Coke all the powers of a bishop, and he accepted from his peers this conferment of office. From whom could he have accepted it with more propriety? To have received it from the Bishop of London, would have been, for reasons of the past, worse than a farce, a *grievous insult* to the Methodists in America. But receiving it from the hands of their acknowledged founder and honored father, he could come to them with an authority and influence by which he could com-

mand their confidence, heal their divisions, and direct their labors. The Conference, which convened on his arrival in 1784, accepted and duly recognized him as their *superintendent*, or bishop; and by this and other action, effected the organization of the *Methodist Episcopal Church of the United States of America*.

I cannot follow the history further, but you will please notice the juncture of the circumstances and events already cited. As a result of the Revolution, the Church of England, which had (though but in part) supplied the sacraments to the Methodists, ceased to exist. Under a pressing demand, which was thus vastly increased, the Methodist Episcopal Church was organized, with an episcopacy, which the "good Churchman," John Wesley, regarded as scriptural. This form of government, thus effected, was designed not only for those called Methodists, but avowedly for that large class referred to in Mr. Wesley's own language: "Who still adhere to the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England, and are greatly distressed for want of ministers to administer the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper according to the usage of the same Church." Furthermore, this measure did meet the wants of both the Methodists and that large majority of the dissolved

establishment who held what are now called "low-church" views. Again, this newly organized Church was formed in a most sacred regard for a demand distinctively *American*—a demand full of providential indications, which God had qualified John Wesley, far more than any other man in the wide world, to wisely, impartially, and safely interpret. This juncture taken in connection with the previous history of Methodism, should sufficiently vindicate the formation of the Methodist Episcopacy to those who admit the possibility of providential guidance.

' You see, in view of the history which we have traced, the ignorance involved in the assumption unaccountably prevalent, that the Methodist Episcopal Church is a *dissenting* body, a sect, formed by a schism. The Methodists of America never "come out" from the Church. Whatever Church should take the place of the Anglican Church after the Revolution must be *separate* from and *independent* of it. The change in the relation of the two countries, would compel this. That separation, which was thus providentially compelled, took place between Methodism and the Church of England—nothing more. The recognized founder of the former died, as he had lived, in the communion of the latter. The first bishop

of the newly-formed Church was placed over those who “adhered to the doctrine and discipline of the Church of England,” and desired the sacraments “according to her usage.” When, and for what cause, was the secession? The Methodist Episcopal Church was the *American* Episcopal Church. And, as to the Protestant Episcopal Church, which was not organized until 1785, I need do no more than call your attention to the assumption which, in view of this history, appears in her claim to be the true and only successor of the Anglican Church, and THE *Church* in America!!

To break the force of the facts which we have produced, it has been asserted that Mr. Wesley never intended to convey to Mr. Coke *Episcopal* powers, and that he rebuked him for suffering himself to be elected a bishop on his arrival in this country. Perhaps some of you have a tract* containing this assertion. Let me say, no honest man will make such a statement if he knows much of the history. The only mixture of truth which this falsehood contains is this: Mr. Wesley had an intense aversion to the *term* “bishop,” because it had become associated with great assumptions of superiority, and with adventitious emoluments and honors; hence he,

* “Why I am a Churchman,” by Rev. G. M. Randal, D.D.

in the ordination of Coke, termed him a "superintendent," and he rebuked him for allowing himself to be "called" (not "elected") a bishop. The Americans did not know, and could not appreciate, Mr. Wesley's aversion to the term; and, as it was certain that he did ordain Coke,* and recognize them as an Episcopal Church, they must have inevitably concluded that he intended to confer on him the powers of a bishop, and so came to use the more common term to designate those powers. This is really the whole of the case; and it is so plain as to give to the misrepresentation the deep tinge of prejudice, if not of absolute wickedness.†

Much has also been made of the fact that the course of Mr. Wesley with reference to ordinations was severely condemned by his brother Charles, and others.‡ But this fact does not

* See "Methodist Quarterly Review," 1871, p. 695.

† See Stevens's "History of Methodism," vol. ii, chap. vii, entire.

