

A Methodist Mecca.

BY BLANCHE BISHOP.

The readers of the MESSENGER AND VISITOR will doubtless remember that last year the Baptist Convention of the United States was held at Asbury Park, one of the long string of summer resorts on the New Jersey coast. The Sunday services of the Convention, however, took place, by special invitation, in the Methodist Auditorium at Ocean Grove, a famous religious resort adjoining Asbury Park. This same Ocean Grove is not only the summer Mecca of American Methodists, but a most successful civic enterprise as well; and it has occurred to me that an account of what I saw and heard there during a short visit in the summer of '95, will not be out of place in this paper.

Twenty-seven years ago a small number of Methodist clergymen and laymen went to the shore at this point for the purpose of holding a camp meeting. It was before the days of universal summer outings and migrations, and the New Jersey coast was then a wilderness of sand wastes and patches of scrub oak. But our clear sighted divines and laymen marked the possibilities of the place, returned year by year, erected cottages instead of tents, formed themselves into an Association, procured a charter from Government, and proceeded to build up their modern Zion. Ocean Grove, now a city with a summer population of about 70,000, reduced of course in the winter to a few thousand permanent residents, is a living refutation of the theory that ministers cannot do business. These are the very Yankees of religious finance.

The Ocean Grove Camp Meeting Association of the Methodist Episcopal Church—such is the full title of the Association—is composed of twenty-six members, half of whom are ministers, half laymen. The city is absolutely under their control. They own the land, though the greater part of it is leased on terms of 99 years. They make all the laws, and appoint officers to enforce them. The public works, the public morals, and the public devotions, they superintend with equal zeal and skill. Their revenues, which are scrupulously applied to the city needs, are derived largely from rents, taxes and tolls. Extra expenses they meet by subscription funds, special assessments and loans. Most remarkable of all, there are only three or four salaried officers, several of the members performing arduous work without remuneration. For the conduct of business they have a building called Association Hall. Its interior resembles a parliament house, with senate chamber departmental offices and all the rest. In short, Ocean Grove is a miniature limited monarchy, of which the President of the Association is at once Monarch and Premier, while the other members are Cabinet Ministers and Councillors.

As might be expected, Ocean Grove bears a character quite unique among its republican neighbors. No manufactures or other money-making concerns are allowed within its boundaries, and only such stores as are needed to supply the daily wants of the inhabitants. On Sunday nothing is sold, not even milk. If a citizen has neglected to lay in a supply on Saturday night, he must travel in the morning to the city gates, where the world and flesh will sell it to him over the fence. Liquor selling is, of course, totally prohibited. It is said that when certain wealthy liquor dealers of New York go to Europe for the summer, they send their boys to Ocean Grove. This is surely a recommendation for Ocean Grove, if not for the discretion of the liquor dealers; for the cutest of the illustrious three is ever in waiting on the board walk at Asbury Park, with not even a fence between!

The nature of other regulations imperative both to Sabbath and week-day quiet and order will be seen from the following quotations from last year's report of the Chief of the Police department: Arrests for disorderly conduct, 7; intoxicated, 4; Sabbath bathers, 2; bicycles, 10; persons in improper bathing suits, 2; pickpockets, 1; tramps 2; persons in improper bathing suits hindered and removed from the bathing ground, 256; persons not properly covered stopped from going through the streets to and from the bathing grounds, 48; shows prevented from entering grounds, 7; bicycles stopped from riding on the Sabbath day. (strangers to our regulations), 128.

Two plausible reasons for the almost supernatural good order that reigns at Ocean Grove are sometimes suggested by the worldly minded. One is that only good people resort there; the other that the natural situation of the place discourages the entrance of evil. Its front is protected by the ocean, its north and south sides by two fresh water lakes that stretch their long arms down to within a yard or two of the sea. True, the lakes are narrow and the world's vain shows in plain sight, but the devil has his own reasons for not crossing the water. Then, on the west, an iron fence completes the chain and renders the enclosure as safe and secluded as a gentleman's park, or a cemetery.

Whatever of truth there may be in this view, it is certainly a matter of congratulation that a given 70,000 of

our race can be found living together in such strict accordance with the laws of sobriety, good sense and good taste. And not only is there an almost superhuman lack of wickedness in Ocean Grove, there is also an incredible amount of positive good.

