

Current Topics and Events.

LOCAL PREACHERS.

We fear that there is not as much use made of lay preaching in this country as there used to be, and as there ought to be. It was for many a year the right arm of the Church's strength, and where energetically employed, it is accompanied with incalculable advantages. There is in it something so unprofessional, so purely benevolent as to disarm criticism and prepare the way for the entrance of the truth. Even the most bigoted cannot say of the lay preacher, as they sometimes say of the ordained minister, "Oh, that's his trade; he preaches because he is paid for it."

It strikes us that our friends in Great Britain make far more wise use of this mighty agency for good than is done anywhere else in the world. We were very much impressed with this fact in reading the report of the part taken by the Local Preachers' Association in the recent Wesley Centennial in Great Britain. At this meeting Mr. H. O. Clough, F.R.G.S., President of the Local Preachers' Mutual Aid Association, began a vigorous address with the expressed intention of building up certain facts, with a view of demonstrating that local preachers are, and will continue to be, an absolute necessity in the Methodist Church. He traced the origin of lay preachers in England, and declared that Methodism was impossible without lay helpers. In this connection he made the following striking statement: "The proportion of services taken by local preachers and ministers is as six to one. If we take our own Church, the 'old body,' our local preachers are eight times as numerous as travelling preachers, and out of every seven services taken on Sundays five are taken by local preachers. We have 5,500 pulpits dependent upon lay help, and if we estimate these men's services as

worth five shillings a sermon—and if they are not worth five shillings they are not worth anything—they would cost Methodism £2,750 every Sunday, or £133,000 per annum. That is what it would cost if the local preachers went on strike. Now if we take the various branches of Methodism in Great Britain we have these totals—18,379 preaching places, 3,920 itinerant preachers, 39,972 lay preachers, or in the proportion of ten to one."

In England much is done for the better fitting of the lay preacher for his important work. A well directed course of reading and study has been provided, and an admirable Local Preachers' Aid Association has been in existence for over thirty years. The report in the *Methodist Times*, of the above-mentioned, proceeds as follows: "Mr. Clough urged the formation of centres in every circuit, where the local preacher may submit himself to wisely-directed study, adapted to his every-day life and duties. These men had under God and the guidance of ministers aided largely in the building up of the Methodist Church; their services were gratuitous; they had much to do, and, as a rule, received little thanks for what they did. Still, they were glad to do it, and he could not help feeling that their services would be better appreciated if they cost Methodism something. Mr. Clough traced the history of the Local Preachers' Mutual Aid Association from its foundation in 1849, and showed that since then it had paid £166,175 to necessitous local preachers; that they now had on the funds 377 aged members, and 97 widows; and that at the present time the annual payments to these necessitous ones amounted to £4,712 10s."

It strikes us that something more might be done for the still more effective demonstration of a system