‡ It is a remarkable coincidence to American Methodists, that, while they are being gratuitously informed and frequently reminded by Protestant Episcopalians that John Wesley "lived and died a good and stanch Churchman," they should find in the writings of an English Wesleyan the verdict that Mr. Wesley, in the act of ordaining, did really separate from the Church, and had no *right* to claim connection with it thereafter. There are, evidently, those who will thank Mr. Tyerman for his service, but this will depend upon their *pro-*

militerate in the least against the evidence that this step was providential. Our judgment should to-day be independent, aided, as we are, not only by the light of those facts which they then possessed, but by the light of those results which they could not then foresee. And certainly the failure of Charles Wesley's gloomy

clivities, and not upon the soundness of his logic. I refer the reader to his "Life and Times of Wesley," pages 433 to 449 inclusive, and ask him to notice how unconsciously Mr. Tyerman seems to alternate between two contradictory positions. If he regards Wesley's *setting apart* of Coke—and Mather also—as an *intentional ordination* for the *Episcopal* office, why, then, does he charge Coke with ambitiously transcending the authority he had received, in representing himself as a bishop, and exercising Episcopal powers? But if he does *not* regard this act of Wesley as *such* an intentional ordination, why, then, does he call it ordination at all, and treat it as such? Does he suppose that Mr. Wesley "ordained" to an order never before heard of? And why does he not show that Charles Wesley was *wrong* in censuring his brother for having "consecrated a bishop?" Why, instead, does he fully approve this censure, and unqualifiedly endorse Charles Wesley's opinion that Coke's episcopal ordination constituted a virtual "separation" from the Church, which Mr. Tyerman regards Wesley as unwilling to acknowledge? Why all this, if he believes that Wesley did not intend to consecrate Coke as a bishop? We can "reconcile Mr. Wesley's practice and profession in this matter"—which Mr. Tyerman says is "simply impossible"—much more easily than we can reconcile Mr. Tyerman with himself. The careless ease with which he pretends to weigh facts, shows that he is not qualified to weigh such *men* as Wesley or Coke.

prophecy, that the Methodists in America would "lose all their influence and importance, and come to nothing,"* does not reflect credit upon the judgment which would now be controlled by *his* opinion. Again, our confidence is rather increased than diminished by this difference. It is not surprising that of such men—all equally restrained by the spirit of reverential conservatism, and yet, at the call of God, pressing on over the barriers of their own prejudices—*some* should hesitate, and fall back when the last and boldest blow was to be struck. And we may be sure that, when of such men some shrink and falter, those who go forward are in fuller view of the Divine Commander. It is the verdict of history, not that John loved the Church less than did Charles, but that his was the quicker eye to see the finger of God, and the bolder, firmer step to enter the way to which it pointed.

But I weary your patience. We rest in a history which is full of Christ, full of his truth, his life, and his guidance. To him be the glory. And to us may it be given, that we be not wholly unworthy the position which he has given us among the grand divisions of his army.

* Tyerman's "Wesley," p. 440.

THIRD LECTURE.

DUTIES TAUGHT BY THE HISTORY OF THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH.

IN vain do we study the spirit and example of our fathers, and the work which God did in their days, if we are not led thereby to a better understanding of our own obligations, and to a higher qualification for the duties of the present. God save us from the folly that falls back on the merit of other days and makes none for our own !

We rest in the principles set forth and the history adduced in the two antecedent discourses, for the vindication of all *essential* ecclesiastical prerogatives, and the enforcement of all essential ecclesiastical duties ; and yet, even in the labors of the present hour, there is such a thing as denominational consistency, or harmony with the indications of a denominational history and mission. While we recognize on every hand the common and pressing demand for Christian ac-

tivity, we yet feel that it is both our right and our duty to carry forward *our* Christian activities in a Methodistic way; and we frequently hear it said of this or that form of teaching, that it is or is not Methodism, and of this or that course of action, that it is, or is not, Methodistic—by which we understand an implied approval or censure of what should be judged by Methodistic standards. But the question, *What is Methodistic?* is often answered vaguely, and without much regard for historic indications. It may not, therefore, be wholly profitless for us, in the present discourse, to glance at some of those denominational duties which are illustrated by those prominent historic facts by which we defend our prerogatives as a Church.

