

Wesleyan.

Conference Address.

DEARLY BELOVED BRETHREN,—

It is with deep and solemn feeling that we proceed to discharge the present annual duty. Our relation to you, as the flocks committed by the CHIEF SHEPHERD to our care,—a relation unspeakably intimate and sacred,—we feel to be now more than ever endeared. We are constrained, by more than common feeling, first of all to assure you of our warmest affection. "Ye are in our hearts, to die and live with you." Most willingly consecrating ourselves afresh to Christ's service in your behalf, we humbly hope for a richer supply of His grace, that the future labours of our transitory life may be abundantly successful; that we may "finish our course with joy, and the ministry which we have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God;" and that we may have the crowning blessedness of "presenting every man perfect in Christ Jesus." "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy."

Calling to remembrance many seasons, rich in blessing, in which we have had sweet and hallowed communion with you, how can we cease to think of you in our prayers, and to seek your souls' prosperity, night and day? Multitudes among you have been dedicated to Christ in holy baptism by our office and ministry. Of such we have watched the childhood and advancing youth with earnest solicitude. The sympathies of their fathers and mothers—many of whom are now triumphant before the throne of God—we have felt it our welcome duty to share. Not a few of these dear young people have been baptized with the Holy Ghost. And, we venture to add, none but Pastors can feel, in all its extent, what gladdened the spirit of an Apostle when he wrote to his beloved Timothy: "Greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy; when I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also." Your earlier vows, beloved brethren,—the dawning of celestial liberty on your spirits,—the "rapturous infancy" of your Christian life,—all are cherished by us in affectionate memory. To watch the progress and expansion of your graces,—to mark your faith, increasing in vigour and fruitfulness; your hope, not only animating you in the conflicts of life, but lifting you up to things above, refining and hallowing all your tempers; your love, greater than faith and hope, "abounding in knowledge and in all judgment," to minister to your comfort in affliction, and to your godly edifying,—to bear you daily to the throne of the heavenly grace, and share with you the common blessing vouchsafed in answer to prayer,—these have been, and continue to be, our purest delights. The bond of pastoral attachment we feel to be altogether peculiar. We know of nothing equal to it in the universe. This consideration will be also felt by our dear people, (and the more deeply, if they reflect the more,) as warranting the mingled fervour and fidelity of our appeals on this as on every similar occasion.

Reviewing our official connexion with you, we humble ourselves before God on account of much imperfection, and gratefully ascribe to His free and infinite mercy all the good that has been wrought by the instrumentality of His servants. What are we, and what is our fathers' house, that we should be employed in this service? The brighter the views of God's glory which open to our eyes, the more deeply we must abhor ourselves, and sink into the dust. That we have been "counted faithful," and "put into the ministry," we owe to sovereign mercy. "Who is Paul, and who is Apollos, but Ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?" "So then neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase." Yet this sacred language will not fail to suggest to the thoughtful mind, that the human agency, while entirely de-

pendent for its value and efficiency on the Divine grace, is made needful in the spiritual husbandry, as in the natural. "Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit." And yet (to borrow an illustrative remark from an eminent Northern preacher) it may be affirmed, that, of all the luxuriant vegetation that followed the second prayer of the Prophet, there was not a single stem that did not issue from grain which had been cast into the soil by the hand of laborious man. The current of modern speculation in some quarters is adverse to the ordinances of Christ; and we are therefore bound, solemnly and distinctly, yet with deep humility, to assert anew that PREACHING is a Divine and perpetual ordinance; that its chief burden must ever rest upon men "separated unto the Gospel of God;" that this unpretending agency is still fresh in its primitive energy and importance; that nothing can supersede it, so long as "the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men;" that, in particular, the press, however powerful, can never take the place of the pulpit, nor the excursive lecture that of the simple Gospel message. To avail ourselves of the analogy furnished by an infallible pen,—if the modern disciples of Paul do not plant, and those of Apollos do not water, suns will shine and favouring seasons roll in vain: whatever may be the wild and thorny produce of the human soil, there will be no abundant harvest of righteousness.

It will not surprise you, if, at this time in particular, we feel it imperative to declare, to the glory of God alone, that we are sustained, amid no common reproach and persecution, by a consciousness of motives which Divine grace has preserved in simplicity and purity. Happy should we be if this pastoral page might be unchequered by allusions to the bitterness of controversy.—We appeal to you, dear brethren, who know that, by no choice of their own, the builders of the wall that encompasses your Jerusalem are compelled, while they toil at their arduous work with one hand, to hold a weapon with the other. Personal afflictions and reproaches we could far more willingly bear, if the building of the holy city and temple were not retarded. But this deepest calamity has caused our tears to flow; nor can "the apple of our eye cease," while Jerusalem thus suffers. The burden of our care and labour, feeble humanity would gladly lay down; but the Master has bid us bear it, and His "strength is made perfect in weakness." In His light and favour we find refreshment which the world can neither give nor take away. And, blessed be His name, "our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward."

