

The Press and General Review

WESLEYAN METHODIST REFORM MOVEMENT IN ENGLAND.

Extracts from the Report of the Corresponding Committee, presented at the Aggregate Meeting of Delegates, March 14th, 1850.

This Committee was appointed at a public meeting, held in a large room, Exeter-hall, on Friday, August 31, 1849, when—after hearing the statements of the Rev Messrs. Everett, Dunn and Griffith respecting their expulsion from the Wesleyan Conference—the following resolution was unanimously adopted:—

“That, in the judgment of this meeting, the proceedings of the Conference, being a direct violation of the principles of civil and religious liberty, justify the Wesleyan community in taking into their immediate consideration the best means of restraining that body from pursuing a career of intolerance and exclusiveness, dangerous to the best interests of the Connexion; and that, therefore, the following gentlemen be requested to act as a committee, to correspond with all the circuits in Great Britain, and ascertain whether the opinion of the societies is favorable to an aggregate meeting of Delegates, for the purpose of deliberating upon the present crisis of affairs, and that the said committee be empowered to receive subscriptions:—Dr Oxley and Mr Hildreth Kay, treasurers; Messrs Hunt, Gibbons and Harrison, secretaries; Messrs. Kay, Wild, Grosjean, Volekman, Nodes, Stephens, Chipchase, Hanson, Bicknell, Brown, Mann, Raymond, Biddle, Child, Chambers, Rennie, Dunsford, Dresser, E. Dunn, Davy, Stevens; with power to add to their number.”

This Committee, augmented from time to time to 65 members, having taken, for a twelve-month, No. 2 Committee-room, Exeter-hall, has regularly held weekly meetings there, on Wednesday and Thursday evenings alternately, besides many others, which have been convened as circumstances dictated the necessity or desirableness of more frequent assemblings of the Committee.

One of the Secretaries, Mr Gibbons, having twice tendered his resignation, on account of health and the pressure of business, Mr Grosjean was unanimously requested to fill up the vacancy.

The Committee, immediately upon their appointment, opened up a correspondence with the circuits in Great Britain.

(The list of Circuits is omitted. The number is upwards of one hundred and thirty.—Ed. W.)

On the main object for which this Committee was formed—viz., “to ascertain whether the opinion of the Societies was favorable to an Aggregate Meeting of Delegates.”—there has been no difference of opinion whatever. Every circuit in correspondence with the Committee has most cordially approved of this measure.

In consequence of numerous and earnest requests, contained in the correspondence from the circuits, the Committee was induced to draw up and issue a circular, “To the officers and members of the Wesleyan Societies in general, and to the members of the Committees in the matter of the Expelled Wesleyan Ministers in particular.” That circular was extensively distributed throughout the Connexion in Great Britain, and, by the views and opinions which it was the means of eliciting from the several local committees, proved a very efficient means of enabling the London Committee to act, not on what might have been their own views, but in accordance with the expressed judgment and desires of their brethren generally. It was as follows:—

WESLEYAN METHODISM.

“To the Officers and Members of the Wesleyan Societies in general, and the Members of the Committees in the matter of the Expelled Wesleyan Ministers in particular:—

“DEAR BRETHREN:—The circumstances in which our beloved Connexion is placed at present, have justly excited alarm and anxiety in the minds of all interested in its welfare. No Christian people have labored more willingly, and contributed more cheerfully, for the cause of God than have the members of the Wesleyan Societies. They have done this in good faith, without much inquiry respecting those who have been ‘over them in the Lord.’ It has been, therefore, a source of great grief to them that matters should have arisen calculated to shake their confidence in the present order of things in the Connexion.

