

The Wesleyan.

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"WISDOM IS THE PRINCIPAL THING; THEREFORE GET WISDOM."

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(From the Watchman.)

DEARLY BELOVED BRETHREN.—The occasion of our annual assembling again presents the opportunity of addressing you; and, while we engage in this, possibly though pleasing task, let us have the gratification of knowing that our words are not regarded as a mere matter of usage, but as the expression of deep pastoral feeling, and as an evidence of that close and inseparable union which subsists between us and you. The present is a season of almost unprecedented anxiety and disquietude. Political affairs seem to promise no repose. Rome is availing herself of every opening and every movement to extend her spiritual despotism and worldly influence. A kindred system, inaccurately called "Anglo-Catholicism," an object of Papal complacency, still prevails in the established Church, and in the literature of the nation. Cold-hearted infidels, who are indebted to Christianity for the little vantage-ground of intellectual standing which they possess, utter forth their proud disregard of all authority, human and divine. Those who are deprived by general distress of earthly good, and who have not the hopes and consolations of religion to fall back upon, are often willing to listen to, and be led by these blasphemers. Thus a grand compact appears to be formed between unbelief on the one hand, and a corrupted Christianity on the other, to drive vital godliness out of the world. It is in these circumstances, that we, as a body of Christian Ministers, solemnly resolve, in the strength of grace, to live for no other purpose than to teach and disseminate those doctrines which we have held from the beginning; and which, as being the attested verities of revelation, have been professed and taught by the holiest and best men of all ages. Methodism, as a catholic and evangelical system, we regard to be as necessary now, as it was at the commencement of the last century. It shall still be our grand aim to assert the corrupt and guilty state of man by nature, forgiveness of sins through penitent faith in the sacrificial blood of Christ, filial joy in God through the Holy Ghost as the Spirit of adoption, holiness of heart through the same Spirit as the Sanctifier; while we still hold evangelical obedience as indispensably necessary to justification in the last day.

We are resolved to maintain and defend that church-position into which Divine Providence has irresistibly brought us, not only in order to rebuke and check intolerant brethren, but to discharge a duty of fidelity to Christ, and to guard equally from latitudinarian intrusion, and despotic assumption, that great work of God which was begun by the instrumentality of the first Methodists, and which the established Church was not able, or was not willing, to cherish. While we wish to stand in a friendly relation to that Church, from which our fathers were compelled to separate, and while we would gladly labour in harmony with her evangelical and spiritually-minded sons, we claim, both for our own sakes and yours, all the rights of true scriptural Pastors; a right which the Head of the church has repeatedly sanctioned and sealed. Denying the sacerdotal character of the Christian ministry, we claim no priesthood, because we know, and the New Testament knows, no Priest but the One in heaven: we claim not to offer sacrifice at the altar, for we know of no altar but the cross, and of no atoning or propitiatory sacrifice but the Saviour's blood: but being inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon us the office and ministry of the Christian eldership, and being outwardly called thereto by those who were in the ministry before us, even from Mr. Wesley's days, and separated unto it from all worldly employments by ordination and prayer, we do claim to be, in all necessary respects, the true apostolical

Pastors of the charge which God has committed to our trust, and the successors of those who, in former ages, have been similarly actuated and sanctioned. This involves a right, not only to publish the word of God to you, and to provide for its publication in the destitute world around, but also to administer the sacraments,—the signs and seals of that covenant of grace of which preaching is the vocal exposition, the administration of the sacraments thus flowing from our pastoral relation by clear and scriptural sequence.

