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Methodism, a Religion for Plain People

By A. M. TRAWICK

AN ADDRESS DELIVERED BEFORE THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
OF THE

South Carolina Conference, November 13, 1928

AND THE

Upper South Carolina Conference, November 20, 1928

It has been estimated that a new "Life of Christ" is published in the English language every year, and that almost every day sees the appearance of a new book on some aspect of the Christian religion. This continued stream of religious literature is proof that the present generation is not lacking in interest in the spiritual life, and we in our day are interpreting the history, institutions, leadership, and significance of religion in terms of our own outlook upon life. Methodism is contributing a fair share of this volume of religious interpretation—both in our own land and abroad; and most of all that Methodists are producing enters into the general spiritual life of the times without any denominational or sectarian mark upon it. This is the great glory of the church: that it loses itself in the larger life of men, and if men are benefitted it matters little that the denominational brand is forgotten.

No charge of inconsistency should be lodged against us if, on the occasion of an annual meeting of a Methodist Historical Society, we review again some of the purposes and ideals of our Church life, since we are well assured that it is only as we are true to the best of our idealism that we are of any value to the life of the world.

Our purpose is to consider "Methodism, a Religion for Plain People," for it is to plain, practical, common-sense people rather than to philosophers and theoreticians that Methodism has always chiefly appealed. World-wide Methodism has produced a few, but only a few, great theologians, apologists, and speculative thinkers; but in writings for plain people, like Falstaff's wit, it has been both literary in itself and the cause that produces literature in other people. Within recent months there has appeared a remarkable series of books treating of various aspects of Methodist life and spirit. Notable among these are Dimond's "Psychology of the Methodist Revival," showing how the movement begun by Wesley illuminates the chief contentions of modern psychology; and Rattenbury's "Wesley's Legacy to the World," being the Quillian Lectures for the present year, a highly praiseworthy evaluation of John Wesley in the light of the twentieth-century needs and aspirations.

Lipsky's "John Wesley, a Portrait," Umphrey Lee's "The Lord's Horseman," and Duren's "Francis Asbury," are vigorous and sympa-

thetic interpretations of the heroic figures of the two English and American spiritual pioneers. Harmon's "Rites and Ritual of Methodism" is a monumental work that ought to have been done, and is here so well done that it will not need to be repeated for many years. Miss Oelmer's "The Holy Lover" gives the facts of Wesley's heart-breaking experience as a lover during his brief mission in Georgia, based almost entirely on his own analysis of the pitiful events in his "Journal." This book adds nothing to the understanding of John Wesley, and might as well have been left unwritten. Dan Brummitt's "Shoddy" calls for many chuckles and knowing winks on the part of those who are familiar with Methodist usage; but, if, in the final rewards of men by the church, Middleton is overlooked and Bonafedes is elevated, the reproach falls upon the church which fails in moral penetration rather than upon a cheap soul who persuades his contemporaries to accept his shoddy for the real fabric.

The successful publication of books dealing with men and issues with a denominational stamp upon them is a proof that Methodism is by no means a spent force in the world's affairs, and that there is in its activities a fundamental appeal to plain people far beyond the limits of a single church's membership.

Plain people are interested in Methodism because of its form of church government. Two centuries of history demonstrate the efficacy of the system, and at the same time reveal the fact that the system itself is flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances. Many of its original forms have disappeared or exist only as survivals of a situation honored in the memory. Without a question, the vitality of the church for more than a century can not be understood apart from the unique feature of Methodism known as the class meeting; and, although the Discipline still contains a chapter requiring the organization of all congregations into classes, yet only the idea remains: the form is unsuited to our necessities. So also of bands and love feasts: they have largely disappeared. Even testimony meetings have almost passed into a memory, and in this we have lost a spiritual power that ought to be recovered. The itinerant ministry remains, but with changes that make it almost a system unknown to early Methodists. Beginning as a revival method, it has become a plan for supplying pastors to local congregations with an all-year program in religious education, one feature of which is an annual or occasional revival. The Annual Conference is the pulsating heart of the itinerant system, the feature of Methodism best known to the sympathetic world. Newspaper accounts and public comment of an Annual Conference begin and end with the appointment of preachers, and this is a perpetual "human interest" story. Both praise and blame are voiced every year by pastors and congregations upon the mysterious workings of the Bishop and his cabinet, springing out of the desire for a pastor's return or the hope of his removal. The probability that everybody will be pleased with the results of a session at the Annual Conference is as remote as the outlook for a golden wedding in Hollywood: but the system survives and keeps alive the spirit of mutual sacrifice in the church. More than that, the itinerancy is a brotherhood, a "connec-