“From time to time, in the history of the body, circumstances have transpired calculated to awaken suspicion, and observing men have noticed with alarm the course of that policy which was seeking to rule with iron hand, and while withdrawing all power from the people and investing it in the preachers, was also bringing the latter under the domination of a few leading men. The enactment of the objectionable Law of 1835 was, at the time, considered by those who are accustomed to look at the consequences of things as the precursor of evil, as it was undoubtedly a violation of the Plan of Pacification. That covenant, between the Conference and the people, though imperfect, if it had been preserved intact, would have prevented many of the evils over which we have now to mourn, and by which we are, as a Christian people, degraded before the eyes of the public.

“Had there been no departure from that solemn compact and had the simplicity of our fathers been more closely copied by those who are their successors, it is fair to presume that we should not have had to lament over such palpable want of success as has of late years distinguished us.

“The acts of the late Conference have, however, called more direct attention to the course which that body, as the legislative head of the Connexion, is pursuing. The expulsion, contrary to all law, of three estimable, laborious, talented, and useful preachers—the Rev. Messrs. James Everett, Samuel Dunn, and William Griffith, jun.—without trial, accuser, or evidence, on a charge based only on

suspicion, is a climax of wrong under which it would be unpardonable in the people to be passive, especially as the ostensible law—justly described as ‘steeped in apostasy and unbelief’—may be applied to individual members of our societies, and under the unrighteous provisions of which they may, though charged with no crime, be cut off from fellowship with the church they have been connected with for years. Such a state of things is manifestly at variance with the intentions of our venerable founder, and with the principles of the New Testament.

“The excitement now prevailing in the Connexion on this subject is wide-spread, alarming, and on the increase. This latter is a favorable omen, as it shows that the great body of the people feel deep interest in the purity, integrity, and usefulness of the Connexion; but it may be productive of the most serious consequences. A fatal passiveness or a disastrous division may be the result. To prevent both we hope will be the aim of every lover of John Wesleyan Methodism.

“In order to avert either of these results, the Committee, appointed at the great meeting, at Exeter-hall, on Friday, August 31st, are of opinion, in common with that meeting, and with others in the country, that an Aggregate Meeting of Representatives, from all or the majority of circuits, should be held in London, or in some large provincial town, at as early a date as possible. That meeting to consider the present fearful state of the connexion, the causes that may have led to it, the remedial measures needed, and the best means for securing an improved state of things.

“The London Committee recommended that you take the earliest opportunity of ascertaining the sense of the societies in your circuits by holding meetings of the local preachers, stewards, leaders, members, and trustees, at which full explanation should be given of the laws, usages, and recent occurrences in the connexion, and that you then and there appoint fit and proper persons as representatives to attend the proposed Aggregate Meeting of Delegates. Two should be appointed by each circuit.—The general wish of the circuits will determine the time and place for holding such Aggregate Meeting. On these latter points the London Committee would be glad to have your opinion, in order to guide them in fixing both the time and place.

“In the meantime, seeing that much ignorance prevails, the Committee recommend that the local committee, and such individuals as can afford it, should circulate gratuitously among the people the publications already issued, and which may yet be issued, as give a true picture of the case, such as, ‘The proceedings of the Conference,’ ‘The Speeches of Messrs. Everett, Dunn, and Griffith, at Exeter-hall,’ ‘The Exposure of the Proceedings of Conference by the Three Expelled Ministers,’ ‘The Law of 1835,’ &c. &c. These cannot be too widely circulated. Others will follow, which will be duly announced.

“You will also direct your attention to the reforms which this Committee consider are needed for the removal of abuses, and the stability, permanence, and extension of Wesleyan Methodism, such as:—

“1st. The rescinding of the anti-Wesleyan and un-Scriptural Law (so called) of 1835.

“2nd. The appointment of laymen as Treasurers of all the Connexional Funds.

“3rd. The discontinuance of the Nomination Committee, which makes committee-men little better than the tools of their nominees, and the choosing of all committees by ballot.

“4th. The right of the Societies, in all official meetings, such as leaders’ and quarterly meetings, to memorialise Conference on any subject bearing, in their opinion, on the interests of the Connexion.

