

Methodism and the Ecumenical Council

BY REV. HUGH JOHNSTON, M.A., D.D.

(NOTE—It was my privilege to listen to an eloquent sermon on the above subject, on a recent Sunday evening in the Sherburne Street Church. The preacher was the Rev. Hugh Johnston, M.A., D.D., formerly of our own Canadian Church, but now of Baltimore, Md. The following is a portion of the sermon, and I count it a pleasure to present it, showing as it does the importance of the forthcoming Council and some of the lessons it should teach all Methodists the world over. The text from which Dr. Johnston preached was Acts 20-24, and in the earlier part of his discourse he showed how clearly the apostles were called to the ministry and how emphatic was the command to testify. After a comprehensive summary of the growth of the Early Church, and then of the decline of vital religion in England of two centuries ago, the preacher dealt with the subject as the following paragraphs report.—Ed.)

THERE is an amusing parallel between the development of the Apostolic Church as found in Acts and the Epistles and that of Methodism. In the five years from 1739 to 1744, there was evolved by the agency of the Divine Spirit all the essential features of a church, when it became itinerant, evangelistic, definite in doctrinal belief, and when its class-meeting made fellowship its distinctive note. Newman, in his Grammar of Assent, calls religion a system, a rite, a creed, a philosophy, a rule of duty. Methodism makes it a life, nay, a partnership in the highest form of life, the very life of God.

During these 170 years there has been no change of principles, and in a few weeks you are to welcome to this city the representatives of world-wide Methodism.

The first Ecumenical Conference was held in London in 1831, the second in Washington in 1894, the third again in London in 1901, and the fourth is to be held in the Metropolitan Church, Toronto, in October, 1911.

Other evangelical churches will give the Conference no grudging or doubtful, but a cordial welcome. It will not be as Wesley was at first received with the couplet—

"Master Wesley's come to town,
To try to pull the churches down;"

but with a thrill of gladness, believing that the Kingdom of God will be advanced by this great gathering.

You will receive them not only with a gracious hospitality but with prayerful solicitude for the outcome of this family gathering, representing thirty millions of adherents. They will come from all the continents of earth and all the islands of the seas; for the Methodist, like the Briton, can speak of

"Our flag on every height unfurled,
And morning's drum beat round the world."

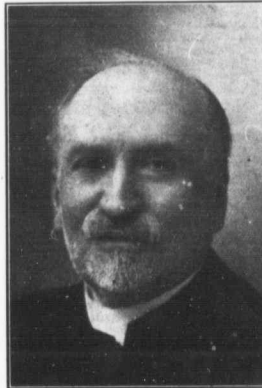
In this diversified family will appear white and black, yellow and brown. They will come from the British Isles and the Isles of Japan; from the Cape of Good Hope and the northern capes; from France and from Fiji; from the Ganges and the Siber to the rolling waters of the Columbia and the Fraser; from the cotton fields of Alabama to the wheat fields of Alberta; from the Golden Horn to the Golden Gate; from the prairies of the Middle States and the pampas of South America; from the lands of Luther and Methuon, of Calvin and Knox to the land of Evangeline; from Farther India and where the breezes blow soft o'er Ceylon's Isle to the island continent of Australia lying under the Southern Cross. All, all will be welcomed to your pulpits and altars, to your homes and your hearts.

They will meet together, not to glorify

Methodism or disparage other branches of the Christian Church, but for the interchange of thoughts, of views, of feelings, and to face the problems and opportunities of universal Methodism.

What practical end will be served by this great council? Shall it be a mere passing inspiration or a living and directing force? Such a gathering should be a benediction to the whole continent, to the entire world. It will help us to look at the Church in the universality and magnitude of her achievements, the multitudes of her conversions, the saintliness of her membership, the largeness of her constituency, the power of her press, the numbers of her churches and schools, her hospitals and orphanages. And then we can realize the enormous influence we may exert over the future of mankind if we are only faithful to our mission and living in abiding union with Christ, the great Head of His Church.

You will have much to learn from these distinguished ministers and laymen, and they will have much to learn from you.



REV. DR. JOHNSTON.

WHAT THE COUNCIL WILL TEACH US.

1. You will value more than ever the evangelical doctrines of Methodism. They are the doctrines that send out missionaries, inspire martyrs, regenerate slums, vitalize the living and comfort the dying.

What are they? A divine redemption, a realized pardon, the witness to adoption and sonship, the blessing of perfect love. These are the superlative elements of divine truth; and the great and successful preachers of Methodism everywhere, instead of dwelling on social and political questions, confine themselves to these central and spiritual themes.

2. You will appreciate more the value of higher Christian education. Methodism was born in a university; Wesley was a founder of schools, and to-day Methodist colleges girdle the globe.

3. You will be impressed with the value of the lay agency. Wesley was the discoverer of the possibilities of the laity. The two great pledges of the non-sacerdotal character of Methodism are that its ministers share the preaching office with the local preachers and the

pastoral office with the class leaders. The first Methodist preachers in England were university men. Wesley, in flame-like zeal, became the great itinerant and impressed this great characteristic for all time upon the Church. When he could not keep pace with the work, he established an order of lay helpers and class, Nelson, Wether, and Gray, Campbell Webb and others were called "Brown bread preachers." They were not ignorant in the one thing they professed to know, and Wesley said, "I trust there is not one of them that is not able to go through such an examination in substantial, practical, experimental divinity as few of our candidates for holy orders, even in the university, are able to do."

In England there are ten local preachers for every ordained Wesleyan minister, and out of the 20,000 or more sermons preached to-day, 1,600 will be by local preachers. Oh, that we were using more effectively this arm of power in the Church.

4. Another thing we may learn from Old-world Methodism is how to capture the cities. The problem of the day is how to save centres of population, to reach the submerged and the fallen. For, while social reforms may be attempted in various ways, the only power that can recreate society from the bottom upwards is Christianity. The great missions of London, Manchester, Birmingham, and other centres have at their head the best equipped ministers of the Church, and they are doing for the England of to-day what Wesley and his evangelists did for the England of two centuries ago. We have this secret to learn, for, while we know how to follow up the new populations, we have not learned to capture the cities and make them centres of evangelistic triumphs.

5. We shall learn, too, that the Methodist world is a unit in the work of world-wide evangelization. The Church has a world vision both in regard to missionary opportunity and missionary obligations. And in this Ecumenical Council it will be able to measure its resources in men and means, and take on a united missionary action such as the world has never known.

Here is to be found that moral equipment for war which Prof. James felt was needed by the race. Foreign missionary work, with its passion for adventure, its heroism and high romance, will be well to the front at the Council, and missionary leaders from every land beneath the skies will help to make up the interesting personnel of this great gathering.

WHAT THE COUNCIL MAY LEARN FROM US.

But the Council will also have much to learn from Canadian Methodism.

1. It will have something to learn as to the conditions of Church membership and the forms of Christian fellowship. The parent body, the English Wesleyan Church, has had a vague and indefinite basis of membership. There has been a disposition to make class attendance a test of membership, and since compulsory attendance was found impossible, to substitute the class book for the class meeting. The resolutions of Dr. Davidson, adopted at the last Conference, have ended a long controversy and brought harmony in upholding the class meetings by various means short of requiring regular attendance as an essential condition of membership. We have attached importance to all the means of grace,