

British Conference.

The Annual Address of the Conference to the Methodist Societies.

DEARLY BELOVED BRETHREN,—The Address which we presented to you on the occasion of our last Annual Meeting, opened with a grateful acknowledgement of prosperity. Signs of prosperity are now also granted to us. Whether we advert to the increase of numbers in our Societies, to the progress of spiritual religion in different places, or to the augmented facilities which are provided for the wider diffusion of experimental and practical Christianity, we find abundant cause, on a review of the year which has just closed, to offer afresh our tribute of thanksgiving to Almighty God, the Father of lights and of mercies, whose "hand is upon all them for good that seek Him."

But we are, at the same time, constrained to mention that disturbances of a serious nature have recently agitated some parts of the Connexion, and produced not a few of the disastrous consequences which are wont to result from dissensions and schisms in a Christian community. We are happy indeed to be assured that, even by means of these disturbances, the principles and fidelity of our best friends have been more fully tried and approved; and we entertain a cheerful hope that, in this case, as in many former ones of a like character, "the things which" have "happened" will, in the issue, and under the control of Him who is "Head over all things to the Church," fall out rather unto the furtherance of the Gospel. Meanwhile, however, we cannot be insensible of the jeopardy to which, not only individuals, but some entire Societies, are exposed; and of the possibility, nay, the probability, that in more instances than it ever will be easy to know or name, there may be a mournful declension in vital godliness, and a departure from the fold of Christ. In these circumstances, it is not without mingled feelings that we proceed to lay before you such counsels and encouragements as the state of our affairs, whether prosperous or adverse, seems most to require.

Permit us, dear Brethren, at the very outset of these our pastoral admonitions, to exhort you to a more diligent cultivation of personal religion, and to the maintenance of circumspection and consistency in all your Christian walk. "Draw nigh to God, and He will draw nigh to you;" draw nigh through child-like and constant faith in Him who "His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree," who "once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God;" draw nigh by the grace of the Holy Spirit, who supplies all the aid which man needs in approaches to the Most High; and thus, looking to the Father, through the Son, and by the "one Spirit" of truth and love, expect the promised gifts of light, and life, and peace, which so freely descend from the eternal and inexhaustible Source of good. "Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound; they shall walk, O Lord, in the light of Thy countenance." Receive from God, use for God. Cherish "the spirit of grace and of supplications," which the Lord is still pleased to "pour upon" His people. Be attentive to seasons of prayer, private, domestic, social, public; and, in humility, faith, and hope, commit yourselves to Him who "will gather Israel, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock;" who "will cause" His people "to walk by the rivers of waters in a straight way, whereon they shall not stumble, while they shall flow together to the goodness of the Lord," and "their soul shall be as a watered garden." Let your "delight be in the law of the Lord." "Meditate" in it. Make it the subject of edifying conversation in your intercourse with each other. Follow all its lessons; for "the words of the Lord are pure words, as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times." Rejoice, that "through patience and comfort of the Scriptures" you may always "have hope."

"Trust ye in the Lord for ever," and let Him be your unflinching resource, that you may be "as a tree planted by the waters, and that shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green; and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from bearing fruit." Forsake not the Lord's Table, but joyfully embrace all the opportunities which may be afforded to you of sharing in the comforts and benefits of that holy Sacrament, of commemorating your Saviour's dying love, of renewing your acts of Christian faith, hope, and charity, and of "showing the Lord's death till He come."—Daily aspire to higher attainments in the life Divine. "Press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Seek that your "love" may be "made perfect." Remember that "God is love," and that "he who dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him." Faithfully aim at the right application of all your spiritual blessings. "Teach me Thy way, O Lord," says the Psalmist, "and lead me in a plain path, because of mine enemies;"—and again, "Teach me to do Thy will; for Thou art my God. Thy Spirit is good; lead me into the land of uprightness." The kingdom of God is "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." But "in these things," in the enjoyment and use of these inestimable blessings, we are taught and bound to "serve Christ." "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise." "Who then," writes St. James, "is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him show out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom." "Put on therefore," says St. Paul to the Colossians, "as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye."

To secure the object which we have now urged on your Christian attention, permit us also, with affectionate earnestness, to warn you against all that might expose your personal religion to danger, and particularly against evils which prevail in the present day. Carefully avoid the indulgence of a suspicious and censorious spirit. Call to mind what our Lord says of our becoming little children that we may enter into the kingdom of God; and dwell also on that beautiful portrait of a true disciple which occurs in the one hundred and thirty-first Psalm; "Lord, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exalt myself in great matters, or in things too high for me. Surely I have behaved and quieted myself as a child that is weaned of his mother; my soul is even as a weaned child." When this temper pervades a Christian Society, there is every ground for confidence, and the grateful anticipation of prosperous times. How truly and cheerfully may it then be added, as the Psalmist himself adds, "Let Israel hope in the Lord from henceforth and for ever." With humility and peace He will bestow prosperity.