1. Of these duties we notice, first, though not as most important, nor yet least so, *denominational self-respect*. I seek not to encourage denominational pride, and yet as between the two kinds of pride—that which involves an appreciation of whatever is honorable in history and high in principle, and that low form of pride which props up personal respectability by petty social distinctions and “popular” associations—I infinitely prefer the former, for that is inherent royalty in a man, while the latter is the spirit of servile toadyism, whose

highest employment is to unloose the latchet of the shoes of fancied greatness. No form of *pride*, however, is desirable ; but that self-respect, which involves a high and unmovable satisfaction with what God has honored, is an *absolute duty*, because an available element of real power. The man who hangs his head and stands cringing in the presence of arrogance and self-assumption, is unmanned through his own weakness, credulity, and the perversion of his reverence ; but that degree of self-respect which stops just short of self-exaltation, is the true secret of self-possession and individual freedom. So the absence of *denominational* self-respect engenders weakness, and causes hesitation ; whereas its possession secures steadiness of purpose and freedom in action, while it honors God and is honored by man.

In connection with this duty, however, we are also taught that of *Christian fraternization*. The principles by which we test our right to be recognized as a true Church, involve no exclusiveness excepting that which is essential to the kingdom and kingship of Christ ; they do not draw around us a line of externalism and empower us to say, "Within is the kingdom of heaven, and beyond are the uncovenanted mercies of God." The history of our Church illus-

trates the utter worthlessness of such a line ; it sprung up regardless of that line as marked by others ; flourished in spite of it ; over-rode and trampled into the dust the prejudices which would sustain it. Founded in the right and duty of God's people to change and shape their polity in harmony with the providentially indicated demands of the times, it vindicates the rights of Presbyterianism, and Congregationalism, equally with those of Episcopalianism. At its origin it brought together, in the company of its founders, men of various beliefs, and, in some instances, antagonistic doctrines ; so that Calvinists and Arminians, indeed, every member of the body of the living, spotted evangelism of to-day, claims to share the glories and the fruits of those pentecostal times. The history of the Church, since the days of the apostles, has furnished no other great movement which so fully recognizes and illustrates the law of Christian unity, as that now historic movement of which Methodism was the organic form.

It is no time now for *us* to let this lesson pass unheeded. Our eyes may seem to be inflamed by the mote of sectarianism to those who have not cast the beam out of their own ; but let us patiently wait for them to perform for them-

selves the work of extraction, rather than displace our mote by a beam ; we can much better afford to endure patiently a false charge, than to be moved by its very injustice to a spirit and practice which will make it true. We stand too near the hour when great battles are to be fought, and victories won, in the strength of unity, to turn our back on this great lesson of our history. *Figures* are not what we need most to study ; they do not help us to compute character. Vast numbers will not constitute or preserve our proportion of power ; fewer will not destroy it ; be our number great or small, it is *true Methodism* which evangelical Christianity asks us to contribute to the combination of all the elements of her power against the kingdom of darkness. But in order that we may be faithful in this matter, other lessons still must be heeded.

3. We are to heed the indication which our history gives of those duties which pertain to our *peculiar* and *distinctive* mission. And what have we that we may claim as distinctive or peculiar ? When John and Charles Wesley “studied the Bible” together, and “found inward and outward *holiness* therein,” did they not get a glimpse of that light which God designed should shine upon *all* minds, and fill the

whole world with its glory? And when they followed after it and incited others to do so, did they not indicate the manner in which that light was to break through the clouds of unbelief and sin, and become universally diffused? And when they felt that "God thrust them out to raise up a holy people," did they do more than recognize, as applicable to them, God's call to the *whole body* of the ministry? Is the mission of his *general* Church other and wider than this, so that it may be the peculiar mission of any one branch of the same? True, if all branches of the Church were perfect, and the wants of society every-where the same, presenting a common and unvarying demand for influences and agencies, all distinctive missions would cease or be lost in the common mission of all; but as long as imperfection exists, and *special* evils and errors characterize portions of the general Church, or so long as society can be classified according to prominent peculiarities of mind, education, or habit, so long may we look for the Divine thrusting out of one portion of God's people to do one kind of work, and another portion, another kind. The needs which the Wesleys recognized in their day called for two things: First, the preaching of *outward holiness* as an essential

element of a true Christian life—a *possible* and *necessary* fruit of an abiding faith in Christ. The standard of morals among professing Christians was then low; they were thinking, and practically saying, that outward holiness—holiness of life—was not demanded by a Christian profession. The faith of those who were willing to learn a better way was weak, through a wrong education, and they were saying, “This following the flesh, this enslavement to passion, is a necessary and unavoidable evil from which it does not appear to be the will of God to deliver us.” Others accepted the Antinomian doctrine, that Christ’s righteousness being imputed to us, not only covered all sin, but gave freedom to it. The Wesleys saw that the Bible taught differently; that it not only enjoined a holy life as a duty, but encouraged it as a privilege, and they felt that God required them to *say* so; they *heard* God’s command to rebuke these sins, to correct these errors, to present the Gospel privilege and encourage a better life. To do these things became, under the demand and the leadings of Providence, their *peculiar* duty.