“5th. The admission of lay delegates into the District Meetings and the Conference.

“6th. The sitting with open doors of those assemblies, and the right of the Methodist people and the Press to be present; and

“7th. The necessity of a rigid investigation of the Connexional Funds by some competent persons.

“These points are submitted to your careful and prayerful attention by the Committee, as being essential, in their opinion, to the restoration of the shaken confidence of the body, its stability, and permanent extension. All these subjects will, from time to time, be taken up, elucidated, and defended in cheap publications, the principles involved in which are in harmony with the spirit of the age, agreeable to the New Testament, and not contrary to the genius of Methodism.

“The Committee deem it incumbent on the friends of liberty and reform, that suitable provision be made for the three ministers who have been expelled by the Conference. It would be a just and fitting tribute to their personal worth, willing sacrifice, and the noble stand they have made in defence of liberty, and against the establishment of an inquisition. For effecting that desirable object, and for carrying out, also, those necessary reforms suggested above, a considerable sum will be required. The Committee rejoice at the liberal spirit which has already been displayed, and indulge the hope that the friends will see that ample funds are provided.

“The Committee press this upon you. Act at once. Give according to your means, and obtain as much as you can from others. The local committees should immediately appoint treasurers, issue collecting cards and books, to those willing to collect or receive subscriptions. Individuals may thus greatly help the cause, who, from their limited means, can contribute but little themselves. The Committee depend upon your efforts. Collecting-books and cards will be sent on application to the secretaries.

“The moneys collected should be paid in weekly to the local treasurers, and be transmitted once a fortnight, at least, to the treasurers of the general fund, in London, that the amount required may be speedily ascertained and announced, and that the aggregate meeting, when held, may decide on the best mode of its disposal.

“The Committee would give you one word of advice:—Let no one leave the Society. The complaint is not against Methodism, but against those who injure and impede it. All the members should continue to attend their classes, and all the officers their several posts. Keep up the fire of personal devotion; cultivate holiness of heart and life; and seek to extend the blessings you have obtained to others; and ‘God, even our own God,’ will bless you, and make you a blessing.

“By order of the Committee,
HILDRETH KAY, Chairman.

“Wesleyan Corresponding Committee Office,
2, Exeter Hall, Strand, London, Sept. 14, 1849.”

The Expelled Ministers having commenced holding public meetings, for the purpose of bringing the arbitrary power assumed by Conference before the Wesleyan societies and congregations, the Committee deemed it desirable to make this part of the movement as efficient as possible, and for this purpose, in connexion with the Expellee, entered into arrangements for holding public meetings in all the circuits, at the earliest convenient period. Though as many of these meetings have been held as time since Conference would allow, and the strength of the ministers has permitted, such is the eager desire of the societies to receive information on the present position and prospects of Methodism, that numerous applications for public meetings yet remain unaccomplished with. Upwards of seventy such meetings have already

been held, and in all cases an intense interest in the proceedings has been manifested.—Crowded audiences, often till midnight, have listened to the speakers; and resolutions, condemnatory of the acts of the last Conference, and expressive of a determination to obtain Wesleyan Reform, have passed with enthusiasm and unanimity; or if, in some cases, there have been dissentients, these have been so few as only to render the demonstration in favor of Reform the more striking and decisive.

Numerous public meetings have also been held by the local authorities alone, when the aid of the Expelled could not be obtained; and, in these cases, the numbers present and the enthusiasm manifested, have afforded convincing proof that, in the judgment of thousands of Wesleyans, a strong necessity exists for effecting reforms in our body.

EPIDEMICS.

