

Wesleyana.

(From the London Watchman.)

Methodism and the Spirit of the Age.

Among the many things that are said about Methodism just now, there is none, perhaps, more commonly heard than that Methodism is behind the age, and at variance with its spirit.

We have lately been puzzling ourselves about the meaning of this saying: So oracularly do we hear it uttered, with such impressive assent do we observe it to be received, that we have thought there really must be something in it; yet what is the precise force of the dictum, as applied to such an embodiment of Christian power and principle as the system of Wesleyan Methodism, we have found it very difficult to understand.

The first difficulty that struck us, was, that we have found it used by professors of religion in order to imply a censure upon Methodism. If an irreligious worldling had complained that Methodism was opposed to the spirit of the age, we should have understood him at once. We should have remembered the words of an Apostle:—"Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess, speaking evil of you." But when professing Christians complain of us in such terms, we may well be at a loss. Our first impulse is to ask such persons, What else did you expect? Is it not the very aim and principle of Christianity, in every true and faithful form of its development, to oppose the spirit and practice of the world? You say that we are behind the age. Is it then the case, that you "run with them" in their "excess?" You say that we are not sufficiently conformed to the spirit and requirements of the age. Have you then forgotten the injunction, "Be not conformed to this world"—this age—"but be transformed," &c.?

Surely, at first sight, and taking language in its obvious and ordinary sense, what is thus urged against us as a reproach, should rather, in the estimation of a Christian, be our honourable certificate of true conformity to Christianity. The whole of New Testament teaching is consonant with the words of our Saviour, when he said, "My kingdom is not of this world," and of his Apostle, when he wrote, "The friendship of the world is enmity with God."

Methodism is opposed to the spirit of the age." Be it so. And must it therefore be condemned? How then shall the teaching of our Lord and St. Paul escape condemnation? Let us listen to the words of the latter: "The Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness."—The Jews demanded a religion signalled by miraculous splendour, and by earthly pomp and glory. The Greeks looked for dialectic subtlety, philosophic speculations, sonorous and artificial eloquence. But Paul preached a mysterious yet simple, a spiritual and self-denying faith, not in the words which man's wisdom would have taught, but in the homely energetic language dictated by the Spirit. No doubt both Jews and Greeks were ready with the objection that Paul's doctrine and manner of teaching were altogether behind the age, and by no means adapted to such enlightened, and cultivated, and fast-going times as those in which he lived. Verily it would seem that the reproaches of Christ and his apostles have fallen upon us.

It does, then, appear very singular that this kind of objection, most indefinitely expressed as it is,—an objection which sounds at least like praise, rather than blame, when applied to a professedly religious body,—it does, we say, seem extremely strange that this kind of objection, without any specific charge, should pass current among religious people as an obvious, reasonable, and momentous ground of complaint against Methodism. A priori, the fact implied would seem to claim commendation, yet some how, with many people who profess religion, it is at once and without inquiry accepted as a presumption of serious faultiness. Surely there must have been some change in the ancient landmarks. Either Christianity has changed

its form, or a part of Christendom has, unaware, slipped from its moorings.

The objection as urged against Wesleyans possesses a further and emphatic singularity. Who ever could have expected the followers of Wesley to be up to the age, or conformed to its spirit? Was it not John Wesley who, 100 years ago, led the onset against the spirit of the age, and was not his whole life one continuous energetic protest and struggle against that spirit? Why, the cry that assails us is the very echo of that which arose on every side against him. Only that cry arose from the formalist, or the profane—this comes not only from the world, but often from the professors of spiritual Christianity.

"Methodism is at variance with the spirit of the age." It is implied then that it ought to be in agreement with it. Are we to understand, from this, that each branch of the Christian Church ought continually to adapt its form and teachings to the character of the age in which it flourishes? Then must truth lose its nature, and become as changeable in form and hue as error. Then the world and Christ, Mammon and God, pleasure and piety, selfishness and self-denial, are no longer twain but one.

