

anyone proposed to abolish the class-meetings; the question was only as to whether attendance upon them should be a compulsory condition of membership. He held that it should not. The question had already been opened up in England and the United States, and he thought the discussion had shown that the strength of Christianity was against compulsory attendance. He knew of many most excellent Christians who could not, by any means be induced to enter class-meetings. Many distinguished Christians would come to them from the Church of England, and particularly from the Presbyterian Church, where it is not for the class-meeting difficulty. Who should most estimable people, who were manifestly members of Christ's Kingdom, be excluded from our membership because of this objection. He would therefore, expunge the regulation on the 21st page of the Discipline, requiring attendance upon these meetings.

Rev. Joseph Hart was not in favor of continuing the class-meeting as a condition of membership. It was assumed that those who took this position were opposed to class-meetings. He disclaimed any such feelings, for he could more highly prize the class-meetings as a means of grace. It was deligent to commune with each other in the class-meetings, and in its own inherent utility as a means of grace was the principle ground upon which he supported the class-meetings. Did the Divine head of the Church make attendance upon them a condition of membership of the church? No one could doubt, and no one had maintained such a position. We should take away as far as possible, all human obstacles to the entry of souls into the folds of the church. We should consider each one's idiosyncrasies and temperament in relation to this question. The first and only condition we should require was a simple and sincere turning to Christ and an abandonment of sin. He dare not take the responsibility of excluding from membership any soul who desired to come in. It was said that the communion of saints was only to be found in these meetings, but was not that communion also to be found at prayer-meetings and at the Lord's table? No one had proposed to abolish the class-meetings.

Rev. Mr. Dewart said this question was stirring the hearts of all Methodists in all parts of the world and there was a remarkable drift in the direction of abolishing compulsory attendance. Twenty-four years ago an old minister had told him that the time would come when the Methodist Church would think differently on this subject than it did then. Mr. Wesley never laid it down that attendance at class-meetings was a condition of membership. He thought some speakers had unduly exalted these meetings as a means of grace above all others. He thought on the whole the feeling was hardly ripe for a settlement of this question by the present Conference. There were only two alternatives before them: either the abolition of the test, or the formation of a second class of membership. The tendency of the times was evidently towards an abandonment of the test. At the same time he feared the adoption of Mr. Bland's amendment would prove a shock to most people, and lead them to look with distrust upon the other acts of the Conference. His final opinion was this, we should for the present endeavor to stir up the people to a more regular attendance upon the class-meetings.

Rev. Ryckman was in favor of retaining the class-meeting as a test of membership. He had been astonished at the prevalence in this Conference of an idea in favor of relaxing our tests, and he was persuaded that on this question the Conference did represent the sentiments of the Methodist people throughout the Church. We had been asked to regard the idiosyncrasies and prejudices of individuals. But these persons were the exceptions, and changing our discipline and practice of a century for the benefit of these people would be to open the door to persons whom we did not want in the Church. It had been said that some of our young people strayed away from us and went into other churches, particularly the young people of our wealthier members. But from what quarter did these statements come? Almost all from Montreal and Toronto and the large towns and cities, from the very places where the church was most in danger from contact with the world. The sons, it was said, became infidels, and the daughters became Ritzyists, and we were told that in order to help these persons we must open our doors wider. But would not these persons do us more harm than good? Our religion would become broader, but it would also become shallower. It had been said that we lost a great many members by our class-meetings. Doubtless we lost many, but did we not gain a great many too? He believed we gained far more than we lost by means of these meetings. It had been said there was no Divine warrant for class-meetings, but was there not as much warrant for them as for Sunday schools, for prayer-meetings and for the temperance test. It was impossible to apply the temperance test in cities and to exclude every one who tips, yet who would say that we should abolish the test? The result of adopting Mr. Bland's amendment would be that it would go ahead over the country that the young convert need not attend the class-meeting unless he liked.

Rev. Mr. Graham was not brought up in the Methodist Church, but when he entered a class-meeting he became converted. His experience was that the class-meeting was remarkably well adapted to the attainment of what the Bible required. When Wesley established the Methodist Episcopal Church in the U. States he put class-meetings as a test of membership; no one could deny that. The real difficulty seemed to him to be that if this rule were in all cases rigidly applied, it would exclude some persons who were Christians. But that was not a sufficient reason to abolish a rule which had proved its excellence. The question was, Is the rule wrong or the man wrong? He was in favour of retaining the rule as affecting those something solid to stand upon in the midst of a general shaking. The question had not been properly brought before the Methodist people, and this Conference should pause before such a radical change in all our practice and traditions. It was no reason for the repeal of any law, whether in a Church or State, that the people disobeyed it, and he should vote for the report of the committee and retain the law.