Secondly. The wants which they recognized called for the preaching of “inward holiness,” a type of Christian life in marked contrast with

the spirit and teachings of the times. That the heart could be so changed that a life of outward holiness should be an easy, spontaneous life, flowing freely from the heart's affections, and in harmony with its impulses, was an idea far above the ordinary conceptions of Christian experience; yet the Wesleys saw it in the Bible, believed it, felt it; the truth burned itself into their very souls. They saw it as the highest requirement of God's commands, and the crowning glory of the Spirit's work. Hence, with this peculiar light, it was their special duty to show that, in contrast to the ordinary teaching of the Church, it was the requirement and hope of that faith which God had commanded his Church to believe and enjoin. As I once heard the great English scholar, Goldwin Smith, say to his class in history, "The special mission of the Wesleyan revival was to bring to the people a *religion of the soul*." The Church had failed to do this; it had left the masses with a religion of words and forms. The Wesleys were particularly called to show that religion was not merely outward, but inward; that a soul-life and soul-power, producing outward obedience, was the privilege of the Christian.

Now this peculiarity of the mission of the Wesleys, which was based on the demand of

their times, must remain to their followers as long as a similar demand exists. And has it ceased? Have all nominally Christian teachers and the whole Church risen so high that the Wesleyan idea of religion is no longer in any sense distinctive, and that Christianity, as the "religion of the soul," needs no *special* defenders? Would the most earnest advocates of holy living, of whatever name, consent that the Methodists should cease their peculiar devotion to this idea of Christian life, and no longer feel bound to it by the obligations of their history, as a special feature of their mission? No! we must still acknowledge our duty, to keep the eyes of men directed to the fact that Christianity promises a holy life flowing from a holy heart.

This one distinctive feature of our work I have treated simply as indicated by Providence, without stopping to inquire whether we are worthy to receive or prepared to perform it. One truth should be borne in mind—our unfaithfulness does not destroy our obligations.

4. We have occasion, therefore, to heed another lesson—that in which God teaches us the necessary qualification for our mission. The "religion of the soul" must be with us something more than an idea, or even a script-

ural truth, to be defended. The mere idea never qualified the Wesleys for their work. It led them to rebuke sin and expose the errors which defended it, to enjoin inward purity and preach the truth which taught it ; but for the space of ten years, during which they “delighted in the law after the inward man ’” and yet felt that they were “carnal and sold under sin,” and during which they failed, through the want of simple trust in Jesus, to make their ideal religion a real element of their heart-life, they were comparatively powerless. So, if for any cause, or at any time, we, as a Church, fail to realize the Wesleyan experience, the Wesleyan idea will not preserve our power, or qualify us to “spread scriptural holiness over the land.” The Christ whom we preach must dwell in our hearts. The light which we shed forth must be from the flame in the soul. If holiness be preached in power, it must be “in the demonstration of the Spirit” of holiness abiding within us.

I wish here to add the remark, that this type of Christian experience, which we have regarded as a requisite qualification for the higher duties of our mission, is not an exceptional, special form of holiness, superadded to conversion ; for whatever may be the experience of individuals,

as resulting from a developing faith and increasing light, which may, we admit, lead men from lower to higher grounds, and however marked may be those transitional periods and processes by which they rise to the higher forms of life, the primitive and special mission of Methodism was, as we have seen, to teach that *religion is holiness of life and heart*. It cannot be questioned that many of those transitions which pass under the name of "second blessing," bring men up from grounds below the Wesleyan type of conversion. And there can be no doubt that, if we are as faithful as were our fathers to the needs of the general Church, we shall seek to elevate the standard of *Christian life* by teaching, not a holiness which Christian obedience allows us to postpone, but that which is inseparable from Christian obligation and privilege; and if we would be as well *qualified* as were they for this work, we shall seek, ourselves, to be holy, not in the end, but now; not in the "second stage" of Christian experience, but in the first and every.