As Ministers, then, of our common Methodist Church, we resolve to do all that we can to provide for the devout and regular observance of all Christian ordinances in our numerous places of worship, and all that we can to secure, by precept and example, that reverence for divine institutions which is one of the evidences of deep, humble, and intelligent piety, and an edifying example of which is sometimes displayed by our very opponents. We invite you, on your own parts, to a devout observance of the sacramental ordinances. Neglect not to bring your infant children, as soon as possible, to be baptized, in the presence of God's people, not only that they may receive the merciful seal of the evangelical covenant, and be themselves received into the visible Church, but that, by mutual faith and prayer, an effectual blessing from above may be invoked upon them. Neglect not to approach the table of the Lord at the regular opportunity, not only to commemorate his death, and to profess his religion, and communion with his people, but in order to seek communion with himself, and thus to become more vital members of his mystic body. Regard the sacrament of the Lord's supper as a divinely appointed channel, through which the Spirit may convey to your penitent and believing hearts, pardoning, strengthening, or sanctifying grace, as your circumstances may require: remembering, that the Gospel way of faith is as remote from a Socinian disregard of things external, as it is free from Popish superstitions.

We resolve, beloved brethren, sacredly to guard every privilege which you have had from the beginning; and still to provide, according to our ability, as times and seasons shall require, every external institution which shall administer to your edification and growth in grace. To do this, it will be necessary to secure for you and the following generations a succession of gifted and effective Ministers. Not that we can do this irrespectively of that divine call which we recognise as essential to every true ministry. We educate and ordain none but those whom we believe God calls; and it is matter of rejoicing and thankfulness that he is pleased continually to raise up so large a number of these amongst us. Yet every thing around us tends to make this educational improvement an indispensable condition,—the rapid spread of superficial knowledge, the controversies of the church, the conflict of opinions, and the learning and zeal of Romanizing opposers of experimental godliness.

The rising branches of your families, in particular, will require, in order to their continued, close, and affectionate union with us, an influential and well trained pastorate, one to which they shall look with deference and respect, which shall be able to guard them in the moral agitations of society, and which shall be a fair resemblance of that spiritual and watchful oversight which was exercised by the venerated Wesleys. A minister of an inferior order to this will sink beneath the requirements of the church of God. It is while we advert to this topic that we announce to you the fact, that the Northern Branch of the Theological Institution, situate near Manchester, is about to be opened. By means of this we shall be able to train a larger number than before of accepted candidates for the ministry.

This added establishment has been provided by a liberal grant from the Centenary Fund; but the annual expenses will be such as to require from all who are able among our people, the most practical proof of their approval of a well trained ministry; namely, an increased amount of annual subscriptions. This subject we commend to your enlightened and affectionate consideration. The proposed additional appointment to the Theological Tutorship of the Rev. Thomas Jackson, who, by his piety, and his acquirements in sacred studies, verified by existing writings, is proved to be eminently fitted for this responsible office, will, we are sure, be hailed by the whole Connexion, and will inspire confidence in the character of the teaching which the candidates will receive.

But, while we are thus led to build up the walls of our Zion, and to fortify the defences against external aggression and internal disunion, we do, above all, humbly and solemnly resolve ourselves to walk more closely with God; and to seek, by constant and believing prayer, for a more fervent, loving, and self-denying piety, only to be realised through a richer effusion of the Divine Spirit upon us. We see how much the character of your piety depends upon ours, and would therefore be jealous over ourselves with a godly jealousy. Holy unction, love to the souls of lost sinners, and an earnest desire for the universal establishment of Christ's kingdom, are qualities above all price. They are not to be bought with gold and silver. No human light or flame can compensate for the loss of that fire which Christ came to bring upon earth. It is holy unction, which, even in the degree in which it now exists, makes Methodism taking the term in its generic sense) so precious; and the world is waiting in expectation upon us, and upon these evangelical communities which believe in and seek it. And therefore, beloved brethren, in order that you may strengthen our hands in the Lord, and at the same time increase your own spiritual happiness, we earnestly exhort you to seek the same gift for yourselves.