But, perhaps, the objection which we have been considering is not to be taken in its obvious sense, and yet has a meaning which is weighty and important. Unless the Millennium in all its glory has already arrived, it must be admitted that the spirit of the age, in the general and most obvious sense of that expression, must be opposed to the rule of primitive and living Christianity. But possibly some special sense may be discovered in which the developments or embodiments of Christianity ought to be in agreement with the spirit of the age, and in which Methodism is not in such agreement. It would seem as though there must be some such sense, and that neither obscure nor remote,—or how can we account for the currency which the objection we are examining, has acquired—and for the complacent and satisfied decisiveness with which it is urged by many moderately informed, every-day people?

And yet we confess ourselves to be considerably at a loss to discover the sense intended.

The present age is perhaps more universally and characteristically distinguished by activity of principles and elements,—by the multiplication of powers, means, and agencies, and by the diffusion of intelligence,—than by any other attributes. But surely the complaint of our censurers is not that in these respects Wesleyan Methodism is behind the age. We will not say that the objection so applied would be altogether destitute of force. But we are sure that this is not the sense in which our reprovers urge it. Their ground of complaint is conceived to be something radical and vital. They have no desire to see our energy and activity increased. They are evidently both jealous and alarmed at the influence we have already acquired, and the power which we continually exert. They know well that, however defective we may be in comparison of the constant, systematic, and manifold activity required by the present times, we yet possess a comprehensive, energetic, and diversified system of plans and agencies, far better adapted, and far more susceptible of continual adaptation, to the multiplying necessities and opportunities of the times, than is possessed by any other denomination of Christians. They know that, spite of the motley and manifold interests and enmities leagued against us, we are, even at this moment, exerting a more intense, diffusive, and penetrating influence upon the masses of the population, than any other religious body.

Less generally and characteristically, but still very remarkably and importantly, the present age has been distinguished by the multiplication of rationalistic and semi-sceptical opinions on religious subjects. Many of the things which were "most sorely believed" among us, have come to be considered, in certain quarters, as doubtful.—The sufficiency, and, in part at least, the historical and doctrinal truth of the Sacred Scriptures; the natural depravity of man; the proper Deity of the Son of God; and the personality of the Holy Spirit; these

articles of our belief have been denied or slurred with doubt. A species of infidelity more subtle and learned, more polite, and wary, and sentimental, than that of Priestley and Belsham, but not less destructive to Christian faith and hope, rose, like a fog, in Germany; and, having long overspread that land, has now settled in some parts of this country, bringing upon the souls of those who sit under its shadow, chill and darkness, and wideness. Some of those who find fault with Methodism have, we know, been led captive and astray by this delusive "spirit of the age"—but Methodism has not. Hitherto, through the mercy of our God, we have light in our dwellings. Can this be the sense in which it is complained that we are not conformed to the spirit of the age?

In close alliance with the tendency just described, is another characteristic of the present age. There is a school of politicians, who, believing more devoutly in the divinity of man than in the being of a personal God,—in human perfectibility than in man's accountability, or in divine revelation,—would instruct the nation in science and morality, without the aid of Bible teaching, and would train each son of man to be his own priest and prophet, without any help derived from the enervating spell of "Christian superstition," or the influence of the Bible "priesthood." The Manchester scheme of education, promoted chiefly by men of the school of Fox and Dawson, has been opposed by the Wesleyans. An insult, doubtless, to the "spirit of the age!"

The revival of absurd and doing superstitions, also,—a reaction from the former prevalence of profane irreligiosity in the Ministers of the Established Church, and in the higher classes of the nation, induced by the piety and zeal of Nonconformists, and the increasing power and spread of Dissenting principles,—this has been one of the most remarkable characteristics of the present age. And the Tractarian, doubtless, thinks that in opposing this tendency of the age, Methodism has been grievously in fault. But is this what our "reforming" opponents intend by their outcry? We suppose not.