tion," which produces a group consciousness more dependable than personal aims and more energizing than personal ambition. The final effect of the itinerant ministry is to keep alive a group morality through which preachers are lifted above the level of egoism, and local churches are stimulated to rise above common mediocrity. Many a church has been rescued from degeneracy and many a preacher saved from the despair of hopelessness by the system that makes each a member of the whole. "As iron sharpeneth iron, so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend."

American historians have not, as a general rule, given adequate attention to the work of itinerant ministers in helping to shape the destinies of our national life, particularly in the days of the formation of the Union. Beveridge in his "Life of John Marshall," however, is distinctly more discerning than many others in this matter. The Union could hardly have survived that crucial period between the Revolutionary War and the War of 1812 except for the moral integrity quickened by the appeals of the traveling preachers. During the years when the so-called Burr conspiracy and the threatened invasion of Mexico were exciting the whole of our Western territory, the great revival under the leadership of McKendree, McGee, Gibson and many other Presbyterian and Methodist preachers, was sweeping like a great spiritual fire over these same lands. In all nations, religious history and political history flourish and decay simultaneously, the integrity of both being necessary to the growth of civilization. If any man's faith is weak concerning the value of religion as a national force in the United States, let him read again Asbury's "Journal," the "Life of William McKendree," Bang's "History of Methodism," and Strickland's "Life of Peter Cartwright." Men who laid deep and strong the religious foundations of the new nations are no less entitled to grateful memory than those who laid other foundation-stones in finance, business methods, and constitutional law.

Plain people are interested in Methodism because it has been from the beginning a social service movement. John Wesley was a Tory with a human release. Once his great soul was set on fire with a holy passion, he began to do things for men that ought to be done for them; but, since nobody else was doing them, he took upon himself the offices of preacher, teacher, physician, nurse, and welfare worker. He wrote books on household medicine and first aid, and gave instructions about eating, sleeping and the general care of the health. We have been told that Wesley knew nothing about children, and we have almost allowed ourselves to believe it; but he advised mothers to do many things for the diet and regimen of children that physicians today are insisting upon. Our mothers knew what was good for small children when they gave them "Sunshine and pot-liker," and many of them learned it from Wesley's "Practical Physick."

Wesley established schools for children, wrote text-books on ancient and foreign languages, wrote treatises on science, anatomy, history, astronomy, and politics for eager—but uneducated—Englishmen of his day. He and his associates preached sermons against drunkenness, dishonesty, ungodliness, and every known personal and social vice. He

denounced slavery as the "sum of all villianies." "I strike at the root of this complicated villiany. I absolutely deny all slave-holding to be consistent with any degree of justice." To exploiters of mankind he sounded the warning: "None gains by swallowing up his neighbor's substance without gaining the damnation of hell." In 1763, Charles Wesley published his "Hymns for Children" in which occurs as beautiful a song for children as was ever written:

"Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
Look upon a little child.
Pity my simplicity,
Suffer me to come to Thee.

"Fain I would to Thee be brought,
Dearest God, forbid it not.
Give me, dearest God, a place
In the Kingdom of Thy grace.

"Lamb of God, I look to Thee,
Thou shalt my example be.
Thou art gentle, meek and mild;
Thou wast once a little child."

