

THE BRITISH CONFERENCE.

The Annual Address of the Conference To the Methodist Societies in Great Britain, in the Convention established by the late Rev. John Wesley, A. M.

DEAR BELOVED BRETHREN,—

The circumstances in which we address you supply abundant motives for gratitude to Almighty God, and for encouragement in the prosecution of the services which He has graciously allotted to us. Not only can we report a more than usually large accession of members to the Societies, both at home and abroad, under the care of the British Conference; but we trust that, notwithstanding a few partial exceptions, we have also ground to rejoice in an increase of unfeigned Christian godliness, of the "faith, hope, charity" which "abide" in all ages as the true principles of the Christian life.

When we review the proceedings of the past year, and attempt to form a just estimate of the kindly and reviving influence which discovers itself in many places, we feel that we are again incited to imitate the conduct of Samuel, who "took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." Permit us, in these favourable circumstances, to address you in a strain of affectionate and thankful congratulation. Evils do indeed surround us,—perils of various kinds threaten,—difficulties, in not a few instances, beset our path; and all these require "the word of" faithful "exhortation." "But who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" "The God of Heaven, He will prosper us," while we simply aim at the erection of His spiritual temple, and the advancement of His glory in the Gospel of His Son. He has favoured us with tokens of His presence and grace, which we would employ as arguments for a more cheerful and unreserved dedication of ourselves to Him and His cause, knowing that "the mercies of God," which we would always own and record, yield the most persuasive motives to a joyous obedience. Receive our paternal counsels in the spirit of gratitude and love; accept the "words of peace and truth" which we now send you; and unite with us in the expectation of a yet more copious and diffusing blessing from above. May "the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us!"

Can we sufficiently remind you, dear Brethren, of the importance of keeping the great scheme of the Christian Salvation continually before your eyes? "For by grace are ye saved through faith." Grace is the source, the one, entire, perpetual source, of all the blessings which man's salvation comprises; and Faith, faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the faith which constantly and fully relies on the Great Propitiation which He made for us on the cross, is the sole condition on which all those blessings are attained. Cherish an habitual sense of your own unworthiness in the sight of God. Seek an increase of humility and contrition, poverty of spirit and self-abasement. Feel and confess your entire dependence on the mercy of God in Christ Jesus. But remember that "He giveth more grace." Repair to Him. Own the fullness and sufficiency of our Lord's atoning merits. Rely on His all-prevailing mediation for every gift which you need; and patiently pursue your course, "looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith." "These things," says St. John, "write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He is the propitiation for our sins." Rest in that propitiation,—rest in it always,—rest in it for every blessing of pardon, renovation, and peace. And let your "faith work by love." Aspire after richer manifestations of the love of God in Christ to you—and pray that "your love," as created and sustained by His, "may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment." Cultivate the principle of Divine Love, that principle which expels all that is contrary to its own nature, and assimilates the spirit of man to itself.

But to cultivate this principle successfully, attend to all the appointed means of grace and spiritual improvement, in reliance on that most blessed Spirit who "helpeth our infirmities." Let us ever acknowledge, with reverential gratitude, the offices and agency of the Divine Comforter. Let us cheer ourselves with thoughts of His power and benignity;—remembering the great promise which belongs to the evangelical dispensation. Pray for the more plentiful visitations from on high. Use them, when vouchsafed. Yet, waiting for those richer baptisms of grace "grieve not the Holy Spirit of God" by undervaluing His present gifts; but listen to the gentlest whispers of His voice.