There is yet another characteristic of the age, which we will name. And if this is not what our opponents mean, we confess ourselves to be entirely at a loss. The present is, very eminently, among some classes of the community, an age distinguished by opposition to the authority of government, and to the gradations of social rank and influence. This is the case, more or less, throughout Europe. The socialism of Switzerland and France, the republicanism of the lower classes in almost every state of the Continent, the chartism and low radicalism in England, are all but various manifestations of the same wide-spreading evil. To this evil Methodist influence ever has been and must be opposed. It is a part of our gospel morality—"not to speak evil of dignities," but to teach "every soul to be subject to the higher powers." We have no sympathy with those who love revolution for its own sake, or who wish to reduce all to a common level. We are no admirers of an unlimited democracy, and can see no truth or piety in the saying, "vox populi vox Dei." In this respect we certainly are not conformed to the spirit of the age, which, after all, is but the spirit of fallen humanity. God, we are convinced, has placed Methodism as the breakwater against which the waves of democratic rage may vainly dash the selves to foam; and, in the same spirit which animated our fathers at the close of the last century, and the beginning of the present,—a spirit of loyalty and duty to the powers that be,—will we adhere to the cause of legal rights and established order, because we are convinced that it is also the cause of justice, religion, and lasting peace. No wonder, such being our position and our power, that we are regarded with deadly dislike by the apostles of anarchy and revolution. Fierce democrats, proud theorists about the rights and capabilities of man, levelling chartists and socialists,—all who are enviously dissatisfied with their social position,—all who are Utopian dreamers about an ideal republic of virtue, equality, and peace,—all who are engaged in the war of the masses with vested rights, civil authority, and ancient privilege,

—will, of course, join in the outcry against that Methodism whose influence they fear, whose mighty, though passive resistance, they cannot overcome. So long as the influence of Methodism remains undiminished, violent revolution. Well is this understood by the crowds of chartists and socialists who throng to hear Mr. Griffiths harangue, and who congregate to insult and assail our Ministers and godly people. Well, too, is this understood by theoretic republicans of the school of Hume and Mill, and hence their hostility to Methodism.

Methodism is, then, in this last sense, opposed to the spirit of the age. But this, with thoughtful and pious men, should be not its condemnation, but its glory.

Methodism, in fact, opposes itself to every ungodly and merely selfish principle and interest. It frowns upon every pernicious speculation in philosophy and every doctrinal error; it refuses to join in any mere class or party cry. It flatters not the aristocracy, it panders not to democracy. It neither upholds the Established Church, nor joins in the bitter cursing of low and fierce dissent. What wonder, then, that its foes are many? And here is the secret of the acceptance which the phrase on which we have been commenting has received.—Each party which has adopted as its characteristic any special heresy or special selfish end, flatters itself that the age is taking its colour and character from itself; and would assume that in opposing it we oppose the mighty and prevailing spirit of the age.—Hence on every hand the parrot-cry is heard—"Methodism is behind the spirit of the age"—and each party that uses it puts upon it the meaning which best accords with its peculiar views.

But surely it is time that Christians dropped this senseless outcry. What is it come to this, that the Christian armies are to gather beneath a banner on which is inscribed "The Spirit of the Age!"

Family Circle.

Franklin in the Social Circle.

BY WILLIAM WIRT.

Never had I known such a fireside companion as he was, both as a statesman and a philosopher; he never shone in a light more winning, than when he was seen in the domestic circle. It was once my good fortune to pass two or three weeks with him at the house of a gentleman in Pennsylvania, and we were confined to the house during the whole of that time by the unrelenting constancy and depth of the snows. But confinement could not be felt where Dr. Franklin was an inmate. His cheerfulness and his colloquial powers spread around him a perpetual spring. Of Franklin no one ever became tired. There was no ambition of eloquence, no effort to shine in anything which came from him. There was nothing which made any demand either upon your allegiance or your admiration.

His manner was just as unaffected as infancy. It was Nature's spell. He talked like an old patriarch, and his plainness and simplicity put you at once at your ease, and gave you the full and free possession and use of all your faculties.

His thoughts were of a character to shine by their own light, without any adventitious aid. They required only a medium of vision like his pure and simple style, to exhibit to the highest advantage their native radiance and beauty. His cheerfulness was our setting. It seemed to be as much the systematic and salutary exercise of the mind, as of its superior organization. His wit was of the first order. It did not show itself merely in occasional coruscations, but, without any effort or force on his part, it shed a constant stream of purest light over the whole of his discourse. Whether in the company of his counsellors or nobles, he was always the same plain man; always most perfectly at his ease, his faculties in full play, and the full orbit of his genius for ever clear and unclouded. And then the stores of his mind were inexhaustible. He had commenced life with an attention so vigilant, that nothing had escaped his observation, and every incident was turned to advantage. His youth had not been wasted