In his schools for children John Wesley did almost everything that modern psychology says ought to be done for children, except that he got them up at five o'clock in the morning, and did not allow them to play. The Wesley Revival and the Evangelical Movement that followed were responsible for the greatest attempt at the social appreciation of Christianity in the history of recent times. Sadler, Stephens, Oastler and Shaftesbury are all declared by Rattenbury to have derived their social enthusiasm from the Evangelical revival. Shaftesbury, according to the same authority, received his distinctly religious bent from a Methodist woman who was his nurse. John Howard, "who died a martyr after living an apostle," was deeply evangelical in spirit and motive. The Eighteenth Century laid the basis for its ethics and philosophy in a flat denial of man's social nature, and asserted the supremacy of his egoistic tendencies. Wesley and his co-laborers completely reversed this self-preservation attitude to life, and put the social nature of duty and morality at the very forefront of their religious experience and activity. "The Gospel of Christ knows of no religion but social, no holiness but social holiness; faith working by love is the length, and breadth, and depth, and height of Christian perfection. This commandment have we from Christ, that he who loves God love his brother also."

Christianity has no greater foe at home or abroad than the disposition of many of its adherents to remove religion from the commonplace affairs of everyday life. To segregate religion, to relate it only to a part of life, to allow the main stream of interest and desire to flow on without the purifying, directing agency of Christian purpose, that is the menace of religion, and that is the supreme opposition of the church

in our day. Not Mohammedanism, nor Hinduism, nor paganism in its many forms is the chief antagonist of vital Christianity. The only serious threat which the Christian religion needs to fear is the interpretation of religion which says it has no right to interfere with anything and everything that destroys and degrades character. There is poison gas in the secular world that disguises gambling as sportsmanship and drunkenness as good fellowship; there is a submarine in the business world that wages ruthless war upon weaker competitors, and there are bombing tactics in party politics that degrade honest citizenship through fear and force. Christian religion is social from the deepest center to the remotest fringe of its fabric.

The efforts of preachers to minister to the religious needs of people are always influenced for good or evil by the prevailing conscience touching social and political circumstances of the times. Preaching both follows and leads the common level of thinking, and the degree of conformity or antagonism to the prevailing public opinion is one of the most critical of the problems confronting the minister of the gospel. His chief mission is to proclaim the gospel message; but unless he instructs and guide in the immediate application of his message to the facts of life, his preaching is mere words without point or purpose. American Methodism has sometimes been reluctant to attack an entrenched evil, and it has not infrequently followed rather than lead economic and social reform. Yet its attack, when it has at last heard the call to attack, has been so direct and impetuous that Methodism has been violently accused of too much meddling in public affairs. No one can set limits to the conscience of the church, and the common conscience aroused by religion has no equal as a social force for the overthrowing of evil.

Francis Asbury manifested his interest in the welfare of the people by pointing out the need of good roads, bridges, ferries, better housing, and better opportunities for common education. Says Dr. Duren: "There was no matter connected with the public welfare which did not enter into his problem of teaching and guidance." It should not be forgotten that Asbury himself, without the advantages of an early education, learned enough Hebrew and Greek on horseback to be able to read and interpret the Bible in its original languages, and in his Journal he gave keen and discriminating comments upon literature, current events, scientific discoveries, and the deeds of public men of his day. His zeal in public education is demonstrated by the fact that he founded Cokesbury School in North Carolina, Ebenezer Academy in Virginia, Bethel in Kentucky, Bethel in South Carolina, Union in Pennsylvania, Wesley and Whitefield in Georgia. (See Duren: "Francis Asbury," p. 67.) Those schools were not able to survive in the face of the general indifference to education, but Allegheny College, established the year before Asbury's death, still flourishes, having in 1928 an enrollment of 667 students and a productive endowment of \$1,200,000.

Out of the first Cokesbury school came the brilliant and eccentric Valentine Cook, who, according to Bishop McTyeire, was a preacher "of more learning than any of his ministerial associates." When Bethel

in Kentucky was established, Valentine Cook was chosen to organize the department of liberal arts, and, although the time had not come for a successful educational venture in Kentucky, this attempt of a pioneer preacher in 1792 is noteworthy as being the first in the long line of Methodist institutions to offer educational advantages to the American people. John Wesley organized Sunday schools in Savannah in 1737, and in England in 1763. Francis Asbury made a new beginning of Sunday school work in Hanover county, Virginia, at the home of Thomas Crenshaw in 1786, and in the following year he opened a Sunday school for Negro children in Charleston, South Carolina. At the Conference of 1790 it was resolved "Let us labor, as the heart and soul of one man to establish Sunday schools in or near the place of public worship." This vote, says Dr. Buckley, was "the first recognition of Sunday schools by an American church." We have Bible Societies, Tract Societies, Temperance Societies, Boards of Public Morals, Wesley Houses, Bethlehem Houses, Goodwill Industries, and Publishing Houses. The two white Methodist Episcopal Churches in the United States have educational institutions enough to fill six pages in "Christian Education," merely to name them. Southern Methodists jointly with the colored Methodists operate and support Paine College, an enterprise in the South, unique both as an educational and ecclesiastical enterprise. Surely Methodism believes in social welfare activity, and plain people endorse it as common sense and every-day religion.