If you have found rest to your souls, through faith in the atoning blood of Christ, the lack of which makes many even religious men of the present day so restless, then seek to rise still higher into the divine image, by pleading for those holy tempers, and heavenly affections, which are not only the proximate cause of obedience, but the soul of Christian energy. With these it is no bondage to labour for Christ, to deny our own will in order to obey His, to rebuke sin, to win souls, to incur the charge of singularity, to stand alone. Without them, our words are faint, our efforts feeble. With these, the father of every family exercises a sacred and loving authority in his circle which it is impossible to oppose; the Leader diffuses through his class a sympathy in which the members cannot avoid joining; the Local Preacher affects his village congregation with a serious earnestness, which makes the most careless hearer attend; the Sunday-School Teacher lays hold on the affections of a youthful group by a bond, the power of which they little know; the individual Christian serves his Lord without fear, in righteousness and holiness before him all the days of his life. Without these every office is a burden and every duty a task.

If you have not found that rest which consists in personal pardon, and the consequent indwelling of the Holy Ghost in you as the Comforter, then make the attainment of this your first and great object. "We which have believed do enter into rest." (Heb. iv. 3.) Humbly wait before God under every prayer, hymn, sermon and sacrament, expecting to receive. They who thus "hunger and thirst after righteousness shall be filled."

Whatever may be your attainments in piety, be solemn and full, and regular in

making your applications to God in the closet. It is in the closet that we have the most unclouded view of the present mercy-seat, and of the future judgment-seat, and it is the place of appeal between both. In the closet our genuine state is the most apparent to our own consciousness; we are neither scolded by music, nor excited by sympathy. We are alone with God, whose a third party has no place; and a third influence no office. There deplores your unfaithfulness, be minute in your confession of sin; there supplicate repeated pardon; in times of prosperity and blessing, go to the closet to get your heart attuned to what will be the everlasting work of thanksgiving and praise; and in times of trouble and affliction, to obtain grace to suffer cheerfully, and, if it be the Father's will, to suffer yet more. You will, as the season for prayer approaches, often detect in yourself an insensibility of heart, and a tendency to cleave unto the dust, which will appear grievously to militate against the praying spirit. But always disregard such feelings as these. Go to your closet, and force, if it be useful, the words from your lips; the gracious interceding Spirit will make the action gradually more vital, and you will seldom retire till you are filled with sacred shame that you were ever backward to approach. Go, if you have no other motive, to the closet as a duty, and you will linger in it as a privilege.

We exhort you, too, to the serious and regular observance of family worship. Those who neglect it, lay aside one of the most general and indispensable badges of the Christian profession, and dishonour God, as he is "the God of the families of the whole earth." Domestic Heathenism cannot be consistent with individual piety. Family prayer is necessary to obtain the sanctification of our mutual relationships, and of our family joys and sorrows. It is a safeguard against sin. And what is more than all, it brings down upon what ought to be "a church in our house," a holy influence which prepares both parents and children for their various places in the church catholic, which is the aggregate of all household churches. In those cases in which the heads of the family are not pious, let the utmost "meekness of wisdom" be employed by the subordinate members to obtain its introduction. In those other cases in which excessive timidity, and the want of natural gifts, shall join at first to disqualify, as it may be thought, for the exercise of this duty, let a form of prayer be used rather than have it omitted; and thus go on until experience and richer grace have set the stammering lips and fettered soul at liberty. Let family prayer be full and copious, not only embracing the wants and interests of the little circle to which it belongs, but, as far as possible, those of the church and the world, and of individuals in special circumstances.

We have, on former occasions, felt it our duty to inculcate upon you the importance of the sanctification of the Sabbath; and so intimately is this blessed institution connected with the purity of our own Christianity, and the salvation of men, that we repeat our earnest admonitions on the subject. We direct your attention to several admirable Letters on the Sabbath which have been drawn up by our esteemed brother, the Rev. Peter McOwan, and published in the Magazine of this year; expressing our full conviction that they form a true exposition of that religious rest on earth which is constituted the type of our final one in heaven. Regard the minute directions contained in these valuable papers, as lessons which the Holy Ghost does not fail to write on every believing heart; and learn that, in proportion as they are not written on our own hearts, we ourselves are not faithful and believing. Let nothing but affliction, or the duty of waiting on the afflicted, keep you from the house of God when this day returns. Seldom would our