

III.—METHODIST PREACHING: "OLD AND NEW STYLE."

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THE phrase *Old and New Style*, as applicable to the Methodist Ministry, has been prescribed for me as the title of this paper. It would hardly be admitted by the denomination without considerable qualification. Doubtless there have been changes of the "old style" of its preaching—some salutary and adverse—but they have been fewer than is generally supposed.

It would be a detraction from the character of the Church had there been no modification of its pulpit by the advancing intelligence of the nation, and the remarkable educational provisions of the denomination; for, though the latter was a few years without successful schools, it has, through most of its history, been energetically devoted to education, and, as results, it now has 144 universities, colleges and "boarding academies" (including 9 theological schools), attended by more than 26,000 students, and 408,000 of its youth have been trained in them. The intellectual character of its ministry has therefore unquestionably advanced. But it may be questioned whether it ranks higher to-day, relatively to the average national intelligence, than it did at the organization of the Church in 1784, or through the first ensuing half century—the period to which may be attributed what is called its "old style." One thing at least may be affirmed, that it has not since had greater "talent" than it had during this period. It had then as large a proportion of men of conspicuous, of national, reputation as it has now, perhaps larger; for it must be borne in mind that many of its most noted men of our own early days began their ministry within that period—its Capers, Pierce (the elder), Bangs, Soule, Hedding, Dempster, Summerfield, Maffitt, Bascom, Durbin, Fisk, Olin, etc. And these men, national as well as denominational in their fame, were formed in the early school of Methodist preaching—they were exceptional only by their superior talents; but examples of rare talent, especially of natural talent, have always characterized the Methodist ministry in both England and America.

Though the early preachers had no special education, or rather pre-education, for their work, they had, at least, the average education of their fellow-countrymen, and they were required to pass through a "Course of Study"—a specified curriculum, with formal "Examinations"—during the first four years of their connection with the "Conference." Of the present 64,200 Methodist preachers of the New World (27,500 "Itinerant," and 36,700 "Local"), the number who have had a collegiate education is not comparatively large; and the number who have passed through a Theological School is also compara-