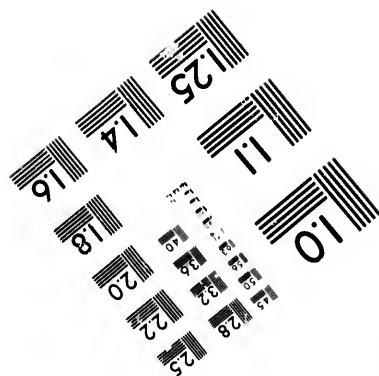
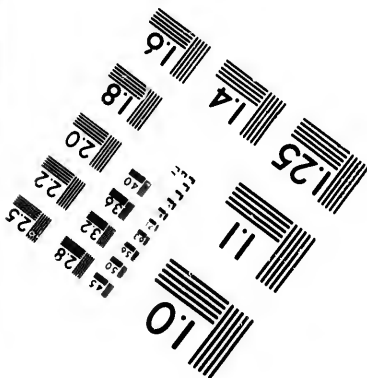
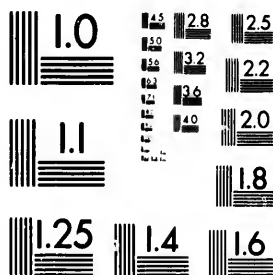


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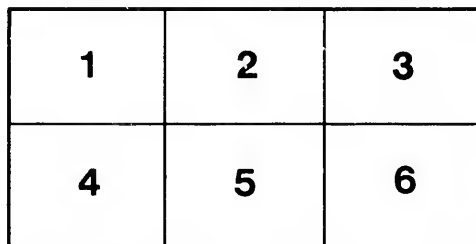
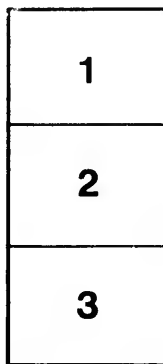
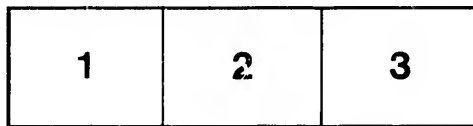
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THE CLASS LEADER.



THE
CLASS LEADER:

HIS WORK, AND HOW TO DO IT;

WITH

Illustrations of Principles, Deeds, Methods,
and Results.

BY

JOHN ATKINSON, M.A.

TORONTO:

SAMUEL ROSE.

HALIFAX: A. W. NICOLSON.

1875.

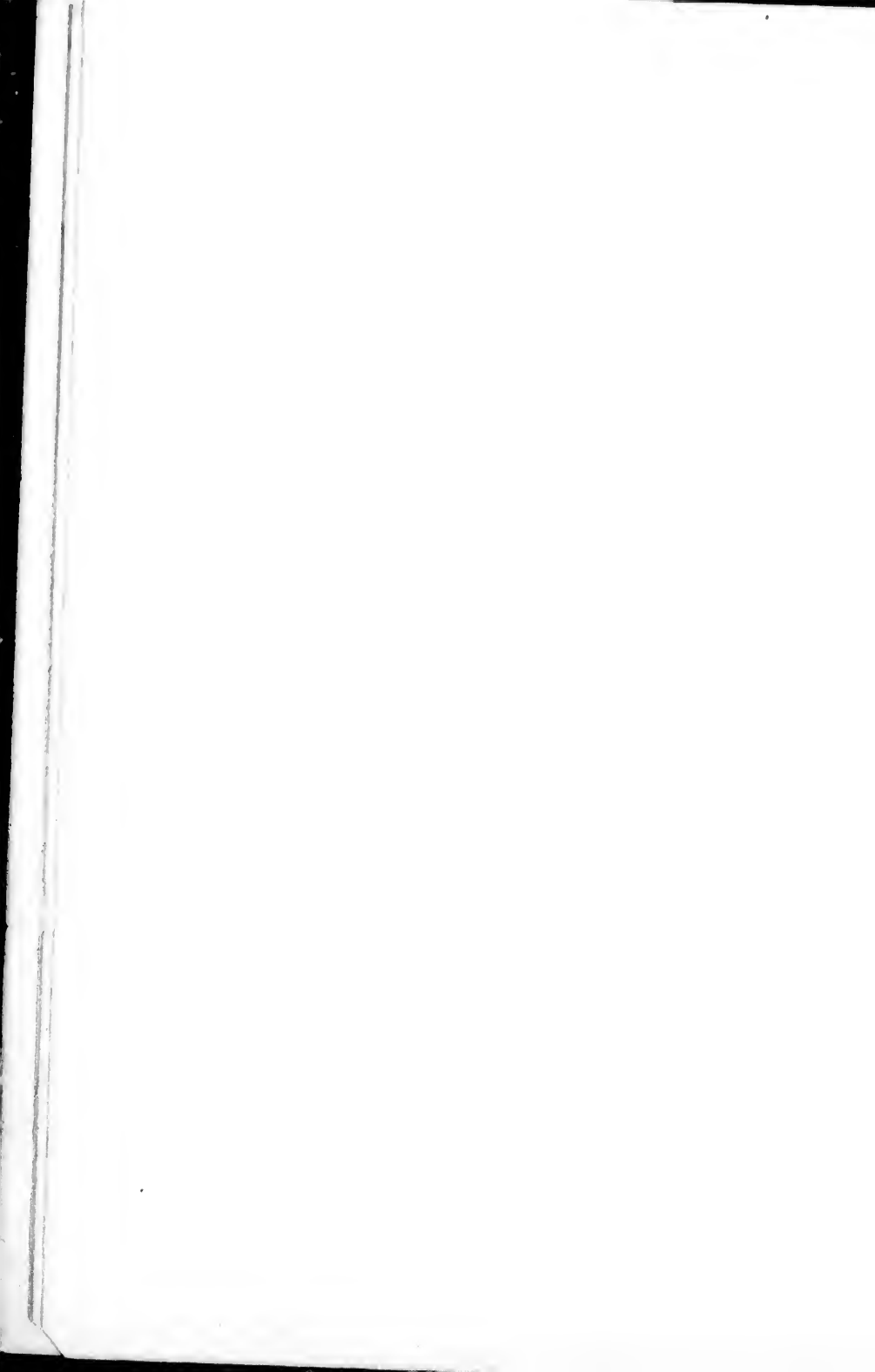
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PREFACE.

THIS book meets a want long felt in Class Meeting literature. It abounds in practical counsels that cannot fail to render the Class Leader who carefully ponders it more efficient in the discharge of his important duties. It is informed by a devoutness of spirit that will be an inspiration to increased zeal in Christian endeavor. It has been eminently useful in the American edition, the high price of which, however, almost interdicted its circulation in this country. The Canadian publisher, by omitting a preliminary chapter, and condensing the others, has, without impairing its value, brought it within the reach of almost every Class Leader in the land, and thus widely increased its sphere of usefulness.



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THE CLASS LEADER.

CHAPTER I.

SIX THINGS A CLASS LEADER SHOULD HAVE.

WHAT is it to be a Class Leader? This question is not difficult to answer. A Class Leader is one who leads a class. But this answer makes one no wiser. To give an answer which shall compass the whole question, and furnish a real and vivid picture of a true Class Leader, is not so easy. This I propose to try to furnish.

There are several elements necessary to make a Class Leader worthy of the name. None of them can be absent. A single vital deficiency is fatal. There are numerous things that are desirable, and the possession of which would contribute to the influence and efficiency of a Leader, such as being a good singer, having an eloquent utterance, and a pleasing countenance; but they are not necessary. There are other elements that are indispensable, lacking which no man ought to be a Leader. Of the latter, and not the former, I propose now to speak.

I. THE WORKING SPIRIT.

I once knew two men, members of the same Church, who each held the position of Leader. They met their classes regularly; but they were seldom at the weekly prayer-

meeting, and could not be induced to take part in revival work. In special meetings for the conversion of sinners while from night to night the pastor and the earnest portion of the membership were kneeling at the altar, they were found in stores, talking about the affairs of the town, and listening to the general gossip. Standard-bearers in the Christian army they fled from the field in the time of serious engagement. Were they Class Leaders? They bore the name, they enjoyed the honour of the position; but—I press the question—were they really Leaders?

Another Class Leader I knew who was quite active in the work of the altar in the time of revival, but whose seat in church when there was no revival was vacant at more than two-thirds of the services. Regular in meeting the class; gifted in prayer, in song, and in speech; yet habitually absent from the house of God more than two services in three—was this person a true Class Leader? I think there can be no hesitation in the mind of any one who has just views of this office in rendering an emphatic nay.

These three persons whom I have described are representative cases. They belong to classes which are fearfully large. Their counterparts can be found in all portions of the land. Their sad example works evil, it is to be feared, more than their counsels and prayers in the class-room can ever avail for good. They are heavy weights upon the Church. They are Class Leaders only in name. They are hinderances instead of helps to the spirituality of the membership, and to the Church's aggressive warfare upon the world.

We get, then, in the light of these examples, a perception of the first thing which is absolutely essential to constitute a true Class Leader—namely, *that he have a mind to work.*

To be a Class Leader, in the true sense, is to be a Christian worker. It were better, I hesitate not to say, to have no Class Leaders at all than to have the office filled by men who have no zeal for God, no love for souls, no heart for earnest spiritual labour. The Leader of a class is, as we have shown, in a sense, a pastor; and his work is of such a nature that he cannot perform it unless he be alive to it, and have a love for doing it.

That he may be a useful worker in the Church it is not only necessary that he have a disposition to labour, but also that his example in the Church be good and wholesome. What does it avail that the leader manifest much ardour and emotion in a time of revival, and be instant in season and out of season, if in other times he show no love for the prayer-meeting or for the public worship of God on the Sabbath?

No man can exert a healthful spiritual influence in a Church who is inconstant and irregular in his attendance at his own Church. This is especially the case if he be a Leader. Where is he? will be the question that will arise in the minds of scores as they see his seat vacant. Why not here? Does he not love the house and the word of God? Is he sleeping, visiting, recreating, entertaining company, or wandering around to other Churches in search of novelty and excitement? These, and inquiries of like import, will be made mentally from Sabbath to Sabbath by numbers who will never speak them aloud; and perhaps by some who may not be so discreet.

Such a course cannot but impair the usefulness of any Church member, and especially of a Church officer. No matter how fluent his utterance, or tearful his eyes, or pathetic his tones when he addresses his members in the class-room, or labours among the serious and penitent in

revivals, there will be a sad lack in all his exercises of the power which only a good and well-directed personal influence can give. An indispensable requisite in a real Class Leader is, that he love the Church's ordinances and regularly attend them. He must be able to say, "I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tent of wickedness."

II. BLAMELESSNESS.

Another thing which cannot be dispensed with in a Class Leader, is *blamelessness of life*. He is a teacher of experimental and practical religion, and it is necessary that his life be in harmony with his teachings. If he be a business man he must illustrate the principles of Christianity in his business. His integrity must be beyond question.

I once knew a Leader who was a very active and prosperous man of business, but who was quite generally spoken of, among even his brethren in the Church, as addicted to suspicious business methods. Now and again it would be said that he was "tricky." He would not always faithfully represent his goods, and would take advantage of the ignorance or weakness of a customer to secure the best of the bargain. Such, at least, was the reputation he bore. While some would not credit these things, and adhered to him strongly, others had little confidence in his religious professions. Now this man's influence was weak just at the point where it should have been strong: it was everywhere it ought to have been good.

Another Leader, who was a married man, was remarkable by his members for his special attentions to and familiarity with a certain female member of his class. He was apparently very devout, his exercises in the class-room were very emotional, but his honour was suspected. So strong

became the suspicions that some of his members resolved to test them. Their investigation resulted in the discovery of grievous moral aberration, and he was displaced from his office and cast out of the Church. Yet for some time he had exercised the leadership while his influence was most damaging to the cause he professed to serve.

Another man whom I knew was a Leader, and continually accused of falsehood. It was difficult, i. not impossible, to get direct proof of palpable lying, and yet such was his volubility and recklessness of speech that his word had very little value with many who knew him. He did not have a nice sense of truth, nor did he always exercise strict fidelity to it in his utterances. As a consequence many, both in and out of the Church, had no confidence in his veracity.

Such examples show the absolute necessity of moral blamelessness in those who are leaders of the flock. They *must* be men of good report. If they be slandered, they must remove the slander and vindicate their integrity. If they do not, no gifts, or social standing, or wealth, or anything else, can render them influential Class Leaders. They must be beyond reproach and above suspicion or their religious counsels and admonitions, though given with tears, will be worse than vain.

This purity of character is so vital that all Class Leaders should exercise the utmost care in regard to it. I do not mean that they should be so self-inspective and self-conscious as to lose their freedom of feeling and action. They should not be afraid to give play to their natural aptitudes lest they should seem to transgress the proprieties of their office. No man can be a power for good in any great degree unless he be natural, and this he cannot be unless he be freely himself.

A man walking on moral stilts is a ridiculous spectacle.

The affectation which says, "I am a Class Leader, and I cannot walk on the pavement of every-day life, as ordinary Christians do, but must move with my feet above it," can only render a man distasteful, if not disgusting, to sensible people. Let him walk where others walk, a man with men; his heart in sympathy with every interest and pain and joy and grief of humanity; putting on no airs of superior sanctity, but maintaining "a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men;" watching against the smallest violation of truth, honour, justice; against holding fellowship with wrong in any form; and he will be sure to enjoy the confidence of all who know him, and the esteem and love of those who fear God.

III. GOOD COMMON SENSE.

The Class Leader must not fail to have good sense.

What merchant would place a man in charge of important trusts whose reason and discretion were at fault? who lacked a ready perception of the fitness of things, and whose judgment was erratic? The man who can be depended upon to do about the right thing in the right way, and at the right time, is the one that wise employers select to manage and guard large interests.

The weightiest interest that a pastor can commit to any of his members is that which he places in charge of the person whom he appoints Class Leader. The Leader has in his hands the guiding and shaping of the eternal destinies of immortal beings. It is his office to lead his flock into green pastures and beside still waters. He is to admonish them when they do wrong, to recover them from their wanderings, to animate and cheer them when weary and discouraged, to instruct them when ignorant, to counsel them in their difficulties, and in general to watch over them as one who "must give account."

A work of such delicacy and responsibility requires the exercise of such wisdom and skill as only sound common sense can supply. Extraordinary piety and devotion, even, cannot compensate for the want of this. A man may be truly good, and thoroughly in earnest to do good, but if he lack wisdom he cannot be relied upon as a safe guide. I do not mean by wisdom, wide knowledge of the world, of books, or of men, though this is desirable. Without such knowledge a man may be a useful Class Leader ; but without the wisdom which is born of good sense he cannot be, because he cannot wisely counsel, admonish, reprove, encourage, and otherwise edify the members of a class.

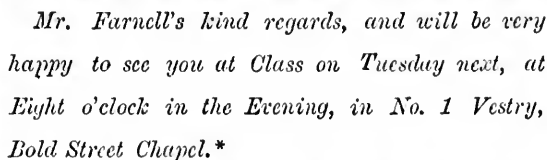
This quality supplies a Class Leader with *tact*. This thing called tact is what wins on most of the battle-fields of life. It is this which renders some men so successful in managing men, and making them subservient to their purposes. It is this which enables some persons so readily to disentangle themselves from unfavourable complications, to repair with ease a mistake, or to settle a difficulty. Tact gives a man the best use of his resources, and leads him to do the best thing in an emergency. No man is or can be the possessor of this ready skill in action, which we call tact, only in proportion as he has common sense.

How tact comes into use in the conduct of a class-meeting is shown in the case of a Leader who writes : " I hear and respond to the evidences offered, unless they have too much sameness and become dull, and if so I suddenly turn my experience into a prayer or singing meeting, get them waked up, and perhaps as suddenly return to experiences."

Other men would go on with a somnolent influence deepening in the class to the end, and have the members leave with a feeling that the class-room is a dull place ; but the Leader whose sense is clear and alert contrives to exorcise

the demon of dullness, and makes the meeting lively and profitable.

This quality was also illustrated by a Class Leader in England whose time was so much occupied in business that he could not always get the opportunity to call promptly upon his members whom he missed from class-meeting, but who yet saw that it was necessary to reach them somehow. So he hit upon a device in the shape of a little card, a specimen of which is here given, which he sent in an



*Mr. Farnell's kind regards, and will be very happy to see you at Class on Tuesday next, at Eight o'clock in the Evening, in No. 1 Vestry, Bold Street Chapel.**

envelope to each absentee, the cause of whose absence he did not know, previous to the next class night, by some one who would deliver it; and he "almost always found it effectual in bringing them to the class."

Many a Leader has allowed a class intrusted to him to dwindle to extinction, because he did not possess the tact to place himself in communication with and bring back to the class-room his absenting members.

I am far from saying that all Leaders who do not use the precise methods given above are deficient in good sense; but I do say, that good sense leads a man to see and overcome difficulties and hinderances to efficiently leading a class, as well as in other spheres of activity and success.

* On the reverse side this text is printed: "Come thou with us, and we will do thee good."

Other things being equal, the Leader with genuine, ready sense will always greatly surpass him who lacks it.

The exercise of the very best judgment is often demanded in replying to the experiences related in class-meeting. Sometimes a Leader's tact will lead him to use language that to an observer would seem unsuitable, but which he perceives is needful to divert the thoughts of the person addressed from morbid contemplations, and turn them to more genial themes.

Captain Bilderback, who was a very successful Class Leader for many years in Salem, New Jersey, when some one had recited in his class a story of Satanic assault, instead of replying by a discourse on the philosophy of temptation and giving minute directions for overcoming the tempter, in his peculiar manner said, "Brother, the next time the devil comes to you take a big club to him."

Such a reply would not soon be forgotten by the person addressed, and the novelty and homeliness of the simile, and the manner of its utterance, probably did more to relieve and assure his mind than would the most polished sentences. It would not be best for every Leader to make that reply in such a case, but Captain Bilderback was a Leader who had tact, and judgment to use that tact; hence he was generally ready to meet an exigence in the class-room skilfully and wisely.

David Taylor, of Jersey City, is one of the best Class Leaders I ever knew. One evening I was hearing him lead his class when not less than fifty persons were present. A member in speaking said that never since his conversion had he desired to turn back to the world. The stereotyped reply to such a hackneyed declaration would have been somewhat as follows: "Of course, brother, you do not desire

to go back. Why should you? The joys of religion are so much superior to the pleasures of the world that no one who possesses them would desire to make the exchange. Hold on, then, to your religion, and never indulge a desire to part with it."

With no such smooth words did Mr. Taylor reply. But he almost startled me by saying, in tones full of earnest feeling, "I believe that you have never desired to turn back, but I do not think you are making much progress; and then he exhorted him to advance. This was not complimentary, certainly, to that scholar in the school of Christ, and I feared for the result. But I found that no harm was done, and just that sort of remark at that juncture was what the ready tact of the Leader, who knew his man, suggested as the best thing to be said to him to quicken his Christian pace.

A Christian woman was lying on a sick-bed in a rather low mood of mind. A friend called to see her, and in speaking with her said,

"You love Jesus?"

"So little," she replied, "that I am ashamed to say that I do."

The visitor struck a match and blew out the flame leaving the fire on the end, and, holding it before her, said

"What is that?"

"A spark of fire," she said.

"Never mind about the spark. What is that?"

"It is fire."

"Yes," answered the visitor, "it is fire; it is not a conflagration, but still it is fire. Now do you love the Lord Jesus?"

"So little that I am ashamed to say that I do."

He then reached out to a glass of water and dipped his finger in it, and held up the finger, on which hung a glistening drop, before the woman.

"What is that on my finger?" he asked.

"A drop of water," she replied.

"Don't say any thing about the drop," he said, "but tell me what it is that is on the end of my finger."

"It is water," said the woman.

"Yes," he remarked, "it is water. It is not an ocean, but it is as really water as the sea is water. It is not the quantity which determines what a thing is, but its nature or quality. So it is with love to Jesus. It is not the amount of your love to him that determines whether you are a Christian, but it is the fact that you love him at all. A little love to Christ is as genuine as though it were a great deal. It is not the quantity that you are to concern yourself about now, it is the thing itself. Do you love Jesus?" And the poor, desponding soul was obliged to confess,

"Yes, I love him!"

Now who does not see that tact of a very high order was displayed in this delicate, yet thorough, treatment of the misgivings and despondency of that sincere but weak believer? And such tact will often be of inestimable value to the Class Leader in treating the various phases of experience that he must meet in the course of his duties.

This quality is so important to the leader that I cannot refrain from giving yet another illustration or two of it.

The Rev. Dr. Payson, who was a distinguished and saintly minister of Portland, Maine, in the early part of this century, once visited a Christian sufferer who was in a very gloomy state of mind because she could not keep her thoughts concentrated on Christ. He said to her,

“Suppose you were to see a little sick child lying in its mother's lap, with its faculties impaired by its sufferings, so that it is generally in a troubled sleep; but now and then it just opens its eyes a little, and gets a glimpse of its mother's face, so as to be recalled to the recollection that it is in its mother's arms; and suppose that always, at such a time, it should smile faintly with evident pleasure to find where it was, should you doubt whether that child loved its mother?” At once the sick woman saw the point, her doubts instantly fled, and her soul was comforted.

On another occasion the same minister was in a house of bereavement, and found it his duty to minister to the sorrow of a mother who had lost a beloved child. And thus he did it. “Suppose now,” he said, “some one was making a beautiful crown for you to wear, and that you knew it was for you, and that you were to receive it and wear it as soon as it should be done. Now, if the maker of it where to come, and, in order to make the crown more beautiful and splendid, were to take some of *your jewels* to put into it, should you be sorrowful and unhappy, because they were taken away for a little while, when you knew they were gone to make up your crown?” It was a word fitly spoken; and the weeper smiled to think that her treasure was only taken for a time, to be restored to her again when crowns shall be distributed in heaven.

Now this kind of skill, which, I repeat, is the product of good sense, will enable the Leader to successfully dispose of the numerous cases of doubt, temptation, sorrow, inexperience, folly and backsliding that will every now and then call for his treatment. No rules can be laid down to meet these ever-varying cases. The Leader must rely upon his judgment, aided by experience, such knowledge as he may be able to acquire, and the wisdom that is from above.

IV. INTELLIGENCE.

The Class Leader must possess intelligence. This is indispensable. It is his duty to give advice, to help men out of their spiritual difficulties, to direct their faith and their walk, and to promote, by his instructions, their highest welfare. How can he do all this unless he be instructed? He cannot.

It is not necessary, however, that he be what is called an educated man, except that he be able to read. The knowledge which he requires is that which is necessary to enable him to do the work of his office. He cannot acquire it in the schools of this world: he must obtain it in the school of Christ. He must know what it is to be a Christian and to live a Christian life. He must be familiar with the temptations and snares with which a Christian is beset: he must know how to resist and foil the tempter: he must understand the means of Christian growth, and the steps that lead to lukewarmness and backsliding. He must know how to apply God's word to the needs of his members, giving to each their portion in due season.

A sensible and earnest Leader can readily acquire this knowledge if he be but poorly furnished with it when called to enter upon this work. He will continually enlarge his acquisitions, also, if he faithfully improve his opportunities, and will become "furnished unto every good word and work."

It is very important that a Class Leader be familiar with Bible truth, as this is the food which he must dispense to his flock.

The Rev. Edmond Grindrod, a Wesleyan minister of the last generation, addressed to Class Leaders the following wise words:

“I do not mean to say that a critical knowledge of the Holy Bible is necessary. This is a rare attainment, and you have in general neither leisure nor means for its pursuit. It is, however, expedient that you should have at least a general acquaintance with the facts, doctrines, precepts, and promises of that Divine book. From this sacred source you will at all times derive the best arguments, admonitions, and exhortations to address to your classes.

“Make yourself very familiar with the *devotional parts* of Scripture, particularly with the Psalms; this will supply you with a richness, variety, appropriateness, and beauty of language in prayer which you cannot acquire by any other means. It is said of Martin Luther, that when he felt a dulness in the devotions of the closet, he used to take the Psalms and convert them into forms of prayer for himself, and was often greatly blessed in this exercise. Such an example is worthy of our imitation. Treasure in your memories the *precepts* of Divine truth. They are scattered up and down in the sacred pages, in short and easy sentences, as if they were designed to be committed to memory. These will supply you with infallible moral maxims, and rules of conduct for yourselves and the members of your classes. Have the *promises* of God at hand, that you may, with wisdom, apply them to the consolation of the sincere in all times of their trouble.

“In order that you may attain this knowledge of the Scriptures, read them every day by some well-arranged method; read them thoughtfully, with a design and effort to understand them; often pause, and inquire what you have learned by the paragraph, chapter, or book which you have just finished; read them with some good commentary upon them, if you can procure one. Mr. Benson's is the best that I know of for your purpose. Read

them prayerfully: the devout mind is most likely to be taught of God. Make yourselves acquainted with other standard works in divinity, particularly Wesley's and Fletcher's Works, and Watson's Theological Institutes."*

Conversation with the members of his class outside the class-room on religious experience and life, and with such mature and thoughtful Christians as he may know, will be found by the Leader a highly useful means of increasing his knowledge of the things of God, and will furnish him with many suggestions, thoughts, and illustrations which he may use to advantage in his addresses in the class-room. Indeed, he may, in his daily life, and amid the cares and engrossments of his secular calling, be constantly enlarging his stock of knowledge, and rendering himself more and more competent as a religious counsellor and guide.

V. SYMPATHY.

One who does not possess sympathy is incapable of being a genuine Class Leader. It is a work which calls for the exercise of the purest and tenderest sensibilities.

A Leader in a large city found in his class, when it was placed in his charge, a genteel-appearing, neatly attired, intelligent-looking, elderly widow lady. There was nothing in her appearance or manner that would have suggested to any one that she was in distressed circumstances. But one winter afternoon he called upon her, and

* "The Duties, Qualifications, and Encouragements of Class Leaders; being the substance of Five Addresses delivered to several persons appointed to that Office in the Wesleyan Methodist Society in Hull." By the Rev. Edmond Grindrod. Fourth edition. London: 1846. I agree with Mr. Grindrod in recommending Benson's Commentaries, and would also especially recommend Whedon on the New Testament.

learned during the interview that, though her house and person showed great neatness, she was so destitute as to be without necessary food. His compassion was roused. He went forth from her humble abode and procured a basket filled with provisions, so heavy that it tired him to carry it, and bore it through the street, in the darkness which had now fallen, on his own arm to her door. He also saw that she was supplied with coal throughout the winter, and that she was cared for generally so long as she remained in his class.

That was a case in which a Leader's sympathy was manifested. What if, like the priest and Levite, he had coolly left her to suffer? Perhaps she might not have complained or reproached him, but the spirit which would have made him capable of such heartlessness would have made him incapable of being a good Class Leader. That he acted as he did showed him to possess the heart of a good Samaritan, and to be capable of feeling for his flock in their sorrows and misfortunes.

Now a Leader must feel for the members placed in his care. He must sympathize with them in their temptations, struggles, losses, crosses, sicknesses, poverty, weaknesses, bereavements, and toils. He must be able to "rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep." He must bear their burdens, and, in a sense, "carry their sorrows." He who would exercise this office in a mere professional and perfunctory way, can never exercise it with pleasure to himself or with profit to his class.

One who has been a Leader nearly a half century says very justly, "A Leader is not fit to be called a Leader who is not ready to shake hands with all his class at all times, and will not bear with and sympathize with all in their trials and weakness."

Another, who has been evidently a true Leader, writes that a Leader, in connection with other traits, should be "fervent, affectionate." A man of cold spirit, and lacking in affectionateness, cannot minister to tired, and weary, and burdened hearts in a way to encourage, lighten, and cheer them.