None of the means of grace would we overlook or disregard;—and if we now select one in particular, one which is inseparably connected with all the rest, it is because we feel its importance and necessity in these present times. Assiduously study the Holy Scriptures. Has God imparted to us His own Word, that Word which is "for ever settled in Heaven?" Is that Word, as we thankfully believe and acknowledge, of sole and sufficient authority in all things pertaining to man's salvation? Is it the instrument of our regeneration, and the aliment of our subsequent spiritual growth? Is it the Word which God's people in all ages have regarded with intense esteem? and shall not we delight in it? Read that Word with regular and devout attention. Select portions of it for your daily meditation. Prize the exposition and application of it, whether from the pulpit, or in the course of more private instruction. Seize opportunities of conversing upon it in seasons of friendly intercourse. "These words," said Moses, "which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." Do you seek instruction? "I have more understanding," says the Psalmist, "than all my teachers: for Thy testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep Thy precepts." Do you seek quickening grace? "This is my comfort in my affliction: for Thy word hath quickened me." Do you covet stability? It is said of the righteous, "The law of his God is in his heart: none of his steps shall slide." Strive that you also may be "nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine." Mix faith with all that you read and hear. When you raise your hearts to God in ejaculatory prayer,—when you retire into your closets, and pray to your Father who is in secret,—when you assemble round your domestic altars at the hours of morning and evening sacrifice,—when you engage in your social devotions,—or when you unite in the offices and acts of prayer and praise with the great congregation, let it be your aim and effort to renew your faith in our Lord's atonement and intercession, and "come unto God by Him." When you join in meetings for prayer and Christian fellowship, when you commemorate our Lord's death in the Holy Eucharist, when you occupy yourselves in other ordinances of the Lord's sanctuary, let it be your object to maintain a simple and sincere faith, a child-like trust, a child-like resignation of yourselves into the hands of your God and Saviour. "I will cry unto God most high; unto God that performeth all things for me."

While the religion of Divine Love is thus fostered in the heart by the use of the Lord's ordinances, let it be protected against all that is adverse to it, and destructive of its very nature. Allow us, dear Brethren, earnestly to urge the avoidance of evil-enmities, strife, and contention; and the cultivation of mutual charity. "Endeavour," or as the Apostle's own beautiful words suggest, "to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." "Now I beseech you, brethren," says St. Paul in language which eminently claims our attention, "mark them which cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine, which ye have learned; and avoid them." Avoid intercourse with such. Partake not of their spirit. Adopt not their maxims. Walk not in their ways. "Think not evil of others. If any have injured you, pray for them." "Be not overcome of evil; but overcome evil with good." Receive not, entertain not, evil reports. "When ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have aught against any." Be deeply impressed with a sense of the evils which attend all surmises, suspicions, enmity, hatred. Consider how directly all these stand opposed to your Christian profession,—and, in your avoidance of them, "walk in love, as Christ also loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour."

At this season especially, and in the further pursuit of our practical admonitions, we deem it our imperative duty to warn you against that prevailing love of Mammon, and its manifold gratifications, to which you are exposed from many quarters. When St. John addresses the several classes of Christian believers as "little children," "young men," and "fathers,"—whom he twicenames under these significant appellations,—it is observable that he says to them all, as thus summoned together, admonishing them of a danger to which they are exposed,—"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him."—Is it possible that Christians who addict themselves to the study of God's most holy Word, and profess to follow it as a rule of life, should forget its frequent and impressive admonitions on this subject?—admonitions on which the his-

tory of many individuals of our day might furnish an affecting comment. "Labour not to be rich: cease from thine own wisdom." "He that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent."—"An inheritance may be gotten hastily at the beginning; but the end thereof shall not be blessed."—"He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house."—"Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and raiment, let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." Who has not heard of "the deceitfulness of riches?" Who has not acknowledged it in the case of others?—When you are invited to engage in speculation, or in any enterprise which promises a speedy and large return of capital, seriously ask yourselves what motive prompts you to comply. Is it a disposition—or a determination to be rich? Is it hastening to be rich beyond the ordinary means which Providence may please to appoint? Beware! When the evil is once admitted into the heart, who can tell how far and how fatally it may spread? "Let your conversation," then "be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for He hath said I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."—"Trust in the Lord, and do good; so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed."

