

METHODISM AND THE NEW ERA.

NOTHING in modern history is more remarkable than the unparalleled growth of Methodism during the last hundred years. The youngest of all the great Protestant Churches, it is already the most numerous. It has grown suddenly with the British Empire, and chiefly within the limits of the English-speaking communities. Mr. Stead reminds us that the world is passing into the hands of the English-speaking peoples. Methodism at this moment commands the allegiance of a larger number of English-speaking men and women than any other section of the Christian Church. Of course, we include in this estimate the United States of America, where Methodism occupies the position that Anglicanism occupies here. The one great drawback to the influence of Methodism in the English-speaking world is the fact that it is at present split up into so many sections. But already in Canada all the Methodist Churches have united, and have consequently become the most numerous and influential body in that great Dominion. The movement in favour of Union is growing and spreading in the Australian Colonies, in the United States, and in the Mother Country. If the Methodists only acted together they could already control the destinies of the English-speaking peoples. Some day they will act together for spiritual purposes. And it must not be forgotten that they alone, of all the Protestant Churches, have an organization sufficiently compact to cope with the organized strength of Rome. Again, as to the socialistic tendencies of the age, Methodism has ever been above everything else a "Connexion" or a Brotherhood. There is a sort of Freemasonry among Methodists that distinguishes them from other religious bodies. Their ministers are organized on a socialist basis. No man receives the stipend to which he might be individually entitled. Even so distinguished an orator, for example, as the late Dr. Punshon, never received more than £250 a year, with certain additions for the maintenance and education of his children. The itinerancy and the class-meeting tend to bind Methodists together, and to produce the fraternization which is peculiar to them. Now this spirit of brotherliness is the very soil in which Socialism naturally grows, and of which socialism, in some form, is the inevitable expression. Lastly, as to the position of woman. She has always occupied in Methodism a more prominent and active sphere than in any other community except the Society of Friends. In former generations, as George Eliot reminded the public in "Adam Bede," woman preached; and woman is beginning to preach again. Tens of thousands of women have occupied at every period the semi-pastoral position of class-leaders; and in the Salvation Army, which is essentially a Methodist movement, the absolute equality of women has been recognized from the first. These peculiarities of the Methodist Church are very striking; and they at least prove that Methodism is peculiarly qualified to deal with the special characteristics of the Era upon which we are now entering. If Mr. Stead had written about Methodism rather than about the Pope he would not have found it necessary to exhaust all the resources of his audacious imagination in proving that the religious movement he was describing might have before it a period of unparalleled prosperity in the