In the stinging sarcasm, "Soul extinct, stomach well alive," Carlyle is smart but not true, when his words are taken, as they are meant, to be a judgment against the whole Eighteenth Century. The soul of a century is not extinct when it can produce Thomas Gray, Samuel Johnson, Oliver Goldsmith, William Blake, Robert Burns, William Wordsworth, Bishop Butler, John Fletcher, and John Wesley. The soul is well alive that can give the world such hymns as "Joy to the World," "Am I a Soldier of the Cross," "O God, Our Help in Ages Past," "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name," "The God of Abraham Praise," "Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken," "O for a Closer Walk with God," "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing," "Hark, Ten Thousand Harps and Voices," "Rock of Ages," and the six thousand songs of Charles Wesley.

Wesley and his preachers taught the plain people of England to sing hymns of unexcelled beauty and grandeur, and to give expression to their new-born emotions in pure and soul-satisfying language. Without a vocabulary sufficient to relieve the emotions, the mind falters, the tongue runs on, and the vocal chords find relief in a shout. Violent physical activity, such as leaping, dancing, running, is a familiar result of an undirected emotional surge, and in extreme forms of excitement these may end in complete prostration, as in a trance or a temporary paralysis of all bodily movement. The early years of the Wesley Revival witnessed extraordinary displays of emotional seizures as was true also of the great religious movement in the early years of the Nineteenth Century in the United States. The Wesleys published their first hymn book and taught the people to sing, and with a better outlet for their emotions, these extravagant manifestations ceased. Meth-

odists do not shout and leap as in early days, but they are not therefore less religious. If we are less religious, the proof must be sought elsewhere than in refined speech and subdued behavior.

Not for their emotional satisfaction alone did the early Methodists sing the best songs the church has produced: they sang their souls out into a broader sympathy with the plans of God for all humanity. A purer worship and a deeper passion for the salvation of the world came to be their soul's desire because of the hymns and tunes they learned to know and love. They took the world for their brotherhood when they sang:

“From all that dwell below the skies,
Let the Creator's praise arise;
Let the Redeemer's name be sung,
Through every land, by every tongue.”

John Wesley was relieving his own breaking heart in his tragic love experience in Georgia, when he translated from the German:

“Thou hidden love of God, whose height,
Whose depth unfathomed, no man knows,
I see from far thy beauteous light,
Inly I sigh for thy repose;
My heart is pained, nor can it be
At rest, till it finds rest in thee.”

When this song was sung in the open fields and on crowded street corners, a new sympathy for broken hearts the world over was brought to tender utterance. Field preachers drew crowds around them when, standing on a box or a table in the public square, they began to sing:

“Come, sinner, to the gospel feast,
Let every soul be Jesus' guest;
Ye need not one be left behind,
For God hath bidden all mankind.”

Better than a church bell to draw a crowd was a melodious voice in the open air singing all the verses of this fine old song.

The church cannot continue to sing that hymn of invitation without awakening in the soul of the singer a divine passion for the sharing of God's love with all men. In their great hymns the early Methodists created a missionary zeal as deep as the needs of mankind. A personal experience of the free, saving grace of God has in itself the elements of universal redemption. Because God's love has reached me, it is God's plan to save all mankind. The beginning of the missionary program is in personal experience. Only one who has felt the love of God in his own heart can pass the bounds of class and race and nation, and take all men in his heart of love.

“Enlarge, inflame, and fill my heart
With boundless charity divine!
So shall I all my strength exert
And love them with a zeal like thine.”