In the providence and grace of God Methodism arose, more than a century ago, to take part in arousing a slumbering church and nation. Its founders were incited by no personal ambition: their one object was to spread scriptural holiness through the land. They proclaimed the ancient, primitive theology; drawing from the formularies of the national Church, and from the still more venerable oracles of God, the proof that their message contained no heretical novelties. They cannot be charged with the guilt of schism, as they never inclined to any causeless separation from the existing Church. But, from the shores of the south to the mountains of the north, Societies were collected; and these, unavoidably separated from the elder communion, became in circumstances implying the solemnity of providential suggestion, a distinct Connexion of churches. Much of their discipline was unpremeditated; but, far from impairing the force of any argument for its preservation, such a conviction throws us back on the first and most sacred plea for regarding the whole with tender reverence. This simple, beautiful system we believe to be in harmony with the teachings of infallible truth. That it has been crown-

ed with a blessing from on high in a degree which commands the wonder and even the veneration of multitudes beyond our pale, it is needless to argue. It may be more seasonable to remark, that the struggles which have disturbed our body show us to be in the safe middle. Methodism is as distant from the theories which ignore the flock of Christ, in order to clothe the ministry with exclusive and sacerdotal dignity, as from those which trample on the gifts and ordinances of Jesus Christ, bestowed for the instruction and edifying of His church in all ages. In doctrine, it combines the evangelical with the practical.—In economical arrangements, it aims at the largest amount of good on the whole, and for time to come. It is now, as it has ever been, no less careful in protecting the privilege of its humblest members, than in maintaining the scriptural rights of its Ministers; and the latter it holds sacred and inviolable, for the good of myriads of the sheep redeemed by the Lord Jesus. The equal sanctity of order and liberty it seeks to guard. It aims at securing, for every one who comes under its salutary shadow, the amplest opportunities of doing and of receiving good. Its end is gained when "we all come into the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ;" when, "speaking the truth in love," we "grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."

The doctrines held by our fathers live among us, in all their purity. On this point we need not dwell: It is patent to the world, that we are more united than ever in the determination to maintain those views—drawn from Holy Scripture—which are dear to our earliest Christian experience, and to which our solemn assemblies give utterance, from Sabbath to Sabbath in their inestimable "psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs." If need be, we are ready to "contend earnestly for" these; believing them to present an embodiment of "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." In regard to our established arrangements for Christian fellowship, also, we trust there is no decline of zeal or of affection on the part of our united Societies. But it is not out of season to urge some of our dear people to new diligence in cultivating this privilege. Let us honour God by early attendance in His house. Let us value everything that makes our union with Christ's church felt and real. While we "draw near" to "the holiest by the blood of Jesus," "with a true heart in full assurance of faith,"—and while we "hold fast the profession of faith without wavering,"—"let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching." Let us with constant care "exhort and edify one another." "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ." Cherish mutual and all-subduing love. Let the weekly opportunity be magnified in your eyes. Some whom we affectionately remember need, in this particular, to "strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die." We earnestly remind such of the fervour and simplicity of their earlier days; and, "longing after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ," we implore you to seek a fresh unction of grace. Avoid everything inconsistent with fraternal charity. "As touching brotherly love," says an Apostle, most significantly, "ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love another." True to so sweet and holy an instinct, the new nature confesses "how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." You know, dear brethren, that everything which destroys or injures love is from beneath.

In this restless age, it would be strange if our ecclesiastical polity were not subjected to the ordeal of severe examination. One or two minor questions, in regard to the

way of applying great principles, and to some few details of a scriptural discipline, may divide the true friends of our beloved cause. But all who are entitled to this character will agree that, in dealing even with the minutest parts of such an organization, a jealous and reverent caution ought to be exercised. Nor ought the voices of history and experience to be disregarded. If certain changes have been elsewhere tried, and have failed; if that which seemed likely to gratify the popular taste has been introduced into other sections of Methodism, and followed by no accession of public influence, no improved spirituality, but rather by a loss of vigour and a relaxation of godly discipline; if the grievances of which complaint is made cannot be detected by the body of praying, peaceful church-members;—it behoves us all, and most plainly those among us who are unskilled in the larger examination of the question, solemnly to pause before asking for fitful and experimental legislation. From the spirit and actions of the parties who propose changes, we may gain an important light on the path in which we are called to go. If these are among the most serious, the most self-denying, the most tender-hearted, the most ready to wash the disciples' feet, the most lovely in the various relations of life; if their zeal is coupled with charity and wisdom; if, "as the elect of God," they have evidently "put on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another;" if their suggestions are obviously designed to promote the spirit of devotion and of unity;—the Methodist Connexion, and the Conference of its Ministers will never be unwilling to regard them with respectful consideration. The humblest member of Society has the opportunity of communicating such suggestions to the Conference. But the sacred laws of peace, and the interests of the godly and quiet thousands who compose our churches, alike forbid us to yield to men of strong political bias, ambitious of office, and publicity, willing to rend Societies in pieces for trivial and doubtful advantages; men who do not scruple wantonly to expose the Church of Christ to the reproaches of a malignant and blaspheming world; men whose weapons are bitterness, wrath, clamour, and the tyranny that would violate the conscience of a collected pastorate, and of a contented and overwhelming majority of the people.

If we hold the PASTORAL CROOK with steady and unflinching hand, it is in obedience to the clearly revealed law of Christ, and for the sake of the flock redeemed by His most precious blood. From all the fancies of men we go back to the Bible.—We dare not neglect to "take the oversight of" God's people: we can never cease to love them. Our interests cannot be separated from yours; nor would your Christian privileges be safe, if the Master's order in the church were reversed. Your prosperity is our life. It is our very business to gather souls into the church, and keep them there. We pray for grace to give up life itself, rather than violate our sense of duty. There is a responsibility which we dare not resign. The wisdom of God may oppose the policy of man: it is enough for us to know who has said,—"I, even I, am He that comforteth you: who art thou, that thou shouldst be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; and forgettest the Lord thy Maker, that has stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth; and hast feared continually every day because of the fury of the oppressor, as if he were ready to destroy? and where is the fury of the oppressor?" The question is, Have we grieved God? The highest courage in meeting the scorn of foes, and in defying the gates of hell, may consist with the most trembling fear of offending His sacred majesty and love.

(To be continued.)

Never forsake a friend. When enemies gather around—when sickness falls on the heart—when the world is dark and cheerless—is the time to try true friendship.—Not many, we fear, act out those principles.

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