

Pastoral Address

To the Methodist People of Newfoundland.

Dearly Beloved:—

Through the abundant goodness of God we have been brought through the labours of another year, and are again assembled in our Annual Conference for spiritual fellowship and deliberation on matters pertaining to the Church and the Kingdom of God.

According to our custom, we send you in all sincerity and brotherly affection our greetings, and words of counsel and cheer. One of our aged ministers, Rev. Samuel Snowden, has died during the year. He was a soul-winner of no mean order, and he now rests from his labours and his works do follow him. We are deeply sensible of the fact that death has come, also, to the homes of some of those whom we address, and we assure you of our sympathy in your bereavement, and would comfort you with that comfort which we ourselves are comforted of God.

Some of your sons have made the supreme sacrifice upon battlefields of battlefields, and have, by so doing, earned the affection and gratitude of all who value home, country and British institutions. We rejoice, at the unstinted sacrifice you have made in giving up your best, and in a world so full of atoning forces, of which Jesus is the supreme expression, it should afford you magnificent consolation, that in your suffering you are filling up on your part "that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ."

"Wherever through the ages rise The altars of self-sacrifice; Where love its arms has opened wide, Or man for man has calmly died; I see the same white wings outspread That hovered o'er the Master's head."

At this point let us, as a Church, define our position with regard to this war. The Methodist Church hates war and stands for peace, but peace with honour and righteousness. We believe that the ideal thing is love and non-resistance. But as we are not yet living in an ideal world, it is imperative to ask whether in an unideal state of society, it is not proper, when circumstances demand it, to use what may be called "consecrated force." No Church or State has ever admitted that it is wrong to use such force, when necessary, even to the shedding of blood. This includes the right to make war. Our law courts, prisons and asylums witness to the fact that force is recognized as necessary for the protection of the individual and the State. And if the State recognize the necessity and reserve the right to punish a wrongdoer within her borders, she has a right to resist injustice and aggression from without, or even to interfere on behalf of the oppressed beyond the area of her own sovereign jurisdiction. This is and always has been the belief of the Church and the State.

In the days of the early Church, before the State became nominally Christian, there were many Christian soldiers in the Imperial army. Patriotism was acknowledged a Christian duty, even to the point of defending by force of arms, the organized society to which one belonged. And being a soldier did not disqualify a

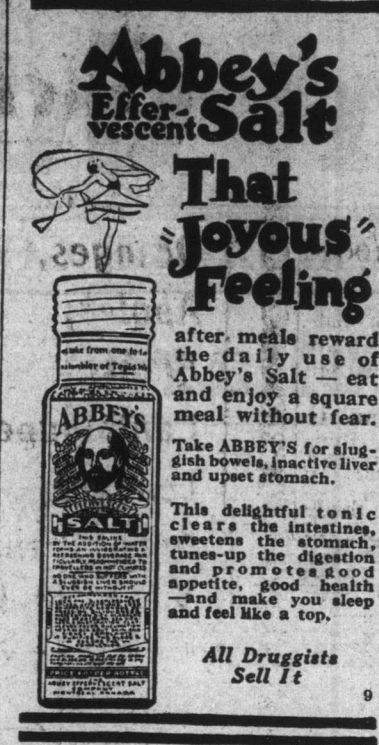
man from being a Christian; there was no necessary inconsistency between the two.

The liberties—civil and religious—which have come to us as a British people are ours, because men like Cromwell and his Ironsides drew the sword, not only for themselves but for posterity. During the last three years we have had overwhelming evidence that these same liberties are in danger. If ever there was a righteous cause calling for the unsheathing of the sword, it is that in which Britain is now engaged. The Crusaders in the Middle Ages left their homes and travelled to Palestine to rescue the sepulchre of our Lord from the infidel dominion of the Saracens. With that sacred mission in view they counted themselves the soldiers of the Lord, and emblazoned the Cross on their shoulders. This is a holier war than that of the Crusades. The cause at stake is not an empty grave, but the destiny of humanity, the sacred rights of men and women, the holy heritage of liberty, which our fathers won for us by much toil and suffering. Therefore the Methodist Church, while it hates war, stands for the defence of the civil and religious heritage of Britain, even to the shedding of blood.

A review of the work of the past year leads us to believe that our labour together in the Lord has not been in vain. In many places the life of the Church has been quickened; and, notwithstanding the big demands made upon you, the work has been well supported financially, in some instances to the point of extreme self-denial. This, together with the heroic effort of some of our missions to become self-supporting, is quite in keeping with the best traditions of Methodism.

