

THE ORDERS OF THE WESLEYAN METHODISTS. IN ENGLAND AND THE COLONIES.

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[APPROPOS of the centenary of the death of the Rev. Jno. Wesley, Priest of the Church of England, now being celebrated by our Methodist friends,—in utter forgetfulness of his entire condemnation of their present position and claims—the following article from the March number of the *Church Eclectic*, N. Y., will be of interest to our readers.—ED.]

Even if the Apostolical Succession through presbyters were valid, the modern Wesleyans can claim no benefit from it whatever, for they have not got a shadow even of that. Presbyterians (e. g.) claim that they have a regular succession transmitted by the laying on of hands of successive presbyters from the beginning. But the Wesleyan preachers simply met together, the year after Wesley died, and put it to the lot whether or not they should administer the Sacraments; the lot said "no." The next year the question was put to the vote, and the majority said "yes," and thus voted themselves into the priesthood.* There was no pretence of ordination, nay, they absolutely repudiated the necessity of it. "We resolved," they said, "that all distinctions between ordained and unordained preachers should cease, and that the being received into full connection by the Conference, and appointed by them to administer the ordinances (i. e. the Sacraments) should be considered a sufficient ordination without the imposition of hands."—*Smith's Hist. II.*, p. 22.

Nor was it till forty-three years afterwards, when a whole generation had passed away, viz, in 1836 that the Wesleyans first began to use an Ordination Service with the laying on of hands. But, even then, the ordainers were not themselves presbyters, for the rite was to be performed by 'the president, ex-president, and secretary of the Conference, for the time being, with two other senior preachers.'—*Smith's Hist. III.*, p. 417 The president and ex-president, for the year 1836, were Jezeb Bunting and Richard Seeco; the secretary, Robt. Newton; all were preachers who had never themselves received an ordination with the laying on of hands from any body whatever, and consequently had no Orders whatever, whether Presbyterian or Episcopal. Up to that time they had abided by the principles laid down by the Conference of 1793. 'We have never sanctioned ordination in England, either in this Conference, or in any other, in any degree, or ever attempted to do it.'—*Minutes of Conference I.*, p. 281. Is it not plain that if the president and his four associates were presbyters without ordination, the preachers on whom they laid their hands did not need it? But if they did need it, then the president and his associates were not presbyters without it.†

*It is to be noticed that this decision was the cause of a deep and wide rent in the Wesleyan Society, which continues to this day.

†The apology which the historian of Wesleyanism makes for this transaction is worthy of being transcribed: 'The Methodist preachers,' he says, 'of 1836, held that the true Apostolical Succession was that the ministry appointed the ministry, and must continue to do so to the end of the world. The reason why the first Methodist preachers were not ordained was that they were not accounted ministers, but helpers to others who held that character; while it is now (i. e., in 1836) an undoubted fact that, by the Providence of God, they had long ceased to occupy a subordinate position. They were no longer helpers to any class of men, but the constituted ministry of a large and growing denomination.'—*Smith's History of Methodism III.*,

Nor can any intelligible explanation be given why the itinerant preachers should assume to themselves the priestly power and deny it to the local preachers. It is quite clear that whatever Scriptural commission the itinerants may be supposed to possess, the local preachers must possess the same. Whatever commission can be supposed to be derived from a connection with John Wesley is possessed by both parties equally. But in fact both the one and the other are now in the exact position described by Charles Wesley. Speaking of King Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, 'who made Israel to sin' by making priests of 'whosoever would,' he writes:—

But kings may spare their labour vain;
For in such happy times as these,
The vulgar can themselves ordain,
And priest commence whoever please.

And how strongly he felt on the subject will be seen from the follow lines:—

Raised from the people's lowest lees,
Guard, Lord, Thy preaching witnesses;
Nor let their pride the honor claim
Of sealing covenants in Thy Name,
Rather than suffer them to dare
Usurp the priestly character,
Save the arrogant offence,
And snatch them uncorrupted thence.

To sum up this matter:—

1. Wesley, throughout his entire life, asserted the Apostolical Succession as running in the Episcopate, and during a short portion of his life, he held that the episcopal and priestly offices are one and the same.

2. Wesley never dreamed of the possibility of any man becoming a priest, or consequently having any authority to administer the Eucharist, otherwise than by the laying on of the hands of Bishops (for a short time, he said, or of priests). Such a thing he termed 'stupid,' 'sinful,' and 'unscriptural.'