That agencies of error and mischief are attitudinal to new effort, amid unparalleled events of our day, cannot excite surprise.—But our beloved flocks will safely rely on the great principles to which they and we are in common pledged. Other conflicts have passed by;—and, in reference to many a trial, we may venture to apply the word of prophecy,—"This is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth, so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee." The "windy storm and tempest" may rage with yet greater fury; but our Lord will "hide" us "in His pavilion; in the secret of His tabernacle shall He hide" us; "He shall set" us "upon a rock." If ready to faint or doubt, let us ponder those words of amazing condescension,—the rebukes of lingering love,—"I remember thee, the kindness of thy youth, the love of thine espousals, when thou wentest after Me in the wilderness, in a land that was not sown. Israel was holiness unto the Lord, and the first fruits of His increase." "O, my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee; testify against Me. For I brought thee up out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of servants; and I sent before thee Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. O my people, remember now what Balak king of Moab counselled, and what Balaam the son of Balaam answered him from Shittim unto Galgal; that ye may know the righteousness of the Lord." With wondering gratitude we own that our God has not "wearied" us;—that, instead of "testifying against" Him, we have ten thousand acknowledgments to make for His unexhausted mercy. But what returns have we made to our great Benefactor? With what fruit are we requiting His most gracious culture?—Suffice us to amplify these inquiries.

Are we cherishing a spirit of earnest, daily, prayerful self-examination? Do we retain, in any adequate measure, the fervour, love, and simplicity of our early Christian life? As our faith strengthened by continued exercise? Are we acquiring a clearer knowledge of Satan's devices, and a more decisive victory over those especially by which we were formerly overcome? Are our hours of secret prayer more highly prized than they were twelve months ago? As we come nearer and nearer to eternity, do we feel the attractions of our heavenly home increasing? Does this lively hope awaken us to seek a ripper preparation for our future bliss? Are we closely following the Saviour, studying His example, and arming ourselves with the same mind? Is it our strife to exemplify all social and domestic virtues,—to maintain a steady and undimmed witness for God in our neighbourhoods,—to contribute to the religious influence of our church and nation,—in all things to "yield ourselves unto God, as those who are alive from the dead?"

With a view to the greater power and glory of Zion, as well as to the safety and peace of many for whom we tenderly care, we ask your prayers and special efforts in behalf of those members of society who have not yet so beloved "with the heart unto righteousness," as to realize the Divine witness of ac-

ceptance through Christ. That some who decline to use language which we deem purely scriptural, and therefore of incomparable excellence, do yet enjoy in blessed measure the comfort of the Holy Ghost, we are most willing to believe;—and that many timid and drooping souls are entitled to much sympathy and encouragement, we would never forget. To such we would "speak comfortably," while we implore them to look for a brightening assurance that their "warfare is well accomplished," that their "iniquity is pardoned." But let not Methodists,—let not the children of Methodists, whose infant-lips have uttered the language of our ancient and deeply evangelical theology, and to whom the testimony of a clear religious experience has been tendered and hallowed by associations never to be forgotten,—in a word, let not any class among our dear people,—rest satisfied until God shall "send forth the Spirit of His Son into" their "hearts, crying, Abba, Father."

To the young we turn with emotions which words fail to express. It is our joy to mark, among our present encouragements, a quickened attention to the momentous subject of CHRISTIAN EDUCATION. Having long known that the Holy Spirit prepares the opening mind for our first instructions, and that early religion promises to tinge all subsequent life with its own beauty and blessedness,—we cannot but rejoice to hear of *twenty-one thousand Catechumens*, and of *nineteen hundred young persons* who have already passed from these interesting classes into closer fellowship with us. Our Day-School Movement also, viewed in a like sacred aspect, claims your liberal co-operation. We do not forget that the pastoral crook is committed to our hands, to be extended to the "lambs" as well as to the "sheep" of the Redeemer's flock; and you will greatly animate us by manifesting a general sympathy in those more public enterprises to which we are willingly pledged.