While a student of medicine I was very pleasantly impressed by the exhibition of this trait by the late Dr. Valentine Mott, who was one of the most distinguished surgeons in this country. At his public clinic in the college one day a poor woman presented herself to receive gratuitous medical aid. The students and professors were very apt to treat such persons as though they did not possess ordinary human sensibilities. Dr. Mott showed the poor child of adversity gentle attention, and then remarked to the class that it was his habit to treat such as she with delicate consideration, because such treatment was due them.

A sympathizing manner, joined with kind words, are often like balm of healing to the troubled, the poor, and the desponding ones that we so frequently meet in life; and if a man so celebrated and refined as was Dr. Mott could thus feel for a poor stranger, how ready ought a Leader to be to sympathize with the meanest and least loved of his flock?

VI. ENTHUSIASM.

No one, as a rule, succeeds in an undertaking without enthusiasm. Whether the work be secular or religious, the enthusiastic worker, unless he be otherwise incompetent to do what he undertakes, almost always wins success; while, generally, those whose capabilities are adequate but who lack enthusiasm succeed but poorly, or fail altogether.

A Class Leader can never attain large success in his work unless he prosecute it enthusiastically. Very many unsuccessful Leaders are so simply because they have no enthusiasm. Their ardour does not kindle as they approach their duties. Their spirit does not bound to their work. They consequently go through the routine of the class-room in a dull and monotonous way, kindling no warmth in their members, dispensing stale advice in phrases hackneyed and threadbare, neither enjoying the service themselves nor making it enjoyable to the class. It is not strange that such Leaders complain that their members do not attend class-meeting regularly, and talk so much about resigning their office.

One such Leader has written to me some passages of his experience which are instructive. He has sixty-six members in his class, and an average attendance of eight. Sometimes sixteen are present and sometimes none.

"Then, I say," he writes, "I am not fit to be a Leader. I will give up my class and ask the preacher to appoint some one else in my place. I have determined several times to do this. Before giving up my book I will just call once more on all my members, and write up my book, so that my successor shall find all my sixty-six members at the correct residences as marked in the book.

"I leave my store at three o'clock some afternoon and take a route of visitation.

"I find a lady who is infirm and has been deprived of the means of grace. She says many flattering things about my faithfulness, and the many good words I have spoken in class. At another place I find the members have moved away from the city without their letters. And so I find work to do which I did not think of. The next Friday evening I go to class hoping nobody will be there, so that

I can give it up. To my surprise I find several persons, and others come in until the room is well filled. The singing goes well. I read a passage of Scripture, and I try to speak on it. It seems so full of Gospel that I drink it in as I speak, and I find myself filled with the glorious promises which I am trying to explain to others. Then the members speak so well. We are like the disciples at the mount of transfiguration. We say it is good to be here. Then I say, I am in the Lord's hands. If he wants me to lead class I will do it, even if there be no glory in it."

Now this Leader obviously lacked enthusiasm until his class got so low that he resolved to lead it no longer. Then he awoke and determined to give his members a visit before severing his relations with them—to close up with a little enthusiasm. In doing so he awakened their interest in himself and in the class-meeting, and the next class night his room is well filled, he becomes more enthusiastic, the members catch his spirit; all feel a blissful uplifting, and go away rejoicing; while that one blaze of enthusiasm has consumed the desire of the Leader to surrender his class book, and inspired him with a purpose to continue his work for the Master. Were he to maintain that spirit steadily and increasingly, as he ought, that Leader would no more talk about giving up his class, but would make his work both a pleasure and a success.

I know of no better illustration of enthusiasm in this service than the case of a sailor who was a Class Leader, and had seven or eight members who belonged to the crew of an English naval packet ship. While at sea they suffered persecution from the officers and shipmates, but they regularly held their class-meeting. They made the time of the meeting suit their duties. Their class-room

was the forepart of the ship, where they had to lie down, side by side, or else partly on one another upon the cables : the arrangement of their position allowing them to pass whispers among themselves so that their voices would not attract the attention of their opposers. They were always glad of a gale of wind, so that the noise would prevent their voices being heard by others, and afford them opportunity of easily hearing one another. In this manner they went through the exercises of the class-meeting, and found it to be the means of fortifying themselves against the influences of their evil surroundings. A Leader who will keep up his class under such difficulties is an enthusiast in his work, and is not likely to have drowsy and unprofitable meetings.

A Lawyer in the North of England, of ability and reputation, and successful in his profession, was accustomed to break away from his office, no matter how engrossing his labours might be, and hasten to meet the class of which he was the Leader. He once said, "I owe more than I can tell to the weekly enjoyment of my class. I entered upon public life with a prayerful determination not to be deprived, if I could help it, of that weekly refreshment of my soul; and, with very few exceptions, my way has been made plain. I have often had to run directly from the office after a whole day's occupation in court; if, however, I could but secure five minutes before the time to kneel, or sit and select a suitable hymn, I have never found myself unready for the duty of giving, or the privilege of receiving, spiritual blessing. How sweet I have found it to get away for an hour in the course of a week's exposure to worldly influences, and from dealing with selfish principles and doubtful customs, to enjoy a little holy talk with my fellow-pilgrims in the Master's

company! I am sure that without it I should not have stood my ground."

Theodore Runyon, of Newark, the Chancellor of New Jersey, though occupying the first judicial position in the State, is an enthusiastic Class Leader. He has been known to rush from the capitol, where he was sitting in chancery, that he might get to his class-room, nearly fifty miles away, in season to lead his class.

These Leaders had enthusiasm in their work, and no wonder the class-room was found, under their lead, to be a place of refreshing and a Bethel of praise.

At the close of a revival in which a good many converts had been received into the Church, I appointed a man, who had never had any experience as Leader, to take charge of a class of probationers. He was disposed to resist the appointment, but I insisted, and he served. I believed he would illustrate in the office all the elements which I have here inculcated as necessary to every Class Leader. He became at once enthusiastic, and, of course, successful in a high degree. After more than a year had elapsed since his appointment, he wrote me, "You will excuse me if I say I have been, by God's blessing, so far successful in my work, and but very few of the lambs committed to my care have gone back to the world. I believe my class, without exception, love me, and I trust my influence with them will do them no harm. One thing I do know, it has been a great blessing to me to work in the capacity of Leader; and, though fully conscious of my inability in almost all respects, I feel encouraged to work on."

These words reveal the presence of the spirit of enthusiasm which every successful Leader possesses, and give the secret of his success in saving "the lambs." Neither

knowledge, wit, blamelessness, regularity, or any thing else, will make a truly live Leader if he have no enthusiasm. This quality, even if some others are but poorly developed, will almost always insure success in this work.

I do not wish to have any Leader who may read this book feel that he is not fit for his office, unless he have, in a large degree, all these qualities which I have tried to illustrate. I merely insist that he must have them; but do not say that he must possess them to the extent that another does. He may have them imperfectly, and yet he may be very useful, and, indeed, necessary to the Church as a Leader. We must not despise the day of small things; and all these qualities are susceptible of culture and increase. A man who has but a fair stock of good sense, intelligence, and grace, but who devotes himself with enthusiasm to the work of the leadership, with a steady effort to improve his qualifications, will grow in his work, and with scarcely an exception, will make it a blessing and a success.



CHAPTER II.

THE LEADER AND THE CHURCH.

No one, except the pastor, sustains a more interesting and important relation to the Church than the Class Leader. If he be worthy of his office, his influence in the Church is powerful. He stands forth before the membership and the outside world among the Church's best and most useful representatives. Men confide in him as an exponent of that which is most vital in Christianity, and as an example and guide in faith and morals. They trust to his counsels, and lean upon him for support in their weakness. They wish him to comfort them when they are in trouble and sickness, and to whisper to them words of hope and promise when they are dying.

None are more valued and loved by the Church than are its faithful and devoted Class Leaders. They are frequently objects of veneration to those whom they have helped in the way to heaven. Deference is given to their opinions, and their words are potential. They often are pillars in the Lord's temple, and prophets who receive honour in their own country and from their own people.

It is a most happy thing for a Church to have Leaders worthy to be thus trusted and cherished. The pure, perennial influence of a good man and beneficent worker in a Christian congregation is like a health-giving fountain in a sickly land.

The affairs of the world generally are carried on by means of leadership. In politics, finance, art, medicine, commerce, government, there are leaders who direct the opinions and work of their followers, and shape the measures that control the thinking and conduct of the multitude. A true leader, who can guide a country safely through its perils, or who can lead the mind of a generation to the recognition of nobler ideals and to the perception and acceptance of loftier truths, is a benefactor whose value to the world no figures of arithmetic can represent. Such men, after they are dead, are often mightier than kings through the ideas they have uttered and the influence they created.

Luther, who led the Reformation, conferred a boon upon the world which no mind can measure. John Wesley, the architect of the vast fabric of Methodism, was the leader of the faith of millions now in the skies; and to-day he is a living force throughout Christendom, and by his spirit and genius is inspiring and guiding the conquering hosts of the Church militant, as they are marching on over the falling idolatries of the earth to its conquest for Jesus Christ. And I have known a poor and illiterate mechanic, who held no official position, to shed the influence of his sanctity over a whole city congregation where he worshiped while living, and in which when he was dead his influence remained like a sweet odour.

Every enterprise has its guiding minds, every organization its leading spirits—and the Church must have them.

I know that sometimes the men who stand foremost in the Church as the managers of its affairs and the captains of its host are looked upon with critical and jealous eyes by those who perhaps covet their honour, but who have neither the heart nor ability to perform their service. All

who understand human nature and the needs of the Church, and who pray for its prosperity, rejoice that God gives it such servants, and "esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake." Every Church has what are called "the leading men;" and they are a necessity, and, as a rule, a great blessing.

Among such the Class Leaders are conspicuous. Their office clothes them with a certain influence. That the pastor has selected them from the rest of the men of the Church to fill this position attests his high estimate of their character and gifts. It stamps them, so far as his judgment and authority can, as superior men.

By means of the influence of their office, and the publicity which it gives them in the congregation, they are rendered equal in weight and force to the chiefest in the Church, unless they have serious personal deficiencies. Assuming that they answer in a good degree to the ideal presented in the last chapter, the Class Leaders of a given Church may safely be regarded as its first men in moral force and religious usefulness. In a good degree they hold in their trust its honour and power, and bear the responsibility of its success or failure.

They have in their care the piety of the Church. The class-meeting is a school for the training of Christians. According as the members of the Church are there trained will be the tone of their spirituality and the consistency of their lives. The Leader is a personal teacher of the religion of the heart. It is his office to hear from week to week a statement of the spiritual condition of each member of his class from their own lips, and to caution, advise, admonish, encourage, instruct and stimulate, according to the indications they give. His chief duty is to so teach, influence and aid them, as that from week to week they shall "grow in

grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

The entire membership of the Methodist Church is, or should be, under the spiritual care of our Class Leaders, and all those souls are made, in a good degree, what they become through the help and guidance they get in the class-meeting. There all the grades of our people are brought together to tell of the Divine dealings, and to receive such inspiration and assistance as they may in the Christian life.

How vital then, to the Church is the Leader's work. Whether its members shall be living branches of the True Vine, bringing forth much fruit, or whether they shall answer to the description of the Laodicean Church—neither cold nor hot—depends largely on the Class Leaders. Let the Leader endeavour to make his class-room attractive by having it filled with the spirit of love, faith, and joy; let him strive to make it a place where weary hearts shall find rest; the troubled, comfort; the desponding, hope; a Pisgah whence longing eyes shall see the promised land, and hearts enraptured by the sense of a nearing heaven shall carol forth their triumph.

Such a class-room cannot fail to be a place of delightful resort to those who are seeking a better country, and must prove a quickener of piety. If a class-meeting cannot but assist the faith and nourish the graces of Christians, and send them forth week by week to "adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things." But a class-meeting that is rendered irksome by cold formalities rather than alluring by the beauty of holiness, will be likely to retard the spiritual improvement of its members, and so tend to depress instead of elevating the piety of the Church.

CHAPTER III.

A JOYOUS RELIGION.

THE Leader has much influence in determining the *character* of the Church's piety. Many pious people have misrepresented religion, caricatured it even, by their moroseness. They have illustrated the notion so false and pernicious, that religion is a gloomy thing, and that it begets a solemnity both of spirit and demeanour which destroys much of the gladness of life. On this principle the Quakers proscribe music, not only in their meeting-houses, but also in their homes. On the same principle many ministers dress in a manner which is calculated to mark them in the eyes of the people as ascetics—men who may not feel the buoyant freedom of a normal human life—and to make the public think that the faith which they profess and teach tends to asceticism.

Now Christianity is not ascetic. It is the brightest and most gladsome thing in the world. It is a rainbow, that spans the cloud-mantled sky of our life; a harp, that fills the temple of the soul with melody; a day star, that ever shineth on the path of the pilgrim. Austerity belongs not to it, but gentleness and peace. Kindliness and joy are its earliest and abiding fruits. It knows no dry, sterile, repulsive moods; but its boundless and perennial blissfulness is imaged by the Saviour as "a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

Methodism has always held forth to the world an attractive and joyous religion. From the day that its founder escaped from the gloom of asceticism, in which he had been so long held, and felt his "heart strangely warmed," it has discarded that dismal experience which does not go beyond "O wretched man that I am!" and has testified to a "joy unspeakable and full of glory." Its exultant songs and hallelujahs have reverberated over the world, and its people have passed through life and through death with shoutings.

The vast success of Methodism as an evangelizing power has, doubtless, been largely owing to the joyous character of its piety. Its radiancy of hope, its rapture of love, its triumph of faith, have won upon the hearts of men; and, drawn by the power of a celestial attraction, uncounted multitudes have abandoned the sinful pleasures of the world for its blissful fellowship.

And this is the power of our Church to-day. The secret by which it is to continue its glorious conquests does not consist in its institutions of learning, or its costly and splendid temples, or refined modes of worship, or æsthetic and scholarly preaching, but does consist in its experimental religion. "The joy of the Lord is" its "strength."

Its members must continue to be able to sing the songs that resounded from the lips of the fathers and mothers who have gone up to their coronation, and by which they thrilled and moved the people in their revivals, at camp-meetings and elsewhere, such as :

"Jesus, my all in all thou art ;
My rest in toil, my ease in pain ;
The med'cine of my broken heart ;
In war, my peace ; in loss, my gain ;
My smile beneath the tyrant's frown ;
In shame, my glory and my crown.

“In want, my plentiful supply ;
 In weakness, my almighty power ;
 In bonds, my perfect liberty ;
 My light, in Satan's darkest hour ;
 In grief, my joy unspeakable ;
 My life in death, my all in all.”

And—

“O what a blessed hope is ours !
 While here on earth we stay,
 We more than taste the heavenly powers,
 And antedate that day :
 We feel the resurrection near,—
 Our life in Christ conceal'd,—
 And with his glorious presence here
 Our earthen vessels filled.”

And—

“The promised land, from Pisgah's top,
 I now exult to see ;
 My hope is full (O glorious hope !)
 Of immortality.”

An experience which was told in such words as

“Exults our rising soul,
 Disburden'd of her load,
 And swells, unutterably full
 Of glory and of God—”

was the charm of early Methodism, and it is the weapon by which our Church is still to conquer. Hush the ecstatic song, arrest the victor shout, quench the radiance of the faith-illumined eye, pull down the divinely emancipated spirit from its free soarings and fasten it in the fetters of formalism, expel the heavenly antepast from the thrilled breast, and but little will remain in Methodism worth preserving.

In maintaining and promoting this type of piety the agency of Class Leaders is momentous. If they be indifferent to that which is bright, inspiring, and blissful in Christian experience, that indifference will, assuredly, tend to lower the spiritual temperature of our class-rooms, and to diminish the fervour of our people. Should they cease to relish and to teach a religion which consists not in "meat and drink," but in "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost," and attempt to substitute for it an æsthetic formalism, or a religion merely of principle, so called, much that is beautiful in our Church will vanish. Our class-rooms will, in a great degree, cease to be vocal with inspired and inspiring songs and testimonies, and our altars will no longer be crowded with multitudes seeking this precious faith.

As the warmth of spring causes the verdure to spontaneously cover the fields, and the trees to put forth their leaves, so does a joyous religion spring forth and flourish in the atmosphere of a class-meeting in which experimental testimonies are weekly given, and an experimental and happy knowledge of Jesus and his salvation is insisted upon by a Leader who himself abides "under the shadow of the Almighty." And as the frosty chill of the autumn winds withers the verdant beauty of nature, so will the atmosphere of a class-meeting in which the ecstasies of an experimental salvation are repressed and stifled sear the loveliest flowers of grace.

There is no doubt but that individuals may live joyous Christian lives without the class-meeting, but that that general and pervasive religious joyousness which has characterized the Methodist Church for more than a century, and which is still its strength, can be maintained without spiritual Class Leaders and class-meetings, I think is very doubtful.

And as the Leaders chiefly give tone to the class-meetings, so must they thereby largely shape the devotional spirit of the Church, and determine, in a great degree, its attractiveness to those who are without.

A lady who became interested in Methodism through a friend determined to know more of the Church to which her friend belonged, and so "she went to a class-meeting, which she had dreaded as a sort of confessional." She thus describes its joyful character and its influence upon her:—

"It was a small class of some seven or eight ladies, with the pastor in charge for a Leader. After solemn and impressive prayer he rose and spoke to the purport that the Lord still was with him, and he felt his presence a blessing and an honour; and he hoped they would all aid him in his prayers to make his heart a fit temple for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

"The next that rose was a lady in the prime of life, but the cheek was furrowed, and the once jetty tresses were gleaming with the silver threads of premature age. Sorrow had left its impress, friend after friend had passed away, and others had lingered by her side only to wound where they should have soothed; been a curse where they should have been a blessing. And there she stood, calmly telling us it was for a wise purpose if human ends were defeated and human hopes blighted, and, warming with the subject, her face shone with the peace that passeth all understanding, and I felt it was good to be there.

"Another spoke of the doubts and fears besetting her pathway, and of the prayers and strength required to overcome them.

"Another one, burdened with the weight of years, whose footsteps were fast tending to the dark valley, spoke of her

willingness to go when called ; she was calmly waiting the summons ; but if it was the will of her Master that she should still linger on this side of eternity, and even be deprived of friends or home, of everything but her prospect of heaven, she would still be content.

“Another pictured the glories of the heaven she was striving for, and she, too, was willing to take up the cross for this life-time, that she might wear the crown of the redeemed.

“The beloved pastor asked me in an earnest, tender voice if I were striving for the joys of that better land. I was, but O how utterly insignificant were all the promises, the prayers, the strivings I had ever been engaged in ! how unworthy had I been of all that I had ever received ! But never was God so manifest to my soul as in this my first class-meeting. So much love and reverence for the great Giver ; so much sympathy for each other ; hearts were softened and tears of penitence flowed freely.

“I had bowed my head in many a sanctuary where the lofty spire pointed heavenward, where the light streamed in through stained-glass windows, and where the deep-toned organ’s notes fell in prolonged vibrations on my ear : but never did I so feel God’s presence shining in our midst. If we could so feel it here, how must it be in heaven. I did not wonder how they who thus meet once in each week could so well understand Divine teachings. It is almost needless to say, my aversion to class-meetings was overcome, and now, as I look back through the dim vista of years, I feel its influence still, and have never regretted the hour it led me to add my name to its list.”

How may the Leader make his class-room exercises best promotive of a rich and happy Christian experience ? is

an interesting and weighty question. I think I cannot better answer it than by giving the pleasant words of a Class Leader whose experience in this office extends over more than a quarter of a century ; together with the views of a veteran preacher who has given nearly threescore years to ministerial service. The Leader writes :—

“ We love each other as classmates. When we meet on the street we have a kind word for each other. We take an interest in all, rich or poor, old or young. We never discriminate between any, but in the class-room we meet as a family—as one band of brothers and sisters in Christ the Lord. And we never have dry class-meetings, but we have pleasant, profitable, spiritual heavenly waitings before the Lord. . . . In presenting to the weaker or younger members the higher Christian life, I always do it in the most winning way ; kindly, gently leading ; helping, not driving, nor belittling the most ordinary attainments. I have the assurance that my class love me, and they know that I love them ; and so we are going on by the grace of God, (the Holy Spirit helping our imperfections,) from grace to grace, and from glory to glory.”

In such a class-room as that here described piety must thrive, and the most beautiful and joyous features of the Christian life find development. It is not surprising that there is a large average attendance of the members of that class throughout the year, for such inspiring and helpful class-meetings must always be attractive. It is not singular, either, that this Leader has a high appreciation of the importance of the class-meeting to the Church, and that he should write, as he does, “ I love class-meetings. I believe they are the backbone of our beloved Methodism.”

The venerable Dr. Brunson, who during a ministry of

fifty-nine years, has made, as he says, class-meetings "a specialty, and almost a *sine qua non*," writes:—

"Without class-meetings it is next to impossible to keep young converts alive in religion, or for older professors to grow in grace and in the knowledge of the truth. But to render them useful, spiritual, and lively, the Leader must be in the spirit. The leader of an army, to be successful, must infuse his own spirit into his soldiers. The Preacher or Leader who would save others must himself be saved. A lifeless head can never have a lively body."

In regard to the method of best promoting a joyous religious life in the class-room Dr. Brunson's words are pertinent and weighty. He says: "After two or three have spoken, sing a single appropriate verse, and sing, not with artistic skill, but with spirit, life and power. I never liked long talks in a Leader, unless they were *especially* spiritual and powerful. I never liked loud, boisterous harangues, nor cold and formal set words uttered in a whisper. The conversational style, unless of a very earnest character, is not so apt to be spiritual as the declamatory. I like to see earnestness, tears, and some agitation of the frame, as if the soul within was moving, and to hear a good hearty amen or glory. But, unless in very extraordinary cases or blessings, I prefer not loud shoutings. Never drag these meetings to heaviness, dulness, or deadness; let them end with animation—with a rising feeling; each apparently hungering and thirsting for more. In such case all will feel anxious to return to obtain more of like precious food."

CHAPTER IV.

MUTUAL EDIFICATION.

ONE of the purposes for which the Church exists is, that its members may give and receive help in their Christian life and warfare. They stand side by side, mutually encouraging and supporting each other. This is not only their privilege, but their imperative duty. They are Divinely enjoined to help one another. "Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do."

This language of St. Paul is good authority for the class-meeting: for that is simply a means by which the end which he proposes is secured. It is a regular and very available method for mutual comforting and edifying. It makes this the specific work once at least, each week, of the members of the Church.

This end may be reached in private gatherings of Christians, and by the social intercourse which they will maintain incidentally; but such methods do not fall directly under the care of the Church, and are intermittent and desultory. Our Church has provided in the class-meeting a systematic and formal mode of fulfilling the law of edification.

"Christian fellowship cannot be carried on to any considerable advantage without stated times of assembling. The meetings held for this purpose must have a name to distinguish them. We call ours class-meetings. Here we

must notice that it is the thing itself, Christian fellowship, and not the name, which we contend for.*

Men are greatly affected by the influences which act upon them. "Evil communications," says the apostle, "corrupt good manners;" and Solomon says, "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise." Companionship—mind acting on mind and soul communing with soul—has in all ages been recognized as one of the most effective means of forming character, whether good or bad.

The effect of one mind upon another is often seen in assemblies where, by the power of the speaker, hundreds are at once moved involuntarily to smile or to weep. The same thing is very frequently witnessed in social circles, where peals of laughter ring responsively to the facetious remark or jest, and sadness and tears show the effect of painful allusions or the recital of touching narratives.

Christianity recognizes this social power and provides for its exercise. It calls upon its disciples to minister to each other by admonition, by comforting, by building up, by restoring when any have fallen, and by inspiring one another by the singing of "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." It requires the maintenance of godly companionship by believers "forsaking not the assembling of" themselves "together."

In this the great power and usefulness of the class-meeting largely consist. The institution means Christian companionship, fellowship, sympathy, and brotherly helpfulness. It means that believers shall "comfort and edify one another."

To edify means, literally, to build up. Charles Wesley expresses it in the lines,

*Coke and Asbury. Notes on Discipline.

“ Help us to build each other up,
Our little stock to improve ;”

and it should be the care of the Leader to make the class-meeting as efficient as possible in doing this work.

He should remember that it is not his office to edify the persons composing the meeting by his own exercises only, but also to draw out the thoughts and feelings of all in such a manner as that each shall contribute something to the edification of the rest. How this may be done is shown by the method employed by a successful Leader in conducting his class-meeting. He says :—

“ We open with singing and prayer, then read a portion of Scripture suited to the general state of the class, and sometimes make a few remarks ; sometimes not. A verse is sung, and one of the older ones is then asked to speak. After this the speaking is from old or young, as the case may suit. I have one experience meet another ; one class of thought offset another, and in this way the members instruct, edify and electrify each other. A verse is now and then sung applicable to the last experience, the Leader encouraging or helping with a verse read or quoted from memory. Sometimes in the middle of the exercises we have a short, fervent prayer. The object aimed at, and generally accomplished, is to let an old member's experience balance a young member's ; a somewhat methodic style is met by a fervent one ; and an experience of a person very much cast down or depressed is met by a happy, triumphant one. Of course all this implies a very complete knowledge by the Leader of the peculiar temperament of each member of his class.”

It is necessary, also, that the Leader have special regard to the *spirit* of the meeting. If it be too formal, and the

members suffer a feeling of restraint, there will be little edifying. There must be freedom, a genial warmth, a sweet blending of spirit, a rising and flow of sympathetic feeling, or the full measure of good will not be secured.

It is of great importance, therefore, that the Leader himself enter the class-room in a suitable frame of mind. His spirit should be attuned to the situation. He should be absorbed in the thoughts and feelings that befit the hour. Thus he will give tone to the meeting, and his influence will be electric, dissipating the indifference and dulness of other minds, and imparting animation and freedom to the whole service.

On this important point a Leader of long experience says "I have always found that to profit a class, and to keep a class alive in attendance and spirituality, it was necessary myself to go to the class-room from the closet, full of faith and love; to carry the holy unction into the class-room; to commence at the time; to read a few verses of selected Scripture; to select a hymn of spirit and life; to read two or three verses at most and sing; then to pray, or call on some brother to lead in prayer, short, direct, and pointed. Then, after singing, rise, and in as few words as possible enter into the spirit of the meeting, avoiding a lengthy experience of my own—to say as little as possible about self—and insist that every member enter into the work of faith and of devotional exercise; never say many words in reply to any experience; if the class is large say nothing to most of the members, especially to such as are old and experienced."

Another, who was a Leader many years, writes: "If the Leader is not awake the members are apt to get stereotyped, and then comes a sameness and indefiniteness in their experience, and then follows decline and spiritual death.

The class-meeting, when conducted by a thoughtful, cheerful, and intelligent Leader is a most blessed means of grace."

Thus the Leader, by approaching his weekly service in a befitting frame of mind, and by direct, pithy and fervent exercises at the opening, adjusting the meeting to its intended object, places the members present in a position to comfort and edify one another. By suitable remarks and advices, brief and stirring, during the progress of the meeting, he may still further promote this object.

The pertinence and brevity which the Leader observes in his exercises should be imitated by the members. The design of speaking in class is not to exhibit oratorical gifts, or to utter an harangue, but to edify. Long, cold, formal speeches are rarely adapted to such a purpose. A set form of words soon becomes distasteful. Freshness, point, life, unction, brevity, are the chief requisites of good class-meeting speaking. Prosy, long, irrelevant addresses, are not admissible, because they are not edifying. And without edification the class-meeting becomes worthless.

Some of those loquacious speakers who destroy the good feeling of the class-room by their tedious speeches, were probably in the mind of the pastor who, when a female member of his church was complaining to him that her inability to express her feelings deterred her from going to the class-meeting, said, "Well, sister, don't be discouraged by this, for some can express all they feel, and a great deal more."