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Little, however, remains to be said on this subject, after the able and conclusive reports of the Board of Health on the uselessness of quarantine establishments as a means of prevention, in which the fallacy of popular ideas, on the supposed contagious character of epidemics, is fully exposed. For the interests of civilization, we trust that translated copies of valuable reports will be forwarded to every government of Europe and Asia with which we maintain friendly relations; and we think that the present cabinet will be wanting in its duty to the country, if they do not promptly act upon its recommendations, in abolishing during the next session, as an example to other nations, English quarantine regulations, and in otherwise exerting themselves to cause the example to be followed. Wherever the principle of quarantine is maintained, a standing lesson of inhumanity is inculcated. It is a practical mode of teaching the people the wisdom of abandoning the sick and leaving them to perish, as a cruel necessity; while, at the same time, it diverts the mind from an investigation of the true causes upon which the propagation of epidemics chiefly depend. Upon the disastrous effects of quarantine in paralysing the trade and industry of commercial countries, we need offer no observation. They are now too well known to require comment.

Quarantine regulations are a relic of the ignorance and superstition of the middle ages.—They were first established at Venice and in Italy about the close of the fifteenth century, in the vain but abortive hope of opposing a barrier to the eruption of the plague; but the bills of health were introduced about the period of the destruction of the French army, before Naples, by an epidemic in 1528. The notion of the importance of a forty day’s detention was founded upon the religious ideas of the period, of some magical virtue residing in forty-day epochs. Christ has fasted forty days in the wilderness; forty days were asserted to be the limit of separation between acute and chronic diseases; forty days were supposed to be necessary for every change in the growth of a fetus; and forty days composed the philosophical month of the alchemists. Let us hope that we are not far from the time when, instead of lazarettos of imprisonment founded upon such puerile theories, marine hospitals will be established in every port for the immediate but voluntary occupation of all sick persons landing after a voyage, and that the principle of the forcible detention of a ship’s crew or passengers will be utterly abandoned.

It may be observed here, that very little faith ought to be placed in the correctness of any of the numerous statements that have appeared of the precise course of the cholera in its march from Asia to Europe, from the date of its appearance at Jessore in 1817. We know of course the year and month when it broke out at Newcastle-upon-Tyne, in London, Paris, St Petersburg, and other European cities; and we assume it to be true, that it had appeared as we are told, previously at Teflis, Astrachan, Saratoff, and other places of which we know little; but all these statements amount to nothing more than industrious collections of newspaper paragraphs; and it will be obvious, on a moment’s reflection, that cholera may, and doubtless has appeared in a thousand places where there has been no newspaper reporter to testify to its existence. Who will prove to us that it was not raging last September in the interior of Thibet, or at the sources of the Niger, or on the banks of the Amazon? Even its existence last summer in the United States has been but little noticed in England, and although the mortality in many towns of the Union has been excessive, the contagionists have failed to explain to us when and by what mode it crossed the Atlantic ocean, and appeared, without local spontaneity of origin at New York.

We shall not, therefore, attempt to follow the narrative of any so-called history of the progress of cholera that has yet been written; and not to extend this paper to a length too great for the patience of the reader, we shall now confine ourselves to the statistics of the disease as it manifested itself in Paris and London.

The following is an analysis of the principle facts connected with the appearance of cholera in Paris in 1832, drawn up by M. de Watteville.

“Cholera showed itself in Paris on the 26th of March, 1832; four persons were suddenly attacked, and died in a few hours.

“The next day, March 27, 6 other individuals were attacked; on the 28th, those attacked were 22 in number; on the 31st, there were 300; and the cholera had already invaded 35 out of the 48 quarters of Paris.

“Out of the 300 cholera patients on the 31st of March, 86 had ceased to exist before the end of that day. On the 2nd of April, the number of deaths amounted to more than 100; on the 3rd, to 200; the 5th, to 300. On the 9th, more than 1,200 individuals were attacked, and 814 died. In short, eighteen days after the breaking out of the malady, namely, on the 14th of April the number of attacks was 13,000, with 7,000 deaths.

