

METHODISM, THE JOHANNINE GOSPEL.

CARDINAL NEWMAN'S famous doctrine of development is so far true, that every student of Christian history must be aware that the Christian Church, as a whole, has gradually apprehended more and more the full content of the Gospel. Jesus Christ was so unique a revelation of God that He could be described to us only by men moved by the Holy Ghost. Ever their teaching was not of private interpretation, and we may well doubt whether they themselves fully realized all that was implied and involved in the principles which they were commissioned to proclaim. It is quite certain that Christians generally have failed to understand the full significance of the life and work and words of Jesus Christ. As the ages have passed slowly away, Christian men in the light of the history and living experience have understood more and more the meaning of the unparalleled events which were crowded into the brief three-and-thirty years under the Syrian sky.

It is a remarkable fact that the three chief apostles appeared upon the scene in the order in which their distinctive views of Christ have dominated the Christian mind. To St. Peter was given the unique honour of opening the kingdom of Heaven to all believers. But before many years had passed St. Peter receded from view, and St. Paul occupied the foreground of Christian history during its most critical and formative period. When the great Pauline battle was fought and won, St. John appeared upon the scene to crown the edifice of revelation, and to enunciate the final form of Christianity. This feature of the apostolic age was prophetic of future history. The course of events during the last two thousand years may be divided into the Petrine, the Pauline and the Johannine periods. The ancient and mediæval Church instinctively accepted St. Peter as the most conspicuous exponent of the Christianity

they know. At the era of the Reformation the teaching of St. Paul became more prominent than at any previous period, and received an unprecedented amount of study and devotion. But the cycle of Christian evolution was not yet complete. It remained that the peculiarly fraternal Gospel of St. John should be preached to the masses of mankind. Of that John Wesley was as conspicuously the appointed instrument as Martin Luther was the exponent of the Pauline theology of the Reformation. Never since the days of St. John himself was the universal, gentle, gracious, all-embracing love of God so passionately preached as by the apostle of Methodism. There is no greater or more mischievous delusion abroad than that the early Methodist preachers revelled in the terrors of hell. As Dr. Rigg has pointed out, Wesley did not "enforce his application by reference to material terrors or painted horrors." No men ever spoke more plainly of sin and the dreadful consequences of sin than did the early Methodist preachers. But they dwelt on these awful facts, not in the vain delusion that they would bring men to God, but in order that they might furnish a dark background against which they could more vividly picture the irresistible love of Christ. The great effect produced upon young and old by the preaching of the Methodists was caused by such a presentation of the intense and everlasting love of God as had never been given to the people of this country before.

The true theologian, the Melancthon of the Methodist Reformation, was Fletcher of Madeley; and the love of God breathes through every page he ever wrote. "Perfect love," indeed, was the phrase which he employed to describe the highest Christian attainments. His fierce and irresistible protest against Calvinism was based upon the conviction that a limited salvation was incon-