It is a delicate thing for a Leader to reprove a member for lengthened and desultory speaking, and it sometimes is a perplexing question how to best treat such cases. A gentle suggestion in private may sometimes do the work. If it be necessary to bring them under discipline in the

class-room to prevent harm to the meeting, the method of Mr. Wolff, which has proved efficient in his hands, may be found useful. He says, "We have some who wish from time to time to lecture the class or the Church. We head off such by reading a verse or two suited to his or her case, or ask them to lead in prayer, and it always cures them. All this is done in great kindness—never using harsh means in word or deed."

Variety in the exercises of the class-meeting is an edifying feature. The composition of the class itself often secures this in a good degree. There are the old, the young, and the middle aged; the male and female; the man of leisure and the man of toil; the cultured and the illiterate; the ardent nature and the stoical; those who are exulting in victory and those who are wrestling with the tempter. In such a meeting there must be much variety in the remarks if the members speak from their experience, and in such variety there will generally be a word in season for all present.

In view of the need of variety in the experiences related, a class ought never to be composed of one sex, nor of one class of persons, exclusively. For years, as pastor, I led week-day afternoon classes of women, and I always found them the most unsatisfactory because of this lack of variety. A Western Leader writes on this point as follows: "Have no droning in singing—better have none. Always manage to have several female voices. The driest class-meeting I ever attended was in — Methodist Church in —, one Sunday morning in May, 1872. There were present about twenty men and not one woman—and such singing! The atmosphere was warm on the street, but it was exceedingly cool in the class-room."

None should shrink from speaking in class, because to edify is a privilege, and the humblest and the feeblest may say some word which, spoken from the heart, shall go to other hearts, and prove an inspiration and a joy. The faintest utterance, a single sentence, may do this work. And surely one who loves Christ can speak a word for him and for the comfort of his disciples.

Still, many stay away from the class-room because they are not willing to speak. They should go, even if they do not say anything, that they may be edified in hearing others. Their presence alone would be a help to some of their fellow-members, though their lips were sealed. It would demonstrate their interest in spiritual things, and their sympathy with those who are striving to be holy.

It is related of a venerable minister who attended a camp-meeting near the city of Charleston, that though he was so deaf he could not hear a word of the preaching, yet he went regularly, and seated himself in the stand each time a sermon was delivered. His brother, the distinguished Rev. Dr. Lovick Pierce, said to him:—

“Brother, why do you weary yourself going to the stand every time, seeing that you cannot understand a word?”

“I go to fill my place, as every one ought,” was his emphatic reply.

And so, if some of our people cannot or will not speak in class-meeting, they ought at least to go and *fill their place* in the class-room, and thus be edified themselves, and by their presence edify others.

When Church-members are unwilling to speak, and yet are ready to attend class if they can be excused from speaking, I think the course of the Leader is plain. Speaking should be left to their option.

The case of many such members is well stated in a letter I have received from a lady in Brooklyn in regard to this matter. She says: "If the custom of requiring every one to speak, whether they have anything to say or not, could be changed, leaving it optional to speak or listen only to others' experience, I think from observation and the experience of fifty-five years' membership, that it would be one of the most pleasant and profitable meetings that could possibly be held. The present form keeps many good people from joining us, and causes others to leave.

"Persons wishing to join our Church have objected to me that our members were required to meet once a week and make a speech, saying they were sure they could not do that, and that the thought of it was giving them trouble. I have endeavoured to answer those objections by saying, they were not expected to make a speech, only to answer any questions that might be put to them; or, if requested to speak of the state of their mind, and if they did not think they could relate anything that would be edifying to others, they could just say that and nothing more.

"I think it is hardly possible for you strong men to recognize the difficulty we weaker vessels find, sometimes, in expressing ourselves before others. There are many pious, intelligent persons who, from a natural diffidence, cannot speak freely in a social gathering of a dozen or twenty people on common subjects with which they are familiar: how much more difficult to speak of the deep experiences of the heart!"

CHAPTER V.

RECLAIMING WANDERERS.

"Do you know," said a Christian Sabbath-school teacher to a friend, "that ——, who is a member of my Sunday-school class, has become very wicked, and is throwing himself away?"

"Has his Class Leader visited him?" was the reply.

"I inquired of him," said the teacher, "and he said that his Leader had not visited him and he was glad he had not."

"How many are lost," remarked the other, "because their Class Leaders do not visit them!"

"That recalls my own case," said the teacher. "Once my employer offended me, and I gave way to anger, felt condemned, and did not go to class that week, and concluded not to go any more. On the next Sunday, while in church, I reflected on what my Leader had said, and concluded to go to class again, and did go, and this day I am holding fast, and shall ever thank God that my Leader visited me."

A Class Leader, in looking over his class-book, found that one of his members had been absent from class-meeting four times. It was his habit to visit a member who had been absent two successive weeks, and sometimes, if absent but once. This case he had forgotten, but now hastened to see the delinquent. The man frankly acknow

ledged, after his Leader had affectionately conversed with him, that he had neglected his duties, burst into tears, and said that he had never had religion. The next day the Leader again visited him, talked and wept with him, and left a suitable book for him to read. The next class night he called by appointment for him, and took him to the class-meeting. The wanderer obtained an experience of grace, continued to attend the class, and remained steadfast in the faith.

The late Rev. Tobias Spicer, long an able minister of the Gospel, related the following incident in his own history :—

“When young in Christian experience, and somewhat ignorant of Satan’s devices, I became much grieved with a member of the Church by whom I supposed I had been injured. Under afflicted feelings I stayed away one Sabbath from church and from class, and had well-nigh come to the conclusion to have nothing more to do with the Church.

“But the Leader missed me, and the next day came to see me. He spoke kind words, calling me brother, telling me he had feared I was sick, as I was not at church the day before. He showed himself an affectionate friend, and made some explanation as to the matter of grievance. This affectionate care and kind attention of the Leader broke the snare of the tempter, convinced me that I had got among the right kind of Christians, whose economy was well calculated to help the feeble and build them up in their most holy faith. Although more than forty years have since passed, I look back to this event with much gratitude to God and my faithful Leader. Blessed man! I believe he is now in heaven.”

Fidelity in visiting and restoring the erring members of

his flock is one of the highest excellences of a Class Leader. The above examples show the vast importance and the blessed results of such service. "Father Reeves," who was probably one of the most useful Leaders in English Methodism, was a most labourious visitor. "Taking his class-books from 1825 to 1852, nearly thirteen thousand visits may be traced—an average of four hundred and fifty a year; and during the last five years they averaged six hundred and fifty a year. These are exclusively to his classes—to those detained by sickness, business, or temptation." "A poor woman, who with her husband met in Father Reeves' class, writes: 'If we have been absent from the class through illness, he has been sure to call the next morning before nine o'clock.'"*

Many persons enter the Church under serious disadvantages. They have been devoted to sinful follies, and even addicted to profligate vices. But in a powerful revival they have been suddenly converted. They intend to lead a new life, but old habits strive to regain their wonted mastery. Old associates also are their tempters. Inexperienced, uninstructed, they have to battle with cunning and powerful foes. It is not surprising, therefore, though it is sad, that they should stumble, and even fall.

But should they be given up? By no means. Dreadful as was the fall of the king and psalmist of Israel, "the Lord sent Nathan to David." The hand of sympathy timely extended, the loving word, the pitiful tear, may break the spell of temptation, awaken contrition, and lead to renewed and more constant efforts for a better life. To neglect them is to let them perish. They need help both to rise and to stand. The Church should watch and nurse

*Father Reeves: Methodist Class Leader. Nelson & Phillips.

them like a mother her infant. It should keep them surrounded with an atmosphere of love, and hold them to the right by its personal and sacred ministries.

Many, also, who enter the Church in our revivals are young, volatile, easily influenced by circumstances, accustomed to the sway of impulse, and therefore very likely at first to be unsteady in their movements in the path of life. They must be trained to stability and consistency of Christian character. They will not have the firmness and steadiness of old Christians at once. If they stumble, pains must be taken to help them to regain their footing; and if they wander, they should be followed by yearning sympathies, tender remonstrances, loving appeals, and fervent prayers, until they are induced to return. By such means how many might be happily saved who now are hopelessly lost!

The duty of restoring the wanderers from his class devolves chiefly upon the Leader. Of course the pastor has a responsibility in such cases; but so intimate is the relation of a Leader to the members of his class, that no one, not even the pastor, can fill his place. He should be the good shepherd ever ready to leave the ninety and nine sheep that are safe in the fold, and, with deep solicitude and unyielding persistence, seek the one that is lost in the wilderness.

To do this he must see them alone. He must make them feel, by his personal attention, that they are on his heart. This will greatly strengthen his influence over them, and make them receptive of his appeals. Such faithful and kindly efforts will seldom prove vain.

Going after the lost is Christ-like. He said, "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was

lost." And a Class Leader can find no higher or more blessed employment than that of imitating the Master by personally seeking those who are thus running to their ruin.

He is under sacred obligations to do this. He has accepted the care of souls. A class has been committed to his charge containing persons who are weak, wayward, impulsive, tempted, and who, if instructed, encouraged, and reclaimed from their errors and stumblings by his faithful and sympathizing ministry, may be saved to Christ and to heaven, but who, if he neglect them, will probably stray to destruction. He cannot treat their absence from the class-room, and their aberrations and lapses, with indifference, and be faithful to his conscience and to their souls. He must seek them and find them, and not give them up until he has exhausted his resources of invention and persuasion to bring them back. He must seek them at their homes, or wheresoever he can best get access to them, and throw about them the safeguard of his watch-care.

It frequently happens that class-members are so situated that a Leader can rarely obtain interviews with them for private religious conversation. Many dwell in boarding houses, and work in establishments where they are constantly surrounded by fellow-workmen. In the case of many who live in their own homes it is difficult for their Leader to see them apart from the family, so as to be able without restraint to say the things that are in his heart. Even in such cases he should not fail to visit them often enough to show them his interest and sympathy which only his presence can fully reveal, but his admonitions and appeals can, perhaps, be best conveyed by another method.

The affectionate epistle will often admirably meet such cases.

It is related of an Episcopal clergyman who was in charge of a large congregation in Philadelphia, that, though he was very laborious in pastoral visitation, he yet found it impossible to perform all the personal ministrations which his solicitude for the spiritual good of his people prompted him to do. He, therefore, as parishioners came to his knowledge requiring admonition or exhortation, wrote pastoral letters to them, expressing his deep concern for them and his wish to do them good, and conveying such counsels and appeals as he thought to be necessary. By this means he promptly reached such as needed the timely word of admonition or counsel.

The Leaders of Methodism may profit by this example. They can secure the attention and interest of delinquent members by sending them suitable epistles, if in no other way. This practice, too, has sacred authority. St. Paul wrote to those who needed his interposition as their spiritual guide when he could not communicate with them otherwise. So also did St. Peter, St. John, and other of the first teachers of the Church. So did Wesley, our founder, and Summerfield, our most eloquent preacher. Some of the most useful Leaders, such as Carvosso and Father Reeves, have done the same. Christian letter-writing has been an effective means in many hands in turning the sinner from the error of his way, and encouraging believers in the work of righteousness. It is a method of doing good, which, in cases where it is appropriate, may be very usefully employed by discreet and faithful Class Leaders.

The Leader should also employ his members in restoring and helping one another. It will often prove an effectual

way of reaching absentees and wanderers to depute suitable persons belonging to the class to see them, and try to influence them to return. How successful such efforts may prove is shown in the following fact, which was printed many years ago in one of our Church papers:—

There was a man, a conspicuous Church-member, who, though blameless in life, could not be induced to attend class-meeting. One day a fellow-member of his class asked him if he knew that he was a stumbling-block in the Church? He replied that he did not, and that he would not be for the world. He was then told that his absence from class was a cause of distress to many of his weaker brethren. They did not see how he could occupy so prominent a place in the Church, when, by his example, he aimed a blow at one of her most vital institutions. In a Christian spirit the reproved member replied, that if such were the case he would neglect the class-meeting no longer. He went, acknowledged it to be a heavenly place in Christ Jesus, and continued to be a regular attendant.

Such fidelity shown toward each other by class members must be very useful in maintaining the spirituality and constancy of the membership: and while the Leader should never try to lay *his* responsibility upon others, he may wisely and profitably employ the co-operation of his members in looking after such as need to be helped in their spiritual struggles, or recovered from their aberrations and backslidings.

Some classes have had Assistant Leaders who divided with the Leader the work of caring for the class. Such Assistants can often meet calls from those who require attention to which the Leader may not be able to respond. One who has had a long experience as Leader says: "We

should have assistant leaders or class stewards, whose duty it should be, in unison with the regular Leader, to visit every absentee, sick or well, and kindly induce them, by every laudable incentive, to attend steadily these blessed services of spiritual communion."

Every class in which there are many female members ought to have a lady assistant. Her services would be useful in various ways among those of her own sex whom the Leader often finds difficult to approach. She could see absent females and bring them again to the class-room, who, without her interposition, might finally wander from the Church.

The English Methodists employ women largely as Leaders. Mr. Farnell writes: "I should say there is not a circuit in England without them. We had four in the church I came from, and very excellent Leaders. Some of them were of large classes of females. When I came to the United States I was surprised to find there were no female Leaders. Whenever females take anything in hand they do it with a will."

It probably is often the case that the delicacy of a Leader restrains him from following up absentees as he should. He suspects that the reason for their absence may be that they do not altogether like him personally, or his manner of conducting the class. He therefore hesitates to press them to attend. He feels that he must be modest in pursuing them from week to week, as they absent themselves from the class-room, lest he should be thought too importunate in his endeavors to secure their attendance at a meeting in which he presides. Thus many Leaders, who have mourned and prayed in secret over their absent members,

have been prevented from using such vigorous and persistent efforts as were necessary to bring them to the class-meeting.

Assistant Leaders, whether male or female, would be of the highest service in such exigences. They would not be restrained by modesty from pressing with frequency and energy the duty of class attendance upon such members as neglected it. Such assistants, too, might profitably assist in conducting the class-meeting, and in the necessary absence of the Leader take his place in the class-room.



CHAPTER VI.

THE STRANGER.

IN this country the people are migratory. This is so especially in our larger towns and cities. In most urban communities there is a ceaseless outflowing and inflowing of population.

Very many are lost to our Church by removal through their neglect to take with them certificates of membership, or from their failure to connect themselves with the Church where they fix their new residence. This is one reason why the apparent gain of members from our yearly probation ranks is no larger. If all the Methodists who change the place of their abode could be promptly introduced into the Church where they locate, much of the fruit of arduous toil and prayer would be preserved which is now lost to the cause of God.

When a Church-member settles in a town as a resident, and is unacquainted with any one, there comes over his feelings an irresistible sense of strangeness and loneliness. The place is strange; each form and countenance he meets on the street or sees in the church is strange. Gentleness and intelligence may beam from the stranger eyes that glance upon him, but there is no gleam of friendly recognition. No loving "How are you? I am glad to see you," thrills his ear. Images of dear ones far away throng in the temple of his thoughts; memories of fond companionships and holy communings flit through his mind, like breathings

from a better sphere ; the melodies of the distant classroom and church float on his ear until he " hears the songs of other days ;" familiar voices, soft and sweet, echo around him ; but he wakes to feel that they are only echoes, and his delightful reverie dissolves into the cold reality of absence from home.

The effect of this trying experience of the Christian stranger is sometimes to lead him to make himself known to the Church and to form the acquaintance of its members. It frequently, however, drives him to seclusion. Diffidence and his solitary feelings hold him aloof, and he fancies that the people of the church he happens to attend are distant in their bearing toward him, and that any notice he receives is cold and critical, rather than sympathetic. He, perhaps, is thrown into contact with worldly persons, or those of another denomination, whose cordiality wins his interest, and whose attentions attract him to other paths ; and so his sense of alienation from the Church of his choice deepens, and most likely an experience of religion that was bright and hopeful becomes shaded by an isolation that darkens into worldliness.

To care for the stranger is one of the most delicate and important duties of the Church. " I was a stranger, and ye took me in," is the encomium which the Master will pronounce upon many a saint when he passes into the enjoyment of his eternal reward ; and " I was a stranger, and ye took me not in," will be the words that shall fix the doom of many a neglecter of Christ's disciples.

The class-meeting has an admirable adaptation to a Christian stranger's needs, in that it affords him a ready means of making himself known to and forming the acquaintance of earnest Christians, and of securing at once

the benefits of a fervid, saintly communion. Many strangers have there speedily found an asylum from their exile, and have there felt the timely clasp of a brother's hand relieve their dreary sense of solitude.

The members of classes can do much for the stranger by fraternal salutations, by inviting him to the class-room, and making him feel that they enjoy his presence there, and by manifesting sympathy for him in his trial in being sundered from those with whom he "took sweet counsel, and walked to the house of God in company." Delicate little attentions have an almost magical effect frequently upon a stranger's feelings—a smile, a softly spoken word, going a little out of the way to notice him—are small acts, but their effects are often very precious.

The Leader, however, bears a special relation of responsibility to the Christian stranger. In the case of the Leader, official is added to personal influence. He speaks and acts in the name of the Church. His words and doings have a weight which does not appertain to those who are not invested with the dignity of office. Besides he, as a sub-pastor, is specially charged with the duty of caring for souls. It is his office to seek out strangers, and introduce them into his class and into the Church. Notice and attention from him will usually be more prized, and more productive of good impressions on strangers, than the same amount of attention from unofficial members.

To far too great an extent Class Leaders neglect this work of caring for strangers. They are not searched out as they ought to be. There is not enough personal attention given them. Sufficient effort is not made to induce them to go to the class-meeting, and to introduce them into the fellowship of the Church, and as the result we are constantly suffering loss.

A writer in one of our Church journals many years ago, in speaking of the work and duty of Leaders, put the following significant question concerning them: "Are they busy seeking out awakened persons, and strangers who profess religion and from time to time come into the public assemblies with certificates from other Churches, which they are retaining in their possession?" It is to be feared that in too many instances the truth would require a negative answer to this inquiry.

Whenever a Leader learns of a Methodist who has come to reside in his neighborhood, he ought to invite him personally to the class-meeting, take an interest in his spiritual welfare, and try to secure his confidence and affection. He should find his residence and call upon him, introduce him to such of the members as would be likely to be specially congenial to him, and make known the case to the pastor, that he also may have an opportunity to fulfil his part of the work of caring for the stranger, and then see that the pastor does it. By such fidelity very many would be retained in the Church who now are lost to it altogether.

Mr. Farnell, when a Leader in England, was accustomed to place his card of invitation to his class-meeting in the hands of strangers whom he saw in the church, and whom he judged to be either serious or converted persons. This card is given on page 14, and such a device might be employed with good results, probably, by very many of our Class Leaders.

It is often the case that in looking after strangers persons will be found who left their former homes without certificates of membership. They should be induced to send for them without delay. By whatever means the Leader can employ he should bring them under the Church's care and into the enjoyment of its comforting and helpful fellowship.

CHAPTER VII.

THE POOR.

MOST of the men who are conspicuous and useful in our Church were once poor. Many of them have acquired wealth, and are nobly using it in promoting the Church's enterprises and in ameliorating and elevating the condition of mankind. They were attracted to our Church in the days of their poverty, chiefly because of its adaptation to and sympathy with the poor. They identified their lives and destinies with it. Under God, it has saved them. Its influence has guided and ennobled them, and made them successful in the world. Had Methodism not courted the poor, and ministered to their moral and spiritual needs, nearly everything that is splendid and heroic in its history would be wanting, and instead of a vast ecclesiastical organization, whose arms reach to the ends of the earth, we should witness only a diminutive body, without popular and aggressive power.

"The poor ye have always with you," said the Master. It is as true now as ever. In all the world the men and women who are compelled with sweat to wring from reluctant nature their daily bread are an immense majority. The brightest glory of Christianity is, that "the poor have the Gospel preached unto them." The Church that turns from them is accursed. And thrice accursed will the Methodist Church be if it ever shall become indifferent to

the class who have built it up in magnificence from foundation to topstone!

The fairest jewels in the coronet of Methodism have been gathered from lowly places. That Methodist girl whose beautiful life, glorious experience, and saintly death, as told by Legh Richmond in his simple story of "The Dairyman's Daughter," have charmed Christendom, and converted multitudes, was a girl in humble life. Now princes in intellect and piety wander to her tomb to pay homage to her faith, and to breathe renewed vows of devotion over her dust, while throughout the Christian world the name of Elizabeth Wallbridge is "like ointment poured forth."

The chief founder and apostle of Methodism in America, Bishop Asbury, was a child of poverty, who was converted and led to preaching while only a lad, but who lived such a life, and did such a work, that he ranks evermore with the grandest heroes of the Church of God.

All over the records of Methodism glitter names of men and women of whom the world was not worthy, who wrought righteousness and put to flight the armies of the aliens, and who were redeemed from poverty, ignorance, and sin by means of its effective agencies. And if, because it has grown to wealth and power, the Methodist Episcopal Church shall cease to adapt its worship to or care for this class, and neglect and despise them, "Ichabod" will flaunt from the door-posts of its temples, and its splendor will expire. Its glory is not derived from the wealth and refinement of its people, but from the saving faith, enrapturing hopes, self-denying and useful lives, and happy deaths of those who surround its altars.

Our fidelity to and success in our work among the lowly demand the maintenance of our class-meetings. Those

whom poverty had hitherto doomed to ignorance, but who, being now gathered into the Church, require special rudimentary instruction in the Christian life, and extraordinary care in their moral and religious training, must be especially nourished. They also greatly need the aid of the pleasant fellowship of the class-room, for they especially cannot stand alone. They require a cordon of strong arms to help them to stand.

The peculiar method of edifying which the class-meeting furnishes is admirably adapted to the wants and condition of such people. The doctrinal statements and ethical teachings of the pulpit are frequently too abstract for them. They want truth in concrete forms, especially at first. The vivid experience of a living Christian, artlessly related, will strike their minds with more force, and convey more instruction to them, than would often the most eloquent address. They are not able to bear "strong meat," and must be fed with the "milk of the word." An inspiring class-meeting will tone up their souls for the spiritual battles of the ensuing week as scarcely any other service can do.

This condition also makes it necessary that they should have special pastoral attention. Visiting the poor is an important department of the Christian pastorate, and they are so numerous in our Churches, or should be, particularly in cities, that the pastor requires assistance in meeting their demands upon his care. The Class Leaders are brought into contact with them once a week, learn their experience, and if they are absent from class-meeting, should visit and bring them back.

The Leaders, therefore, can appropriately and usefully minister to them privately and in their families as their spiritual exigencies require, and maintain supervision of

their life and walk generally. Without the Leadership much that is necessary to be done in the spiritual culture and training of the Lord's poor must be left undone. This subpastorate in our Church is of the highest importance to this valuable and numerous class of people. If the Methodist Church shall so administer the Gospel as that none shall truthfully say, "No man careth for my soul," it must everywhere maintain a faithful and efficient Leadership.

A Church which is continually gathering the poor from the highways and hedges into its communion, must expect to frequently have occasion for the display of its pecuniary benevolence. Sickness, dearth of employment, death, and other causes, often bring want and distress to the homes of Christ's poor, who are in a special sense his representatives. Out of lowliness and want he will bring them soon to dwell in palaces of light, and to sit on thrones. Then he "shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

But while they are here he intrusts them to the care of his Church. If they be naked, he requires disciples to whom he has vouchsafed a better store, to clothe them; if they be hungry, to feed them; if they be sick, to visit them. And he declares that what we thus do for them he accepts as though done unto Himself.

It is the delicate but pleasant duty of the Class Leader to see that such of his members as are thus suffering the bitterness of adversity are comforted and relieved. For him, who in the arrangement of Providence is bound to them by more than common Christian bonds, to neglect them in their want and trouble, is to grieve their Lord.

He does not forsake them. Their lowly homes are glorified by his presence. He soothes their aching hearts. He calms their throbbing, weary brows. He makes all their beds in their sickness. When they are dying his ministering angels wait around them to be their escort to Paradise.

The Leader, too, must tenderly care for such. No delicacy must prevent him from ascertaining and relieving their necessities. Nothing in their condition must deter him. What if there be an absence of ornament and attractiveness about their rude dwellings, and themselves little and unknown among their more favored neighbors? Their worth and claims consist not in such external things, but in themselves—their divinely created and redeemed bodies and souls. Though unknown to the great world, they are members of the household of faith, and their names are written in heaven.

I have sometimes found in the Churches a sad lack of both delicacy and system in caring for poor members. In many places the chief reliance for this purpose is upon the collection taken at the monthly sacrament. This commonly goes into the hands of a steward, who may or may not have a Christ-like disposition toward the poor. If he have not, he is not disposed to be very industrious in searching for suitable opportunities to disburse it; and if such opportunities are brought to his notice, he is inclined to be very sparing in the distribution of the funds.

While it is proper to afford the Church an opportunity at the sacrament to give to the poor, I think the Class Leader is, by the nature of his office, and by his relation to his members, the person, above all others, to bear the responsibility of administering to them. He knows them. Even the pastor, who every three years at most gives place

to a successor, cannot be expected to know them so well. The Leader usually abides. He has only the members of his class to care for, while the pastor, much of the time a stranger, is engrossed with the whole membership, and the multiform interests and demands of the Church. Every true pastor's heart is in sympathy with the poor, but from the necessities of the case, he must, in large churches, depend chiefly upon assistants to attend to the details of ministering to them.

The Leaders are the appropriate assistants of the pastor in this work. They should see that all needy members be suitably and tenderly provided for. They, with their influence, gift of speech, and knowledge of the case, can secure from the Church the needed supplies, and in this the pastor will readily and successfully co-operate. They should especially enlist the interest of those of their class members who are in better circumstances, in behalf of their less fortunate brothers and sisters. Each class might thus be led to care for its own needy ones.

My friend, Rev. J. Longking, has told me of a class composed of wealthy people, in which there is a poor member. The class hold her directly under their care, and see that she does not want for anything. Delicacies are sent to her as well as the more substantial supplies, not in a way to make her feel the humiliation of dependence, but rather the strength of her fellow-members' affection, and the tenderness of their care. Almost all our classes, whether composed of the wealthy or otherwise, could, by proper attention to the needy ones among them, see that their necessities are delicately and lovingly met.

In this work the services of a woman are often of the greatest value. Her native delicacy and grace, her gentle

way of approach, her tender sympathy, her readiness of access to sufferers of her own sex, her quick insight into the condition of a household, render her a most befitting and useful minister to the unfortunate. In such ministries I have found her to be almost indispensable. What is said in a preceding chapter about female assistant Leaders of classes is applicable here.

I have found in my observations that these needy class members are not always the recipients of such thoughtful care from Leaders as they should be. Because they are needy, it has seemed to me, they are neglected. This is a special reason why they should be attended to. "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak." "Bear ye one another's burdens." "God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister." "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this: To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

Once while I was visiting a class member, who by unexpected misfortune had for the time been brought to almost utter destitution, she said to me, speaking the name of her Leader, "I thought brother —— would have come to see me." She made no further allusion to him. She did not censure him, though he knew of her case. But these words, filled with unconscious pathos, showed that her heart turned to him and had met disappointment in the time of tribulation. These things ought not so to be.

Sometimes the unworthy foist themselves upon the Church, and through their hypocrisy secure the means of living in idleness or vice; and such cases may be used as reasons why there should be hesitation in ministering to

the temporal needs of poor members. Ought the worthy to be left to suffer because the Church's confidence and sympathy is occasionally misdirected? There cannot in this world be absolute freedom from mistake. And it were far better that now and then the Church should be imposed upon by the fraudulent, than that through fear of such imposition one of the weakest of Christ's little ones should go unvisited and unrelieved.

Churches with free sittings are a necessary provision for the poor. The pew system in churches is well adapted to exclude the very class that most need their ministrations. That system assumes that if the godless multitudes wish to hear the Gospel they will hire pews in the churches. Now the truth is, that most of them do not desire to hear it, and if they did their poverty would often prevent them on such terms. They need to be invited and persuaded to go to the house of the Lord. They require to be made welcome, and to be placed upon an equality of privilege while there with other worshipers. If they are not they will not go, only in exceptional cases. The masses of the poor and perishing will be excluded.