Singing such songs as these, the Methodists kept their hearts warm and their zeal burning for the full occupation of the world-parish which they claimed for their possession. Without an enriched emotion the spiritual incentive wanes, and the Methodists of a former generation may have been wiser than we in singing the loftiest of hymns to the best of tunes.

Preaching, singing, and testimony furnished the basis of the church's missionary passion. And the spirit of world conquest has never departed from the church. The spirit of Bishop Coke passed in unbroken succession to Bishop Lambuth. Melville Coxe, a North Carolina boy, an invalid in his youth, and within a few months of his death, went to Africa with this as his reason for going: “At present I am in peace. Death looks pleasant to me, life looks pleasant to me, labor and suffering look pleasant to me, and last though not least, Liberia looks pleasant to me. I see, or think I see, resting on Africa the light and cloud of heaven.” Mumpower, in our day, entered an unoccupied field in Central Africa, and Joe Maw a few days ago responded to the same vision. Fountain E. Pitts and John J. Ransom occupied a portion of Brazil in the name of the church, and the succession of workers in that field has been unbroken to the days of Dan Betts and Louise Best. Laura Hagood and Ann Herbert are links in a long chain that binds China to the throne of God. In many lands overseas and among many races and conditions of people in the homeland, the church has its workers for every kind of service men need to have done for them. Methodism will continue to be a missionary religion as long as she continues to preach and sing and believe the gospel of free saving grace. The limit of the missionary enterprise today is the financial response of the church—not the willingness of young life to obey the command to go. Will the whole church be missionary in spirit and purpose? That, and not the heedlessness of youth, is the real missionary problem.

Plain people have a vital interest in questions of doctrine. To say the contrary is to deny the desire of men to think and understand their own experiences. Men must interpret to the best of their ability what happens to them in their spiritual lives; and interpretation is doctrine. Thinking is the method of arriving at the meaning of events, and the most important aspect of any event is the meaning attached to it. Anyone who has an experience of religion and explains it so that he can understand it and lead others to grasp his meaning is declaring a doctrine; and the spiritual life grows by doctrine. The doctrine that plain people are not interested in is that which is totally unrelated to their experience; that which is remote, artificial, merely theoretical, without point or purpose so far as their own lives are concerned. But a real experience made clear to another is the cause of a new experience both in him who gives and in him who receives it. A clear doctrine, therefore, becomes an occasion of religious realization. All of

us, it is reasonable to say, ought to have broader experiences of religion than we have; therefore the preaching of doctrine is a constant need.

"The center of gravity in religion," says Dean Inge, "has shifted from authority to experience." That is no new note in Methodism. From the moment he felt his heart strangely warmed, John Wesley met unusual circumstances, for which there was no precedent and no answer in authoritative plans and methods of the church. Every distinctive feature of Methodism developed out of conditions that had to be met in new and untried ways. Class meetings, lay preaching, field preaching, the itinerant plan, conferences, all had their origin in experience. In fact, the Anglican Church, to which in theory Wesley was attached, had no place for any of these institutions, and its authority was directly opposed to them because they were innovations. The center of gravity in Methodism has always been in experience, not in authority. John Wesley, loyal churchman, contravened any church law that interfered with his experience. Methodism is today as it has always been (except in periods of stagnation) a church in the hands of its living members.

In nothing does this new center of gravity act with greater force than in the doctrines that bear a distinctive Methodist emphasis. Wesley's sermons on the judgment day and the end of the world are in perfect agreement with the authoritative statements of his church; but today they have no weight, even if they are remembered. The Thirty-nine articles of the Church of England he accepted only as far as he saw fit, erasing fifteen of them because they contradicted his experience of free grace and universal love. He preached justification as he found it in the Bible, and in the needs of sinful men. Regeneration he presented not as a matter of speculative theory, but from the point of view of one who tested and measured the fruits of the spiritual rebirth. Concerning Christian Perfection, John Wesley made as daring a statement as Christian preacher ever uttered. After proving that perfection as he taught it was a true Scripture doctrine, he declared: "Convince me that this word has fallen to the ground, that in all these years none have attained the peace of God that passeth all understanding, that there is no living witness of it at this day, and I will preach it no more. . . . I want living witnesses. If I were certain there are none such, I must have done with this doctrine."