The aim of the Association is strictly religious, being in their own words, "to make and help all Christians rather than to build up a single sect." It is doubtful if another sect than their own could accomplish the aim in their way, the work demanding, as it does, that most unusual combination of qualities—keen business sagacity with undoubted spirituality. All summer long, all day long, there are meetings, meetings, meetings; holiness meetings, morning consecration meetings, helping hand meetings, experience meetings, encouragement meetings, surf meetings, twilight meetings, after meetings, mothers' meetings, children's meetings, boys' and girls' meetings, young people's meetings, meetings of the Epworth League, of the King's Daughters, of Deaconesses, of the W. C. T. U., of the W. H. M. S., of the W. F. M. S., and a half a dozen other societies and leagues. There is a summer school of Theology which gave last year 33 lectures attended by three hundred students, a Sabbath School with an attendance of nearly 27,000, and a series of 16 studies in the Greek Testament under a special Sunday School Assembly. Last year's programme included 60 sermons, 596 addresses, 30 special song services, 16 musical rehearsals, 6 concerts, 2 oratorios, 9 lectures, 8 entertainments of varied character, to say nothing of a Lake carnival, a G. A. R. camp fire, a Fourth of July oration, a negro jubilee, and last but not least a Baptist convention.

Many of the speakers on these occasions are men of great distinction, of all denominations, of many countries. The managers pride themselves, too, and justly, upon the quality of their musical entertainments. The two oratorios mentioned, for instance, were given by the New York Symphony Society Orchestra under the conduct of the famous, Dr. Damrosch. The great auditorium, seating 10,000 people, is often too small for the audience. A monster camp meeting, truly, and worthy the enthusiasm it invariably evokes.

Least it may be thought, however, that the good people of Ocean Grove are so abnormally good as to spend their whole time in meetings, it ought to be mentioned that there are numerous intermissions when even the saints may be seen disporting themselves in the surf, or enjoying the life and go of the promenade. It must be remembered also, that while 10,000 people are at meeting in the auditorium, and perhaps 25,000 more in the Tabernacle and the temple, there are fully 57,000 others enjoying themselves elsewhere, it may be on the countless verandahs of their gaily painted cottages and hotels, possibly floating lazily about Wesley Lake, reclining on the cushioned seats of the gondolas, and watching the thousand witcheries of light and water, but more likely passing the hours amidst the untiring delights of the sunny beach, the crowded promenade, or the music enlivened pavilions (of Asbury Park).

But a list of the attractions of Ocean Grove would be incomplete without mention of its tent life. It is a novel sight in the midst of a city of regular, concreted streets and substantial houses, to come suddenly upon a block of tents. They are generally very close to the street, with the curtains drawn back as if to invite inspection. One's first impulse is to look the other way, but the temptation is too great. It is like a show of doll houses, where the front walls are down and the dolls go about imitating the performances of real, live people. At night, especially, the scene is irresistible. There is always a carpet on the floor, or stage rather, and some lace curtains in the background. In the middle foreground is a small table with books and a shaded lamp. An old gentleman and lady, perhaps, are sitting on either side of it, actually rocking. They glance at you with wooden indifference, and go on with their toy newspapers. Behind them a jointed doll is preparing supper, disappearing behind the lace curtains and appearing again with the precision of clock-work. Then your eye falls upon the beds, two of them, one right, one left in the background, big, white, counterpane, pillow, and pillow shammed to the last degree of whiteness and puffiness, and at the very idea of those great *real* beds, stuck here on a platform almost within arm's length of a city street, you just manage to save yourself from a fit of laughter, and pass on. There are blocks and blocks of these tents, some of them private property, others rented by the Association. One long row is suggestively situated on Pilgrim Pathway.

Have I praised Ocean Grove too unreservedly? Visit it and see.

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From Halifax.

The holidays lately past showed no falling off in social and religious civilities. The Levée is no longer confined to Government House. After citizens had paid their loyal respects to His Honor, the Lieutenant Governor and General Montgomery Moore, commander of Her Majesty's forces, the way was clear to honor three of the religious denomination represented in Halifax. Archbishop O'Brien was advertised to receive the regards of his fellow citizens on behalf of the Roman Catholic Church, Bishop Courtney for the Episcopal Church, and Dr. Gordon of Pine Hill, Moderator of the Assembly, for the Presbyterian Church. Large numbers availed themselves of the pleasure of making their submission and paying their respects to all these notables.

Among the preachers on Christmas day the Rev. Mr. Dobson of Grafton Street Methodist Church was the most distinguished. He came to Halifax last summer from Bermuda. He is past middle life, white with age, tall and pale. He has an active brain, philosophically disposed, and the orator's gift in a high degree. He is much sought

after as a public speaker. The impression he leaves is that of a man deeply sincere and passionately earnest. Men gifted in these lines owe a debt to the entire public, and can give good service outside of their own denomination. This Mr. Dobson seems willing to do.