The class-meeting and Class Leaders have an important relation to the system of free churches which in most of this country has distinguished Methodism. This system is one of the secrets of our marvellous success among the poor. And the weekly or monthly contributions in classes have been the financial reliance and strength of the system.

For the efficient maintenance of free churches it is necessary that the Leaders exercise skill and energy in securing the class collections. Some Leaders, otherwise effective, are sadly deficient in this particular. It should not be. Efficiency in maintaining the financial system in the class-

meeting is vital to the cause of free churches, and every Leader ought to feel, therefore, that he is nobly serving God and humanity in helping to keep the church free for all by diligently working the system of class collections.

In regard to collections in classes I quote the following from a good authority:—

“ Let there be a meeting of the Stewards and Leaders of the circuit or station, in order to ascertain the amount necessary to meet the expenses for the year, and to devise means for raising it. Let this amount be divided among the several classes, according to the privileges they enjoy and the means they possess ; and let each Leader pledge himself to raise the sum apportioned to his class. In order to accomplish this, let him inform the members belonging to his class what amount is necessary, and how much his class is expected to raise. Let the Leader remind his brethren of the value of the privileges which they enjoy, and the propriety of their bearing their proportion of the expenses necessary to sustain these privileges. It is as much the duty of Leaders to instruct their members in these matters, and to reprove them for covetousness when they neglect their duty in this particular, as it is to inquire how their souls prosper, or to comfort them in affliction. And, especially, let the Leader inquire of each member personally what he will give toward making up the sum apportioned to his class ; and let him set down on his class-book opposite each name the sum promised, and when paid credit it in another column, opposite the name.”

None need fear that the introduction of money-matters at the close of a spiritual and edifying class-meeting will detract from its usefulness. On the contrary, as God loves a cheerful giver, the very act of contributing to sustain his

Church in its great work of saving men becomes an additional means of blessing. If the poor are to be largely reached and saved by the Gospel, especially in cities, there must be an adequate number of free churches. And their maintenance depends largely upon the fidelity of Leaders in gathering weekly or monthly contributions from their classes.



CHAPTER VIII.

THE LEADER IN THE SICK-ROOM.

IN defining the authority of the Class Leader Mr. Wesley says: "He has authority to meet his class, to receive their contributions, *and to visit the sick in his class.*"

The care of the sick was, therefore, in the view of the founder of class-meetings, one of the chief portions of a Leader's work. It is a part of his work, too, which no Leader can afford to neglect; for whatever his gifts, a Leader could hardly maintain a successful class if he habitually overlooked his sick and afflicted members.

All persons love to receive affectionate attention, and especially do those who have a nervous and impressible temperament. If ever one's mood is of that sort, it is when both body and mind suffer the annoyance and debility of sickness. To be neglected then by those we most trust and cherish is a trial grievous to bear.

Many able preachers have seriously damaged their influence with their congregations by neglecting to care for the afflicted. Those who, while well and busy, are ready to excuse a pastor for any lack of personal attention, are often not so lenient when they are visited by sickness and deprived of their ordinary occupation and means of enjoyment. They then more fully realize their need of religious ministrations. They look to their spiritual teacher and guide for help and comfort; and for a pastor to be indifferent to them is frequently to forfeit both confidence and respect.

A religious newspaper lately said: "A sister who has been afflicted with illness for years, and been confined to her room months at a time, writes us that she has had occasional calls from her pastor, but that at such times she has not heard a prayer from him, nor any spiritual conversation, unless it was drawn out by herself. She adds, 'Please tell me if *etiquette* is the commission modern ministers labour under, instead of the great commission, 'Go preach?' I am hungry for comfort.'"

This sufferer may have been morbidly critical and exacting, yet she shows the common feeling of Christians in affliction. She wished to hear her pastor pray at her bedside, and to have him cheer and help her by conversation about the things that were most precious to her. And because he did not freely respond to this want she was grieved.

The relations of the Leader to the sick of his class are scarcely less intimate and important than those of the pastor. He is an assistant pastor. His sick members, who have been accustomed to his prayers and spiritual conversation in the class-room, now that illness prevents them from being there, desire to hear the same in their sick-room. And if he would maintain and increase his influence and usefulness as a Leader he must gratify that desire. A Leader writes that "on visiting an absent member another person in the house remarked that she had been very sick for many weeks, and never saw her Leader, and might have died without seeing him."

Many years ago a preacher wrote: "I have, in the course of a few years, examined a number of class-books, and have found, in too many instances, that they have not been marked as they ought to have been. Sometimes there are but two different letters to show the attendance

and non-attendance of members, that is, A. for absent, and P. for present; sometimes, though but seldom, S. for sickness. It too frequently happens when a member is not present that A. is put down opposite his or her name without further inquiry, by which course some class-books have more of A. than any other letter, presenting a sad picture indeed. Frequently, when a long string of A's is attached to a name, the Leader, in carrying forward his class-list, leaves the name out, or tells the preacher, 'there is no use to have such members—they don't attend—they do us no good—cross them off.' But I say, Stop. We will go and visit them; and to our surprise we often find them afflicted, or aged and infirm, rejoicing in a sense of the love of God, but no longer able to assemble themselves with the people of their choice. They have borne the burden and heat of the day, and are now waiting for their final reward." Such cases show the necessity of Class Leaders caring for their sick members.

There is need of tact in visiting the sick. They are not as they were when they were well. Infirmities weigh them down. Suffering tries their patience. Privation and weakness worry and depress them. The demure face and lugubrious tone of a sanctimonious interlocutor are altogether out of place at the bed-side. The visitor should be bright and cheery, yet not hilarious. Gentleness should mark his bearing, and his speech should be genial and kind. He should manifest tender sympathy, and easily accommodate himself to the whim or caprice of the sufferer.

It is reported of a distinguished Baptist pastor of New York, who was formerly a Methodist preacher, that he has a conservatory from which he gathers floral gifts which he carries to the sick rooms he is called upon to visit. He

illustrates the spirit of Mrs. Hemans' poem, "Bring Flowers:"

"They have tales of the joyous woods to tell,
Of the free blue streams and the glowing sky,
And the bright world shut from his languid eye;
They will bear him a thought of the sunny hours,
And the dream of his youth—bring him flowers, wild flowers!

"Bring flowers to the shrine where we kneel in prayer,
They are nature's offering, their place is *there!*
They speak of hope to the fainting heart;
With a voice of promise they come an *l* part;
They sleep in dust through the wintry hours;
They break forth in glory—bring flowers, bright flowers."

Their beautiful hues and fragrance render them charming to the senses of the invalid, while, as shadows of the Divine beauty, they sweetly appeal to the trust and hope of the suffering believer.

On a Sabbath in early spring-time a Christian lady, who had recently been left to the woes of widowhood and poverty, with several children, was reclining upon her bed oppressed with her calamities and secretly bemoaning the darkness of her lot, when one of her children, a lad, entered her room holding one of the first flowers of the season which he had somewhere found, and said:

"See, mother, what a pretty flower!"

It at once appealed not only to her eye but to her heart. It recalled to her mind the words of Jesus, "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?"

That flower was to her an eloquent sermon of faith ; it was the means of disclosing to her the wrong of distrusting her heavenly Father ; and saying in her heart, "I will trust God," she rose bravely to face adversity and the future. That faith was gloriously rewarded. God did for her beyond all that she could have thought.

The New York pastor is right. Take flowers to the chambers of God's suffering ones. They will speak to them of him—of his loveliness and love, his care and faithfulness. Where a Leader has access to a conservatory, or the means to procure a bouquet, he can minister very sweetly and profitably to the sick by frequent gifts of flowers. By such little tokens of thoughtfulness and sympathy he can beguile many a solitary and weary hour of the sufferer, strengthen his own influence in the afflicted household, and so increase his power for doing good.

The more friends a good man can make in a community—the more love he can win—the greater, of course, must be his influence and consequent possibilities of usefulness. A man whom no one cares about or loves can do but little to religiously benefit any one. Confidence and a favorable regard are necessary to usefulness among a people. Every one, therefore, who would be useful, ought to seek the confidence and affection of those whom he would benefit. And one of the best ways of doing this is to show a delicate, kind, and helpful interest in persons who are in affliction.

Visits to the sick should not be prolonged, and should always be made pleasant. Long and loud talking is inadmissible, because it wearies the sick one. Thoughtlessness on this point often causes many well-meaning visitors to be an annoyance in the sick-room. Do not stay long, and while there shed all the sunshine you can. Then your coming will be hailed with gladness.

In visiting the sick the Leader should especially aim at the spiritual good of the sufferer. He should be skilful in shaping the conversation to this end, and should breathe such a spirit and drop such words as will be likely to secure that result.

The Leader should pray at the bedside of the sick. After all else is done, the right sort of praying in the sick-room amounts to more than all. It is not every prayer that is offered in chambers of sickness that is so useful. Loud, long, formal, discursive prayers with little reference or adaptation to the place and sufferer, evidencing no sympathy and tenderness of feeling, are of little worth in the sick-room, only so far as being honestly offered, God may answer them. But the same sincerity can infuse itself into prayers that by their delicate reference to the sick one's needs and sufferings, by their gentle and quiet utterance, their tenderness of thought and language, and suitableness of petition, excluding all that is irrelevant, shall be at once a means of light, comfort, and strength. Such prayers, poured forth with fervor, are more than all besides in the chamber of affliction. They shed the aroma of heaven there. Nothing can take their place. Flowers are delightful, but such prayers are still more delightful, and leave a better and more abiding fragrance.

The sickness of his members must sometimes be unto death. In such cases it becomes the Leader's mournful duty and privilege to accompany them to the gates of the invisible world, and minister to them as they pass beyond the veil.

Such a scene must arouse his profoundest interest. He stands beside one with whom he has been joined in loving, holy fellowship—whose recitals of hopes, fears, joys, sor-

rows, trials, victories have been poured into his ear, and to whom he often has offered encouragement, counsel, and help. Together they stood, together they fought, together they rejoiced and triumphed. Now the one with whom he "took sweet counsel," and for whom he has borne a fond and prayerful solicitude, has come to the last hour of earthly existence: the hour of which mention has frequently been made in the class-room, and to which his counsels and admonitions have had reference: the hour of "fading flesh and heart," of soul emancipation, and heavenly coronation. The Leader weeps and yet rejoices—weeps for the parting, but rejoices at the glorious consummation of a career over whose progress he has watched with tenderest interest. His soul is thrilled with the rapture of the hour in which heaven is dawning on a spirit he has helped to guide thither. Could the departing one frame the experiences of the final moment in words, they might be such as these:—

I am passing through the valley,
 And its gloom is on my eyes ;
 But I hear celestial voices
 Sounding sweetly from the skies :
 And they sing of coronation,
 And of triumph with the blest :
 O I feel the touch of angels
 Gently soothing me to rest.

On the rod and staff I'm leaning
 Of my Shepherd, Saviour, Guide ;
 He protects my trembling footsteps,
 I am sheltered near his side.
 On before, the gates are gleaming,
 And I see the fountains shine
 In the radiancy of glory,
 With a beauty all Divine.

There are ranks of white-robed beings ;
 Bands of cherished friends I see ;
 And they wave their palms immortal,
 And extend their arms to me.
 Now I fly to their embraces ;
 Lo, I shout beneath the dome
 Of the everlasting temple,—
 Halleluia ! safe at home !

Thus have died multitudes of Methodist class members. From such scenes of more than royal triumph many a Leader has returned with new inspiration to his class-room to help his members yet left behind in their struggles onward toward the heaven where

“ — all the ship's company meet
 Who sailed with the Saviour beneath ;
 With shoutings each other they greet
 And triumph o'er sorrow and death.”

Legh Richmond, the Church of England clergyman who was called to attend that dying Methodist maiden, “the Dairyman's Daughter,” in her last hours, was not accustomed to such death scenes. He describes his last interview with the enraptured saint ; gives her last words, so familiar to Class Leaders and pastors who have been accustomed to see our people die, “ I am going—but all is well, well, well— ;” tells of the last pressure of her hand when speech had failed, and then remarks, “ I never had witnessed a scene so impressive as this before. It completely filled my imagination as I returned home.”

Class Leaders who are devoted to their work are not unfamiliar with such scenes, however strange they may have been to that good minister of the Established Church. No. “ Our people die well.” The happy death of Elizabeth Wallbridge has had its counterpart in unnumbered

Methodist death-chambers. And we believe that Methodist class-meetings and faithful Class Leaders contribute much, under God, toward the preparation of our people for such glorious dying—dying which is like a translation in a chariot of fire.

Let the Leader go with his dying members down to the banks of Jordan. Let him stand closely by them while yet they linger there, though the cold spray moisten his garments. Let him hold them by the hand until they slip from him to receive the pilotage of angels, and the welcome of the triumphant host on the other shore.

CHAPTER IX.

THE TROUBLED.

HUMAN life is clouded with sorrow. To every life there is an outer and an inner side. The former is often wreathed with smiles, but the latter is as frequently bathed in tears. None hesitate to exhibit smiles, but most are careful to conceal tears. Persons mingling in society are fond of occasion for laughter, but they seek seclusion for weeping. They laugh in the open day, but “night is the time to weep,” and then they water their “couch with tears.”

Thus men are deceived in regard to the troubles of their fellows. They see the signs and hear the exclamations of their joy, but are not admitted into the privacy of their griefs. And so society receives credit for far more enjoyment than it has. Could all the secret places of weeping be disclosed, and all the sore and troubled hearts be unveiled, the words of the suffering patriarch would be seen to be a true picture of human life—“Man is of few days, and full of trouble.”

No one can thoughtfully read the Scriptures without observing the prominence which is given to this fact. It is conspicuous in the histories, the biographies, the experiences, the teachings, and the promises of the Bible. "Few and evil have been the days of the years of my pilgrimage," said the venerable Jacob to the monarch of the land of his refuge. "Out of the abundance of my complaint and grief have I spoken," said the weeping Hannah. "I am the man that hath seen affliction," exclaimed the tearful Jeremiah. "My face is foul with weeping," declared the sufferer of Uz. "All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me," sang the pathetic singer of Israel. "She goeth unto the grave to weep there," is the affecting picture which is given us of Mary of Bethany. "In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness," was the experience of Paul; and the Master said to his disciples, "In the world ye shall have tribulation." "Many are the afflictions of the righteous."

The Class Leader should know, therefore, that his must be largely a ministry of comfort. He should listen to God's voice saying, "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people." He will have no member who will not frequently need comforting, and it should be his endeavor to be a comforter of the troubled.

The causes of trouble will be various. In the case of one there will be overwhelming bereavement; of another, frustration of worldly plans and business disaster; another will suffer from lack of employment; another, from loss of health; yet another will be bowed with domestic grief, the result, perhaps, of the waywardness and misconduct of a prodigal, rebellious child, inducing the cry of the royal weeper, "O Absalom, my son, my son!"

Sympathy is essential to the work of comforting. If the Leader can "weep with them that weep," he will certainly be a minister of consolation. "A brother is born for adversity;" and if the Leader can show a brother's heart to his troubled members, that heart will be to them a shelter from the tempest, and its free and flowing sympathies like "streams in the desert."

Those in trouble should receive the Leader's special attention and care. "God is a very present help in trouble." It is then, especially, that he comes near to his people. His ministers should do likewise. Every Leader called in God's providence to minister to sorrowing saints, should, for their sake and their Master's, take scrupulous pains to tenderly and faithfully impart to them the consolations of the Gospel.

He should make the class-room a sweet asylum for troubled souls. Its prayers, its songs, its teachings, its encouragements, should be such as will cheer the fainting and disconsolate. While the spirit and exercises of the meeting ought to be such as will enkindle an immediate glow of comfort in the tried and the distressed bosom, they should especially be such as will inspire hope of the future, that hope which is as "an anchor to the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the vail; whither Jesus, the forerunner, hath for us^e entered."

Some persons have criticised the songs that are most used in social meetings, because they contain so much about heaven: "The River of Life," "The Shining Shore," "The Sweet By and By," "The Robes, the Palms, the Crowns," and much more of the like; but there is a reason for the universal popularity of such songs, and that reason lies in the deep pathos of Christian experience. Christians

are "pilgrims and strangers." Here they "have no continuing city," but they are seeking "one to come." Here they dwell in the gloom of a troubled night, but they have heard that "there is no night there." Here they part with friends, but they "hope to meet again." Here they hunger and thirst, but they are told that there "they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more." Here they weep, but they have learned that there "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." Here they are familiar with, and must experience, death, but they have heard that in that country there shall not "be any more death." Here they wander in an exile land, beside streams that are turbid and sickly; they hear that there they shall be at home, and that "the Lamb shall lead them unto living fountains of waters." Here their nerves are jarred by incessant discord; they are told that there the inhabitants "sing a new song," whose melody never dies. Here they see the fairest things wither and perish, but they have learned that that inheritance beyond the sky is "incorruptible, undefiled, and fadeth not away."

How, then, shall such songs be repressed? They cannot be. Criticise Niagara if you will, but you cannot repress it, nor stifle the thunder of its voice. And so you may criticise the hymns that flash with imagery of the world of light; but no more can be hushed the pathetic songs of a better life, that gush from the lips of troubled pilgrims going home. Sing them they must; sing them they may, sing them they will. Let the class-rooms resound with songs of heaven. Let the members sing, as I heard a class-member sing while dying,

"We're going home, to die no more."

Let the weeping ones be thrilled into ecstasy in hearing
their class-mates sing,

“ My suff’ring time shall soon be o’er ;
Then shall I sigh and weep no more ;
My ransom’d soul, shall soar away,
To sing Thy praise in endless day.”

CHAPTER X.

HINDRANCES TO CLASS-MEETINGS.

THERE are various hindrances to the success of class-meetings. Among the chief of these is the aversion to them of some Church members, and the indifference and neglect of many others.

The example of such members often is a heavy burden to a faithful and zealous Leader. Without sufficient relish for spiritual communion to move them to seek the society of the class-room, their influence causes these meetings for devout and earnest Christian fellowship to be lightly esteemed by others. In a Church where such things exist, a Leader’s work must be very difficult.

Quite often such persons speak against the class-meeting. They deride its services by describing them as monotonous and profitless, and by descanting upon the hackneyed stories related by the members. In relation to this the Rev. Dr. Leving’s has well said :—

“ We have the united testimony of thousands to the great value of class-meetings as a means of grace ; and it should not be forgotten that the most pious and devoted of our people throughout the Connexion not only love class-meetings, but are constant attendants at them. And these

growing Christians do not tell the same old stereotyped story over and over from week to week ; but being in the way of cultivating their minds and hearts by a regular course of reading, meditation, and prayer, they always have something new to say at every meeting. There is a freshness and interest in their testimony which show that they are growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

The evil of this aversion to, and neglect of class-meeting by our members is strongly portrayed by the same writer, who says : " An inward feeling of dislike to the exercises of the class-room is evidence of a low state of religious experience, if it does not indicate the absence of all feeling in favor of the subject. One of the particular covenant engagements into which we entered when we joined the Church was, that we would be governed by the Discipline in this matter, and yet how general is this neglect ! We speak not of unavoidable detention from class, but of that neglect which is the result of indifference to the means of grace. Vast numbers of members in our Churches do not enter a class-room from month to month ; and why ? Because they have no relish for the exercises of the place. This was not the case once, if they were ever truly converted. *Then* they were glad when it was said, ' Let us go up to the house of the Lord.'

" But some tell us that they derive little or no benefit from class-meetings, and therefore dislike them. And whose fault is it ? Dare such persons charge it upon the institution itself, amid the ten thousand testimonies to the contrary ? Was it always so with them ?"

In respect to the error and inconsistency of such members Dr. Levings again employs very earnest language. He

says: "Persons who habitually and willingly neglect to meet in class show thereby a reckless disregard of their solemn covenant engagements with the Church of Christ. My heart has been pained to witness the strange inconsistency of many members in regard to this Christian duty—I should say, privilege. Visit them at their houses and converse with them respecting their delinquency, and numbers of them will tell you that they would like to attend, but their health is not sufficient; or that their circumstances are such as to render it impossible for them to attend their class; while at the same time numbers of these same persons may be seen shopping among the stores, or visiting their neighbors and chatting by the hour. Now, what shall we say of such conduct? Not of the shopping or visiting, both of which may be well enough in their places; but of the excuses offered for the neglect of a religious duty for want of health, while many of the same persons find no difficulty whatever in doing anything or going anywhere they choose? Do such persons expect to give an account of their conduct at the bar of God? How will they do it: With joy or grief?"

Indifference to the class-meeting on the part of our members is rebuked by the fact that thoughtful and pious members of other denominations have discerned the value of this institution, and have even sought to secure its introduction into their own Churches.

In a communication to the author an earnest advocate of class-meetings says: "During the last forty years I have never known a living, active member of the Methodist Church but loved the class-meeting. When good old Dr. Bond was editor of the *Christian Advocate*, writing on class-meetings, he said he never knew a member to

backslide who was punctual in attending class and prayer-meeting; on the contrary, he never knew one to grow in grace who wilfully and frequently neglected them."

A writer in *Zion's Herald*, over a generation ago, observes: "To this means of grace is the Methodist Church indebted for its prosperity more than to any other, if we except the public ministration of the word. Mr. Wesley said the formation of classes was a scheme for which he never could sufficiently praise God; and after testing their value for many years, he declared their usefulness to be more and more apparent. How careful, then, ought we to be to cherish them, and to avoid everything subservient in the most remote degree to bring them into disrepute. The non-attendance of members, except in cases of urgent necessity, is directly calculated to do this."

Bishops Coke and Asbury, in their Notes on the Discipline, say: "We confine these meetings to Christian experience, only adjoining singing and prayer in the introduction and conclusion. And we praise the Lord they have been made a blessing to scores of thousands. . . . In short, we can truly say that, through the grace of God, our classes form the pillars of our work."

One who has long been familiar with this subject writes: "To class-meetings, in a great measure, early Methodism owed its aggressiveness and spirituality. Through the direct instrumentality of class-meetings myriads of souls have been nursed, kept in the way of life, and at last presented before the throne of God with exceeding great joy."

A minister says: "Lack of interest in the class-meetings is a heavy weight upon the Church, and one that must be laid aside before she can achieve her full measure of success."

A veteran Leader writes: "I have often thought if our people would attend more punctually to their classes there would not be so many formal professors and back-sliders in the world. It is there we often have our hearts cheered when we go bowed down. I have often heard a good old father or mother in Israel arise and tell what the Lord had done for their souls, and how he had kept them for twenty, thirty, and forty years; it would encourage my heart; I would think, if he has kept them he is able to keep me; and, bless his name! he has kept me for more than forty years."

Still another, writing on this point, says:

In class-meetings Christians "can cast upon the Saviour all their care, and realize the blessed truth that he careth for them. Here the burdened spirit is relieved of its load; here the disconsolate receive comfort; here the weak are made strong, the bowed-down are raised up, the spiritually blind have their eyes opened; here Methodists are built up in their most holy faith.

"Who shall gainsay the virtue of class-meetings? There are but few who would have the temerity to declare themselves the *open* enemies of this heaven-born privilege; but, alas! this institution is beset by numerous secret foes, who, using that powerful weapon, *example*, are waging a most disastrous war against the best interests of Methodism.

"How many scores and hundreds are there who belong to the Methodist Church, and who professedly love all her institutions, and are even bold in defence of them, but when personally called to comply with the requirement of the class-meeting are found careless and indifferent. They acknowledge it to be a means of grace, but seldom or never think it necessary to partake of its privileges. They would

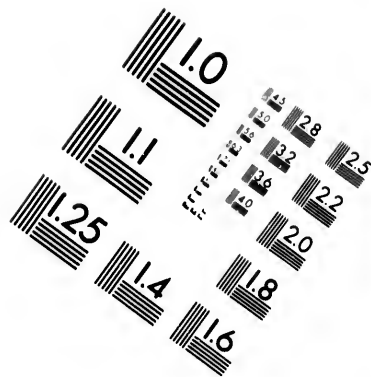
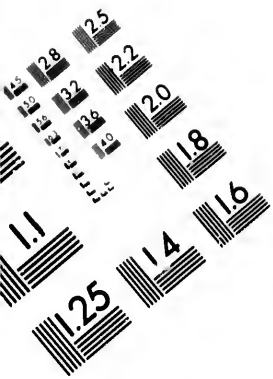
not give their public consent to abolish it, but by their cheerful negligence yield their secret influence to effect this end."

How shall a Leader overcome this indisposition to attend class-meeting, and secure the attendance of indifferent members? This done, a great victory is secured.

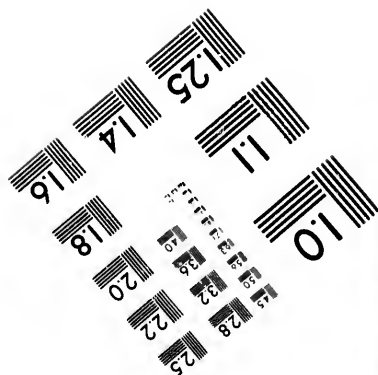
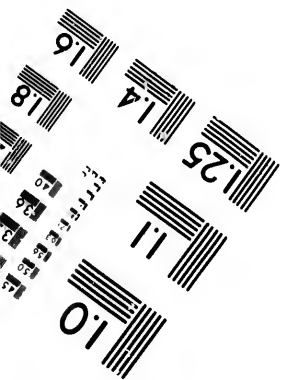
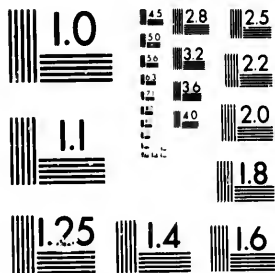
One who was successful in doing this says:—

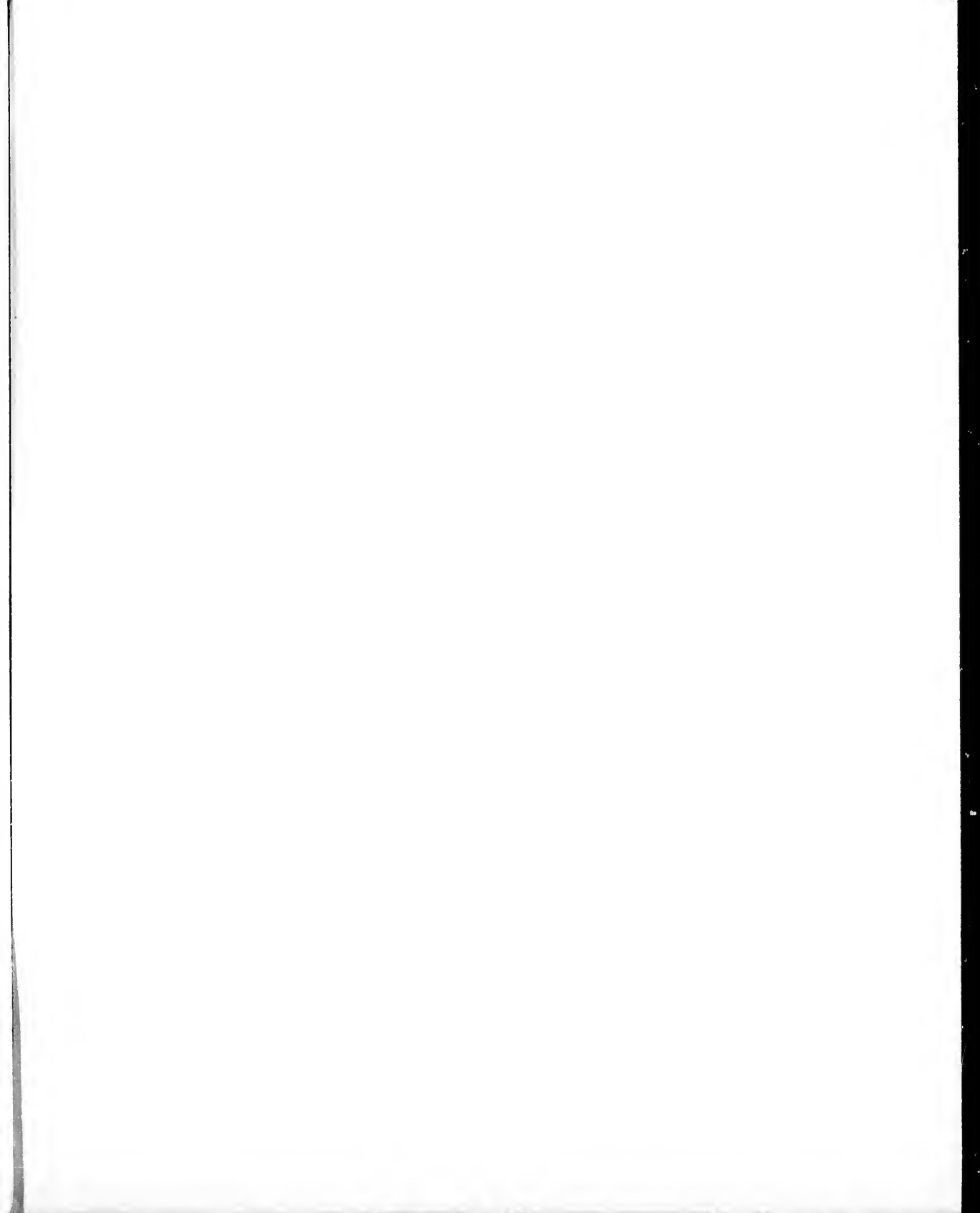
"Let me give you some of my experience on this point. Take the last class I had. At the first meeting I read that part of the Discipline which relates to the duty of the Leader, and told them that the Discipline made it my duty to see each member every week, and that by taking the office of Leader I agreed to perform the duties of one as laid down by the Discipline of the Church; and that every week, if they were not at class, I should call on them. I did so; had eighteen members; and on looking over my class-book I found that for twelve months the absent marks amounted to seventy-five, being an average attendance of sixteen and a half.

