

CHURCH THOUGHTS BY A LAYMAN.

RELIGION IN THE GUTTER.

THOSE who speak of the Salvation Army as only in its ways a revival of primitive Methodism do that movement serious injustice. However much the early Methodists offended against good taste by their extravagant language, and their offences were not flagrant in this regard, they never were open to the charge of lowering religion or degrading any of its customs or manifestations into the gutter by slang, coarse humour, or unseemly jesting. They were in deep earnest, therefore they were reverent. They did not make revivalism a trade, they did not preach for large fees, nor make vast gains by selling and puffing hymn books, therefore they were not tempted to do anything however revolting to Christian refinement in order "to draw a crowd." Those who were scornfully dubbed "Ranters" were usually the very salt of the community, and their peculiarities would to-day be regarded with sympathetic approval by even Church people. It has long been our conviction that Methodism dropped its right arm and abandoned its only reason for existence, when it became too respectable to go out in the highways and ditches proclaiming the Gospel message by song, by procession, and by exhortation. Methodism to-day boasts itself a "Church." At the recent conference the delegates rolled out with unctuous pomposity the phrases "Our Church," "the great Methodist Church," with such frequency as showed that the sensation was as novel as it was delightful. Wesley never put himself in rivalry with the Lord Jesus Christ by laying the foundations of a Church, *that work was done by the Master once for all*, and they who affect to have founded a Church apart from the "One Catholic and Apostolic Church," might just as reasonably claim Divine honours and attributes as expect us to recognize their presumptuous creation of a rival to the Church of God. But when this "Society," as its founder called it, as its own Magazine called it, and as all its members called it in our earlier days, dropped this truthful title and audaciously assumed the untruthful one of "Church," it seems to have signaled the change by ceasing also to carry on the work for which its founder called it into being, and abandoned the mission which justified Wesley's work, and of which his followers before they became a "Church" were justified in regarding with pride. The early Methodists were a band of lay evangelists, they did nothing which militated one iota against Church order. We have often seen their leaders at Holy Communion at the Parish Church in the morning, and passing along the streets singing in procession and exhorting from a waggon or some common or other open space in the afternoon. These men were at times rough in speech, but their intense spiritual earnestness was manifest in their solemnity. Men who in their worldly calling were artisans became as it were transfigured and they spoke with the gravity, oft times with all the dignity of Apostles. As we recall the memory of many of

these zealous men we can imagine them regarding the prevalent habits of their successors with feelings of painful revulsion.

The style of the Americans seems to have been modelled rather after the matter of "Joe Miller's Jest Book," than the Word of God. The quips and cranks of speech, the forced humour, the slangy phrases, the sneering, the personalities, which form the staple of the "Reverend" Sam Jones' discourses, smack strongly of the whisky saloon. Their delivery seems to require as fit accomplishments the clinking of glasses, the fumes of the dirtiest tobacco, and the incessant use of the spittoon. The evangelists and their friends make a great parade of their abbreviated Christian names. It is evidently regarded as a strong point that they can be called by everybody familiarly—"Sam." Will those who admire it follow this fashion? Shall we see our walls announcing that the "Rev. Jack Potts" or "Rev. Bill Briggs" will preach?

It will be a disagreeable revelation to our neighbours to hear such sentences as the following loudly applauded by Wesleyans. Mr. Sam Jones said, "*The Presbyterian has his dignity, the Baptist his water to fall back upon, but the Methodist nothing but religion, so a Methodist without religion is in a bad way.*" This slander ought to have been promptly protested against. Again he spoke of the "*progressive euchre playing Presbyterian.*" Indeed his sneers at the Church and those who are shocked at foolish jesting on sacred subjects so very frequent in Mr. Sam Jones' discourses, seemed highly popular with the ministers on the platform, and was loudly applauded by prominent members of their congregations in the audiences. There seems a notion abroad that as it was said, "he who breeds fat oxen should himself be fat," so he who preaches Christ to the vulgar should himself be vulgar. The idea never occurred to the Great Preacher, nor to His Apostles. The foolishness of preaching did not consist in silly jests, nor was Apostolic power manifested by shouts of laughter. The audience had not their risible faculties excited by St. Peter, his hearers were "pricked in their heart," the cry was not "what a witty fellow"—but "what shall we do to escape the wrath to come?" We have read the so-called sermons of the new Methodist revivalists with pain—some passages are blasphemous, a larger proportion are mere froth, and what sayings were worth uttering are parodies from well known authors whose wit and wisdom has been translated into slang. For one person moved towards a better life by listening to such a torrent of frivolous jesting, there will be hundreds confirmed in the vile practise of making the Bible and religion subjects for profane jokes, indeed we have been informed that the whisky saloons are ringing with indecent laughter excited by the retail of Mr. Sam Jones' humorous allusions to the Saviour and to Bible incidents. Some few phrases we admit to be full of "cuteness," "they cut like a razor," as the Psalmist says. Several sentences satirising the morbid hymns of rival evangelists, "two of a trade seldom agree,"

will we trust bear fruit. "We want less of 'Sweet by and by' and more of 'Sweet now and now,'" is admirable. So also, "Those who sing, '*Oh! to be nothing, nothing, are usually gratified.*'" That is worth remembering. But secular writers and lecturers let fall pungent sayings of this class, but such wit is neither "Gospel" nor likely to produce any spiritual result. Most of these smart phrases might have been said by Ingersoll in an infidel lecture. Indeed the great mass of the "Reverend" Sam Jones' discourses might have been spoken by one ridiculing Christianity and its professors.

"Pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall." From the swagger and lordly talk about "the great Methodist Church," to the revolting vulgarity of "Sam Jones'" method of dragging religion into the gutter, the step is a natural sequence.

We cannot bring the Salvation Army into this condemnation. They are grotesque, but they do not deliberately indulge in vulgar jests to draw a crowd. Indeed we believe the Catholic Church owes a deep debt of gratitude to the Salvation Army. They have smashed utterly and hopelessly the bigoted and selfish puritanic folly which was the very stronghold of partyism in the Church. When General Booth declared "I care not for methods—I care only for results," he made a show openly of those who so long have kept up strife in the Church because certain "methods" were not to their liking. On the platform when General Booth uttered this phrase was one whose very presence there committed him to this sentiment, one who for years has spent untiring energy and large funds in a violent onslaught upon brother Churchmen who in their longing for souls have fished in a manner this agitator disliked. Hereafter let him hold his peace. Though before going into honourable retreat he ought to make amends to those of his brethren whom he has insulted, assaulted, and injured.

The Salvation Army has cleared the ground for us by demonstrating that a "simple Gospel" is not antagonised by striking displays of music and bannered processions. The Church should now show them and men of the Sam Jones school, that the evangelisation of the social outcasts can be successfully pursued by methods which do not drag down religion into the mud of vulgarity, foolish jesting, and saloon slang.

In Taylor's "*Natural History of Enthusiasm*" we read that the excitement of such revivalism as Sam Jones arouses, "diverts attention from the cultivation and practice of the virtues and becomes a fermenting principle of frothy agitations, that either work themselves off in the sourness of an uncharitable temper, or by a relaxation of the moral sentiments which leaves the heart exposed to the seductions of vicious pleasure. Thus the religious life, instead of being a sunshine of peace and hope, is made up of an alternation of ecstasies and despondencies; or worse—of devotional fervors and of sensual indulgences." The absolute truth of which is demonstrated in the