The week of prayer has passed. The fervor and earnestness in religious work are greater than in some years past. Hopefulness and zeal seem to characterize the public worship. The purpose in some of the churches is to continue the extra services. Two military men, Captain Winn and Captain Wigham, are devoutly pious and make their influence felt in religious life. Zeal and hard work characterize the pious in the military department in Halifax. They are pronounced and decided in their piety and labors. This is essential to the cultivation of religion in the social atmosphere of military life.

The reports of Mr. Moody's meetings in New York had a cheering effect upon Christians in Halifax. The fact that New York was moved strengthened their faith. It enabled them to believe that Halifax, St. John and all parts of the Dominion, as well as the rest of the world, can be stirred by the divine agent. A feeling is abroad that God's kingdom is about to be enlarged in a marked unusual degree. May faith and labor go hand in hand till great things are accomplished for God.

The Baptist Book Room was thronged for days before Christmas. The staff of helpers had to be enlarged. An unusually large amount of business must have been done. Here I may refer to a very useful book, especially for ministers of the denomination, can be obtained through the Book Room or from the Baptist Publication Society, station at Boston, I refer to Dr. A. J. Rowland on "The Pentateuch." Dr. Rowland has done good service, not only in giving a clear outline of the Pentateuch, and hints for an intelligent study of it, but he has gathered up the results of "The Higher Criticism," admitted its excellencies, and exposed and refuted its fallacies. It is a small book of about one hundred pages. I know not its cost, but should judge that it is not more than fifty cents a copy. To ministers who have neither the means nor the time to explore the whole forest of literature of "The Higher Criticism," I commend to them this little work of Dr. Rowland's.

Halifax fortunately, like other cities of the Dominion, has the advantage of seeing both sides of the long drawn out discussion of the Manitoba school question. All are studying it in its many bearings. As it has now settled down to be a question between the French Hierarchy, and the French Premier and his party, it is watched with a peculiar and deep interest. One of thy Halifax political papers does not see ecclesiastical tyranny in the suppression of a French newspaper. This paper says, if the hierarchy judged the suppressed paper injurious to religion, as they believe it, they had the right, yea it was their duty to protect their flock by suppressing it, if they had the power to do so. If the people choose to submit to this command which has back of it no civil authority to inflict punishment for disobedience, then let them do it; and let the hierarchy exercise their undoubted right to suppress such papers. The opposing papers would mildly make it out that this is religious tyranny, that should be crushed—an out of date tyranny. It is a fortunate thing that in this struggle the seat of war is in Quebec, and that both sides are led by French Roman Catholics. This saves the war from being between Protestants and Roman Catholics—a most desirable thing. When the struggle has come to an end, the people of Quebec province will have light they did not have when the discussion began. Indeed in the House of Commons last year, the French members heard every possible phrase of the question of the spheres of the jurisdiction of the state and the church discussed. It was a school to them. They can learn. They have learned. They are still learning. To Baptists it is a great source of satisfaction that they have been in the field for so long a time in the agency of the Grande Ligue Mission, paving the way for what is now taking place on a large scale.

Among ourselves we have the same question on a small scale. At Fredericton I was gratified to see all the teachers, Protestants and Roman Catholics and all the students attending the religious exercises of the Normal school. I trust the same state of things exist now. This has been the custom at the Normal school at Truro. There the Roman Catholic teacher took his turn in conducting the religious exercises at the opening of the school. All went on smoothly till Archbishop O'Brien learned of this state of things. Here he interposed his ecclesiastical authority, and forbade both teacher and students of the Roman Catholic faith to attend these religious services. Their consciences were untroubled and they enjoyed the worship. But his grace smells heresy and he has put down his prelatical foot. The faithful must obey. This matter of religious liberty is not fully settled. Mediævalism is a perfect salamander to stand fire. It seems impossible to burn it up. It dies hard, and still it is dying. Patient waiting will bring the time when it will be dead.

REPORTER.

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The wheat crop of Australasia for the coming harvest is so short, according to estimates reported to the State department at Washington by Consul Bell at Sydney, that it will reduce that country from her position as sixth wheat exporting country of the globe to about the eleventh wheat importing country. Instead of being an exporter of about 12,000,000 bushels per year, Australasia will have to import not far from 5,000,000 bushels to supply the deficiency for short crops.

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