As if drawn by an irresistible force, Wesley followed the indications of experience rather than the voice of authority in planning the course of Methodist development, both in England and in America. His "Deed of Declaration" recognized no authority but his own, and his ordination of Coke did not have the sanction of church Canons. His Articles of Religion, Standards of Doctrine, and Church Ritual were distinct departures from established usages, and what he intended to do for Asbury was to hold him and the American work in connection, not with the Anglican Church, but with himself. Asbury, by the same kind of instinct for the vital, quietly laid aside Wesley's authority and accepted ordination as deacon, elder and bishop only at the unanimous election of the American preachers. The Methodist Episcopal Church

in America was the outgrowth of the experience of the American preachers, many of its features being directly contradictory to Wesley's wishes. Methodism in this country has moved steadily toward the same center of gravity. The dead hand of the past has ever rested but lightly upon our heads. Everything in our form of Government, standards of doctrine, general rules and ritual, has been changed to meet changing conditions and can be still further modified as necessity arises. Our spiritual center of gravity today is as certainly toward experience as it was in the beginning, and decay has struck at the heart of the church when the voice of the past becomes more compelling than the light on the path ahead.

The doctrine of the Witness of the Spirit has been declared to be the most valuable contribution Methodism has made to the thought of the church. Taken in connection with its logical implications of organized activity and progress toward perfection, it deserves that high praise. Says Wesley: "I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for my salvation; and an assurance was given me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death. I began to pray with all my heart for those who had in a more especial manner despitefully used me and persecuted me. I then testified openly to all there what I now first felt in my heart." All the essentials of a complete personality are combined in that experience: emotion, intellectual conviction, voluntary worship and social communion. Before this, Wesley had been a divided personality; now he was a personality in unity with God and the world in which he lived. The Witness of the Spirit is just that unity of God, man and the universe. "All things work together for good to them that love God." St. Paul further testifies to this universal harmony in these words: "Seeing it is God that said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' who shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." A divided personality is not, in the full New Testament meaning, a Christian personality; but a human being in harmony with God and all his works is a son of God by the testimony of the Holy Spirit.

Modern psychology, argues Streeter in "Reality," recognizes the mediate and the immediate as two ways of knowledge. The mediate is the scientific way, and proceeds by observation, experiment, test, reduction to general law. This is the scientific method, but it does not reveal all that man wants to know and must know in order to live. Living men must know with an unmistakable certainty something of that mysterious entity called life which science cannot weigh or measure, but which, says Streeter, a man knows by "a direct experience within himself." "Whenever, therefore, I speak of 'life,' I am interpreting the observed facts of 'behavior' in the light of an inward experience of my own." Of the certainty of that inward experience, Wesley and the Methodists have never entertained any doubt, although the new psychology came as an indorsement long after they discovered the fact. Dimond explains Wesley's joy in his new experience as the release of his natural buoyancy and delight in life which for so long a time had been "dammed up and ignored under the influence of legal and deistic theology."

Without question, Wesley had suffered from repression and unfulfilled desire, and after his conversion there was a marvelous release of his natural powers; but something more than psychology is needed to explain his religious life. There is that in him which can be understood only as God is brought into the explanation.

The reality of the Holy Spirit's witness to the Christian can be demonstrated by two lines of argument. The first is the pragmatic test. What are the results? What is in the life of the man who claims this assurance that resembles God? "The fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace." "We know we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren." "Hereby we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments." Assurance is not a claim, it is a demonstration; and if those marks are impressed upon a man by the Holy Spirit, he cannot refrain from giving his testimony to it. "If these should hold their peace, the stones would cry out." Surely in God's world, there must be something that responds to God's presence, is the comment of Glover of Cambridge.

The second line of argument declares that the Spirit of God deals immediately, directly, with the spirit of man, so that a new truth is brought to consciousness over and above all that man's reason, volition, or feeling brings to realization. "The testimony of the Spirit is an inward impression on the soul, whereby the Spirit of God directly witnesses to my spirit that I am a child of God; that Jesus Christ hath loved me and given himself for me; and that all my sins are blotted out, and I, even I, am reconciled to God." This is the method by which the Spirit, whose function among men is to create holiness, declares that His work is well done. Creation and character are brought together in a divine synthesis. "And God saw everything he had made, and behold, it was very good."