"I feel sure their attendance can always be had; but to get it the absentees must invariably be visited. Let the members know that if they are not at class they will be called on at their residence, talked to, prayed with, and asked for the reason of their absence. Let them know this, and very many times they will come when otherwise they would stay away If a Leader has eighteen members, and does not visit them, he may have an attendance of say eleven, and will say, 'I cannot visit seven a week.' Only let them know you *will* do it, and five of the seven will come. They may at first stay away on trifling excuses; but when they find you are faithful, that you never fail, they will come. Your practice will force upon them the conviction that you care more for their souls' welfare than they



**IMAGE EVALUATION
TEST TARGET (MT-3)**





themselves do. One member was only absent twice in the year, who the year previous did not go half the time. She said she 'could not have her Leader call on her, she must go.' None but the faithful Leader knows the closeness of the bonds that grow around the Leader and his members in pursuing this course. O how many souls, now lost, would have been saved if, on the first neglect, the first spell of lukewarmness, the Leader had visited and performed his duty in the fear of God. How many now, dead weights on the Church, would be warmed to life, and become useful members, if their Leaders would thus visit them."

A Leader who was very successful in reviving a class which had suffered from this evil, tells how he did it:—

"When the class-book was placed in my hands I found that the class had dwindled down to a few old members, and they, seemingly, had lost all individual interest. I began to pray and wonder over this apathy. I made up my mind that it was necessary to devise some way to interest as well as draw the class out. The Leader before me had strictly adhered to that old and time-honored custom of ours, to wit: to commence with the corner-man and ask each one in turn to 'tell us how you feel this morning.' I, for the sake of a change, would frequently have a *general talk meeting*—call on no one in particular, but every one in general—would frequently sing a verse and call on some one to pray—would have some talk, and pray again. I studied to vary the exercises, and to not be abrupt, but make the change at the right time and place.

"I went personally to each one of our young members at the beginning of the year and requested that they would all be present at a certain time, as I had something I wished to communicate. At the appointed time they were all present. I then told them my plan, to wit: that I

intended to keep a correct book of their presence and their absence, and at the close of the year I expected to make up a yearly summary of their attendance, and read it at watch-night meeting. I made some comments on the possible results, wondering how many times during the year each one would testify for Jesus, etc. . . . We have regular attendance by both old and young."

Bishop Janes, in discussing this subject in his "Address to Class Leaders," expresses strong confidence in the success of earnest and skilful efforts to overcome the aversion of members to attendance at class. He says: "Though I have been pastor several years, and of very large Churches sometimes, I never found an instance in all my pastorate where I could not induce members to attend class—not one. It required some patience, some perseverance, and it required some management." The Bishop further says: "I believe that any person who has even 'a desire to flee from the wrath to come' can be induced to attend this means of grace; and I doubt whether I would consent, if I were a preacher or Leader, to report them as delinquents unless I had made the most persistent and earnest efforts to save them. If they did not come to the class-meeting I would go to their houses. I would take two or three sisters and brethren with me and go to their houses and say, 'I have come to hold class-meeting with you,' and commence it in the parlor, and have it there. There are various ways, means, influences, and agencies by which this result can be reached; and I now say before God that in my judgment the great delinquency in this respect in the Church is mainly owing to the deficiencies of the pastors and Leaders. I have a better opinion of the members of the Church. I believe that all persons who are under gracious influences can be led to both love and attend class-meetings."

Leaders sometimes do harm to the class-meeting by the exhibition of an unsuitable spirit and manner. Gentleness and affectionateness ought always to characterize the Leader while leading the class. A rough, boisterous manner is wholly unsuited to the place and the work. Earnest he should be, but never stern; faithful, but not severe; honest and plain in reproving and admonishing, but kind and tender. His manner throughout should be such as will win and not repel. He ought to study to make his class-room one of the most delightful places his members can find this side of heaven; and while he ought never to sacrifice, in the slightest degree, truth or righteousness to do this, there should never be anything in himself to detract from the enjoyableness of the meeting, but much to promote it. While he ought not to wink at wrong or suffer it to pass unrebuked, his speech and action should be so ruled by love as that the most sensitive may not be unnecessarily hurt or offended.

“I recollect,” says Bishop Jancs, “some years ago I was present when a Leader was very zealously leading his class. He came to a timid young female, and asked her, as he did others, to state her religious experience. She had not the courage or the strength to rise and speak as others had done. He addressed her at once sternly in this language: ‘The Lord will have no dumb dogs that cannot bark.’ I felt there was more dog in him that did bark, than in that poor, timid child of Christ in her seat. If that Leader had been gentle and affectionate, and asked her kindly some question about her spiritual state, and allowed her to answer him in a monosyllable, and shown interest in her welfare and concern for her religious growth, he would have won her confidence. She would have been there next time, and in a little while she would have had strength and fidelity

to bear her cross and take her part in the service as did the other members." Such a spirit and manner as this fact illustrates must always prove detrimental to a Leader's success.

"A Leader," says Rev. T. Spicer, "should become sufficiently acquainted with human nature to know how to reprove without giving offence. If he do not show a kind spirit when he administers reproof, if his reproofs are rather *reproaches*, he will not succeed in doing much good. Much depends on the manner of reproofs to render them effectual. In general they should be given *privately*; few persons are willing to be reprov'd publicly, or in the presence of their friends, especially to be reprov'd sharply. Although the rule makes it the duty of the Leader to reprove when necessary, as well as to *comfort* or *exhort*, yet it may be questioned whether it designs he should do this in a public way, or even in the presence of the class. He must be very much unacquainted with human nature who generally takes this course. There are certainly but very few cases which require it."

For a Leader to speak so loud as to transgress propriety, and cause the voice to grate upon the nerves of the members, is a hindrance to a class. Bishop Janes well says: "The class-room is not a very suitable place for rhetoric or elocution, yet the manner of speaking there is highly important. . . . The Class Leader, in a small room, speaking to twelve, twenty, or even forty persons, need not raise his voice like a general giving orders to soldiers in battle; this would be so incongruous as to destroy the effect of his speaking."

The Leader's voice while conducting class-meeting should be distinct and pleasant, not loud and strained. A gently modulated voice is always more musical than when pitched

to a very high key. Persons appreciate this in the social circle. It affords, too, far more opportunity for giving suitable emphasis to words and sentences that need to be made emphatic.

The Leader should adapt his voice to the space "it has to fill. To some it is peculiarly painful to sit in a small room and have a volume of voice pouring upon them, so that its reverberations are almost deafening; and in anticipating a confinement so irksome they begin to count the remaining members to be spoken to, in order to make an estimate of the quantity of patience they must expend in passing through this present trial."

In so far as an undue expenditure of voice and physical energy is likely to prove a hindrance to the Leader's success it should be studiously refrained from.

Another hindrance is unreasonable length. These meetings should be short; with ordinary sized classes, not more than an hour long, and, in the case of very large classes, not to exceed an hour and a half. Mr. Taylor, of Trinity Church, Jersey City, has usually about fifty persons at his class, and he never protracts his meetings beyond ninety minutes. Mr. Samuel Sterling, of the same Church, has from thirty to forty in attendance, and he now confines his meetings to seventy-five minutes. Smaller classes can well be limited to one hour.

A sensible writer says:—

"I know not that I ever witnessed a profitable lengthy class-meeting, but I have witnessed, to my sorrow, for my own sake and for that of the class, protracted meetings grow dull and tedious, and apparently every spark of life in the soul expire, whereas the meeting commenced well, and had it closed at a proper time, the members would have

gone from the place with the holy fire burning in their souls, and longing for the class hour to return again."

The Rev. James B. Finley once visited an intelligent lady on account of her neglect of the class-meeting, when she gave him her reason for her absence, as follows :—

"My pastor I love, my class-room I love. The class hour is a source of great comfort to my soul, and I would seldom if ever miss it ; but my good Leader keeps me from two to three hours every time I go. You see my charge. There are four little children, one quite young, and I have no one to leave with them except my husband occasionally. I could leave them for an hour, but it is impossible for me as a mother to leave them much longer, and do my duty. So you see I am deprived of this blessed privilege by my Leader, who now complains to you of my neglect, when I am driven by his tediousness to this neglect."

In regard to the length of class-meetings the late Rev. Tobias Spicer pertinently says :—

"I think a class-meeting should not generally occupy over an hour ; this is a sufficient time to answer all the purposes of a class-meeting unless there should be an unusual number of persons present. Sometimes, when but few are present, half an hour is all-sufficient. It often happens that class-meetings immediately precede or immediately follow the public service, and when this is the case, if they are extended to any great length, they often become fatiguing, and detain persons, especially women who have families to care for, longer than is convenient.

"I have known Leaders, after the public service was concluded, call the members to class-meeting, and after giving out a long hymn, and singing it, would pray at a considerable length, and then deliver an exhortation occupying ten or fifteen minutes, giving their views, perhaps, of

the sermon they had just heard, and then commence speaking to the members. Each member is expected to make a speech of some length, or at least several of the members do so, and the Leader makes a reply to each, occupying five or six minutes, and thus the class-meeting is extended to an hour or an hour and a half. Some, who are fond of hearing themselves speak, and have nothing to require their attention at home, are well pleased; but many find it very inconvenient to be thus detained, and will seldom attend class under such circumstances. And who can wonder at it?"

That the class may always close at a suitable time a proper hour should be fixed for beginning, and the service should commence exactly at the time. Little things are often potential in their influence, and punctuality in commencing at the appointed hour is not without healthful effect upon a class. I have never known such class-meetings for attendance and interest throughout the whole year as those of Mr. Taylor and Mr. Sterling, in Trinity Church, Jersey City, and those Leaders are always prompt in beginning at the time.

In the early days of Methodism in New England the Rev. Jesse Lee inculcated punctuality in Class Leaders. Enoch Mudge, afterward a distinguished minister, was then Leader of a class in Lynn. He once went to his classroom, waited till the time, and no one came. Resolved on strictly adhering to the advice of Mr. Lee, he began the service with singing and prayer. Still no one appeared. He then spoke his experience, knelt again in prayer, arose, and went home. His members, it is said, were never again delinquent in that particular.

That is the correct principle. Fix an appropriate time

for the class-meeting to begin, and then commence at the time fixed, whoever is absent.

In a paper on Leading Class, the Rev. J. B. Finloy says:—

“ Let me show the Leaders of classes the most effectual way in the world to kill their classes, and make the members stay away from them.

“ 1. Do not go to your meeting until after the time: keep your class waiting for you fifteen or twenty minutes.

“ 2. When you get there hunt up a long-metre hymn, with eight or ten verses, and sing it to the tune of Old Hundred.

“ 3. Then get down and pray half an hour.

“ 4. If there is any person there, no matter whether he belongs to the Church or not, get him to meet your class, or go at it yourself, and let every member tell an experience of from ten to fifteen minutes long, and then you preach a short sermon to each one about as long, and so continue the class from two to three hours, and you will make almost every member you have hate the class. You will, on an average, have from three to six at class, and you will be complaining all along that your class does not meet. It is no wonder. I do not blame them. To go there to be droned at two or three hours is most distressing. I have never known one of those drones as Leader that would not kill in six months the best and most lively class in the world.”

Every Leader should carefully guard against giving offence to any of his members by slighting them, or by austerity in his bearing toward them. He should everywhere show himself the friend and brother of all alike. None should be allowed any reason to think that he discriminates against them; for to the extent that this is the

case will his work be hindered. "His social habits should be agreeable, and he should feel a tender concern for the spiritual interests of all his members. If a Leader keeps at a distance from his members, and does not seem to know them when he meets them in the every-day concerns of life, or is unsocial with them in a manner calculated to make an impression on their minds that he feels himself somewhat above them; or if in class-meeting he does not show a kind spirit and regard for them, he will not be eminently useful. He must not do his duty to his class as a professional man, but as a kind brother, who deeply feels for the interests of his brethren, and is evidently laboring to promote their good in all possible ways. Such a course cannot fail to endear him to all the members of the class, and render him eminently useful and much beloved by the whole Church.

"He should treat the poor of his class with as much respect as he does the rich. When a Leader is observed to pay more attention to the rich than he does to the poor it cannot fail to awaken jealousies among his poor brethren, and will greatly lessen his influence over them, and of course, prevent his general usefulness. Many that are poor possess as refined feelings as the rich, and if they do not, they can, however, see when a difference is made in matters of religion between them and the rich, and many of this class are greatly tempted when they see this difference, and are apt to think they are reproached, or at least slighted because of their poverty. A Class Leader would do well to give no occasion for such a temptation."

"The Class Leader," says an eminent authority, "should be a man of kind and social feeling. We have seen very good men, men of unquestionable piety, occupying this relation, whose natural austerity of disposition and manner

greatly impeded their usefulness. They seemed to consider themselves rather the police officers of the Church than as shepherds, and when they discovered any delinquency in a member, they seemed to have no idea of any other duty than bringing the delinquent to trial—the very last thing to be thought of, and never to be resorted to until all possible means of reclaiming the delinquent have been tried. And these to be successful must be accompanied with unmistakable manifestations of loving-kindness and tender concern for the spiritual interests of the erring brother.”

The Rev. Dr. Thomson, (Bishop Thomson), writes that “feeling above the work is fatal to it—fatal to one’s self. A love of this work, and feeling honored by it, give rich meaning to stammered words—Divine force to the feeblest instruments. Loving work makes amends for almost any mental deficiencies, intensifies any mental endowments. A right spirit in the Leader catches like fire in the hearts of the members. Lacking this, the most perfect management and the severest sense of duty can only make the class a place of forms as dead as the perfection of Jewish temple service at the time of the coming of Christ.”

A Leader’s work will be hindered by tolerating wrong tempers toward each other in his members. Divisions among professed Christians greatly harm the Christian name. When such divisions arise between classmates the effect can only be evil upon the class and the Church.

“The sheep he never can devour,
Unless he first divide.”

Much self-poise and skill will often be required to arrest such evils and bring into harmony the discordant elements. It is the Leader’s office and duty, however, at whatever pains, to do this to the extent that he is able.

“Suffer no bickerings,” says Rev. J. B. Finley, “or backbitings, or little quarrels in your class ; but as soon as you hear of any, go directly and have the parties face to face, and make them settle their difficulties ; for if you suffer it to run on it will grow worse and worse, until your whole flock is infected with the disease, and, perhaps, your whole class ruined.”

Other hindrances than these will arise, doubtless, to embarrass Leaders and hinder their work. Peculiarities of locality, of circumstances, and of individuals, will often originate disturbing and depressing obstacles. It must be the study of the Leader to surmount them. He should be fertile in devices to meet and remove such hindrances as, from time to time, he will encounter, and in spite of all difficulties strive to achieve success in his high calling.

CHAPTER XI.

HOW TO LEAD A CLASS.

THE interest and usefulness of class-meetings depend chiefly, so far as their human aspect is concerned, upon the character of the men who lead them, and the manner in which they do it.

“We must have devoted, spiritual, wide-awake Leaders ; no half-hearted, worldly-minded professors ; but well-experienced, talented men ; apt to teach, consistent in their own lives, full of faith, and ‘fruitful unto every good work.’”

It is possible, as so many have seen with sadness, to make the class-meeting dull and insipid. It can, on the other hand, be so conducted as to render it an occasion of rich spiritual refreshing. The great, urgent need of the

Church, with respect to this institution, is, that it be made everywhere attractive and edifying to its members.

The Leader should always go to his class-room as well furnished as possible for the immediate demand that is to be made upon him. Too many Leaders go to the class with little or no preparation for the service. As a consequence their exercises are deficient in freshness and life, the members are not interested, and but little good is done. Thought and study, as well as prayer, are essential to real and abiding success in this work.

“I have found it very necessary,” writes a Leader, “to make some preparation beforehand, and to avoid running on the same line all the while.”

I have read of a Class Leader who, on the evening that his class met, was accustomed before going to the meeting to spend an hour alone; “and more than once he has been seen by members of his family, when unperceived by him, on his knees in his chamber, with his class paper before him, pleading at the throne of grace on their behalf; and from papers found after his decease it was discovered that his practice was to keep a record of the spiritual state of each member of his class.” It would be strange if such a Leader’s exercises in his class-room were not instructive and edifying.

A writer very sensibly and justly says:—

“The Class Leader must have his members upon his mind, not only in their presence but much more in their absence. He will not then address them week after week with an unedifying sameness; with pointless generalities, or in terms so superficial as to show himself destitute of discrimination. Each address, though brief, will be to the point; for the individual, a hit. The garment will fit because it was made expressly for the individual. His

measure was taken before the cloth was cut. The dose is the right one, for the surgeon has taken pains to know the case, and to apply his remedies accordingly. He does not come into the room with a profuse supply, in a large vessel, of one compound. He brings his medicines in separate phials and packets, and each consists of different ingredients, for he has studied each patient's case, and scarcely two are precisely alike.

“A man of thoughtful habits, accustomed to weigh a matter before he pronounces an opinion or proffers counsel, more desirous to give a safe answer than a ready one, and to utter a weighty saying than a smart one, is a man from whom as a Leader, other things being equal, a class will derive most profit.

“It is no easy matter, week by week the year through, for years in succession, to bring forth things both ‘new and old’ that shall be profitable to the hearers assembled in the social quiet of the class-room. Patient, plodding, habitual, discriminating thought is necessary to attain this power as a Class Leader. Gems of truth, like gems of commerce, are not picked up in the street by careless stragglers except on rare occasions. They lie in the mine, and must be dug out one at a time, and at some intervals, after patient, but not useless labour. For such labor is its own reward.

“Such a Class Leader comes every week well furnished. His hive is never empty, for he is ever on the wing when any nectar lies distilled in the cup, whether on the extended wild of heath or in the cultivated garden. Such a Leader—his members bless him. His weekly counsels are inestimable. Intelligent and earnest piety hastens to sit at the feet of such a guide. His lips drop wisdom. The return of the hour of edification is looked for with

anticipation. The hour is a short one. The moments are golden. Their price is above rubies. The member goes home refreshed, instructed, counseled."

In opening the service, let the Leader announce and read an appropriate hymn, and confine the singing—which should be animated and set to a suitable tune—to three or four stanzas. The prayer, offered either by himself or another on whose sense of propriety he can depend, should not be hurried nor immoderately extended, but should be the outpouring of a prostrate soul in adoration, confession, self-abnegation, praise, supplication, and trust. It should be the prayer of faith that goeth not out of unfeigned lips. The Leader should intercede for the members of his class—for the absent as well as for those present; for their families; and should introduce in a becoming way any case of trouble, sickness or temptation, and anything else in connection with his class that awakens his concern and his sympathy. If penitents or new converts are present their case should be suitably noticed. The prayer should not be general in its character, but should be a class-meeting prayer—suited to the time and the company.

"We think that the prayer of the Leader at the commencement should be confined to the persons and objects immediately before him. There are other occasions altogether more suitable to pray for various other objects, not having immediate connection with the object of the meeting."

It is appropriate after prayer and another brief song for the Leader to read a short portion of Scripture, well selected, and to make a few terse and suggestive remarks illustrating and enforcing the words read, and opening the way for the speaking of the members. He should relate modestly and

in few words his own experience, and not discuss matters that are not relevant to the meeting.

“Instead of giving a long exhortation, as is sometimes the case, Let the Leader briefly state the exercises of his mind, and what progress he has made in the way to heaven the week past. To take up ten or fifteen minutes in an exhortation is, in ordinary cases, out of place, and is unprofitable.”

Says another writer : We meet to obtain fresh supplies of grace and encouragement on our way to our abiding home in the skies ; and while at class-meeting our minds should not be occupied with abstruse thoughts, or consuming those precious moments in discussing points in Christian theology which belong exclusively to our leisure moments, in our studies, or in conversing with a divine when time and circumstances will justify the exercise. But let us not forsake the simplicity of class meetings,—to talk of the *love* of God in the *soul*, of our *hopes* and *prospects*, our *joys* and our *sorrows* ; then we shall continue to witness joyful seasons while waiting on God in this means of grace.”

In calling forth the experiences of the members some persons attach great importance to questions being put to them by the Leader. “To inquire how their souls prosper” is certainly, according to the Discipline, a Leader’s duty. Mr. Charles Perronet stated the design of the class-meeting to include the following particulars :—

“To know who continue members of Society.

“To inspect their outward walking.

“*To inquire into their inward state.*

“To learn what are their trials, and how they fall by or conquer them.

“To instruct the ignorant in the first principles of re-

ligion ; if need be to repeat, explain, or enforce what has been said in public preaching.

“To stir them up to believe, love, obey ; and to check the first spark of offence or discord.”

To which Mr. Wesley said : “I earnestly exhort all Leaders of classes to consider the preceding observations, and to put them in execution with all the understanding and courage that God has given them.”

The line I have italicised in the above quotation shows that it was the intention of the founder of class-meetings that the Leader should make inquiry into the inward experience of his members. To do this, however, in a suitable and effectual way, requires no little skill and forethought. Such questions, addressed to members in the presence of their brethren, ought never to be flippant or pointless. They should never seem to be prompted by curiosity, but by a desire to help the person addressed. They should be asked with the utmost kindness of both spirit and manner. In no part of his work will a Leader’s last reserve of good sense be more called into exercise than in this.

It is said that a half century ago it was the custom in leading class “to put such questions as these to every member : ‘Do you pray in secret ? How often ? Do you read our Discipline ? Do you understand our rules ? Do you love them ? Do you observe fasting ?’” Says a writer :—

“Instead of the unmeaning question, ‘How do you enjoy your mind ?’ let it be ‘How does your soul prosper ?’ or ‘Are you growing in grace ?’ or ‘Do you feel the love of God in your heart ?’ A man may enjoy his mind pretty well and yet not be growing in grace ; and, on the other hand, there are cases where Christians are fast growing in grace, and yet they have sorrow upon sorrow.”

An intelligent Christian writes that "at a late class-meeting, I was much pleased and profited by the course pursued by our teacher in charge. The course was as follows : After previous notice had been given to the class that a close examination would be made on a day appointed, the Society being convened, questions, plain and pointed, were asked, such as these : 'Do you pray in secret?' 'How often?' etc. 'Have you family prayer?' 'How often?' 'Do you uniformly read a portion of Holy Writ when you attend family worship?' I must acknowledge that I was much surprised to find many there that day who neglected these duties. . . .

"One brother said to me, in a conversation I had with him after the examination alluded to, 'I will henceforth pray in my family. My heart trembled that I could not stand an examination before my brethren; and if not there, how shall I stand before God?'"

The judicious writer first quoted on this point says in regard to questions : "In the hands of a skilful interrogator, one who would not suffer reproof by them himself, they would impart new interest to one of the most useful religious exercises. To commend the duties to which they refer in general terms is insufficient. An affectionate inquiry into the individual's personal habits, made to illustrate the present state of the heart and of religious progression, would be of more service than a whole homily of precepts. The common and almost unvaried set of questions relating to 'enjoyment' tends to a tedious monotony. If enjoyment is wanting, nothing is so necessary as interrogations of sufficient point to probe the heart and extract the lurking poison. If enjoyment abounds, it ought to be known whether there is sufficient principle and religious action to form it a basis and a safeguard."

An earnest writer, from Virginia, speaks on this subject thus :—

“According to the Discipline, it is his duty ‘to inquire’—for the purpose of ascertaining—‘how their souls prosper.’ How much is this neglected ! How often is this important question, when asked, evaded on the part of the members, by thanking God that ‘it is as well with them as it is,’ etc.—and so might every sinner who is yet a stranger to the torments of the damned—and, after all, no one present can tell anything about their religious experience at all, or what their prospects are for another and a better world ; and, consequently, the Leader is not prepared to give them the most suitable advice.

“But in order to an efficient discharge of duty, and the greatest possible degree of usefulness, he must press the subject, probe deep, and find out what is in the heart. The Leader is to the souls of his members, in some sort, what the physician is to the bodies of his patients. If he cannot give a definite character to the case, he can only make an effort at a venture. He may happily meet the case, and accomplish the good desired, or he may miss the mark, and accomplish nothing but a solemn failure. And if the failure be the result of negligence, let him remember it is said, ‘Woe to him that doeth the work of the Lord deceitfully,’ or carelessly.”

In a very sensible and suggestive essay on class-meetings, is the following pertinent passage :—

“Probably one of the most marked departures from the old and beneficial features of class-meetings, is the lack of directness and point which formerly so generally prevailed. Class Leaders once knew the habits conducive to holy living in each of their members, not by inference, but by direct questionings, and we imagine if any were disposed to tell

the same stereotyped story from week to week they were startled by the inquiry, 'Do you habitually pray in secret? or are family prayers observed in your household?'

"The work of salvation among our people would doubtless be furthered by learning from each if they have private and family prayer, or more exactly, 'Do you use private prayer every morning and evening? Do you forecast daily, *wherever you are*, to secure time for private devotion? Are you searching the Scriptures by reading habitually with meditation? Do you attend the ordinance of the Lord's Supper? Are your children baptized? What particular rules have you in order to grow in grace? What arts in holy living? Are you temperate in all things?'"

In his replies to the experiences of his members the Leader should study to be apt and discreet. He ought not to consume much time in speaking to any member in the class-room. If there be anything in the case of any one that requires a very extended reply, the person should be seen and conversed with privately. "I always," says Mr. Farnell, "made a point of concluding at the end of the hour, and of being short and pointed in speaking to the members."

Mr. Wolfe says of his class: "The old plan has long been avoided. I mean when the Leader preached a little sermon to each member, walking up and down all the time, and wearing out the most patient by repeating some things more than a dozen times."

"If the members made a clear deliverance," says Dr. Brunson, "which indicated prosperity, I never took the time of the meeting for mere complimentary remarks, but passed on, and made such general remarks at the end as would apply to all present."