3. Wesley sternly forbade any of his preachers to administer the Sacraments unless they had been so ordained.

4. Two years after Wesley's death, the Conference solemnly protested that they had never at any time sanctioned any sort of ordination in England.

5. Whence it follows that the Wesleyan Society in England was without any kind of ordination or ordained ministers till the year 1836, when the preachers, without ordination themselves, began to ordain by the imposition of hands.

Extracts from John Wesley's Writings, &c.

In 1744, among the Minutes, &c., are 'Wesley's Instructions to his Preachers':—

Let all our preachers go to Church. Let all the people go constantly, and receive the Sacrament at every opportunity. Warn against calling our society 'a Church'; against calling our preachers 'ministers'; our houses 'meeting houses'; call them, plainly, 'preaching houses.' License yourself as a *Methodist preacher*.—*Works*, VII., p. 358.

In 1746, Wesley wrote: 'If any man separate from the Church, he is no longer a member of our society.'—*Works*, XII., p. 361.

In 1793, the Conference forbade the preachers to assume the title of 'Reverend.'

In 1794, the Conference repeated this prohibition.

p 325. To assert that it was 'by God's Providence' that the preachers ceased to occupy a subordinate position, is not only begging the question, but is also a placing of God's Providence and John Wesley in direct antagonism. How the ordainers were 'constituted' a ministry, our author does not tell. It is plain, however, from what he does say, that they were not ordained by ministers, as he confesses they ought to have been.

§ It is worthy of remark that the Conference in 1792 enacted that 'the distinction between ordained and unordained preachers shall be dropped.'—*Smith's Hist.*, II., p. 24.

In 1789, John Wesley wrote: I abhor the thought of separation from the Church.—*Letter to Mr. Tripp*.

In 1785, John Wesley wrote thus to the so-called Bishop Ashbury:

'How can you, how dare you, suffer yourself to be called a Bishop? I shudder, I start at the very thought! Men may call me a knave, or a fool, a rascal, a scoundrel, and I am content; but they shall never, by my consent, call me a Bishop.—*Smith's Hist. of Wesleyan Methodism*, I., p. 524.

Their (the Methodists) fixed purpose is—let the clergy or laity use them well or ill—by the grace of God to endure all things, to hold on their even course, and to continue in the Church. . . . We do not, will not, form any separate sect, but from principle remain, what we have always been—true members of the Church of England.—*Wesley's 54th Sermon*, written in 1777.—*Works*, VIII., p. 403

The contrast between these extracts and modern Methodism is very great, wide apart as the poles.

LENT.

The season of Lent is looked on by many as a long, dreary, sad season, with no brightness in it. They dread its coming, and are glad to hear it is over.

Now we want to help our friends to correct this. First, the very meaning of the word *Lent* is anything but sad. It is a good old Saxon word and means *spring*, a time full of brightness and hope.

There is something grand and inspiring about the season of Lent! It means to us a season for a fresh start, a time for refreshing and strength, as well as for fasting and self-denial, a time for getting a firmer hold of what we know is true; a time of storing up power to do battle for the right.

Lent should mean all this to us. We are so apt to grow careless and to forget our good desires and resolutions, that we need a special time to remind us of what our Heavenly Father wants us to be, and to do. We need to make clear again the blurred lines of daily duty.

For example in regard to early rising and in keeping a closer watch on each thought, word, and deed; in carefully saying grace; in offering ordinary work to God; in avoiding gossip and meddling in other people's matters; and in regard to light reading, to prayer, Bible reading, self-examination, and in regard to our whole duty toward God and man.

In short, Lent is a time in which to learn thoroughly how to live, a time to bring us into closer fellowship with Christ, that we may work in His strength, rest in His Peace, share in His purity, and live in His Life.

—*Banner of Faith*.

What is the use of Lent? It has two uses. One to keep under the body, the other to give the soul a chance to grow. The body should be the soul's servant, not its master. Lent helps to decide that question. It is a test of spiritual character. It proves whether the soul is gaining or losing ground, or only holding its own, in the things which concern its salvation, its grasp on God, its loyalty to Christ, its willingness to suffer in order that it may reign with Him.

Let every one of us all this Lent retire ourselves as much as possible, making no unnecessary visits. Let the consideration of the Divine mercy toward mankind move us to afflict ourselves with fasting, or if that cannot be, with spare diet. Make no feast, nor accept of invitations to them. Leave the playhouse empty, make the churches full, give alms liberally, spend the time when you come from Church, in setting all things right at home.—*Bishop Patrick*.