Rev. Dr. Sanderson regretted that the discussion had come up. He was delighted to see that every one who had spoken on this subject on either side had expressed their love for the class-meeting, but he regretted that so many had asked the Conference to take a step which would only have an ultimate result to destroy the class-meeting altogether. He could have some confidence in the man who said, "Woodman spare that tree," and who argued eloquently for the retention of the class-meeting test, but he could have no confidence in the man who said "Woodman spare that tree," and who at the same time lifted his axe to cut it down. (No, no and Yes yes.) Where would be the Methodist Church today were it not for the class-meetings? Where would be our converts young and old but for this means of grace? It had been said that the class-meeting test excluded some excellent men. There might be some such men who, not possessing the life of God in the heart, were anxious to become members of the church to fill official positions. But were we to break down our walls for these? He did not think these men would be of much use in the prayer-meetings. They might go to church on an evening, but they would go to dance the next evening. We had been told that camp-meetings had been adapted to the times; but what kind of camp-meetings were they? There was plenty of boating and plenty of fishing at such camp meetings, but precious few conversions. That was an unfortunate illustration of the brother who had spoken in favor of adapting the class-meetings to the times.

Rev. Dr. Rice was thankful to God for E. B. Ryckman, who had spoken such noble words for the truth. We were asked to legislate for people who are not members of the Church, and not for members who are already in the Church, regarding the Church before he became converted, and he only found the light after he began to attend the class-meetings. The result of Mr. Bland's resolution, while abolishing the class-meeting test, would institute several other tests, the violation of any one of which would turn a man out of Church, and the man who neglected family prayer would be turned out of the church; if he neglected the Lord's table he would be turned out of the Church. He maintained that John Wesley had established the

class-meeting test, and that it had been so accepted by the Methodist world. We might get into the Church thousands more than we do, but we do not get them to heaven what is gained by it? The object of the Church is not to increase its membership but to increase the number of Christians. John Wesley was the greatest Christian the world has seen since the first ages of Christianity, and we should not esteem lightly what he had established. Rev. Dr. Potts valued class-meetings very highly. Like other ministers, where these difficulties arose, he ignored the test. In reference to Mr. Ryckman's remark he denied that less spirituality existed in the country than in the city. The reverse he had found to be the case. It was the pulpit of Methodism which attracted ninety-nine out of every hundred of the members into the church and not the class-meetings. He was opposed to requiring every convert to speak in these meetings. In three-fourths of the class-meetings of the country, converts and say, "Come, you must get up and say something." A Christian gentleman had told him that while in the class-meeting he had felt so nervous as he felt his own turn to speak, and as he knew every one expected him to speak, and his feelings became so painful that he discontinued his attendance at the meetings. He desired to see these meetings assume a more spiritual and voluntary character.

It being now half-past five o'clock the Conference adjourned.

(Conclusion on fourth page.)

INTERNATIONAL BIBLE LESSONS.

THIRD QUARTER: STUDIES IN LUKE'S GOSPEL.

A. D. 29. LESSON II. THE GOSPEL FEAST, or, The call Refused. Luke 14, 15-24. Oct. 13.

EXPLANATORY.

Verse 15. Them that sat at meat. From the preceding verses, and the drift of this parable, it may be inferred that the company at the feast was largely composed of rich Jews belonging to the Pharisaic party. Sat at meat. "Reclined," would more nearly express the position of the guests. The tables in ancient feasts were arranged around three sides of a square, the remaining side being left open for the access of the servants with the viands. Outside of the table couches were placed endwise toward them, on which the guests reclined, each leaning on his left side, and taking the food from the table with his right hand. With him. 1. "How honored the guests who sat at supper with the Son of man on earth! How much more highly honored those who shall sit down with him forever in heaven!" Blessed is he. The speaker supposed that the kingdom of God would commence with a great feast, to which none but the chosen people would be invited. He was unconscious that the Bread of Life was before him, and the kingdom already begun.

16. Unto him. Christ would teach the guest that those who possessed that privilege which he had just called "blessed" did not appreciate it, and would consequently lose it. A certain man. There is a similarity between this parable and that of Matt. 22. "The marriage of the king's son," but they are unlike in important particulars, and belong to different periods of Christ's ministry. A great supper. The feast represents the blessings of the gospel dispensation. 2. "God's grace is a supper of the richest fare, the fullest enjoyment and the noblest companionship." Bode many. This refers to the invitation extended to the Jewish people. To whom the gospel was first preached; but, as in most of the parables, there is a secondary meaning, which applies to all who hear this call of Christ.