And now, beloved, as we enter upon the labours of another year, we would exhort you to acquire a firmer and more intelligent grasp of the things for which we stand, and the things by which we stand, so that, as a Church, we may more effectively serve the present age. We are passing through unprecedented times. Rulers are being deposed, ancient dynasties are falling, old empires are being removed, autocracy is dying, and democracy is awakening to new life. Churches are being placed on trial, and creeds tested by present day experience. A new moral and social order is displacing the old at an alarming rate. Blind, indeed, must be he who does not see that this old Colony is being greatly affected by this world revolution.

It should greatly concern us as to what contribution we, as a people, are making towards the building of the new world. What impressions are we making upon, and to what extent are we directing the life of to-day? Historians have paid glowing tributes to the services Methodism rendered England during the 18th Century. In the early part of that Century it was pathetically said, "Our light looks like the evening of the world." It seemed as if in the spiritual sky of England, the very light of Christianity itself was being turned by some strange



and evil force into darkness. The England of that day was black with every kind of wickedness, its ideals were gross, its sports were brutal, its public life was corrupt, its vice was unashamed. The clergy were indifferent, religion was ridiculed, and the Church laughed at itself. Upon those days "dark with the shadows of some dreadful swift coming spiritual eclipse," the Methodist revival dawned; the old land became illumined with a strange light, spiritual decline was arrested, religion was respected, the Church "rose again" and the nation's life was saved and consolidated. Lecky says that the religious revolution begun in England by the preaching of the Wesleyans was of greater historic importance than all the splendid victories by land and sea won under Pitt. He also holds that Wesley was one of the chief forces that saved England from a revolution such as that through which France passed.

As in the 18th so in the 20th Century, God is calling Methodism to help in the regeneration and the reconstruction of society. Are we able? Do our utterances count? Is our testimony regarded as reliable? Do we impress our earnestness? Are we capable of leadership? True, we live by quiet and devout lives. But does not Methodism stand for more? The religion of our forefathers did not exhaust itself in quiet influence, it did not thrive in corners, in dens and caves, it shouted for joy upon the housetops. It gave conspicuous and outspoken utterance to the power of God to save. Our fathers talked as if filled with new wine. Our Founder made his voice heard everywhere. He had no fear of rank and wealth. They made no difference to his utterances. He stood for God and humanity, and was not afraid to interfere in this sphere or that.

The impression made by early Methodism may be measured by the new moral and human temper it created, and the effect it had upon the rise of Christian legislation. Soon after its inception the slave trade was abolished, prison reforms effected and national education inaugurated. Wilberforce, whose ruling passion it was to free the slave, was followed by Shaftesbury, who was the means of enacting legislation, which excluded the women and boys under 13 from the coal mines, assured the better treatment of the insane, the improvement of factories, and other legislation for children. In fact men everywhere appeared who were electrified with an new enthusiasm for the well-being of humanity, and these were supported by the prayers and sympathy of a great body of people. Moral awakening thus led to Parliamentary reform.

Beloved, in this present age we must prove ourselves worthy sons of our forefathers. The type of Christianity needed for to-day is that which applies itself to all problems. The Church must associate herself with a definite view of life. It is our business to make the Christian gospel a challenge to all the reserves of the human soul, and to make men understand that faith is a very reasonable attitude for a bold man to take up. Our faith must make us big enough to stand up in this great universe. Our religion must cost us something to live; it must make us interested and eager about this absorbing business called life.

The Christianity of to-day must take a greater interest in social activities. We must see to it that the social reformation, through which the country is surely passing, is not secularized but Christianized. The Christian Churches ought to be the keener and best of social reformers. While, as a Church, not allowing ourselves to be captured by the politician, nor dragged at the heels of a party, we must 1. Recognize the wrongs that exist; 2. Show practical sympathy with all efforts to improve the condition of the people; 3. Stand by all those who, in commercial, civic and national life, are trying to fill out the

teaching of Jesus Christ; 4. Help to create a national and civic conscience and 5. Co-operate with the State in improving the conditions under which we live. There are evils to be exposed and fought. There are State positions that ought to be occupied by the best men, irrespective of party affiliation. We must see that in Church and State the democratic principle is observed: "Equal rights for all, special privileges for none."

Here is opportunity for vigilance and effective work. And this effective work must be done at once. It would be cruel to hold out to those crushed with social burdens merely the hope of being freed from all these evils in the world to come. We must lift the burdens and wipe the tears away to-day. There are those to be helped who have not had a chance to get a foot on the first rung of the ladder. Our prison system and method of dealing with juvenile offenders must be improved. The State must be urged to provide suitable law courts for such offenders, and reformatory schools in which they will be encouraged to become good citizens rather than placing them in penitentiaries among older offenders, and thus making more confirmed criminals of them. As a Church we stand against that form of capitalism which would exploit the people, and against the monopoly which would crowd the people from their homes against unwholesome conditions, and the holding up of food for higher prices.