"Truth is what a man recognizes as value when his life is fullest, and his soul at its highest stretch." Faith that yearns and lifts and reaches after God and intends to find Him is the organ or spiritual knowledge. Assurance accompanies the faith that works as God works in inexhaustible energy. Charles Wesley brings faith and assurance together in one of his most joyous hymns:

"We know by faith, we surely know
The Son of God is come;
Is manifested here below
And makes our hearts His home.
To us He hath in special love
An understanding given
To recognize him from above,
The Lord of earth and heaven."

Our continued value as a church in the world depends upon our fidelity to this doctrine and our zeal in keeping it alive. For men want nothing more earnestly than they want to know how matters stand with them and their God. But our times demand a social as well as an in-

dividual application of the benefits of assurance. Pentecost is normal Christianity. A small united band of believers surrounded by a throng of eager, curious, doubting, wondering, scoffing unbelievers, and the Holy Spirit coming with power upon the few for the benefit of many, that is Christianity in the world. Peter at Antioch subordinating Christ to race superiority; a handful of believers in a corner of Ephesus not knowing that the Holy Spirit was given to Christians; a group of church people stirpiculturing all holy impatience out of their souls—that is not Christianity. Bishop Keener in his last days gave special emphasis to the witness of the Spirit as the social philosophy of the church. William Arthur, in his "Tongue of Fire," calls attention to the fact that the church is the agency in and through which the Holy Spirit bears his testimony. In the New Testament, the work of the Holy Spirit is described oftener in connection with the church than with the individual believer. The operation of the Spirit, elevating the general level of spiritual living, rebuking the erring, comforting the wounded, directing the faithful, and making Christ alive again in the lives of men, that is assurance; and that is the authority of the keys, the power to bind and loose. We have not unlocked the mystery of godliness until we see its group power, and a personal opinion is of no value except as it is able to make community living more secure.

To preach the doctrine of perfection requires a high degree of boldness at any age of the world's history, since the set of the world's interest is more in some other direction than spiritual completion. But once perfection is set forth as a possibility in religion, earnest souls in every age seek after it as the one thing above all things that they desire. Men are not satisfied with forgiveness; they want to be right, right with God. The Wesleys could not continue to preach and sing their message of free grace, justification, the new birth, and the witness of the Spirit, and be unaware of the implications of the gospel as they taught it. Perfection is implicit in regeneration and assurance just as the flower is implicit in the sprouting plant. When Wesley became convinced that the mission of Methodism was to spread "real, essential holiness throughout the land," he had to oppose him the moral standards and the orthodox theology of his times; and in his support he had the plain teachings of Scripture, the needs of men, and the testimony of living witnesses. In the year 1765 he published "A Plain Account of Christian Perfection," which, in spite of what we now believe to be faulty psychology in many places and special pleading in some of its arguments, is yet one of the most notable treatises and most valuable documents he ever issued, and deserves to be more widely read by the same kind of plain people for whom it was written. The cry from the heart is written in the "Plain Account":

"O grant that nothing in my soul
May dwell, but thy pure love alone!
O may thy love possess me whole,
My joy, my treasure, and my crown!
Strange fires far from my heart remove:
My every act, word, thought, be love!"

Love is the key word in Christian Perfection as Wesley taught it, the love of God shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Ghost: so that a man loves God with all his heart and his neighbor as himself. He quoted the communion prayer, "that we may perfectly love thee and worthily magnify thy Holy Name," insisting, adds Dimond, "that this is to ask from God no boon beyond His giving."

Wesley rejected the idea of the absolute perfection of mental or physical powers. Yet, against some who were disposed to regard their sins as nothing but bodily infirmities or mistakes of intelligence, he uttered the stern rebuke: "This must argue either the deepest ignorance, or the highest arrogance and presumption." He also rejected the idea of perfection by degrees or percentages; as if a man should claim 65 per cent or 80 per cent perfection. No; God's saving health was for the whole of man as well as for all men. Any inconsistency at this point did not arrest Wesley's attention. He was bent on breaking the soul away from all voluntary transgressions of the will of God, and going from one good stage of spiritual life to the one next higher.