5. The example of our fathers teaches, furthermore, that this holiness is to be spread through the land by *preaching Christ* as the revealer of the soul's want and the object of the soul's trust. John Wesley learned, by a painful expe-

rience, that the outward part of purity could not be reached by carefulness alone, nor the inward part by works however good. He tried these methods, and still described his condition as "sold under sin"—enslaved by its power. And it was not until his broken spirit leaned wholly on the crucified Christ, that he felt the up-gushing and out-flowing of his new love-life.

The preaching of a *subject* was sometimes attempted, but with great caution ; it was generally diverting ; controversy about terms and definitions only engendered unnecessary strife. But when Christ was preached for the end of holiness—held up for the fullest disclosure of the soul's disease and the sufficient remedy for its cure—men fell with broken hearts, and rose with hearts renewed. The sunshine of hope chased the shadows of despair, as Christ the example, and then Christ the Saviour, came to their souls through the ministry of the Wesleys. Let *us* fear lest in becoming the champions of an *idea* we cease to be the true witnesses of *Christ*. Let us remember that men learn holiness from Christ ; that they are most effectually rebuked when Christ is made to reprove them, most thoroughly humbled by being brought into the presence of his purity, and fully saved only by the revelation of his mercy. Let us, then,

preach Christ, "the truth," "*warning*. every man, *teaching* every man," that we may present every man perfect in him.

6. None of these duties, which we have noticed as connected with the distinctive feature of our mission, should divert us from others which are common to the recognized missions of all Christian Churches, but are urged upon us especially by the teachings of our denominational history.

Here we may notice that the *foundations of Methodism were laid in the most zealous, self-sacrificing missionary spirit*. John Wesley was a princely giver, while he made the *world his parish*; living as a poor man, and parting with a large income, in love for God and in pity for the world. Nor was he alone in this: Fletcher, Coke, and Asbury, yea, all those names which shine in the roll of honored leaders, share the double glory of this example. How far the example of these men should be followed by us is not for me to say; but it should not fail to teach us that our benevolence should be *founded* in the spirit of *entire consecration*, nor to rebuke the worldliness of the hour, which expends more for *hurtful* indulgences and *superfluous* ornaments than for the promotion of education and religion—the sustaining of schools,

churches, missions, and all forms of ordinary benevolence. Could John Wesley rise from his grave, would he not weep over the degeneracy of the times when he should find Christ a beggar amid the luxuries of Methodists who hope for life through his blood? Our history should move us to self-sacrifice, and make us at least *among* the foremost of those whose benevolence embraces *a world* in its plans, and the uplifting of *humanity* in its aims.

So, too, should we perform our part among the friends of social virtue. Intemperance, even in its mildest forms of tippling; those kinds of amusement which are hurtful because in their tendency they are immoral; the theater, which does not and will not free itself from its vile associations; social dancing, which many careful observers know to be the gilded archway through which some, at least, go down to the pit of licentiousness and adultery: to all these Methodism is historically opposed.

Every form of infidelity expects its opposition, because it has had many a battle with hydra-headed error.

Romanism, adroitly seeking to destroy our free institutions, should especially feel the power of Methodism, not only because it is the very opposite form of thought and life, but because

it is *American*. John Wesley standing upon the shores of England at an hour when the embers of that fire which had burned through years of war were yet smoldering in the hearts of his countrymen, listening intently to the voice of God, treading his tattered prejudices once more beneath his feet, and, even in the hour of the nation's infancy, reaching out his hand over the sea to give to his American followers the nucleus of a church government formed in a most sacred regard for an American demand and feeling, was a prophetic symbol of that high respect and decent charity which American Methodism, in common with the whole American Church, would ever demand from the pretentious hierarchal systems of the Old World. Methodism, historically true to that type—earnest in support of American institutions—should, for consistency, be a most zealous and persistent foe to Rome putting forth her blasphemous efforts to slay American freedom in the name of religion and God!