One of our fundamental doctrines—Perfect Love—insists on carrying out all things to the test of righteousness. Hence perfect love must seek to create an order of things corresponding to its own nature, and its essential sovereign claims and binding laws. It cannot, for example, be content to meet a Christian brother or sister in the spiritual intercourse of the class-meeting without labouring to see that the fellowship of the class-meeting is reflected in the rate of wages and business relationships. Perfect love labours to create for all the brotherhood, those social advantages which are not merely material, but which have far-reaching effects upon spiritual life itself.

But, beloved, there can be no social reform, real and lasting, without the reform of the individual. "The soul of all improvement is the improvement of the soul." And the only real way to the improvement of the soul is the radical, the spiritual, rebirth of the soul.

We must therefore see the necessity for a revival of the old time passion for souls. Dr. Jowett is reported to have said to a Methodist audience, "Suppose I were a stranger from Mars, knowing nothing of you here, yet familiar with the three Methodist books, 'Wesley's Journal,' 'The Marrow of Methodism,' and the Methodist Hymn Book, what kind of people should I expect to find?" His answer was: "People having a passion for God, a passion for souls, and a passion for building the new Jerusalem." We need to feel this passion for souls as the Apostle felt it.

"Then with a rush, the intolerable craving Shivers through me like a trumpet call; Oh! to save these! to perish for their saving. Die for their life, be offered for them all."

Besides passion we need power, but by power we do not mean surcharged emotionalism, or a kind of force that is almost mechanical. The power we need is a rich outpouring of the Spirit of God, illuminating, vitalizing, God-intoxicating; that Spirit finding in us fit and willing instruments, with a fit measure of devotion and faith, to be used for the renewing of the world.

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With this purpose in view we would exhort you to give due attention to private and public means of grace. Enter heartily into the singing of the hymns, the responsive reading of the Scriptures, and the repetition of the Lord's Prayer. Let there be that reverence that becomes us in the House of the Lord, and that exalted worship which is "in spirit and in truth."

The class-meeting still affords splendid opportunity for spiritual fellowship—such fellowship which cannot be found in the public services. The class-meeting, rightly conducted, corresponds to the fellowship of the early Christians. "They continued steadfastly in the Apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers." There is something implied in that word "fellowship" which is not to be found in the preaching of the Word, or in the meeting for prayer.

But if not properly conducted the fellowship of the class-meeting may be of the flimsiest description. Meetings conducted in an antiquated, rigid dreary manner, where people repeat lifeless formula dropping into a ritualism, which lacks the charm of music, or the colour of art, only irritate, bore and depress. But where, week by week, people bring a real, live experience, and celebrate the victories of faith, they enter into the fellowship of the Holy Apostles.

And, beloved, if fellowship with one another is so helpful to spiritual ends, how much more helpful is fellowship with Christ, in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper! This is why the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is also called the Holy Communion.

"Here, O my Lord, I see Thee face to face, Here would I touch, and handle things unseen; Here grasp with firmer hand eternal grace And all my weariness upon Thee lean."

We regret that large numbers of our people permanently absent themselves from the Table of the Lord; who at the same time regard an occasional attendance at class as the basis and sign of membership. Do not allow the class-meeting to be thus perverted into a hindrance to the observance of this Holy Ordinance.

We ask, therefore, that as a minimum test and basis of membership you participate in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper at reasonable intervals. To do so is quite in accordance with the mind and will of Christ. Did He really say to His Church, "Do this in remembrance of Me?" If so, the Lord has spoken, and we beseech you in His stead to observe His commands.

We would also ask that our Sunday School teachers and leaders of Catechizing Classes carefully instruct our young people in the meaning and observance of the Lord's Supper with a view to their participation therein. The place and opportunity given to the laymen in the activities of the Church has always been a characteristic of Methodism. No church owes more to its laity. The large army of voluntary workers has an important financial aspect. It would be impossible to bear the financial burden involved in carrying on the same amount of work by paid workers. Moreover, when laymen take a keen interest in Church finance, we can always depend upon a measure of success. If our business laymen systematically and earnestly engaged themselves to the raising of finance for missions, in that manner of which they are capable, we would not believe that we should soon become a self-supporting Conference.

We regret that so large an army of our laymen are on the retired list, retired all too soon. Jesus says, "Trade till I come," yet hundreds retire at forty. Just think of a man giving up Christian work in middle life, and then singing,

"Myself, my residue of days, I consecrate to Thee."

Beloved, if Methodism is to serve the present age, every one of us must respond to the call that comes to us all. The whole Church must be mobilized into a League for Spiritual service and advance. All our resources must be commanded in the name of Christ our King. On our banners let us ascribe as one motto—"I serve."

And now, beloved, we commend you to God, who will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit the Comforter, be with you all, evermore. Amen.

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