Beware of whisperers,—who, under the guise of friendship, and perhaps of great candour, in the possession of your confidence, and in free communication with you, scatter insinuations to the disadvantage of others, and secretly diffuse a poison which may not soon be removed. Consider that the "reproving" at which a Christian man ought to aim is this,—the testimony of his conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with lofty wisdom, but by the grace of God, he is "that his" conversation in the world, and more abundantly towards those who are united with him in Christian relations and fellowships. Guard against them who, in any way, so under any professions, "lie in wait to receive;" and "speaking the truth," or being sincere, "in love," seek to "grow up into Him in all things, which is the Head, even Christ: from whom the whole body fully 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." Let "your love abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment." Pray that, in the enjoyment and exercise of this Divine love, "ye may approve things that are excellent," and may, in all events and exigencies, "be sincere and without offence," keeping at the utmost distance from

every thing by which "your minds" might "be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ."

Never give entertainment to the spirit of retaliation or revenge. Yield not to enmity. Be prompt and glad to make allowance for the infirmities of others, and to maintain the "charity" which "shall cover the multitude of sins." Do not forget that the only petition in the Lord's Prayer to which He has Himself annexed a particular comment and application, is the one in which He teaches us to say, "Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors;" "for if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." Are you assailed, misrepresented, injured? and are you tempted, by reprisals, by contempt, or in any other way which the Law of Truth and Charity does not warrant, to requite what you have suffered? Pause and reflect. Think of what the Law of Moses enjoins: "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart. Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the Lord." "Dearly beloved," says St. Paul, "avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." Vengeance, then, is the Lord's, not ours. Let us beware lest we usurp His prerogative, and forget our entire dependence on Him. Has any one done you evil? "Say not thou, I will recompense evil; I will do so to him as he hath done to me; I will render to the man according to his work:—but wait on the Lord, and He shall save thee." "Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head."

Suffer us further to admonish you, that you exert yourselves, in your several spheres of life and action, and according to the abilities and opportunities which the Great Proprietor of all things may have conferred upon you, in the promotion of religion, with all that relates to its peculiar influence, and the maintenance of its sacred Institutions.

Care, with affectionate and faithful zeal, for the spiritual interests of your own families, and of all to whom you may stand in any domestic relation, whether nearer or more remote. Recall to memory the plain and powerful lessons which the Holy Scriptures teach, under every dispensation and in every circumstance, with respect to the religious training of families. It is "God" Himself who "setteth the solitary in families," and whose own word declares that He "will be the God of all the families of Israel." He, then, is the Author of our domestic communities, for which He provides, to which He condescends to stand in the relation of their Head, and by which He is always to be acknowledged and adored.—By the daily reading of His holy word in your families,—by prayer, intercession, and thanksgiving suited to the cases of all their members,—by the free communication of familiar Christian teaching,—by the habitual observance of kind but firm discipline, and by your own consistent examples,—seek that your families, as well as yourselves, may be consecrated to Him to whom both you and they belong,—that they may perpetuate His name and praise when you are no more seen,—and that, in all their branches and connexions, they may escape the calamities which hang over the families that call not on the name of the Lord. Be vigilantly on your guard, "lest there should be among you" a "family whose heart turneth away this day from the Lord our God;" and, for your encouragement, remember that the Lord has promised to "create upon every dwelling-place of Mount Zion," as well as "upon her assemblies, a cloud and smoke by day, and the shining of a flaming fire by night."

Attend to the sick and poor in your several neighbourhoods, and wherever your influence may extend. "Blessed is he that considereth the poor." He that despiseth his neighbour, "whenever the circumstances of that neighbour may be, "something" but he that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he." He hath dispersed, he hath given to

the poor; his righteousness endureth forever; his horn shall be exalted with honour." Shall we on this subject, forget or disregard His instructions who, in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, has so fully and forcibly answered the question, "Who is my neighbour?" and who, in His solemn description of the proceeding of the last day, speaks of Himself in the person of the poor and suffering, warning us that, in them ("these my brethren," He says, nay, "the least of these my brethren,") He is "an hungry" whom we are to "feed," "a thirsty" whom we are to "give drink," "a stranger" whom we are to "take in," "naked" whom we are to "clothe," "sick," or "in prison," whom we are to "visit." "When James, Cephas, and John," writes St. Paul, "who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship; that we should go unto the Heathen, and they unto the Circumcision. Only," in this great distribution of apostolical equality, and in this great distribution of apostolical labour, "they would that we should remember the poor; the same," adds this devoted Apostle of the Gentiles, "which I also was forward to do,"—as indeed all his conduct proved. It is unnecessary to remind you that, in this province of most charitable service, our venerable Founder was pre-eminently distinguished, and that it is also a province which the Connexion of Wesleyan Methodists has always sought to cultivate. "See," then, "that ye abound in this grace also." Manifest your care for the poor and needy by your own personal exertions, and by freely supplying all the encouragement in your power to the unostentatious (but patient and most useful) forms of charity which search out the destitute and afflicted in their own abodes of sorrow, and minister at once to their temporal and spiritual relief. And, in these offices of love, do not neglect the reasonable and suitable provision which is due to the aged Christian poor.

