

Current Topics and Events.

HIGHER METHODIST LITERATURE.

From the very beginning the Methodist Church has made copious use of periodical literature. In 1778 appeared the *Arminian Magazine*, which has been published continuously ever since, and is now, under the name of the *Wesleyan Methodist Magazine*, we believe, the oldest of the almost innumerable monthlies of the time. Methodism throughout the world publishes no less than 164 weekly, monthly or quarterly periodicals. Its reviews and great weeklies are among the best of their class. Their circulation is the largest and their moral and religious influence is simply incalculable. Methodism, it is true, has not had the opportunity for devotion to the technical niceties of scholarship; to the preparation of books on Greek verbs in *mi*, or in the middle voice, or on the dative case. She has not had at her command the sinecure fellowships, the rich endowments, the opportunities for learning and the leisure that encourage devotion to such literary minutiae. Her writers for the most part have been hard-working preachers, whose first and all-important work was the ministry of the Word, the evangelizing of the masses, the edifying of the saints and the upbuilding of the Church of God. But, notwithstanding this consecration to a higher work than the writing of books, she has no reason to be ashamed of her achievements in the latter regard. She has not been unmindful of her birth in the first university of Europe, nor of the fact that her early teachers and preachers were amongst the most scholarly and learned men of their day.

But there is one respect in which we think the great and wealthy Methodist churches of Great Britain and the United States have not fulfilled their duty toward higher literature. One of the most important vehicles by which literary culture is

developed and diffused in these days is the monthly magazine. The circulation that these have obtained is enormous. Some half dozen magazines in the United States issue over a million copies monthly; they furnish the staple literary food of thousands of Methodist households. Most of them are of high literary merit, and of splendid artistic illustration and mechanical manufacture. They are respectful, most of them, towards religion, and have occasionally contributions of a religious character; yet they are for the most part secular in spirit and not in sympathy with vital godliness. In some of them—the *Scientific Monthly*, for instance—there is frequently exhibited a covert or overt scepticism and opposition to revealed religion. In others much space is devoted to theatrical, sporting and fashionable life and its interests. Where religion is introduced it is in the proportion of a “half-penny worth of bread to an intolerable deal of sack.” The fiction, while clever, amusing, sometimes even moral and instructive, is not seldom frivolous, sometimes pernicious and unadapted to give moral inspiration or spiritual uplift. In the higher civilization of the future, when “Holiness to the Lord” shall be written upon all the literature and philosophies and art and amusements of the world, much that now passes current as elegant literature will have to go. And yet this unhelpful reading is sustained very largely by Methodist patronage.

We think our friends of the Methodist Episcopal Church made a great mistake when they allowed their promising monthly, the *National Magazine*, to expire. With their vast reading constituency, with the amount of literary talent in their Church, with the great wealth of their publishing houses, and with the admirable means they have of circulating their literature, they ought to have the strongest literary monthly