In regard to the exercises of both Leader and members a

writer judiciously observes: "In the first place, let all the members be present; and as to the hour, as punctual as possible. Then, with fervent and holy aspirations, let every member unite with the Leader in a feeling, *short*, and appropriate prayer. Let each be modest as to the time occupied in detailing experience, yet never so brief, or spoken in so low and timid a manner, that none can be edified. I like to see the Leader exercise a candid yet affectionate manner, and throw as many kind, encouraging words into as small a compass as possible to those who need this mode of treatment. To those who have much to say, especially if it be with a little self-complacency, I like to hear a mild rebuke by a short and plain reply."

The Rev. J. B. Finley says to Class Leaders: "Lead your class, and do not suffer them to lead you. Do not fear to come home, in your oversight, to the heart and conscience of your charge. Tell them plainly of their neglect of duty.

"Know of every member of your class whether they pray daily in secret; and whether family prayer is constantly kept up in all families. Let none escape. Make no exempt case, lest their blood be found on your skirts. Reprove all who neglect to commune at the Lord's table and attend to the ordinance of baptism, and if they will not reform after proper dealings with them, then hand them over to the preacher in charge to be dealt with according to rule."

The Leader should confine the meeting to the object for which it is held. The class-meeting is not a prayer meeting; it is not a love feast; it is not a meeting for social and literary improvement. It is a meeting which the Church requires shall be held once a week for the purpose of promoting the experience and practice of godliness by means of the relation of the religious state of the members, and the

application of the truth to their case by a Leader in the form of advice, admonition, instruction, warning, or encouragement, as their condition may require.

If more prayer-meetings are desired or needed than are already provided, in any particular Church, let them be appointed and held; but the class should not be turned into a prayer-meeting, unless it be at special times and for special reasons, such as praying for a revival or seeking the conversion of penitents. This distinctive means of grace cannot be surrendered by a Leader for any other without violating a sacred trust. He should not, therefore, change it from a class to any other service, nor should he as a rule make it a meeting for the delivery of formal religious addresses, or reading of essays; but should conduct it as a class-meeting, as he is appointed to do.

“A minister met a class at the quarterly visitation. It was very large, and had in it a majority of young men. It was found that one secret of the popularity of the class and its Leader was in the fact that the meeting was allowed to afford opportunity for exercise in religious oratory or eloquence. The minister found himself called to listen to a succession of trial sermons, until stern duty obliged him to enforce a check. One member, after a quarter of an hour's flow, closed by remarking that so many things pressed on his mind that he was at a loss to know how to choose a point. The minister handed his ticket to him, quietly saying that he found himself in the same difficulty among the many things to which he had so long listened. Nor would the history of class-meetings be barren of evidence that it is possible to make them dry, catechetical, literary reading clubs, rather than means of spiritual interchange of sympathy, and mutual encouragement to heart meditation and prayer.”

When the class becomes an occasion for speech-making, its

distinctive object is in a good degree sacrificed, and evil is done by deterring from attendance those who think they cannot attain to the class-room standard of oratory. "Being young, and bashful in the presence of mature Christians, they cannot express themselves, and soon lose all desire for the class-room." A most intelligent Christian gentleman once related how in early life he was unfortunately connected with a class which was conducted on the speech-making plan, and though very sincere in the pursuit of spiritual blessing, he at times felt himself unequal to what he believed to be the demand upon him, when his excuse to himself for absence—and he once offered it to his Leader—was that he had not "got up anything" for the class.

A pastor in Illinois organized sixty young people into a class, which he conducts personally very much on the principle of a prayer and literary association. At the opening of the meeting eight or ten of the members make short prayers. "One reads a five minutes essay on a religious or moral topic, such as Prayer, Faith, Conversion, etc. ; and one other reads a five minutes account of his or her conversion, thus combining mental and religious culture. It adds great interest to the class. Average attendance forty."

This meeting is, no doubt, very attractive and useful, in both a religious and literary sense, and such attention to the mental and spiritual nurture of young Christians by a pastor is very praiseworthy ; but it could not properly be called a class-meeting. Eight or ten prayers, even though brief, and two short essays, if there be singing, would seem to be nearly enough for one evening. How, then, with forty in attendance, could time be found to lead the class? It seems impossible.

Meetings of young Christians, and even of older ones,

conducted with a view to the improvement of mental and spiritual gifts in connection with prayers, essays, and addresses, are valuable as well as entertaining, and might be profitably introduced in many Churches where they do not exist; but they should not be made substitutes for the class-meeting. That is an institution of the Church which none may subvert for any cause. Leaders may here profitably heed the injunction of the Discipline, to "not mend our rules but keep them for conscience' sake."

It is right and needful often to vary the exercises of the class-meeting in order to avert apathy and dulness, and there are occasions when the time may profitably be devoted to prayer; but the essential purpose of the institution should be constantly in the Leader's mind, and to that purpose he should seek to make every meeting contribute.

It may be profitable to unite in prayer with the class for any member who asks prayers for deliverance from temptation or trouble, or for strength to endure any unusual test to which his or her faith, patience, or courage is subjected. Dr. Brunson says that, in leading class, "if I found one in deep distress, struggling for pardon, or deliverance from deep, powerful temptation, I would fall on my knees and pray for that one." It is both appropriate and scriptural to "pray for one another;" and it would seem not unsuitable to do so in the class-room when there are cases which seem to require it.

Good singing is an important element of a class-meeting. It intensifies the interest, dispels dulness, and enkindles devotion. Melody flings a pleasing and inspiring spell over the heart.

Music is adapted to the sensibilities and passions of mankind, and moves and sways them as readily as the clouds

drop rain. In all lands, and from early time, it has swept the chords of human souls, and held the multitudes by its magic charm. The strains of Homer and Virgil were so enchanting that they have floated through the centuries to our ears. The witchery of song is as great now as ever, and will continue until men's hearts no longer throb amid the tears, anxieties, and hopes of life.

During the battle of Waterloo, Wellington discovered at a critical moment that the Forty-second Highlanders were wavering. On learning that the band had ceased playing, he gave immediate command for it to resume; and as the martial strains again rolled forth, the dispirited men rushed anew to the charge, and bore their tattered banner forward in a valorous struggle for victory.

The founder of Christianity, knowing the power of music, appropriated and hallowed it to his own service. He sang with his disciples; his Church sang while passing through its experience of persecuting torture; and still the duty abides to "sing and make melody in your hearts unto the Lord."

A singing Church, that sings with the spirit as well as the understanding, will always be a conquering Church. A Church that lightly esteems melody, one of the brightest of God's gifts, will, like the Quakers, fail to be aggressive. The final triumph of Christianity will be achieved in a good degree through the influence of sacred song.

Many a Christian warrior has had his courage revived by the singing of the battle hymn,

"Am I a soldier of the cross?"

Many a fainting pilgrim has been stimulated as with a cordial by the refrain,

"There I shall bathe my weary soul
In seas of heavenly rest."

Many a home-sick exile has felt his breast thrill with joy
while hearing the song,

“We're going home.”

Many a penitent has beheld the cross during the singing of

“Five bleeding wounds he bears,
Received on Calvary.”

The hearty singing of an appropriate and suggestive stanza or chorus at suitable intervals is essential to the highest interest and usefulness of class-meetings. No leader should allow his class-meeting to lack such singing. If he cannot lead the singing himself, he should, if possible, secure the presence of some one at every meeting who can and will do it. Let the right words and tunes be always selected, for much of the power of singing in the class-room consists in its adaptation.

“The singing ought not to be heavy, dull, and formal. Neither should it, on the other hand, approach the style of dancing tunes or jigs. The character of the singing should be that of chaste simplicity, flowing, lively tunes, easy to learn and easy to sing.”

“Let the singing,” says another, “be in the spirit. Introduce singing books. Engage in silent prayer for a moment or two as preparatory to one who shall audibly pray not into heaven to bring God down from above, but believing that he is nigh them, even in their hearts.”

The class-meeting should be closed with prayer. A Leader ought not to send his members away without first committing them to God. It may be as profitable, however, for him to invite one of the members to lead in the closing prayer, especially if he prayed himself at the opening. But after the experiences have been told, and the advices have been given, and the members of the class are about to separate

for the week, they should bow down together in prayer for the Divine guidance and protection.

Before dismissing the class, the Leader should call the names of the members and carefully mark his class-book.

"I found it useful," says Dr. Brunson, "if not necessary, in meeting class to have the class-book with pencil in hand, and mark it according to usage. If the book was duly marked I could know how each member attended, and whether the absence of any one was from negligence, sickness, distance, or absence from home, and consequently, who should be looked after."

Another writer says that a Leader "should mark his class-book correctly every week. In order to do this he ought to call each name in the class-room, so that if any were sick or at a distance, some one present having a knowledge of the fact may report the case, and the book be marked accordingly, and not marked absent merely because they are not present and no one knows the cause thereof. Besides, when the preachers come to meet the class, or examine the class-book, they can see precisely how every member attends class." Of those who are not present to respond when their names are called, the same writer says: "The Leader should try to ascertain as far as possible the cause of their absence. They may be sick and need the prayers of the brethren; or if poor, some temporal relief; or they may be sorely tempted, and need special encouragement, or they may have partially deviated from the path of propriety, and are about to give up all effort to serve God and save their souls, and need special help to recover their footsteps and renew their covenant with God."

"Never forget or neglect," says the Rev. J. B. Finley, "to mark your class-book in the presence of your class, and

inquire about those who are absent. Never omit this. And, if possible, go right from your class-room to see the absentees, and you will not have to do this more than twice or thrice until your delinquent brother or sister will say, 'I must go to class or my Leader will be after me.' "

CHAPTER XII.

DIFFERENT METHODS OF LEADING CLASS.

DIFERENT men, employed in the same work, do not commonly use the same methods. Their individual characteristics are shown in their way of working. Though the work be the same, the plans for doing it differ, and bear the stamp of the individuality of the worker.

What work is there which affords no scope for the inventive faculty? The rudest labors have been relieved of their more repulsive aspects, and the ease and efficiency of the laborer enhanced by means of this faculty. While progress has distinguished our age, and has permeated and elevated every sphere or toil, is it unreasonable to suppose that the means of Christian work would also be simplified and rendered more effective?

The same method is not equally good for all workers. What one man can do best in one way, another can best do in another. It is a waste of energy to trammel a man by a method unsuited to him. It is, therefore, the right of each to adopt the means which will best enable him to accomplish the intended results.

This is as true of a Class Leader's work as of any other department of religious activity. While the design and character of the class-meeting have been fixed by the

authority of the Church, and the Leader must bow to that authority in the conduct of his office, yet there is abundant scope for the display of individual gifts and the exercise of special aptitudes. Every Leader is required to ascertain the spiritual state of his members, and to be acquainted with their walk, and to instruct them accordingly. But how he shall answer this requirement the Church does not determine. It leaves him free to do it in the way which he finds to be for him the most natural and effective.

One Leader, for instance, is equally skilful in drawing out the experiences of his members by asking them questions. Another is equally happy in reaching the same result by means of the conversational method—that is, having the members converse freely and informally about their religious experience, while he directs the conversation, and imparts to it the interest of his suggestions and advice. Still another is never so much at home in the class-room, nor so efficient as Leader, as when the members each speak in their turn, and he replies to them with force and wisdom, giving to each “a portion of meat in due season.”

This latter method is pursued with very decided success by Mr. Taylor, of Trinity Church, Jersey City. He reads a brief Scripture lesson after prayer and singing, and makes pertinent and earnest remarks, which are not improperly protracted; presents his own experience in a few words, and then proceeds to ask those present to relate their experience one by one. He either sits or stands, according to his inclination or convenience, while the speaking is going on. His replies are short, quick, sagacious, revealing often a good knowledge of his members when they are out of the class-room, and his spirit and manner are with unction. He is evidently very earnest and happy, and infuses his spirit

into the exercises. He is prompt to approve what he sees is praiseworthy in a member, and hesitates not to rebuke, out of a loving heart, when he believes fidelity to his holy trust requires it. His class is largely attended always, and every meeting is a season to be remembered. He is a genera' in the class-room, and his class-meetings contribute much towards the maintenance of a healthy and happy spiritual life in the Church in which they are held.

Mr. Sterling, of the same Church, conducts his class after substantially the same plan, and with marked efficiency and success. Better class-meeting work and results are seldom seen than these leaders exhibit, in following the old method of leading class.

Another very efficient Leader, who steadily maintains the interest of his class-meetings, and the attendance of his members, describes his way of leading class as follows :

“I devote one evening in a month to prayer and singing exclusively. One to an experience meeting, either voluntary or solicited, with an occasional word of encouragement, reproof or advice, as may seem best adapted, interspersed, of course, with appropriate songs. On such occasions I generally read at the opening one or more verses from the Bible, making a few remarks to draw out from the members the real spiritual condition and feelings of their hearts. I devote generally, in the course of a month, two evenings to Scripture recitations, bearing on some subject previously announced, and I find them very interesting and profitable. Two weeks ago the subject which was given out the preceding week was, ‘Who are the blessed? Am I among the blessed? and, Where shall I find a verse adapted to express my feelings?’ This plan has the tendency to keep our minds fixed on spiritual matters during the week, affords

food for thought, and familiarizes young converts with the word of God. Last night, as previously announced, our subject was 'heaven.' Number in attendance, nineteen; many of whom testified that they had given it much thought during the week, and had often asked themselves during that time 'Shall I gain that blessed abode?' The meeting was very interesting, and I really felt 'heaven begun below.'" He adds, "I have made every effort to make my meetings as varied as possible." He also says, "Freedom, ease, sociality, with becoming reverence in the class-room, is what I am continually trying to effect."

Another method for securing the object intended by the class-meeting is thus stated by a successful pastor :

"After opening the meeting I announced the topic of conversation, and gave *my own experience* concerning it, and then asked for volunteers to do the same, all the while making all they say come out in the form of natural conversation. I forewarned them that there must be no discussion—nothing but experience. One had the liberty to interrupt another at any time by questions, and sometimes this privilege was improved and enjoyed very much. I proposed no subject but such as related to the inner life, as, for example, 'Faith in the promises,' 'the witness of the Spirit,' 'answers to prayer,' 'secret prayer.' I did not continue these meetings many weeks in succession in either place, because to some they were too novel; while others pronounced them spiritual, very instructive, and interesting."

Another Brother says :—"Disliking the old method of a brief testimony from each person, and a reply from the Leader, because of the monotony, and because of so little real thought being awakened, I have tried various experiments in different places. I am fully convinced that methods

must vary according to the circumstances of the people and their intellectual and spiritual advancement. But the plan which I have found to work to the greatest advantage is to have a free talk. To avoid rambling and unprofitable conversation, and also to lead to thought both before and after the meeting, the Leader gives out a Scripture promise at the close of a meeting for the succeeding one. Something of a system of texts, beginning with the Christian life, and then expressing different stages of advancement, has been profitably used in several classes. With two or three persons of considerable experience there is no difficulty in occupying an hour or more in illustrating and enforcing a text from practical experience and observation. Young Christians being encouraged to ask questions and present any difficulties which may hinder them, soon find these meetings sources of knowledge and strength. In a class of six or eight, or even twenty, nearly every regular attendant will soon have something to say, if the Leader is skilful in drawing out the diffident. In a class of fifty, as my present one often contains, all do not have the opportunity to converse, yet all acknowledge themselves profited. Frequently unconverted persons are present, and several quite regular attendants. Much depends upon the Leader in giving variety and in making home applications of the promises used."

No method should be so employed as to deprive any member of the class of the privilege of speaking, and allow to those who are inclined to be loquacious an opportunity to monopolize the conversation of the class-room. All the members have equal rights there, and a Leader ought not to permit those of the humblest to be infringed.

The following are also good suggestions :—

"1. Get the best men for Leaders, pious, thoughtful, laborious.

" 2. Have Leaders' prayer-meetings once a month, to suggest improvements and seek the Divine blessing.

" 3. Commence on time and close promptly.

" 4. Never fail to have class. A merchant never closes his store because it is rainy.

" 5. Variety is good, but within limits.

" 6. Follow up decided impressions on the young, through the week, either yourself, or by asking a suitable person, by a card, to do what you want to have done.

" 7. Conversation, free and yet under control, brings out conditions no other system does.

" 8. Avoid formality.

" 9. Seek frequent baptisms of the Holy Spirit.

" 10. Have a special subject occasionally, and encourage praying for certain persons in the class."

Another pastor writes :—

" An experience of seventeen years as a minister has taught me the following requisites for successful meetings :—

" 1. A pastor who believes in class-meetings.

" 2. A religious Leader—a sensible man.

" 3. Good singing.

" 4. Social and religious conversation, questions and answers, instead of set stereotyped *speeches*,

" 5. A suitable room.

" 6. Brief services."

As to "social *and* religious conversation," we doubt. The class-meeting is a strictly religious meeting though it has a social character. Religious conversation carried on in a social way is what we suppose to be intended by the writer in this suggestion. If the various domestic, and business topics which frequently enter into the social conversation of Christians—and properly enough at the right time and

place—are to be introduced, it should be either before the class begins or after it is closed.

An experienced Leader says that in leading class he varies the exercises, which are enlivened by “good, earnest, quick time singing; sometimes I have volunteer speaking, at other times close, searching meetings of inquiry as to how our souls prosper, and work in all the good material to the best advantage. If the interest keep up I hold an hour; but if few are present, and the interest is about to flag, close at once, if the meeting has only run fifteen minutes.

“Sometimes, and in some places, frequent conversational meetings are interesting and profitable. After the opening exercises let the Leader say, ‘The class is open for conversation.’ Some topic may be introduced occasionally.”

Another Brother writes, “I sometimes announce a particular theme for prayer and study during the week. As often as every three months I request all the members to try and live nearer the cross than they ever did, and say to them ‘I want you on next Sabbath to tell how you have lived during the week.’ When the time arrives, I say ‘I don’t care anything about any of your past life except the past week. What have been your daily and hourly enjoyments? Have you made any growth in grace? Do you feel you are one week nearer home and heaven?’ Oh such meetings as follow these *individual weeks*! Such witnessings for Jesus! Such sweet seasons—to hear them tell how happy they have been all the week—to hear one recount his troubles over, and another recount her treasures above! I believe this to be a very successful way of promoting pure holiness; at least it has proved a great success with us. We have glorious meetings every time we meet—have a revival all the time—have had for the last year.”

None will wonder that this Leader is able to say, as he

does, that he has a "regular attendance by both old and young." Lively and profitable class-meetings are always alluring.

It is not always necessary to conduct the exercises in the same way. Cultivate a social, cheerful spirit. Do not be perturbed if one of the members should ask for the singing of a hymn which expresses the heart-hunger of the asker. Too much formality might be prevented by reading in connection a selection of Scripture. There need be no fear of flippancy and irreverence, for class attendance involves a deep-seated solemnity. Once a week, at least, the soul seems to be opened for Divine inspection. Occasionally ask a good reader to read the opening hymn, calling special attention to it. . . . The need of all our meetings is, to impress the truth of God's word on all, that whenever two or three are met together in his name, there is he in the midst. Let the expectation of the class be expressed in the hymn, 'Talk with us, Lord, thyself reveal.'

Father Reeves, the noted English Class Leader, was accustomed occasionally to hold a delightful Bible service in his class. And thus he gave variety to his meetings and incited his members to study the sacred word.

Thus do earnest Leaders employ different devices to make the class-meeting interesting and useful. How best to secure such an object is worthy of every Leader's most thoughtful and patient study. Whatever method he can devise or adopt which will increase the interest and profit of his meetings, he should employ with whatever skill he can command. He should keep in mind the following directions, given in the Discipline, for conducting class-meetings: "Let care be observed that they do not fall into formality, through the use of a uniform method. Let speaking be voluntary, or the

exercises conversational, the Leader taking such measures as may best assist in making the services fresh, spiritual, and of permanent religious profit."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PASTOR.

THE relations of the Leaders and the pastor ought to be of the most cordial and confidential character. They should know everything needful to be known in relation to the moral and religious condition of the Church, and should freely consult together. They should "see eye to eye," and act in accord with reference to the spiritual work and discipline of the Church. They should be in harmony, especially in their views of Christian life, doctrine, and duty, so that there may be no conflict between the teachings of the pulpit and of the class-room.

The relation of the pastor of a Church and its Leaders is that of principal and assistants. He is responsible for the spiritual oversight and instruction of the membership; they are appointed to assist him in this work. While he, on his part, should not "lord it over God's heritage," they ought not, because of the influence of their office, to disregard his authority as the overseer of the Church. Pastor and Leaders ought ever to labor in perfect agreement in caring for the flock.

The Discipline of the Church wisely intrusts to the pastor the appointment of Class Leaders. "If it be right," says Bishop Janes, "that a general, who is responsible for the results of a campaign, should select his staff, is it not just as proper that the pastor, who is to lead 'the sacramental

host,' and who is responsible to God and his Church for the spiritual weal of the people, should select those who are to represent and assist him? It seems to me that there can be none but an affirmative answer to the inquiry."

It is the pastor's business to know how the Leaders do their work. As they receive their authority from him, and are his agents or assistants, doing his work, it is needful that he be acquainted with their way of doing it.

He can ascertain this by visiting the classes, and hearing the Leaders for himself. I think it is a serious mistake for a pastor, when he visits a class, to always accept an invitation to lead. If he has anything to say to the members he can say it at the close, and by quietly sitting among them during the meeting he can know just how the Leader does his work. Then if he discovers anything improper in the method of the Leader, or sees how his efficiency might be increased, he can give suggestions and advice with a full knowledge of the case. It is a part of the work of the pastor to hear his Leaders with sufficient frequency to know to what degree they instruct and edify their members.

It is, therefore, a pastor's duty to visit the classes. The old rule was, that he should do this quarterly; but it is probable that most pastors would find it useful to make their visits more frequent. And yet they should not be too frequent, lest there should be occasion for the Leader to feel that he is under surveillance; nor should visits be made to one class much more frequently than to others, unless for special reasons.

The pastor can make his visitations to the classes helpful to the Leaders in several ways. In the first place, if he will announce his intended visit from the pulpit on the previous Sabbath, and kindly invite all the members of the

class to meet him in class-meeting, giving them to understand that it will afford him pleasure to see them, he will make his visit an occasion for a special rally, and will be likely to draw out those who need an extraordinary incentive to attend. The result will be, increased interest in the class-meeting. In this way let the pastor go regularly through the classes of the Church, and his visitations will be means of help and of blessing.

He can aid the Leader and class by manifesting, in suitable ways, his interest and sympathy; by addressing inspiring and encouraging words to the members; by becomingly commending the Leader and his work; and by such counsels as will tend to an increase of efficiency and enthusiasm.

The class-meetings should receive attention from the pastor in the pulpit. If he do not preach especially on the subject, he can at least give them a place in his ministrations incidentally, and occasionally stir up the membership in respect to the privilege and duty of class attendance. A warm appeal now and then from the pulpit will help the class-meetings and the Leaders. The pastor should also regularly announce the time of the meeting of classes. This might be done with advantage, at least, each Sabbath. It gives the classes prominence, it serves as a reminder to the members, informs strangers, and shows the pastor's own concern in an important interest of the Church.

The pastor can also greatly contribute to the success of the Leaders' work by giving suitable prominence to the class-meeting in his pastoral conversations with the members. Especially should he inquire of them concerning their habits in attending class; encourage them to be regular in this duty, and remove any hindrance or prejudice from their

minds, should any exist, so far as his skill and knowledge may enable him to do so. He should also aim to sustain the Leaders and strengthen their influence by speaking favorably of them, and inducing their members to rally round them.

In the same manner ought the Leaders to aid the pastor. They should never, on any account, speak disparagingly of him. They ought to endeavour to strengthen his hold upon the Church and increase his usefulness, by commending him and his teachings to the favour of their members. They should insist on their members regularly hearing the word which it is his business to proclaim from Sabbath to Sabbath. They ought to look as closely after them on the Lord's day, to see that they are in their places in church, as they do on the class-night, to see that they are in the class room ; and especially should they see that they attend the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

It is said of that rare Class Leader, Father Reeves, that at the meeting " prior to Sacrament Sunday he was sure to make the announcement, together with the ' hope of meeting all my dear members at the Lord's Table.' And he looked after them too. For many a long year the good old man took his stand just under the corner of the pulpit stairs, gently aiding to form the line of waiting communicants, and narrowly scanning each line for the members of his own flock." By such care and faithfulness a Leader can greatly contribute to the success of the pastor's ministry, and to the unity and prosperity of the Church.

The pastor should seek to promote, in all suitable ways, the personal improvement of the Leaders. He should not only be solicitous for their spiritual progress, but also for their mental growth. In proportion as they increase in

knowledge and in grace will their usefulness be augmented. It is the duty of a Leader to study, that he may show himself "a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." It is not necessary that his studies should lead him into very diversified regions of knowledge; but in the domains of Bible history, biography, precept and promise, he should be a steady explorer. He should study such books as are rich in Christian experience, and clear in the statement of Christian doctrine. Leaders ought to become familiar with the best hymns of the Church, and with works that have a special relation to their office. In fine, they should apply themselves to whatever studies will increase their qualifications as religious teachers, and render them more effective as Christian workers.

It should be the pastor's care to supervise the studies of his assistants in the great work of the pastorate. He ought to be able to direct their attention to books suitable for them, and in the study of which they would receive spiritual nourishment and mental quickening. It would be well for him to meet them at stated times, for the purpose of learning how they progress; of discussing with them the subjects of their investigations; assisting them by such suggestions and information as he can give them, and directing their attention to whatever might help them in their work. If all the pastors of the Church would thus labor for the improvement of the Leadership, the class-meetings would greatly increase in interest and usefulness, and the power of the Leaders would probably be doubled. If Sunday-school teachers need the aid of the pastor in seeking better qualifications for their work, so also do the Leaders; for their service is at least no less difficult, important, and responsible.

In view of the great interest the Church has in its Class Leaders, and the vast importance of their work, it ought, I think, to provide for them a series of volumes, specifically adapted to their needs. A "Class Leaders' Library," consisting of a score, more or less, of inexpensive volumes, thoroughly prepared by competent writers, would be one of the most useful publishing enterprises in which our Book Concern could engage.

Every Leader ought to be instructed in regard to the necessity of an adequate knowledge of words and of the use of them. The Leader should be able so to employ words in his class-room addresses as to convey precisely the meaning he intends. The happy use of language is an art which every religious teacher should labor to acquire. The Leader should, like the preacher of whom the author of Ecclesiastes writes, seek "to find out acceptable words." His should be words of truth, but they will not be such in the fullest sense, if through failure to select them intelligently he shall cause them to convey to his hearers a meaning which he does not intend, thereby making them, it may be, vehicles of error.

In respect to this subject Father Reeves showed nice discrimination. "I have learned," he says, "that there is a vast difference in the force that different words carry with them, as much difference as there is between the sound of a sheep-bell and the great bell of St. Paul's." And a wiser than he says, "The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies." The Leader should be so well furnished for the expression of his thoughts as that he may not let any communication proceed out of his mouth "but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers."

The best and most suitable words effectively uttered, add

much to a Leader's addresses. They go far to constitute eloquence. The class-room utterances of a Leader, because of their necessary brevity, ought to be crowded the more with pungent thought and eloquent emotion. And words fitly chosen are the best vehicle of both.

Thus in harmony and love should the pastor and Leaders live and serve. Counseling, encouraging, and inspiring one another, and rejoicing in one another's success, they should labor together as "true yoke-fellows" in the Gospel. Their mutual sympathy and help will lighten the burden of their toils, and greatly conduce to the felicity of the Church. Their unity of mind and effort will give efficiency to their plans for promoting Zion's prosperity. They will have the happiness of seeing their part of the great vineyard made beautiful and fruitful under the culture of their united hands, and also the blissful anticipation of the final reward, when together they "shall shine as the brightness of the firmament," yea, "as the sun in the kingdom of their Father."