Pay a more particular and active regard to the establishment and extension of Christian Schools. You are deeply sensible that all education ought to be based on religion,—that, whether in earlier or in latter life, "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom,"—and that Christian "fathers" are especially enjoined by apostolical authority, "not to provoke their children to wrath," but to "bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." This is a principle which you have always been taught to esteem as one of vital and paramount importance, and one from which we trust that nothing will ever be able to move you.—But let us affectionately admonish you to hold it practically, and to promote the institution or enlargement of Christian Schools, not on Sundays only, but also and especially on the week-days. This is a department of Christian service to which we are now peremptorily called, and which we cannot omit, or heedlessly postpone, without injury to others, as well as serious blame to ourselves. Opportunities are afforded in a larger measure than formerly, by the erection, for example, of the spacious and most convenient premises at Westminster, where, in addition to the education of children, a competent number of Teachers, both male and female, will be trained, to meet the demands of the Connexion. It is our confident hope that this noble Establishment will not fail, or be impeded in its operations, for want of adequate support. Let us diligently maintain and use all the facilities which are, or which may be, provided for the religious welfare of them who are now rising into life, that we may not "hide" what we have "heard and known," but may "show to the generation to come, the praises of the Lord, and His strength, and His wonderful works that He hath done,—that the generation to come may know them, even the children which shall be born, who shall arise and declare them to their children, that they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments."

Freely concur with your Christian Brethren of other Communities, and according to the earnest recommendations which you have often received from us on this subject, in striving by all the means which Christians are taught to use to secure a better ob-

servance of the Lord's-day, and of other institutions which it has pleased Almighty God to appoint. Whatever pleas or excuses may be urged on the other side, as to the plain teachings of Scripture. For the inflexible rule which is there prescribed, and let no man's cupidity or man's pleasure divert your attention from it. Efforts on right and well-tryed principles, such as the spirit of truth and unfeigned good reprocuted, "by evil report and good report, in patience and peace, and offered in love and submission to God, cannot fail to end in some gratifying success. Permit here also to remind you of the admonition which we addressed to you last year at large, to be constantly on your guard against the love of the world, and the encroachments of a worldly spirit. Let the claims of man, real or imaginary, not the claims of yourselves or your lies, interfere with the claims of God, and in your secular plans and engagements be cautious how you connect yourselves directly or indirectly, with what involves a practical disregard of God's day, or a violation of its sanctity, cannot prevent "other men's sins," "partakers" of them.

Allow us farther to exhort you according to your means and opportunity you support what is emphatically called Work of God, at home and abroad, as you do in from motives which rise far above the reach or influence of vain and glib insinuations. As in other for Christian effort, so also in this, let there be a willing mind." When the commanded Moses to "speak unto the children of Israel, that they should bring Him an offering" for the Tabernacle added, "Of every man that giveth willingly with his heart ye shall take offering." Accordingly, as is afterwards related, "they came, every one whom stirred him up, and every one whom spirit made willing, and they brought their offering;"—"they came, both men and women, as many as were willing." "The people," in David's rejoiced, for that they offered willingly, cause with perfect heart they offered to the Lord,"—so that David gratefully say, "I have seen with mine eyes, and have seen with mine eyes the people, which are present here, to bring willingly unto Thee." The chief of them, in Ezra's time, "offered freely after their ability." A gift presented a mind thus willing and ready, "is not according to that a man hath, according to that he hath not." "man," then, "according as he purges his heart, so let him give; not of necessity: for God loveth a generous." He that giveth, let him do so with simplicity." When these followed, the Work of God, in its parts and provinces, will not in the pecuniary supplies which are to carry out its several operations.

Seek to conserve the godly order ought to exist in every Christian Society. Let every one be found at his present on the duties and services we allotted him. And here we would our beloved brethren, the Leaders, Preachers, and others who sustain offices in the Connexion, to their respective labours with patient zeal, and to "take courage." Labour is not in vain in the Lord: as Jerusalem is banded as a city that is together, or "at unity in itself." St. Paul was writing to the Colossians, "Though I be absent in the flesh, I will be with you in the spirit, yet holding your order, and the steady your faith in Christ." If every one his due order,—it is "I look not on things, but also on the things of if he faithfully occupy the place of Grace and Providence of God be led to him, and in all this, he anticipate success,—he shall be pointed. Peace shall calm and his spirit: the path of useful and service shall open more and in him, and in his faithful endeavor, from our common Saviour's cause happily prove that "the fruit of peace is sown in peace, of them peace." "The wicked," indeed with a deceitful work: but to him