

THE WESLEYAN

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"WISDOM IS THE PRINCIPAL THING; THEREFORE GET WISDOM."

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Poetry.

(From the Wesleyan Methodist Magazine.)

GATHER THE FRAGMENTS.

(By Mrs. W. Duncan, of Clerk.)

Thin clouds are floating o'er the sky,
And in the glorious west
Lingers the rosy brilliance,
Where sank the sun to rest.
A streak of light is hovering there,
Unwilling to depart;
And, soft and still, the wistful air
Breathes o'er the grateful heart.

Though summer's step of joy is fed,
Her voice of music hush'd,
Her shades of living verdure dead,
Her flow'ry chaplets crush'd,
Sweet nature still hath power to bless,
By mercy's hand array'd,
Her morn in fairy loveliness,
Her eve in dove-like shade.

So, when the days of joy are past,
And life's enchantment o'er;
When we have bow'd to sorrow's blast,
And hope is bright no more;
There still are mercies full and free,
Mix'd in the cup of woes;
And, where the mourner cannot see,
In faith he onward goes.

They weep not o'er the hour of pain,
As those who lose their all;
Gather the fragments that remain,
They'll prove nor few nor small.
The thankful spirit finds relief
In calm submission here;
Tells hopeful on, amidst his grief,
And looks for joy afar.

THE VALIDITY OF THE WESLEYAN MINISTRATIONS, AND THE CHURCH CHARACTER WHICH THE WESLEYAN SOCIETIES HAVE ASSUMED.

(Continued.)

8. Could the fact of an uninterrupted succession of Bishops, as a distinct order superior to Presbyters, be satisfactorily traced, and the regularity of every ordination clearly proved, still the doctrine against which we contend could not be maintained; because it is at variance with the general tenour of holy Scripture. It is asserted, that if a man be in the "succession," he is a true Minister of Christ, and a supernatural efficacy attends his ministrations, particularly with respect to the sacraments; but, if a man be not in this "succession," whatever qualifications and authority he may otherwise possess, should he preach the Gospel, and administer baptism and the Lord's supper, he is an intruder into the sacred office, his services are a profanation of holy things, and are unblest to the people who join in them. Personal character, it is alleged, does not alter the case on either side.

If this doctrine be true, the Lord Jesus affords his direct sanction to the ministrations of bad men, whatever errors they may teach, and whatever may be the enormity of their crimes. Can any man reconcile this revolting principle with the solemn and express declarations of God's own word? Christianity is eminently a holy religion. It calls upon all men, everywhere, to repent, and do works meet for repentance. The sacrament by which men are introduced into the Church, teaches them, most impressively, that, from the very beginning of their Christian course, they are to cleanse themselves from all moral filthiness, and walk in newness of life. Every one that names the name of Christ is to depart from iniquity, and deny himself of all ungodliness and worldly lusts; he is to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in all good conscience before God and man. Indeed, "if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." The Christian ministry is the most sacred and responsible of all the offices that either man or angel can

sustain, and yet men have the audacity, in effect, to declare that the vain exercise of its functions is consistent with every form of impiety and wickedness: Such is the acerbity that is presumptuously taken with the character of Christ, as the Head of the Church. Without any authority from his word, he is daringly provoked to approve and bless the acts of men, against whom he has uttered the most awful denunciations of his vengeance! That he may occasionally overlook for good the ministrations of wicked men, is conceded, as he sometimes makes the foulest crimes subservient to his own glory; but it is impossible that such ministrations should have his sanction. Men who themselves were never converted and sanctified are not the agents whom God ordinarily employs to convert and sanctify others.

We are not left to mere inference upon this momentous subject. The Bible speaks upon it in language which all can understand. "Unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do that thou shouldst take my covenant into thy mouth? seeing thou hast instruction, and castest my words behind thee." (Psalm 115, 17.) "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them." (Matt. xii. 15, 16, 20.) Here private persons are admonished by our blessed Lord, to stand aloof from those men who undertake to guide others in the way to heaven, while they themselves are walking in the way to hell. He makes no exception in favour of those who are in the "Episcopal succession." Could he have given such a warning, if he had pledged himself to bless the ministrations of those men to the people? If the grand test of a man's ministerial authority be the nature of his ordination, as episcopal or otherwise, how could our Lord direct his people to judge of it by personal conduct? To all workers of iniquity, he says, "Ye are of your father, the devil." This is their true "succession." Whatever men may say concerning them, His decision is, "I never knew you."

Now, what have been the "fruits" of a large number of men who are said to have been the "successors of the Apostles," and the divinely-appointed channel through which the true ministerial character and authority have been conveyed to those who are alleged at present to possess them? History is too faithful a record of their misdoings. The details are too shocking for recital here. They may be found in the writings of authors of unimpeachable veracity. The men of whom we speak have practised the worst vices and crimes that ever dishonoured human nature, and such as, in a well-regulated state of society, would have been visited with capital punishment. Many of them were steeped in sensuality and spiritual wickedness, others spread desolation through extensive districts, and with a fiend-like avidity shed the blood of saints like water. And did these men claim to be the true Ministers of the Lord Jesus? They did, and I blush to add, some English Protestants vindicate their claim, and loudly boast that they are themselves in the same "succession!" The most awful part of the subject is, that these monsters in the human shape are declared to have been the representatives of the Apostles, who were the chosen and sanctified witnesses of Christ! But these holy men in their writings repudiate the scandalous connection. The Roman apostacy is a prominent subject of prophecy in the Epistles of St. Paul; (2 Thess. ii. 1-12; 1 Tim. iv. 1-4;) and it is held up as a warning to the Christian Church in every age; so far was that blessed Apostle from connecting himself with the Papal Episcopate. Mystic Babylon is declared to have become