CHAPTER XIV.

REVIVALS.

REVIVALS are the Church's harvests. They are as legitimately the result of the fervent prayers, the vital faith, and zealous work of the Church, as fields of grain waving before the sickle are the product of the sowing and culture of the husbandman.

The Church of Jesus Christ is essentially and successfully aggressive. Pentecost sounded the opening trumpet of militant Christianity, as it started at Jerusalem on its conquering march over the world; and ever since the skies

have trembled with "the noise of its captains and the shoutings" of its hosts, while falling ramparts and tottering principalities of darkness have proclaimed its triumphs in the earth.

In nature God accomplishes his purposes by lightning and thunder, as well as by star-beams and zephyrs. He shakes the world with earthquakes, and moistens it with dew. The night winds that "creep from leaf to leaf" are his messengers, and so are the tornadoes that rouse the seas into fury, and blacken the heavens with wrath. The small and the great, the weak and the mighty, the gentle and the terrible, are alike the instruments of his will.

So, also, is it in the realm of grace. God speaks in "the still small voice," and also in the whirlwind, and he answereth by fire. His gracious economy includes the quiet influence that opened Lydia's heart, and the rushing mighty wind that overwhelmed the multitudes in Jerusalem.

Methodism is the fruit of a revival. Commencing in England, it "set the kingdom in a blaze." Unchecked by floods, it leaped across the ocean, and began to flame over North America. It flashed the light of life into vast regions that were enveloped in the darkness of spiritual death. The fire became shut up in the bones of hundreds, and they rushed forth on saddle-bags, through forests and waters, over valleys and mountains, shouting: "Whosoever will, let him come." Tears fell. Weird sounds of anguish filled the air. Halleluias broke forth. "Glory" resounded to "glory," as though the seraphic choir of Bethlehem had returned to repeat their song. Classes were formed. Class-meetings gave an outlet to strange raptures. Temples rose. Schools opened. The press was harnessed to the saddle-bags. The work was organized into a mighty system, and the result is—the American Methodist Church.

No genuine Methodist is without the revival afflatus, for Methodism is a revival. It is a providential medium through which is poured into the world the fire of the Holy Ghost of the Pentecost. Millions are not converted in a century by a single agency, and scores of thousands of churches are not built in the same period for their accommodation, by a slow and languid movement. Such results can only be produced by a revival of momentous power.

Such a revival Methodism has been and is, and such it should continue to be. It has no reason for existing except to spread "scriptural holiness," or, in other words, to turn the world unto God.

Every one who identifies himself with this movement, and enters heartily into it, becomes an instrument of revival. Whether in the pulpit or in the obscurest pew, every soul converted through Methodism, and united with it by the bond of that conversion, is a part of this wonderful revival agency, and contributes in his measure to its force and its increase.

Whatever regulations and adjustments human hands have given to Methodism as a system are intended to adapt it more fully to its mission. This is the position of the class-meeting. It is a revival institution. It is a conspicuous part of a mighty spiritual enginery. "The class meeting," says an authority, "is the nursery of Methodistic revival power."

"The secret," says the same authority, "of power on the part of Methodism in its aggression on the world, has been from the beginning its own internal brotherly culture of spiritual life, in obedience to its own tested rules of weekly fellowship. While it has kept these rules 'for conscience' sake,' the Lord has added to its numbers. But when there has been an evident lack of the 'converting power,' it has

been invariably in association with looseness of internal discipline, and the decay of class-meeting life and enjoyment. Methodism still shows that its loss of order in the use of its distinctive means of mutual edification is always answered by a loss of saving power over the outer world. It saves others just as it saves itself; no farther than it diligently uses the means which the Methodist conscience knows to be most effective. Its condition as a converting agency at any period has been the condition of its classes."

To the extent that the class-meeting is a means of maintaining and developing the spiriual life of the Church, is it an agency for promoting revivals; for the stronger and more vivid is that life, the greater are its triumphs over sin and sinners. Thus the class-meeting is the training school in which the hosts of our Zion are fitted for conquest. It is a forge in whose heat their weapons receive celestial temper.

In describing a wonderful revival in Virginia in 1787, the Rev. Jesse Lee, the first historian of American Methodism, says: "The work was not confined to meetings for preaching," and he adds: "In class-meetings the Lord frequently set mourning souls at liberty."

This has been the case throughtout the history of the institution. In class-meetings the impressions made by the preaching of the word have very often developed into conversion, and the class-rooms of Methodism from the beginning have resounded with the testimonies and the shoutings of souls there disenthralled by redeeming grace; and in them many times have been enkindled the fires that have enwrapped Churches and communities in a glorious blaze. The power of the class-meeting as a revival agency is demonstrated by its entire history, and cannot be adequately measured.

The early Methodist preachers were accustomed to follow up the impressions produced by their preaching with personal appeals in the class-meeting directly after the sermon. There they met, not alone the members, but serious and awakened persons. Thus they made the class a powerful auxiliary of the pulpit in promoting the salvation of the people.

To illustrate this statement I will give a pleasant sketch from the pen of one of the early heroes of our ministry, the late venerated Peter Vannest.

"In the year 1799," he says, "on Pittsfield Circuit, at a place called Greenbush, I held a meeting in a school-house. After public meeting I held a class-meeting. In passing through the class I came to an old man, a German, not a member of the class. I asked him if he had religion. He said he had. I asked him if he belonged to any Church. He said that he belonged to a Lutheran Church in Germany. I asked him if God had converted his soul. He said, 'I do not know what you mean.' I asked him if he knew, that God for Christ's sake had pardoned his sins. He said, 'I do not know any ting about dem tings.' 'Then,' said I, 'you have got no religion; for the Lord says you must be born again or you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.' So I passed on till I came to his wife, and found her in the same state. They both began to weep. I talked to them, and prayed with and for them; but their distress increased.

"I invited them to attend a prayer-meeting that evening in a private house. They did so, and when they came they were in great distress. The man said, 'I feel so bad as if I can't liff.' I said, 'You must pray to the Lord to pardon your sins for Jesus Christ's sake.' 'O coot Got, what shall I do? I cannot pray English.' I said, 'then pray Dutch.'

He said, 'Can de Lort understand dat?' I said, 'Yes.' So the old man and his wife both began in earnest to cry to the Lord in Dutch and English, all mixed together. When they used English words it was, 'Good Lort, give me dat religion of Jesus!' So they prayed and cried to the Lord, and others joined them in fervent prayer; and the good Lord came down in power and filled the house with his glory and the old man got out of the prison-house, and such shouts of glory to God, in Dutch and English; it was like heaven begun below. The man of the house also was brought under conviction, and the next morning about day-break the Lord set his soul at liberty."

Thus did the class-meeting prove in the hands of the fathers a powerful agency for the conversion of souls. And it is still capable of equal effectiveness, not only for the edification of believers, but for the salvation of sinners. Every Leader should constantly endeavour to make his class-meeting promotive of conversions and revivals.

Class Leaders bear a very important and responsible relation to the revival work of the Church. While the pastor is the commander of the spiritual forces, they are his chief lieutenants. While he gives general directions for the movements of the army, they should see that their own battalions are valiant in the fight. They should bravely support their captain, by seeing that his orders are carried out in battle.

Bishops Coke and Asbury clearly show what is the relation of the Leadership to revivals when they say, "The revival of the work of God does perhaps depend as much upon the whole body of the Leaders as it does upon the whole body of the preachers." The words of Bishop Thomson are of the same import. "There can be," he says, "no question that the united influence of our Leaders in any

charge where our system is properly worked is greater than that of its minister." Coke and Asbury likewise say, "A spiritual body of Leaders may counteract the otherwise pernicious consequences of a languid ministry." Still again they affirm, "Our Leaders, under God, are the sinews of our society, and our revivals will ever, in a great measure, rise or fall with them."

A writer in New England, more than a quarter of a century ago, truly and forcibly said: "How much depends upon the Leaders to preserve the purity and spirituality of the Church, and to increase its members by the awakening of sinners and the conversion of penitents! Each class is a little Church by itself, and if every one is duly active and diligent, the main body is thriving, and active, and powerful. But not single class can languish without a wasting and deadening influence upon the cause. All that is peculiarly valuable in our system depends, therefore, in a very eminent degree, upon the fidelity of the Class Leaders. These are the mighty men of our Israel, the captains of the tens, under whose conduct the spiritual host is kept in order and carried into the conflict. Taken together, they have a good deal more power over the fortunes of the Church than the ministry. Without them but little can be accomplished—with them everything."

The vast power which the Leaders are capable of wielding for the world's salvation is scarcely exaggerated by this writer, who says: "Fifty thousand Class Leaders can put a new aspect on the state of religion in this nation, if, in the name of Him who was Leader of the first twelve, they resolve it shall be done."

The Leader can make his office promotive of revivals by teaching his members to labor for the conversion of sinners. This object should be held steadily before them, and the

burden of the prayers in class-meeting should often be, "O Lord, revive thy work!"

Personal appeals should be made to the unconverted, and they should be invited to the class-room. Persons who are in the habit of attending the Church services on the Sabbath should be addressed tenderly by the Leader himself, or by members deputed to do it, and they should understand that they would receive a warm welcome at the class-meeting. There are in every congregation persons who are serious about religion, and who would be glad if they could become Christians, but who lack the courage and resolution to come out boldly for Christ. Yet, perhaps, none take them by the hand and offer to lead them to Jesus. What they need is the loving offices of some one who yearns for their salvation.

The Class Leaders, as the pastor's assistants, should be continually looking after such, and supervising the efforts of their members in behalf of them, that they may be gathered into the fold.

When the unconverted come to the class-meeting with serious concern for their souls the meeting should often be shaped in their interest. The speaking, the singing, and praying should be largely for them. The class-hour might often thus become memorable on account of displays of converting grace. While believers receive encouragement and strength, penitents should there be led to lose their burden at the cross.

Father Reeves gave much attention as a Leader to the work of saving souls. Had he "a number of penitents in his class, the next prayer-meeting would be specially for them, penitential hymns selected, and an address of encouragement with Scripture references would be delivered. Were penitents set at liberty, well-chosen verses of praise to God,

previously marked, were heartily sung. Had the class received, as into a hospital, some poor back-sliders, the following prayer-meeting was for them; for them the hymns, for them the exhortation, for them the Scripture fact and Scripture promise, and for them the earnest, importunate, and prevailing prayer."

Says his biographer, from whom also the above passage is quoted: "Some of the prayer-meetings in his classes were distinguished by much of the Divine presence: at one penitent prayer-meeting twelve souls were set at liberty. Again, in 1838, Father Reeves writes according to his wont in his class-book:—

"Glory be to his holy name, he has been fulfilling that great and glorious promise which he so clearly and fully gave me one Sunday morning, about the year 1830, when on my knees praying for my classes: 'The Lord shall increase you more and more, you and your children; ye are the blessed of the Lord which made heaven and earth.' Oh, my ever blessed Father, keep me humble at the feet of Jesus while thou savest poor sinners. Oh, what have mine eyes seen! The Lord has added in this class-book—

To my Sunday afternoon class.	9
“ Sunday evening “	8
“ Wednesday “ “	12
“ Friday “ “	8
	<hr/>
	37

And the blessed Lord has set twenty souls at happy liberty."

The class-room of this devoted Leader frequently witnessed scenes of revival, as shown by the following extracts from his journal:—

"December, 1832. The number of those who have been convinced of sin, those who have been converted, the

back-sliders restored, and the happy deaths, in my three classes this last year:—

Convinced of sin.....	60
Found peace.....	40
Backsliders recovered.....	6
Happy deaths.....	2

“*Whitsunday*, 1850. Glory be to God, my classes prosper. Although these are troublous times, yet we are adding poor sinners’ names to our classes every week. And as the penitents increased in number we set apart this day to pray to Almighty God that he would pour out his Spirit as on the day of Pentecost. And, glory to God! it was a season of triumph. No sooner had we begun to pour out our souls in fervent prayer and faith, than there came down an overwhelming power of the Spirit. Penitents began to cry aloud for mercy, and, glory be to Jesus! they did not cry in vain. Five poor sinners found peace by faith in the blood of the Lamb. One poor old backslider was so overcome with the joy of pardoning love that he was some minutes before he could speak to tell us; one poor stranger found mercy from God; and I believe several of the old members were made perfect in love. The spirit of love was poured out mightily on all, so that we scarcely could part. It was a Whit-Sunday, a day of Pentecost, never to be forgotten. To the triune God be all the glory, to whom alone it is due. It so overcame my weak body that I could not rest day or night for pain; but I could have wished for another body, to be spent for the Lord and the salvation of poor sinners, in the same work,”

For such seasons and results should every Leader labour. If such scenes were common in all the class-rooms of Methodism its Churches everywhere would be radiant with revival glory, and the world would soon fall at the feet of Immanuel.

My reader, are you a Class Leader? Then remember that you stand at the head of a company of Christ's warriors. You hold in your hands a potent weapon. Wield it for God and for sinners. Be wise to win souls. For this study, pray, talk, plan, and work. Push the battle. Rally your whole force. See that all your soldiers are equipped and in the fight; and, trusting to the Captain of your salvation, be determined on victory.

Leaders bear a weighty responsibility in relation to the *special* revival labors of the Church. When it is engaged in a campaign for souls, led by the pastor, the duty of the Leader is to stand by his side, foremost in the conflict. They should remember that they are his lieutenants—Aarons and Hurs, who are to hold up his hands, and if they fail to do this, the battle will most likely end in defeat. How dreadful the disaster of such a defeat!

During the progress of revivals the Leader should see that his class is fully enlisted, and that it has its appropriate place and share in the contest. He should be ambitious to bring up his whole force. He should encourage and stimulate all, and see that none desert the field. Not only should they be engaged in the conflict in the Church, but he should direct them in the hand-to-hand encounter with the enemy in the outside skirmishes during the day. In this he should be to them an example. Nothing should be left undone. The whole field should be kept under vigilant oversight, and at no point should the ranks be allowed to waver, nor the battle to slacken.

Ought the class-meetings to be omitted during revivals? I think not. At such times of interest and exigence the Leader needs especially to see his members together as often as once a week, that he may counsel with them in regard to the struggle and rally them anew to the onset. New converts,

too, need to be gathered into the classes while in the fresh raptures of their first love. The class-meeting lines should be kept unbroken throughout every revival campaign.

Of course the class-meetings should then be brief, and directed specifically to the promotion of the revival. In such times for action it is not necessary that all should speak, nor should the Leader indulge in lengthened remarks. Pertinent, earnest, stirring prayers, with addresses and songs, should be the order, concluded in thirty to forty-five minutes. By commencing a little before the time for opening the Church service, the members of the class may be in their places in the congregation shortly after the people are assembled.

Shall not every Leader and every class in Methodism thus come "up to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty?"

CHAPTER XV.

THE CARE OF CONVERTS.

CONVERTS should be gathered into the classes without delay, and taught to be regular and punctual in their attendance upon them. The class is the convert's training school.

Converts commonly prosper who are faithful in attending class, while often the earliest indication of backsliding is absence from it. If all our probationers could be held to the class-meeting, very few of them would be "dropped."

A long and wide acquaintance with the personal history of many who were young Methodists during the earlier life of the writer, has left an impressive recollection of known

facts. Multitudes upon multitudes were gathered into the fold, for the most part in times of gracious revival. Two things are still clear. Those who learn to prepare themselves for class-meeting by private heart-searching and prayer in the light of God's word, and who attended the class as regularly as they returned to their closets, have almost without exception, left most pleasant and holy memories; while those who began their use of the weekly class loosely, or fell into a fitful and unpunctual observance of it, have been seen to pass over the border of worldliness, one after another, and to sink into cloudy regions where at last they have shown the sad results of throwing themselves open to the world by neglecting spiritual culture in regulated fellowship.

Elsewhere in this volume I have shown that the class-meeting has commended itself to thoughtful persons of other denominations. The following remarks of a minister of another Church show how important for the nurture of converts are such meetings in the estimation of earnest Christians who are not Methodists. The writer is not speaking of class-meetings, but only of training converts. He says:—

“How are all the ends contemplated in this process of training best reached? That, so far as *methods* are concerned, must be left to the judgment of the individual pastor. But this may be said, whatever the methods selected, they must be discriminating, specific, personal in their character. Preaching will do something, the frater form of lecture-room address will do more, but neither are adequate to the exigencies of the case. As a general rule, no expedient has proved more efficient than the plan of *convert classes*, meeting week by week, and following the Socratic method of question and answer. Personal views are thus elicited, and personal misapprehensions corrected, while each secures the benefit of the experience of all the rest. Until experience

shows some better method to be practicable, this must stand as the most serviceable, the fullest of promise, and ordinarily the richest in results of any that has yet been tried."

Other denominations have found that something besides the regular services of the Church is needful for the training of converts, and they sometimes adopt for this purpose a means equivalent to the class-meeting, as the writer just quoted shows. But they suffer the disadvantage of its not belonging to their polity, and of its use being regarded perhaps by some among them as an innovation; whereas Methodists enjoy the advantage of its being a regular and essential part of the Church's machinery. Others employ it fitfully and irregularly, for special purposes, and on occasions of exigence; we have it constantly, every week of every year, conducted by an approved Leadership. What a superiority over others does this give us in the nurture of converts!

Perhaps the best thing that other denominations can do is to form "convert classes," because they have no others into which they can introduce them. With the Methodists it is different. And as one of the objects of the "converts' class," as used by non-Methodists, is to give to each "the benefit of the experience of all the rest," we can best secure that end by placing the converts where they shall hear the experiences of veterans in the service, and of those who are in the various stages of Christian progression, as well as of those who are novitiate in Christianity. The young disciple needs the sympathy and assistance of class-mates who have passed through the initial temptations and experiences of the Christian life, and he should not be deprived of such an advantage by being appointed to meet exclusively with those who are on the same plane of experience with himself.

"Beginners in the Christian life need the assistance of maturer Christian experience to help them out of the practical difficulties with which they find themselves face to face."

Besides this, the introduction of new converts into a class composed of persons of longer experience is a blessing to it. Their simplicity of spirit and freshness of religious feeling will quicken the members, and thrill them with a sweeter joy. Such additions are quite sure to be corrective of apathy and monotony in the meetings.

But it is often said the existing classes are sufficiently large and therefore no more should be added. If this is really so, ought they not to be divided to make room for the converts? I doubt, however, if there is not frequently an undue fear of numbers. I know originally there were "about twelve persons in a class, one of whom was styled the Leader." But this rule is practically obsolete. How many classes are regulated by it? Experience has demonstrated that a larger number is needful to maintain what may be called the *esprit de corps*, or in other words, the spirit and mutual animation of the members.

There can be only two valid objections urged against large classes. The first is, that the Leader may not be able to give to each member the necessary personal attention and oversight; and the other, that he cannot furnish so many with the requisite amount of advice in the class-room without improperly protracting the meeting. On the other hand, it can be affirmed that some Leaders, though engaged in business, by forethought, system, and diligence, do give all the personal supervision necessary, and by the exercise of mental agility and tact in the class-room hear all, and make the necessary replies within a reasonable time, with sixty or more members. Then there is the enthusiasm of numbers,

the enlarged sympathy, power of song, and greater variety of experience and expression, that pertain to large classes.

The most influential classes and interesting class-meetings with which I have been acquainted have had the advantage of considerable numbers. Father Reeves was Leader of a class of eighty members. "It has often been a matter of surprise," says one who well knew his method, "that he could manage so large a class and do justice. It was immense labor, certainly, but he knew his work, and, with much tact and skill, he always acquitted himself well. His soul held close communion with his God; therefore bustle and hurry he could not endure. Serene, calm, and collected, with much fervor of spirit, and abundance of material carefully arranged in a well-disciplined mind, he could as well meet sixty members as six. Our meetings were always orderly and quiet—*never dull*. In some of our prayer-meetings, when rich blessings have been given, and many penitents set at liberty, there was no confusion." Says his biographer: "When his members were at the highest, before one of the later divisions of the Sunday class, conversation had arisen in the Lambeth Leaders' meeting respecting very large classes. Father Reeves did not always defend his position on the instant as fully as he might have done; but on this occasion, as on others, he went home, thought, and wrote. And here is the statement and defence:—

"It has been said, at our Leaders' meeting, and very reasonably, too, when they consider the number of members (eighty) in my Sunday class, that it is impossible the end of class-meeting can be answered. Now what is the end of class-meeting?"

"That the members may be instructed to know their lost state by sin.

“That they may be led into a state of justification by faith in the blood of Jesus, and feel the spirit of adoption enabling them to cry “Abba, Father,” without a doubt.

“That they may be led on to perfect love, to holiness of heart and life, till they are made meet for glory.

“Now let me say to my beloved friends, (and I do indeed say it as a fool,) let them take out of that class twenty members, whom they will, and compare them with any other twenty members from another class in Lambeth, and see if they do not come up to the above standard as fully as those who have been fed with the finest wheat, although we have been, like Daniel and his three brethren, fed upon pulse.’

“This was no empty boasting, nor does it evidence to those who knew the man any feeling contrary to humility; but he loved his members and was jealous of their honor.”

Though a mechanic, working every day at his trade, and having several classes to care for, this remarkable Leader somehow managed to fully meet the requirements of his office. He, however, gives the secret of his being able to accomplish so much work as Leader. “To be a Christian,” he says, “and yet to have no control over business, I do not understand. I have been more than twenty-five years a Leader, and yet, though I have business, I never missed once through business, and never should while I have two such swift helpmates as ‘Forethought’ and ‘Redeeming the Time.’”

The fact, therefore, that the classes are large, ought not to prevent the admission of converts. “In some of our city churches,” say Mr. Richards, “there are classes where seventy persons are enrolled as members, and a large majority attend. It is probable that such meetings are as profitable and interesting to all attendants as any of the smaller classes would be.”

The question of the size of classes, however, is one about which there will be differences of opinion, and it is certain that they ought not to be *too* large. When, therefore, there is an in-gathering of souls, and the existing classes are believed to contain so many members that the formation of new ones is necessary for the accommodation of probationers, let not the latter be placed by themselves; but let the classes be reconstructed, and the converts suitably placed in class-fellowship among their more experienced brethren. Mr. Richards says justly: "For the purposes of an interesting and profitable meeting, and the present and future growth of the members, we think young and old of both sexes should usually meet in the same class;" and the Rev. C. M. Morse, Jun., says, with equal discretion, "Take the young converts into the regular class-meetings, and nurse them."

After they have been placed in the classes the responsibility of the Leaders begins. It is a delicate and weighty task to watch over the trembling footsteps of those who have but just begun to walk in the way of life. It has been said that it is well for a Christian to be afraid that he may backslide, because the recognition of the possibility of such a disaster, and the consequent dread of it, will incite him to watchfulness against it. On the same principle a Leader should fear for his probationers. He should not contemplate the possibility of their making "shipwreck of faith and of a good conscience" without shuddering, for such a wreck is woe unspeakable.

A long time ago, at a preaching place where many converts had been gathered, an old Christian took up the class-paper, and, on "reading the long list of accessions to the Church, burst into a flood of tears, exclaiming, 'Ah, what a falling off to come!'" The bare thought of the possibility of such a calamity is indeed enough to turn the eyes into

“a fountain of tears.” It, too, should awaken a firm purpose in the Leader to avert such a result, in so far as he can, by faithful watch-care. There can be no doubt that timely and adequate nurture will prevent any large “falling off.”

There is far too much faithlessness respecting converts. When they enter the Church in considerable numbers, it is too commonly expected that defection will soon thin their ranks. So it will, if they are not sheltered from the storms. But if the Church, and especially the class, is made a warm and pleasant fold for the lambs of the flock, in most cases they will live and thrive.

The history of our Church demonstrates this truth. It has continued to steadily and rapidly increase in numbers notwithstanding the doleful cry has rung through the land, that the fruit of Methodist revivals, though brilliant as gardens of flowers gemmed with morning dew, is quite as evanescent. Its ranks have been constantly thinning to augment the ranks of the Church triumphant. Expulsions, and withdrawals, are always depleting the membership, and the vacancies must be filled by additions from the world. After repairing the losses caused by death and sin—losses not peculiar to one denomination—there has nearly every year been a large surplusage to swell the hosts of our Zion. How could this be if apostacy makes such havoc of our probationers, as some have proclaimed?

A leading religious newspaper published, some time ago, a statement to the effect that a vast proportion, seven-eighths, I think, of Methodist probationers are not received into full membership. I called the attention of its editors to the manifest error, and cited them for its refutation to the growth of Methodism in a hundred years—a growth unparalleled in the history of modern Christianity. I said to one of those gentlemen, that if the statement were true

it would necessitate the admission that the Methodist Church alone, to have reached its numerical magnitude by saving only such a fraction of its probationers, must have had the whole nation on probation. That journal promptly corrected its error. Such extravagantly fallacious pictures of the failure of Methodism to protect and keep its converts show their own deceptiveness.

Still it must be confessed that there is too much back-sliding, and consequent loss of probationers, following our revivals. This calamity is often the result of the guilty carelessness of those who are intrusted with the care of converts. Faithful and gentle nursing will generally avert it. But if neglected, and left without sympathy and instruction, they are likely to fall out as precipitantly as they came in.

A Leader, writing respecting the care of converts, says: "I feel the responsibility of a Class Leader. I feel that these souls are in my keeping. I do feel that all Class Leaders need to be in earnest." Says Dr. Brunson: "If he is wise who wins souls to Christ, he is twice wise that retains them." Earnestness and wisdom are, indeed, required in Leaders for this vital work of convert-nurture.

The veteran preacher just quoted says: "The rearing of young children requires tender care. Their food must be of a suitable character; babies must have milk, not strong meat. So of young converts. Like young children, they require to be fed often, and on that which nourishes spiritual life."

Jesus said, "Feed my sheep;" "feed my lambs;" that is, act toward them the part of the shepherd,—guiding them, protecting them, nourishing them,—this is a command to all Christian Leaders. And we question whether the Churches yet fairly begin to apprehend the duty of bestowing culture upon the young members of the flock—the lambs of Jesus. From this cause half the benefit of revivals is lost.

“The force of this thought is enhanced by considering that the convert is in the ductile, shapable period. The wax is now warm, and readily takes the seal; the clay is moist, and the hand of the potter may form it as he wills. There is but one convert-period, as there is but one child-period; and whatever is done *then* to mould the character will exert a far more decisive influence than anything done at a future period; and upon the counsels and directions which an individual receives at such a moment depends, in a very great degree, the amount of good which he is to accomplish during his whole life.”

One of the best means for the growth and safety of converts, is to keep them employed. A bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church recently gave a narration of severe labours through which he had just gone, and said that with him work is a means of grace. And the remark is verily true. Activity is the law of life, of spiritual equally with physical life. Converts should be kept so busy for the Master that they will not have time to backslide, or even to think of it.

“In religion,” says an authority, “they who work the most for God, grow most in grace. Hence those who, being often in the house of God, and especially in the prayer and class-meeting and the Sunday-school, in the work of which they participate—speak and pray, however small the effort may be—will find themselves improving, their peace of mind widening and deepening.”

Says another: “It would be absurd to let a child grow up in ignorance and then demand a dissertation on mathematics or astronomy. Our members must be taken when weak and ignorant, and educated to be workmen that need not be ashamed.”

They should be taught that “God requires of his people

that they shall gladly take up every cross and perform every known duty. Particularly their attention should be called to the necessity of rebuking sin, of constant prayer, and of witnessing for Jesus at every opportunity."

Says the Rev. E. S. Atwood, "Give every convert from the start *something to do*, suiting the work to the talents and opportunities of the individual. Insist upon it that no drones can live in the Christian hive."