For thousands who have been "dedicated" to Christ "by our office and ministry," we cherish a lively and prayerful interest. Unspeaking personal advantages are the crown of early consecration. This is the prelude to honours that cannot wiberit is promotive of eminent attainments in the Divine life, of stability in the Christian profession, and of deep acquaintance with the things of God; it yields, moreover, the utmost promise of good to unborn generations. If we have been reminded, in this annual meeting, of not a few who appeared but recently among the luminaries of our Israel, but whom we see no more!—They are not quenched in death, but removed to a brighter firmament to shine for ever and ever. Their memory lives; and of the record of God's grace in them serve to light up in others the promise of kindred excellence, earth and heaven will rejoice. To this worthy end let all domestic and all acknowledged eduction be directed. If the young be not trained for God, our "candle-stick" will be "removed out of his place." History may preserve our name; but, instead of living churches, a future generation will find sepulchral monuments of glory departed.—The institutions of charity, the revival of religion, and the consolations of peace, will then be transitory, like human life. But, by the blessing of God, these sad passages shall not be fulfilled. God shall bless us in this, as in our other spheres of labour. Let parents, guardians, and Pastors, go on in devoted hope scattering the seed of truth. Many of them are already more than recompensed for their patient toil. "Lift up your eyes and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal; that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together."

Two or three other classes we commend, briefly yet most early, to your care. First of all may be here specified the multitudes of bearers in our congregations, more or less attached to our forms of worship, who have not yet availed themselves of the privilege of church membership. They hope for admission to the family above, while with lamentable inconsistency they forego the blessings of union with the family below. If all acted as they act, it is obvious that Christ would have no church on earth. Let us hasten to warn them of their loss and danger; to remind them that communion is the visible token of love to our Master, and to those who bear His image. We may not be silent, moreover, as to the obligation—one full of mercy and privilege, yet still the commanding obligation—of Christian fellowship. This is beyond question implied in the establishment of a church, and in the recorded practice of the first Christians;—and no less in the Scriptures which require separation from the world, in those which assume our profession of a common faith, and in those which enforce the duties of church members. "By this very union" writes Mr. Wesley to one whom he evidently viewed with more than common interest, "is the whole (external) work of God upheld throughout the nation; besides all the spiritual good which accrues

to each member. (For the sake of the work for the sake of the work) wardly and outwardly the sake of your own thing not easily exp of the Spirit, which of living Christiar that therefore thei to more clearly un fellowship; and th will gratefully adm claims of that com: thers have answere the highest ends of

To the poor and the back-slides, you often guided.—But in this work of the eminent usefulness ly may bless an en are the light" even spread more and u beams. Remembe of exhortations who shores; help them them, as opportuni response; and als spread the commo ends of the earth. find, no less when shall give.

We repeat once before given, fringes the decoru and the sanctity of jects bear at once and on the progres munity. It could to warn our floo nodes of Sabbath enormous evil has most boldness, an self. He who "is compassionately "dust," bleeds neer iving promises, and thou turn away it from doing thy pli call the Sabbath a Lord, honourable not doing thine o own pleasure, not then shalt thou de and I will cause t places of the ear heritage of Jacob of the Lord hath; the least to the g to promote the Lord's own day; vindicate its claim.

Your assembly Address with an currences which Not that we nov r upon affairs, or opening to Christ we will acknow of all passing evi tranquility of our dignity and influ the contrast of m dissolving of the ages held the I bonds to tyrann openings for Ch mote. Let us e Cannot we do m is far spent," in forth the messa: Heaven, and of pure Word in language? In ad ing an eye of p Jews, and of the prisoners and cr

Honour God, own institutions your estimate of Dispensation of for that "ble eighteen hundr eyes of the chu the glorious ap great God and "Surely," say "I come quick tells us of the t tainty of our L nearness of a But we hesitat tends to disco postpone the h or to impair a power of the C Ghost, the Lo ing from the F the Father and ped and I glori phets." Let promised "fla and "the wai wastes, shall fruitful field s

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