"the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird." "Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine, and she shall be utterly burned with fire, for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her." (Rev. xviii. 2, 8.) Whatever affinity with her certain Ecclesiastics may claim, the omniscient Spirit declares her overthrow to be an occasion of pious joy, saying, in reference to that event, "Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy Apostles and Prophets, for God hath avenged you of her." (Rev. xviii. 20.) Erring men hold her up to the public confidence. Apostles and Prophets exult in her absolute subversion. A wicked person, whatever order men may assign to him in the Church, cannot be a true Minister of Christ, for Christ denounces him both in this world and the next. Whatever may be said in favour of the more decent and moral of the Romish Prelates, there is nothing in the New Testament to justify any man in claiming for the body of them the character of true servants of Christ, in any respect. Many of them might perform ecclesiastical acts, but there is no promise of Christ, securing the communication of spiritual benefits through their profane ministrations. The case of Judas has often been referred to, as directing to a different conclusion, but generally without due consideration. Mr. Charles Wesley for example, apologizing for the official acts of ungodly Clergymen, says,

"Free Jesus said an apostolic chair." But this is a mistake. Not one of the Apostles, strictly speaking, entered upon the full duties of his office till the day of Pentecost, for not until then did they receive the requisite qualifications for their work. Up to that period they were in a course of training for their allotted service, but they performed not apostolic acts, nor did they, indeed, understand the true nature of Christianity, till the promised gift of the Holy Spirit came upon them. Before that time Judas had forfeited his call, and was "gone to his own place." He "fell from" his office, "by transgression," as does every Ecclesiastic who acts in a similar manner, for a wicked Minister of Christ's holy religion is a palpable contradiction in terms. Those who countenance such a man make themselves partakers of his evil deeds, and to pledge the Lord Jesus to bless and sanction such ministrations, is to make him the minister of sin. If Romanists will boast of their own priesthood, in every period of its hateful history, in the name of all that is sacred, let not Protestants make themselves responsible for its idolatry, murders, and other abominations. There have been periods at which

"Its crimes were such as Satan never knew." Capital error, as well as immoral conduct, is inconsistent with the ministerial character, in whatever "succession" the offender may be placed. "Whoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed. For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds." (2 John 9-11) Hence it appears that the people of God are carefully to examine the doctrine, as well as the moral character, of their Teachers, and that as matter of solemn duty.

It is the prerogative of God to qualify men for the Christian ministry, and then call them to its holy and responsible duties. The Church of England therefore properly directs that this question shall be proposed to every one who applies for ordination: "Dost thou trust that thou art inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon thee this office and ministry?" If he be actuated solely by selfish and worldly motives,

so as to deceive his own soul in this weighty matter, or if he obtain ordination by the utterance of known falsehood, no external ceremony can make him a true Minister of the Lord Jesus. He is an intruder to the day of his death, unless he repent of his sin, and then receive a commission from above. Those whom God calls to this work, he qualifies by deep piety, and by requisite gifts. He then draws them by strength, and often involuntary inclination, and by a conscientious feeling of duty. "Necessity is laid upon me, yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the Gospel."

A Minister of Christ is to declare "the whole counsel of God," as contained in the evangelical revelation; he must therefore understand it, and be "apt to teach." His work is connected with the honour of Christ, he must therefore have a burning zeal for his Master's glory. The design of all his ministrations is, to convert and save the souls of the people; hence he must love them with a passion like that of the Saviour, and travail in birth for them, till they are made new creatures. His is not a mere "profession," but a sacred vocation, and therefore his conduct must be blameless, as a living sermon. He is to govern and "take care of the Church of God," he must therefore be no novice, but a man of understanding and experience. His work demands his undivided attention, and must he give himself wholly to it; being "separated" from the engagements and cares of worldly business. "We will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word." (Acts. vi. 4.)

The manner in which a man thus qualified and called of God is to be actually appointed to his office, is left very much at large in the holy Scriptures. That he can only be validly ordained by a Bishop, occupying a rank superior to that of a mere Presbyter, we do not read in the inspired book. But we do learn, that, in the ordinary course of things, he should be solemnly "set apart to his work," as a man continually and especially belonging to God, with the concurrence of the people to whom he is to preach the word of life, by one or more Ministers of Christ, and that with fasting and prayer (Acts. xiii. 3.) "The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." (2 Tim. ii. 2) This is the rule. The ordination of unfaithful men, who neither know the Gospel, nor are able to teach it, is an unauthorized act, by whomsoever performed. Whatever hands may have been laid upon the head of a "false prophet," and whatever credentials he may have in his pocket, the people to whom he comes, judging by his "fruits," are commanded to "beware of" him. He assumes the office of a Pastor; but the Chief Shepherd has not been concerned in his appointment, nor will he sanction him in his charge.

With these facts before me, I confess that I contemplate, with satisfaction and gratitude, the ministry which I enjoy as a Wesleyan Methodist. Its orthodoxy is unimpeachable, and every proceeding is used, that none shall be admitted into it, but men of piety, and of competent abilities. Every year the personal character of each Minister in the body undergoes a strict examination; he is also annually questioned respecting his views of Divine truth, and in any case of erroneous doctrine or of corrupt practice occur, it is immediately investigated, and decided upon; so that no congregation can be permanently perplexed by strange doctrines, nor scandalized by immoral ministerial conduct.

The external order of this ministry is Presbyterian, with the advantage of a modified Episcopacy; for every Superintendent of a Circuit has the oversight of his colleagues, and the Conference has the