A Leader writes of his method with new disciples: "With regard to young converts I have adopted this plan: To teach them as soon as possible that it is their duty to attend to all the means of grace, and at all times to take part in them. I tell them that every time they neglect the class or prayer-meeting it is sure to weaken them. Our Tuesday-night prayer-meeting for young people is always well attended, and that meeting has been, I think, one of the very best means of keeping them. Any one, out of some forty or fifty, is willing to open the meeting. Some make crooked prayers, but God can straighten them; and I know that this meeting is daily growing in earnestness. I have endeavoured to instruct all my young class-mates that they must not be idlers in the vineyard of the Lord, and I will say, and I give God the glory, that all who do work cheerfully are growing in grace."

It is difficult to retain converts, or to render them of much use to the Church, unless they keep the joy of religion. If religion does not make them happy they will seek happiness in something else. So great is the thirst of the young for bliss, they will strive for its gratification. When they find the Christian profession a restraint, and not a delight, they will commonly cast it off. They will not carry the yoke except they "find rest to their souls." The constant and

prayerful aim of their instructors ought to be, therefore, to promote their spiritual blessedness.

But this cannot be done unless they work for Christ. Their fervor will surely fail if it is not fed by activity. Their faith will wane without exercise. Their beautiful hope will vanish like a rainbow dissolved in clouds if they do not keep under the beams of the Sun of Righteousness. And he only shines on those who work. No counsel or comfort that a Leader can give them will avail anything unless they

“Toil in the vineyard here, and bear
The heat and burden of the day.”

There is as inseparable a relation between service rendered to Jesus, and religious joy, as there is between taking physical exercise and the exhilaration of health. If the convert would be happy he must talk for his Saviour, try to induce others to love him, and, in the best way he can, employ his time and talents for his glory. Then there will not be any complaint of leanness, but his peace will be “as a river.”

Speaking of new disciples, the Rev. C. M. Morse says: “Organize them at once for work. It is the Christian’s greatest safeguard. Have a young converts’ prayer-meeting. See that each one attends and that each one prays. After the first timidity has worn off, a wonderful growth in grace and in power will be manifest. It has been found very beneficial in many instances, after a short prayer from each, to have every one present speak a word for Jesus.”

Converts should especially be preserved from irreligious society. The spirit of worldliness is fatal to their religious growth, and the Leader should endeavour to keep them from its influence. Multitudes of promising young Christians

have been injured, and many others ruined, through evil company. The early experience of Dr. Brunson is here pertinent. "When I was young," he says, "the fascination of youthful company and amusements was my chief besetting sin, and kept me several years from seeking the Saviour, though under conviction most of the time. Nor could I, nor did I, yield to be saved by grace till I severed myself from such associations. The charm once broken, I sought the company of the aged, the grave, the pious. I read only such books as tended to the knowledge and love of God. I went to my closet three times a day. I attended every preaching, prayer, and class-meeting within reach—Sunday-schools were not known then—and took such part in their exercises as were fitting for me; the result was, I grew in grace and in the knowledge of the truth, and in less than nine months I obtained the evidence of sanctification; and had I been better informed on the subject I might have obtained it sooner. And now, in my eighty-second year, and the sixty-sixth of my religious pilgrimage, I see no cause to change my views on holy living, and training young converts for heaven." Beginners in religion should be encouraged to imitate such examples. The Church should see that they have pleasant Christian associations, and should guard them from the insidious enticements of a vain and illusive world.

The Leader needs to cultivate his own spiritual experience in order that he may be able to guide and nourish the lambs committed to his care. He must take heed to himself and to his doctrine, that he may save both himself and them.

The words of Bishops Coke and Asbury are here strikingly apposite. "We have almost constantly observed," say they, "that when a Leader is dull, or careless, or inactive, the class is, in general, languid; but, on the contrary, when the Leader is much alive to God, and faithful in his office, the

class is also, in general, lively and spiritual." How important, then, is the spirituality of the Leadership to the nurture of converts.

The newly saved ones, who are introduced into the classes, should be loved. How Jesus enjoined upon his disciples the exercise of mutual affection! "Love one another," he said, "as I have loved you." The "disciple whom Jesus loved," and who leaned on his bosom, said, "We ought also to lay down our lives for the brethren." What yearning and solicitude, such as only love could excite, do the letters of St. Paul breathe for those under his guidance. A Church or a class that is without love is hollow and worthless, and its services are but "sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal." It were as reasonable to expect that a tender babe would live and grow without milk, as that converts will prosper in a class where they get no love. If the Leader cannot love them he should not attempt their nurture, for that requires that he bear them on his heart and enshrine them in his affections. If he love them he will not permit them to suffer for lack of attention, sympathy, and counsel.

All Leaders having the care of probationers should aid them in the culture of their minds, which, quickened by the inspiration of a new life, crave knowledge. It is highly important that they be encouraged to read and to think, and to form correct mental habits, while in the freshness of that inspiration. Intelligent piety every religious teacher should seek to promote, and there is no way of doing it so fruitful of results as that of assisting young Christians to right methods for mental improvement. Encourage them, especially, to study the Bible; particularly, at first, those portions that are eloquent with the lofty and glowing conceptions of seer and

psalmist, and rich with the experiences of saints of old. Warn them against frivolous and dissipating reading. Let the books and periodicals to which they are directed be such as will conduce to a healthy life, both spiritual and intellectual. Books adapted to their condition and wants should be placed in their hands either by gift, loan, or sale. Volumes for converts need to be multiplied by our Publishing House, and Leaders should see that they reach the persons for whom they are designed.

A converts' Library would be highly serviceable in this training. One or two hundred dollars wisely expended for attractive books, suited to stimulate and enrich the minds and souls of the probationers, and to which they all could have weekly access, would be one of the best and most productive investments a Church could make. It would be sowing seed that would bring forth bountiful harvests. It would be casting "bread upon the waters," which would be found "after many days." It would be an efficient means of promoting their growth in grace, and their knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it would contribute to the stability and symmetry of their Christian character, and to their influence and usefulness in the Church and in the world.

Finally. The Leader should never permit himself to lose sight of his responsibility for the care and safety of Christ's lambs, placed by the Church in his charge. By his acceptance of the sacred trust he has bound himself to be faithful to it. Whether they shall perish, or reach a happy maturity, depends largely on the nurture he gives them. If they become faint, and he do not animate them—perplexed, and he do not try to solve their perplexities—tempted, and he offer them no succor—troubled, and he do not comfort them—if they stumble and he attempt not their recovery—who

can wonder if they are lost. Let it be his delightful care to guard the lambs from danger and to over lead them "into green pastures."



CHAPTER XVI.

CHILDREN, AND CHILDREN'S CLASSES.

A CELEBRATED German professor is reported to have said :—

"Whenever I appear before my pupils I feel like making my most respectful bow, and that I ought to pay them my respects."

"Why?" asked a friend.

"Because I see before me the men of the State and of the age."

With a similar feeling the Church should look upon children. They are its future men and women. From them are to come its pastors, leaders, teachers, and members. They are to form its families and to manage all its enterprises. In fine, the childhood of to-day will make the Church what it shall be in the near future.

With what profound interest and solicitude, then, ought the Church to watch over its children! With what tender love and unwearying pains should it nurse them! How earnestly should it present them before the mercy-seat! At whatever cost of time, thought, labor, or money, it should seek to instruct and train them for their future service and solemn responsibilities.

The grave and pernicious error, so long and widely prevalent, that the very interesting and important period of childhood should be passed without religion, and that only when

persons come to mature years should they be rescued from sin and Satan, is nearly exploded in theory, but not sufficiently in practice. A withered flower, whose sweetness has exhaled, might be accepted if it were the only gift which love could offer ; but how much more fitting for that love to bestow is one whose fresh petals have just revealed their beauty and perfume. So when a heart has been blighted by sin, and the fragrance of its innocence has vanished, and it is all that can be given to the Saviour, he will receive it ; but it were far better to offer it to him ere sin has defiled its loveliness.

"A flower, when offered in the bud,
Is no vain sacrifice."

"Suffer little children to come unto me."

The religious principle and graces require sedulous culture in childhood. A lady asked her gardener why the weeds always outgrew and covered up the flowers ?

"Madam," he answered, "the soil is the mother of weeds, but only step-mother of the flowers."

So with a child's heart. It has inherited evil tastes, impulses, and principles. These are native to it, as the weeds are to the soil. To it spiritual graces are exotics. Therefore they will not grow spontaneously. Careful and persevering culture is requisite to their vigor and perfection. How, then, should the Church, with prayer and loving labor, cultivate the dimmest and feeblest manifestations of spiritual life in its children !

Our Church has recognized its responsibility and duty in this matter. It requires that suitable attention shall be given to the religious training of childhood in all its societies.

The argument which is presented in the preceding chapter

in behalf of converts being admitted into classes of experienced Christians, applies with nearly equal force to children. I question if it be wisest to put them by themselves. Should not the youngest lambs be allowed the freedom of the same pastures with the rest of the flock?

If older disciples need the aid of the experiences of mature Christians, equally so do the children. They have everything to learn in experimental and practical godliness. Their imaginative minds are alert at the recital of narratives and incidents by older persons. The relation of experiences in the class-meeting by intelligent Christians is, therefore, an indispensable means for their best religious training. Far better instruction in the highest things will they thus derive, because of its adaptation to their taste and understanding, than from any didactic teaching whatsoever.

As most of the adult classes meet at an hour when it is impracticable for the majority of those who are of a tender age to attend, their needs can be best met by the child's class. As soon, however, as circumstances warrant, they should be promoted to the regular classes, where they will receive larger nurture.

There is one advantage of the children's class which is important. The attention of the Leader is devoted exclusively to them. He has none but the little ones to watch over and provide for. He thinks and devises for them. He, like the great Shepherd, carries "the lambs in his bosom," and nestles them near his heart. His is an office of peculiar sacredness and beauty.

There should be provision by which the little ones can, at stated times, hear the adult Christians relate their experience and participate in their goodly fellowship, even though they do not go to the regular class-meeting. This provision is furnished by the general class and love-feasts. I was taken

from my early childhood by my parents to the quarterly love-feast; and how vivid in my memory are some of those scenes of thirty years ago. To my ear "the old, old story" was new, and full of fresh interest. I well remember the falling tear, the tender words, the tremulous voice sweetly musical, the plaintive song, the exultant chorus, the shout of rapture, the swelling emotion that swept in melting tides over the assembly, and the forms, both youthful and venerable, that are now in the grave.

My father stands before me now, distinct to my mind's eye as he was then to my child-eye, in one of those love-feasts. His position is near the altar of the old church. He is speaking of his experience in a love-feast twenty years before, and asks, "Where shall I be twenty years hence?" I hear his thrilling tones, and I see his triumphant attitude, as he points to the graveyard near and exclaims, "Ah! my head will then lie beneath the clods of the valley. But when I die, should it be to-day, I shall live forever." Soon afterward he went up to "the light forever," saying as he rose, "Good-bye."

Expunge from my mind the effect of the memories and impressions of those scenes of childhood, and I am another man. Their influence largely shapes my thoughts and feelings, my writing and my speech, at this hour. Nor can the Church to-day afford to deprive its children of such means for inspiring and ennobling their lives. Let them go to the love-feasts and to the general class-meetings, and there learn how to live and how to die.

A Leader of a children's class in the West has kindly sent me an account of the working of the general class, to which the children are admitted in the Church to which he belongs. He says:—

“We have the five adult classes meet the first Sunday of each month in general class, as they did yesterday morning, [August 2, 1874,] and my children’s class is gathered in. I was glad to see so many of my children present—on count there were sixty-five. We had a glorious meeting. The children’s voices aided very much in the sweetness of the singing. The presence of the children stimulated many of the adults to speak *well*, giving good advice and encouraging words. Had it not been for my children’s class there would not have been a dozen children present. In our other Churches here, on general class occasions, children do not attend. The interest is greatly promoted by having general class once a month, and having the children present. The child-like faith of the little ones proves a lesson to grown people. The Lord will bless all such meetings.”

Children ought to be taught that it is their privilege and duty to attend the regular services. It is not sufficient that they go to the special meetings which we have considered and attend class. They also should go regularly to the house of God, and join in his worship, and hear his word read and expounded. Their interest in the preaching may be enhanced by frequently asking them to give the text of the sermon, and to repeat some thought or illustration which it contained.

It is sad that children are so generally remiss in this duty. Notwithstanding all the benefits of the Sabbath-school, it is to be feared that it works injury also in causing parents to think that attendance at its sessions is sufficient excuse for their children’s absence from public worship. The school is an auxiliary of the Church, not a substitute for it; and if the child can attend but one, the Church ought, by all means, to have preference. The Leaders of children’s classes

should make this duty prominent in their instruction to their young members. The whole Church, indeed, should awake to this subject, and strive to train up a generation who shall be worshippers on the Lord's day in his house.

The Sunday-school, however, may be rendered a highly serviceable means of promoting the class-meeting instruction of the children. An illustration of this is afforded by the following narrative, kindly furnished me by the Rev. Dr. De Puy, associate editor of the "Christian Advocate," in regard to his method of encouraging this sort of religious training while in charge of St. John's Sunday-school, Brooklyn, New York, "one of the largest, best regulated, and most successful Sabbath-schools in the whole Church."

"Our school," he writes, "numbered on register over eleven hundred pupils, many of them from among the best families in that portion of the city. They were in charge of about eighty teachers. How shall we best lead the children to Christ? was one of the chief questions kept constantly before the Teachers' Meeting. We talked over the matter, and prayed over it together, until our hearts were charged with it as a special care. This was a great point gained. Each teacher felt the pressure of his privilege and duty to ask his pupils to give their hearts to the Saviour *now*, and the conversations with them which were thus incited, with their precious fruits, may not be fully revealed this side the better land.

"A special class, to meet immediately after the close of each session of the school, was provided, and placed under the leadership of one of the most devoted, sympathetic, and winning hearts to be found in the Sunday-school board. Into this class every serious-minded pupil was sent by his teacher as soon as there was manifested the least desire for piety. The whole work was quietly done. Nothing was

said concerning the matter before the school. No list of names was read before either the school or class. But each Sunday afternoon, on dismissal of the school, such pupils as had been selected by the teachers immediately repaired to the private room assigned for the Children's Class. Individual instruction and devotions followed. Every meeting was a revival service. The young hearts were led to Jesus.

"I need not say that the children willingly continued their attendance; they loved the services. In due time the Leader and Superintendent recommended those who remained faithful as suitable persons for record in the lists of Church membership. Said the father of one of those children to me afterward: 'Both my boy and myself will thank you in heaven for that Children's Class-meeting;' and several notes were sent me by other parents expressive of their grateful appreciation of special class services, by means of which their little ones had been led to Jesus. It was a precious work."

The instruction given to the little ones in class should be rudimentary and fundamental. They should be taught the alphabet of Christianity. God's love of the world, and his gift of his Son to be a Saviour and Mediator; the privilege of coming to God by him; the duty of trusting, loving, and obeying him; the cultivation of gentle and forgiving tempers, and of maintaining a habit of prayer, should all be presented with a simplicity adapted to their intelligence, and in a manner suited to win their attention and awaken their interest.

The description of his child's class, and his way of conducting it, by the Leader last quoted, will fittingly close this chapter:—

"The past six years I have been a Leader of a children's

class, and the class has failed to meet but twice in all that time, once on account of a fearful storm and once because of a camp-meeting. We commenced with twelve members, and the number soon increased to fifty, and it has been as high as seventy-two. It requires more preparation and variety to successfully keep up a children's class than it does a class of adults. We have children from six to fourteen years of age—all the baptized children of the Church that we can get, and quite a number besides.

“In a year I suppose I have just fifty-two different methods of conducting this children's class. I always commence promptly at half-past nine in the morning, and hold from thirty to forty-five minutes, according to circumstances. This is the sure way of having full and good classes of adults. When these children grow to be men and women they will not fail to attend class, and they will always be ready to speak without embarrassment, as the Lord may bless them.

“I will give some idea of my method of leading children's class. Well, last Sunday, I went in and shook hands with all that were present and those who afterward came, talking to them familiarly, and asking how the folks were at home, learning if any of the class were sick, etc. Then I call Maggie to the organ, as it is a bright, cheerful morning, and we sing, ‘Praise God.’ I then call on Charles to make a short prayer; he was taken out of a saloon four years since, and came into our class and was converted, and is now teacher of a class of boys in our Sunday-school; he is fifteen years of age. Then Maggie plays and we sing,

“‘I am so glad that Jesus loves me.’

Then I say, Stand up, one at a time, and all give me a verse of Scripture, and I comment on the most pointed passages,

taking up with this exercise from fifteen to twenty minutes. The pastor then comes in and makes a few remarks, and we sing, and he dismisses the class with the benediction. Next Sunday I will read a few verses, 'As Moses lifted up the serpent,' etc., and make it plain and simplify it for the litt ones. Maggie plays and we sing,

“ ‘I will sing for Jesus.’

Then I make a short prayer, and we sing,

“ ‘Jesus loves me, this I know.’

Then I state my experience of the past week, and have as many of the class to speak as will have time, and we close with the Lord's Prayer, and so on differing every Sunday.”

CHAPTER XVII.

TRAINING CHRISTIAN WORKERS.

THE urgent need of the world is Christian workers who can accomplish results. Not names, nor titles, nor parade, does it require, but achievement. This, also, the Master asks. “Herein is my Father glorified that ye bring forth much fruit.” Successful work for God covers the worker with a glory which shall never vanish. “They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and *they that turn many to righteousness*, as the stars for ever and ever.”

What earthly joy is comparable with the exquisite and profound delight of one who, having spent a life in religious service, can thus contemplate not only work done, but results achieved, and in the gathering shades of the eventide can shout, “I have not run in vain, neither labored in vain.”

To insure the largest success of Christian workers there must commonly be training. "The time is short." The work is great and pressing. "The night cometh when no man can work." How needful, therefore, that the hand of the worker have cunning, that it may dispatch the most in the little time allotted. To possess that cunning it must be trained. "It cannot be too often repeated that all extraordinary skill is the result of preparatory training. Facility of every kind comes by labor. Nothing is easy, not even walking or reading, that was not difficult at first." Practice itself is training. The fingers becomes dexterous by use.

"We are not only to work, but to make the most of our power to work. The training may be very simple, and can seldom be elaborate; for the work is to be done by those whose hands seem already full. It may be no more than placing the inexperienced in the company of the experienced. Those who would nurse the sick can have the opportunity of a hospital. Those who would teach in a Sunday-school can have lectures and attend a training class. Those who would visit a district may be shown the most effective way. Such help and culture are possible without imposing a strain on such as are already overworked."

For training in religious labor the class-meeting affords special and priceless advantages. There the young, who stand at the entrance of their life-field, which stretches away full of invitingness before them, are taught that essential lesson for the Christian laborer, namely, *to speak for Christ*. Older disciples, too, are there incited to zeal and effort, and reminded that the day is waning, and are inured to bearing the cross, and become accustomed to "stand up for Jesus." The class-room is, indeed, the field of training for the workers of Methodism. Some of the most successful toilers "in

the kingdom and patience of Jesus" would never have attained their glorious art but for the inspiration, the guidance, and the practice which the class-meeting afforded them.

Very many successful winners of souls have, by means of this unique but powerful agency, been thrust forth into their work. Many of the past and present ministers of the Church would never have learned to speak publicly, nor become acquainted with their own gifts, had it not been for the class-meeting. It was in talking there that their lips received the kindling touch, and their tongues were trained to holy eloquence. Bishops Coke and Asbury say that the class-meetings are "in a considerable degree, our universities for the ministry." In those universities the whole ministry of our Church received its initial culture, for the time has not been when a man could stand in a Methodist pulpit who did not reach it through the class-room; and it is safe to say, that, judged by results, better universities for training ministers have not existed since the pentecostal age.

Multitudes of Leaders have had the joy of seeing such heralds of salvation go forth from their classes. Many could give recitals like these: "Out of my class sprung five or six local preachers." "For thirty years I have tried to lead a class, and during that time I have had the honor (I say it with all humility) of seeing four of my boys, as I have familiarly called them, become preachers of the Gospel." Of one of the Presidents of the Wesleyan Conference, in England, the following interesting fact was inserted by Father Reeves in a memorandum which he kept to show what became of his members. "Samuel D. Waddy. After meeting with me sixteen months, left to become a travelling preacher. November, 1825." How sublime is the work of the Leader who thus educates men for the

ministry of reconciliation—men who, perchance, shall “shine as lights in the world.”

Never can I forget how, shortly after my conversion, a Leader yet living, in addressing me in the class, said : “ Our prayer is that you may be a laborer in the vineyard.” Thus should the Leader watch for indications of aptitude for the Church’s work in his youthful members. Should he see signs of preaching power, accompanied with suitable discretion and zeal, he should encourage its possessor to aim at the highest usefulness, and should also seek to guide his impulses and develop his gifts. He should counsel him to study the word of God, and such helps to a right understanding of it as he can obtain ; to be much in prayer ; and to engage in such public exercises as he suitably may.

The Leader ought also to direct the mind of such a young man to the importance of literary culture, and incite him to strive for its acquisition. If it be practicable, he should be induced to enter such an institution as will afford the needed facilities for such pursuits. If he lack the means to follow a course of study, let the Leader set about obtaining it for him from such friends as God hath prospered ; for what are a few hundred dollars compared to the advantages resulting to the Church and the world from a life of service of “ a faithful minister of Christ ? ” Or, if the Leader possess money, let him assist himself. He could scarcely exercise benevolence in a more grateful or productive way. I know a Leader who has just sent a youthful member of his class to a literary institution at his own expense, that he may get the necessary intellectual furniture for the work of the ministry.

Among the most necessary and useful laborers in the Church, next to the pastors, are those who sing and pray.

Without them there could be, comparatively, but little aggressive work. The singing power of Methodism has always been conspicuous, and is a potent means for maintaining its vitality and promoting its revivals. "It was," says the Rev. S. W. Christophers, "in these happy scenes of weekly fellowship that Methodists learned to sing. There it was heart singing. And from those heavenly places there came every week those thrilling voices which inspired the multitudes, and gave a resistless power to the glorious hymns which arose throughout the united kingdom." For these Charles Wesley composed those deeply spiritual songs of mutual delight, and those triumphal hymns of love and full assurance, which form so large a section of the Methodist hymnology." Again he says: "Without class-meetings songs like these would never have burst from Methodist lips; without its class-meetings songs like these would necessarily die from the lips of Methodism. They were made for a class-meeting people. And they fell from the pen of an author whose rich variety of Christian fellowship songs prove that he could never conceive of Methodist Societies without such means of pouring spiritual melody into one another's hearts as the classes and Society meetings afford.

A young man who had recently left his home and native land wandered alone on a Sabbath morning in one of our pleasant American cities, and at length seated himself in a park. It was summer, and the voice of song, floating from the open windows of a church in the neighborhood, fell sweetly on his ear. Though a careless and wild youth, unaccustomed to religious worship, the singing attracted him, and he arose and walked in the direction of it. It led him to a Methodist church, where some of the members were

holding a prayer-meeting previously to the hour for public service. He entered and was quickly convicted of sin. He asked the prayers of the people, and they at once responded, praying fervently for his salvation, and then and there he experienced the great transition from darkness into light. He remains to this day a devoted, happy, useful Christian. Almost innumerable have been the like instances of the saving influence of Methodist singing.

The praying power of our people has also been largely developed in the class-meeting under the guidance of skilful Leaders. Mr. Farnell was accustomed to conclude his meeting at an hour which would enable him to give two or three of his members an opportunity to lead in prayer before separating. "This," he says, "gave them courage to pray in public, which they never would have acquired elsewhere." Says Mr. Christophers: "Many a raw, uncultivated lad has been led into the class-meeting under strong religious feeling. There, at first, he would scarcely have sufficient command of his native tongue to intelligibly express the feelings of his soul, and, perhaps, under ordinary circumstances, would never utter a pure or correct sentence; but, unaccountably to all but those who acknowledge the work of a Divine teacher, that same lad, in his weekly intercourse with his Leader and classmates, begins to talk with propriety about spiritual things, and at length, by dint of exercise in sincere prayer, he learns to pray with the spirit and with the understanding also, and might gracefully and with holy effect lead the devotions of an intelligent and even educated congregation. The praying ranks of Methodism derive their most useful power from such trained recruits."

Again the same authority says: "This reserve of praying power is, in a great measure, peculiar to Methodism. No

people have shown themselves so full of devotional gifts, and so possessed of prevalent energy among gathering crowds of earnest seekers. The rapidly growing numbers who, from time to time, have pressed into the Societies, could never have been guided to the mercy-seat or permanently brought under saving grace but for this abundant spirit of prayer. This is essential to Methodist success. Where did this gift first show itself? Where was the power first felt? Where was the grace nurtured and by exercise brought up to its maturity? In the class-meeting. The class-meeting is the school for the development of its grace and expression of prayer."

A body of laborers peculiar to Methodism are the Class Leaders. A really good and efficient Leader is of untold value to a Church. His influence, constant as that of the atmosphere, is, like it, healthful and invigorating. A Church cannot well languish which has a band of such devoted servants. Even should the pastor be weak and fail, they would keep the ensign flying, and the host in order. The Methodist Church well knows how useful and necessary to her weal are these gifted workers. It cannot dispense with them. Yet, "under Divine grace, they have all been the fruit of class-meetings."

A Leader gives an experience touching this point which is similar to that which could be given by very many others. "For some years," he says, "I had the training and advantage of sitting every week under the instructions of a judicious, devout, and most princely Leader—the late Joseph White, of Urbana, Ohio. There I was nursed, built up, established, and made strong, until I was appointed to a class over which I had happy and successful charge." Thus are Class Leaders trained.

To the class-meeting is largely due, also, the power of exhortation which distinguishes Methodism. It may be safely said that no people can exhort like Methodist laymen. It is in the class-room they learn the art of public address. There they not only speak, but constantly listen to the speaking of others, and thus they acquire skill in the appropriate expression of thought and feeling which renders them so effective in exhortation. Divest the Methodist laity of its hortatory power and you deprive the Church of an arm of its strength. That power is the fruit chiefly of class-meeting training.

Shall not the Methodist class-meeting, then, be maintained in all its original efficiency? Shall not its Leaders and members rally to its support, and increase, as far as they may, its interest and usefulness? It is a great means for training workers in Christ's vineyard, and of promoting an emotional religion, which is none other than the religion of the heart, the religion of the Bible, the religion which St. Peter so eloquently describes when he says, "Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

I know there are those who deprecate an emotional religion. They would have it chiefly of the brain. They recoil from any demonstration of strong religious feeling. But God's ways are not their ways. He has made man an emotional being. He has placed in his nature capabilities for the most profound and diverse feelings. And so intimately has he joined the intellectual and emotional natures, that they go hand in hand, acting by and through each other. Man lives, thinks, learns, works, and achieves largely by means of his emotions. Only through their

medium does the intellect apprehend the highest and divinest truths, for with "the heart man believeth unto righteousness." Religion sways the whole of the emotional nature.

Those who deride Methodism for the encouragement and culture it gives to religious feeling are as unphilosophical as they are uncharitable and unscriptural. They might as well deride the electricity which flames and roars in the atmosphere. Such critics, could they do so, would muffle the thunders, and tone down the tempests to softly sighing winds. Despite criticism and scornful derision, our soul-thrilling Christianity has gone on its way shouting and triumphing, and time shall never witness the hush of its rejoicings. Above the din of critics sounds the command from the heavens, "Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous; and shout for joy all ye that are upright in heart." The class-meeting is necessary to the general maintenance of this joy, and the befitting and scriptural expression of it in Methodism.

The devoted, genial, and gifted Eddy, of the Methodist Missionary Society, has just illustrated this joy and triumph in his death. Dr. Dashiell, who was much with him in his last hours, says: "He went down into the valley like a crowned and conquering king. He stretched out his hands, trembling in death, and pronounced upon his family the apostolic benediction. He attempted to clap his hands together, but he was so weak they passed each other, and he shouted, Halleluia! Halleluia! Halleluia!" His last words were "Eternity dawns!"