17. Sent his servant. Every bearer of the gospel invitation to his fellow-men, whether preacher, lay worker, or Sunday School teacher, is represented by the servant. 3. "What honor God places upon men in making them his heralds of the glad tidings!" At supper-time. It is customary among Orientals to send an invitation to the feast in advance, and then at the hour when the supper is ready dispatch a servant with a fresh summons to the invited guests. To them that were bidden. As the second message is sent only to those who had previously accepted the invitation, they would have no right to plead other engagements as an excuse for absence. Come. The call to the gospel feast is, 1. Authoritative, since it comes from God. 2. Joyful, since it promises only pleasure. 3. Urgent, since it demands immediate action. 4. None can taste the pleasures of the feast unless they come. "All things are now ready." The Gospel comes at the fullness of time, when the world has been placed in complete preparation for it.

18. They all. A picture of the treatment which the Gospel in the presence of Christ received from those who had been "the chosen people." Individuals accepted the invitation, but as a race they rejected their own long-promised Messiah. One consent. Under all the varied forms of excuse we discern one mind and one heart. To make excuse. Invited to a feast, where there is every promise of pleasure, a cordial acceptance is to be expected. 5. "The wonder is that any one invited should seek to be excused from tasting the delights of the heavenly repast." An excuse shows an unwilling heart. A true friend will give a sufficient reason for his action, but no one with love in his heart will frame an excuse. And no excuse can be framed which will suffice to explain the neglect of salvation. The first. The excuses are alike in their source, an unwilling heart; but there are shades of difference between them. The first represents those in whose hearts dwells the pride of life; the second, those whose time is occupied with the toil of life; the third, those whose worldly associations and affections keep them back from Christ. 8. "How many and how varied are the influences which tend to hinder our soul's salvation." Bought a piece of ground. A frivolous excuse, since his purchased property could wait until the morrow, while the feast could not be delayed. 7. "We should attend first to that duty which can least afford to wait." I must needs go. Note

a descending scale in the manner of the excuse. The first pleads his necessity; the second states his purpose; the third declines to come.

19, 20. I have bought. If the first is too full of pride in his possession to heed Christ's call, the second is too full of life's business. 8. "The one already rich has no desire for salvation, and the one seeking to be rich has no time for it." I go to prove them. It was right to prove his oxen, but wrong to let his oxen carry away his privilege of salvation. 9. "Things lawful in themselves, when the heart is too much set upon them, prove fatal hindrances in religion."—M. Henry. Married a wife. The hindrance of sensual pleasure and worldly association. 10. "How often earthly affections stand in the way of heavenly enjoyments." Cannot come. It is not customary for women in the Orient to accompany their husbands to public places or parties. But though a newly married wife was a sufficient excuse from war, (Deut. 24, 5) it could scarcely be offered as a reason absence from supper.

21, 22. showed his lord. The servant bears the message of his master to men, and the answer of men back to his master. 11. "So God's ambassadors may go to God with their gratitude over souls won, and their sorrow over hearts hardened." Being angry. Can God be angry? Yes, but with a just and righteous, not a passionate indignation. His justice was against sin, while he feels love toward his sinner. Go out quickly. The feast must be enjoyed at once, if at all; now is the accepted time, not to-morrow. 11. "He that works for God must be in haste." Streets and lanes. To the Jews this meant that as their leaders had rejected Jesus, he had turned to the masses, the publicans and the sinners. The apostles, most of the disciples then, and nearly all the Christian Church in Judea afterward, came from the middle and lower classes of society. So ever since, not many wise, not many mighty, have been in the ranks of the earnest followers, but many of the lowly and the poor. The meined, and the halt, and the blind. Those who have defects in character can have them supplied by him who summons them to his feast. It is done. These servants make no complaint of the strange command, but instantly and ungrudgingly obey it. 13. "Happy are those workers for Christ who are conscious of having faithfully obeyed their master!" Yet there is room. God's provision of grace is vast as the needs of men. While there is one soul hungry, there is room remaining.

23, 24. Highways and hedges. In the East there are multitudes of homeless beggars, who shelter themselves from the sun by day and from the dews by night under trees and bushes outside the cities. These represent, in the parable, the Gentile nations who were called after the Jews, yet far more readily accepted the word of life. While the twelve apostles in Jerusalem accomplished but little, Paul won thousands among the Gentile nations of Asia and Greece. Compel. A servant could not exercise other than moral compulsion. He could urge, persuade, exhort, but he could not force. 14. "The ultimate decision of every soul rests with itself." Christ was no persuasion offered to those who had already excused themselves, because they showed no interest; but these who might plead excuses of unfitness, and want of preparation for the royal feast, are urged and besought to come. "That my house may be full." 14. "there are no vacant thrones in heaven, and there will be no empty seats at the Lamb's banquet." None of these. In the end, God deals with man as they in their hearts deal with him. Every soul has the solemn responsibility of choice, and even the Mos. High abides by its decision.

GOLDEN TEXT: Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God. Luke 14, 15.

DOCTRINAL SUGGESTION: The free agency of man. The next lesson is Luke 15, 11-24.

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