“At length the virulence of the epidemic began to abate; on the 15th of April, the number of deaths fell from 756 to 631; on the 30th they were but 114; and from the 17th of May to the 17th of June, no more than from 15 to 20 per diem occurred. All at once, this limit was exceeded; on the 19th of July, 71 succumbed to the malady; on the 13th, 88 died; the next day, 107; on the 15th, 128; the 16th, 170; and the 18th, 225. But, on the 19th, the number of deaths decreased to 130, and this rapid diminution continuing daily, the alarm of the public began to subside. The epidemic went on decreasing up to the end of September, and on the 1st of October, the cholera was regarded as extinct.

“The total duration of this epidemic, in Paris, was 189 days, or 27 weeks, from the 26th of March to the 30th of September, or from the vernal to the autumnal equinox.

“The period of augmentation or increase was 15 days and that of diminution 62. Thus the second period lasted four times as long as the first.

“The cholera carried off 18,402 individuals in the French capital, viz.:

March (from the 26th only)	90 deaths.
April	12,733
May	812
June (from the 15th to the 30th, second increase & recrudescence)	602
July	2,573
August	969
September	357
General total	18,402

“This total of 18,402 comprised 9,170 men and 9,232 women; and bears a proportion to the general population of 1 to 4,270.

“Of these 18,402 deaths, there were,—

Under 5 years of age	1,311
From 5 to 10	392
“ 10 to 15	202
“ 15 to 20	377
“ 20 to 25	959
“ 25 to 30	1,206
“ 30 to 35	1,423
“ 35 to 40	1,348
“ 40 to 45	1,311
“ 45 to 50	1,416
“ 50 to 55	1,473
“ 55 to 60	1,440
“ 60 to 65	1,527
“ 65 to 70	1,594
“ 70 to 75	1,218
“ 75 to 80	756
“ 80 to 85	307
“ 85 to 90	68
“ 90 to 95	13
“ 95 to 100	1
Total	18,402

“We may add, as a curious piece of information, the number of deaths which occurred in the different parts of houses, during the six months of the prevalence of the epidemic:—

Ground floor	1,506
First floor	2,868
Second floor	2,264
Third floor	2,023
Fourth floor	1,375
Fifth, sixth, and seventh floors	962
Not indicated	170
Total	11,168

The last table, which M. de Watteville introduces as a curious piece of information, is the most important part of the whole. It establishes two facts upon which our attention cannot be too strongly fixed, and which there is abundant additional evidence to confirm—first, that the cholera does not attack the poor in preference to the rich, where the poor are not unhealthily lodged; second, that the mortality is greatest where the air is the densest, namely, at its lowest level. In Paris, the reader is probably aware that few persons rent private houses as in England. The different classes of society occupy separate suites on the different floors of houses, built somewhat upon the plan of the chambers of our inns-of-law. The only persons who sleep on the ground floor are the porters and their families, who suffered largely; although the number does not appear so great as on the next floor, because the ground is principally devoted to shops and warehouses. The premiere and seconde, or first and second floors, are exclusively occupied by classes in easy circumstances, and will be noticed that it was among them that the greatest number of deaths occurred. Higher up lived the families of the poorer class, and it will be seen that there were fewer deaths on the third floors than on the second, fewer still on the fourth, and that the inmates of the attics or mansardes (always the very poorest of the poor), nearly-escaped altogether.

In noticing the return of the aggregate deaths in each of the different arrondissements of Paris, the same rule may be observed. The cholera made no distinction between rich and poor, nor between crowded and thinly inhabited districts. The mortality was greatest in proportion to the number of residents, where the houses were built on the lowest land. Thus it was greatest in the tenth arrondissement, which includes the fashionable Faubourg of St. Germain, where many of the houses are isolated and surrounded by gardens, but the level of which is low, corresponding with that of Lambeth in respect to London; and it was in Lambeth where the ravages of cholera in the British Metropolis were the most severe during the late autumn. The smallest number of deaths occurred in the third arrondissement, which embraces part of the