He denied the perfection of purgatory and the super-merits of the saints administered by the priests; he presented the possibility of every plain man having an Advocate with the Father, even Jesus Christ the Righteous, with a pure heart for His dwelling place here on earth. He did not, as some of the Reformers, so consider man victimized by original sin that the grace of God could set him free and make him perfect only at death. "Where sin did abound, grace did super-abound," and here in this life that grace was operative. Unlike a notable school of American theologians, Wesley did not base perfection on the will, or on attention, the secret of the will's power. "What gets your attention gets you" was never the Methodist way of presenting Christian perfection. There is something deeper in human nature than attention, something indeed that determines what the attention shall be, and gives the will its motive power. That deeper thing is desire, and Wesley, again with the instinct for the vital, made the deepest desire, love, to be the beginning and the consummation of Christian Perfection. "What get's your love gets you" is the Methodist way of putting the doctrine. "Pure love, reigning alone in the heart and life, this is the whole of Scriptural perfection." Love is the beginning and the crowning of our prayer:

"Teach me to love thee as thine angels love,
One holy passion filling all my frame:
The kindling of the heaven-descended Dove,
My heart an altar, and thy love the flame."

One of the great hymns of the early Methodists gave voice to this intense yearning of the soul:

"Come, O my God, thyself reveal,
Fill all this mighty void!
Thou only canst my spirit fill;

Come, O my God, my God!
Fulfil, fulfil my large desires,
Large as infinity!
Give, give me all my soul requires,
All, all that is in thee!"

Poetry seems to be a fitter vehicle for conveying the longings of the heart after perfection than sermon or any other form of discussion. Take a few selections from the songs the church continues to sing:

"Have thine own way, Lord, have thine own way!
Hold o'er my being absolute sway:
Filled with thy Spirit till all shall see
Christ only, always, living in me!"

"'Tis not enough to save our souls,
To shun the eternal fires;
The thought of God will rouse the heart
To more sublime desires.
God only is the creature's home."

"Come Holy Spirit, still my heart
With gentleness divine:
Indwelling peace thou canst impart,
O make that blessing mine!"

"Take my heart, it is thine own,
It shall be thy royal throne.
Take myself, and I shall be
Ever, only all for thee."

"My God! I know, I feel thee mine,
And will not quit my claim,
Till all I have is lost in thine
And all renewed I am.
Refining fire, go through my heart,
Illuminate my soul,
Scatter thy light through every part,
And sanctify the whole.
My steadfast soul, from falling free,
Shall then no longer move;
But Christ be all the world to me,
And all my heart be love."

"There is life amongst some of the Methodists, and they will grow because they preach growing doctrines" is a note in Asbury's Journal. Every preacher at the door of the Conference is asked: "Do you expect to be made perfect in love in this life? Are you groaning after it?" For children and adults at baptism the church prays, "Grant

that all carnal affections may die in them, and that all things belonging to the Spirit may live and grow in them." At the celebration of the Lord's Supper, the church intercedes: "Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and worthily magnify thy holy name, through Christ our Lord," and for a benediction we pronounce in the spirit of the New Testament: "May the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God." "Press purity on thy soul," exclaims Asbury, "on the souls of the preachers and people there, that is the spot we fail. Our glory is departing. We must preach holiness plainly, positively, now, to be obtained by grace."

Preachers and members are surrounded by one mighty hope and urged on by one divine ideal. We would be poor indeed without this hope, and useless in the world without it. Perfection is not in attainment, but in progress toward the heart of God. We believe that "all we have willed or hoped or dreamed of good shall exist." Thus plain people hope and strive and pray and rejoice in an ever enlarging harmony with the nature of God.

"O thou who camest from above,
The pure celestial fire to impart,
Kindle a flame of sacred love
On the mean altar of my heart.

"There let it for thy glory burn,
With inextinguishable blaze,
And trembling to its source return
In humble love and fervent praise.

"Jesus, confirm my heart's desire,
To work, and speak, and think, for thee;
Still let me guard the holy fire
And still stir up thy gift in me:

"Ready for all thy perfect will,
My acts of faith and love repeat,
Till death thy endless mercies seal,
And make the sacrifice complete."