Education claims our support; and here, again, our history enforces the claim. Methodism was born in a University; the child of education and religion. The responsibility of her early training was laid, not upon the illiterate, but upon the learned. Frequent references are

made to the attempts of Asbury to found Cokesbury College early in the history of our Church. The sacrifices which were made for this end by the people, are a sufficient indication of the spirit which then prevailed ; but its singular and repeated destruction by fire, rendering its re-erection quite impossible, led Asbury to think that the time "had not yet come" when God would have the Methodists engage in the work of education : not that the time would never come. We can now, perhaps, better interpret God's design. We may see indications that he meant to hold the Methodists to the great lesson that *spiritual Christianity* should be the chief element of their power, and its spread the distinguishing feature of their work, until that lesson should be thoroughly learned.- The needs of the whole American Church required this. The tendency in this country had been to exalt theoretical and intellectual religion at the expense of the spiritual. It had affected the Puritanism of New England, and brought high, heavy, juiceless intellectualism into the pulpit. It was crowding upon the sphere of heart-culture. But Methodism came to bring her "religion of the soul ;" she came with her songs and her shouts, and her grand inspiring consciousness of a Divine indwelling ;

and God ordered that she should not be diverted from this until it had become the *permanent* element of her power, and the permanent characteristic of her teaching; but now that the lesson has been learned, and holiness is spreading over the land, God lets the walls of our colleges and universities stand, and thus commands us to do our part to bring out the mental forces of the age, and baptize them in the fire of pure heart-life which Methodistic zeal has kindled. The importance of the work I need not here discuss. I would simply enforce the thought that the broad plans and vast outlays of our present educational movements, appealing to all our people, and earnestly pressing their claims upon men of wealth, are in harmony with the providences of our history. True Methodists should sustain them. They are *God's call* especially to the wealthy sons of the Church.

7. One other lesson, admonitory in its character, and I have done. The liberty of change—the right of adaptation—to which our Church has always held, in the formation of its government, has caused the honors of “invention” and “improvement” to be above par. Some would point to the old as worthless, and others recommend some new thing as of great value;

and "fifth wheels" are frequently discovered by those who are inventing the sixth. "The demand of the age" is the rallying *war-cry*, and the hosts who respond are impatient for the victory. If any man among us has caught the contagious spirit, he will do well to recall the caution, the enlightened conservatism of our fathers, and thus learn into what hands God places the reins of revolution. Their example makes hasty separation from the Church, and a division of its numbers, nothing less than a crime. It also shames the criticisms of ignorance: it requires that any man who would step forth with his criticisms of our Church polity should have upon his shelves the well-worn volumes of our Church-histories, upon his brow the signs of thought and reverence, and in his breast a heart that does not flutter with passion, but is steady in the power of faith. It condemns changes of polity which are not dictated by necessity or demand, and those which do not respect the essential elements in the constitution of the Church.

The force of this same example lies equally against the undue exaltation of those peculiarities of custom which have been accidental. If we fix our attention upon *non-essential*, though prominent, developments here and there, and

say that in this or that is the power of Methodism, we shall derive weakness from our mistake. If, for instance, we regard excessive plainness in dress, or disorder and boisterousness in worship, or any accidental development which may have been very prominent in the periods of the Church's most marked success, as *essential* to present success, our failures will be the proof of our folly. It is admitted that there are many non-essential features of Methodistic custom which we do well to retain and perpetuate, and yet *reliance* on these may divert us from the real sources of power. Besides, there is one tendency which we should shun—that of mere imitators to copy defects, and those the most marked. If this caution be always exercised we shall be saved from the perpetuation of mere eccentricities. It is worth our while to remember that the foundations of the broadest charity and strongest union are laid in a *few* elements, and those all joined in Christ himself.

And if we would—as indeed we ought—take pattern from “old-fashioned Methodism,” let us remember that its distinguishing characteristic was *conformity to the requirements of the hour*. Whatever we lose in adapting our polity and usages to the clearly marked demands of the present, is not necessary to the preservation

essential in the Methodism of our fathers. We of any element shall be unworthy to be called their sons if, standing with our faces always to the past, we fail to see the work that lies before us in the broad field of the world, or the means and methods by which, under God's direction, that work is to be wrought.

God forbid that we should refuse to abide by what Christ has ordained to permanence, or that our feet should be so chained to the dead customs of the past that we cannot follow the lead of his present providence! Our conservatism should be in such measure as to save us from haste and destructiveness, but not in such extreme as to hide the presence of him who has said, "I am with you always." Our fathers, under God, gave us the lessons of the "times of old;" let us transmit them uncontradicted to the generations which shall follow us.

THE END.

