

THE PECULIARITIES
OF
METHODIST DOCTRINE.

AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED IN THE OPEN SESSION OF THE IRISH
WESLEYAN METHODIST CONFERENCE.

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TO THE
PRESIDENT AND MEMBERS
OF THE
IRISH WESLEYAN METHODIST CONFERENCE,
RECENTLY ASSEMBLED IN CORK
THIS ADDRESS
THE GREATER PART OF WHICH WAS DELIVERED
IN THEIR HEARING,
IS DEDICATED WITH GREAT RESPECT.

JULY, 1873

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AN ADDRESS.

MR. PRESIDENT,

It is needless that I should occupy time with formal greetings. Our mutual introductions may be supposed by this time to be already over, whether as it respects the Conference now assembled, or the congregation gathered with us. Suppressing, therefore, much of a mere personal nature that it would be very pleasant to say, I will proceed to discharge the more difficult duty which you, Sir, in harmony with my own inclination, have authoritatively committed to me, and express a few thoughts which have been engrossing my mind on our common relations in Methodism, as based upon our common relation to the Lord Jesus Christ, whom we regard as the real Founder of Methodism.

The term Methodism is one that has grown to be very large and suggestive. It means much more now than when it was the watchword of contempt poured upon those who were counted a body of religious fanatics. It has taken its place in the vocabulary of the Christian Church. It has become the designation of one of the most widely diffused forms of modern Christianity; of one whose ramifications bid fair to pervade the world. Like the holy law of which it is the herald, it proclaims the glory of God through all the earth; there is no speech nor language where its voice is not heard. Its missionaries encounter almost every kind of heathenism; it is diffusing its leaven through almost every form of corrupt Christianity; it is silently impressing its influence, acknowledged or unacknowledged, upon all the uncorrupt churches of Christendom; whilst, as an independent system, it is laying its firm foundations in every soil. You have, Sir, given us a luminous summary of the numerical statistics of the several branches of Methodism,

in relation to the other denominations of the Christian world. But you have, at the same time, forbidden us to dwell with complacency on this view of the subject. It is not on numbers, or ubiquity, or aggressive zeal, that we lay stress; these notes of commendation might be pleaded by religious bodies that have no other ground of rejoicing. We do well to consider, on such an occasion as this, the character of those peculiarities which may be fairly regarded as the secret of our extension and influence throughout the world. To some of them I propose to address myself this evening.

It will not be thought presumptuous on my part if I speak on this subject as a representative of the theology of Methodism. That theology is the living energy of the entire community: not an after-thought, as many seem to suppose, engrafted on a system that owed its existence only to religious emotion. Its doctrine is, and always has been, compact, systematic, and complete; embracing the Catholic verities of the Christian Faith, but exhibiting in certain departments a stamp that marks it as unique among the confessions of Christendom. Its ministers and people, in England and Ireland and everywhere, account their theology the richest heritage of their traditions, and know well how to defend it, even as it is their glory to preach it. Not that Methodism has received a new dispensation of the Christian Faith. We are not modern Montanists, deeming ourselves the peculiar instruments of the Holy Ghost, who has seen fit to impart to us a new Pentecostal manifestation of truth. We have not founded any Catholic and Apostolic Church, charged with the mission of reviving doctrines and usages lost through long intervening ages. We do not believe that any cardinal doctrines have ever been lost; and as to the miraculous gifts and effusions of the Holy Ghost which glorified the first days, we believe that, like the sheet which Peter saw, they served their purpose for a season, and were taken up again into heaven. We do not claim to have added a solitary tenet to the Christian confession; or to have revived one practice which would otherwise have been forgotten. We claim only to be among those who firmly and tenaciously hold fast the Faith once delivered to the saints, giving special prominence to some aspects of it which have been too much hidden from the eyes of men. No doubt these special points are of great importance, and in a certain sense stamp a character upon our doctrine.

But we do not regard these points as constituting our theological prerogative; we think that we are only the instruments used by the Holy Spirit to teach our brethren around us what their own principles should dispose them to accept. Meanwhile, it is our rejoicing that, as to the whole compass of the Christian Faith, we are one with the general confession of evangelical Christendom.

Before referring to any particular doctrine, it is right that I should mention the fidelity our community has exhibited towards the Scriptures of Revelation. Speaking broadly, there is nothing here that is peculiar to us. The formularies of other churches are faithful on this point; and we are peculiar, if at all, simply in this, that by the grace of God we are, as a Christian body, faithful to our own confessions. We note with sorrow the growth of tendencies in the churches around us which insidiously, but surely, sap the foundations of the Word of God. There are some who go far towards the Roman error, which mars a sound definition of inspiration by enlarging the Bible beyond the Spirit's limits, and by giving a concurrent endowment of inspiration to the living church, represented by one man; thus introducing two Voices, one of which may neutralise, contradict, and violate the other. Others, in the opposite direction, are taking away the authority of Scripture, by exalting very highly a certain abstraction of the Divine voice in the Bible, but leaving it utterly uncertain where to find it. We may regard it as one of our peculiarities, that throughout our whole communion—I speak now for ourselves in this United Kingdom—and throughout the thousands of our ministry, there is one unanimous and unhesitating declaration of confidence in the supreme authority of the Scriptures as the Standard of Faith, the Directory of Morals, and the Charter of Christian privilege and hope. Whilst many in all communities are surrendering principle after principle, making concession after concession, until there seems to be nothing left to fight for, we appear to have the peculiarity of requiring all who guard and teach the Christian doctrine among us to utter on this subject an unfaltering confession. We are not glad to have to number this among our differences.

Referring now to those specific doctrinal points which are my subject, I have first to indicate that there is a wide round of doctrine in which we have no peculiarities; holding as we do the confessions

of the Church, as held in British Christendom. At the same time, there are slight shades of difference almost everywhere, in what may be called Redemptional Theology. These are the result of the fact that Methodism is *sui generis* and unique. This is not the time for dwelling on the origin of this system; that would be another topic; I shall adhere to my one subject. Suffice that such as it is in our hands to defend and propagate, it is itself and no other. It is not bound to any articles or confessions, though generally faithful to those of the Church out of which it sprang. It is Arminian in general, though not limited by those superficial views in which Arminianism has receded too far from its antagonist. It is opposed to Calvinism in many respects, though grateful to that system for some elements of doctrine, for which Christianity is much indebted to it. In short, it allows great latitude everywhere, save in those doctrines which have been by all men held fundamental.

It is in the Mediatorial work of our Lord and Saviour that we have the fundamental subject of Christian Theology. Here we maintain the doctrine that is common to all evangelical confessions, so far as concerns the propitiation for human sin in the vicarious sacrifice of the incarnate Son of God. The definitions on this subject that are given in the best formularies we also hold. But, as we are dwelling upon our peculiarities, we may find some important shades of distinction here.

For instance, marking the relations of the systems around us, there are two from which we widely differ. The one is that of those who hold the vicarious sacrifice of Christ, but limit it in its sovereign and sole efficacy to the original sin of the race, washed away in baptism through the application of the Saviour's merits. For all subsequent transgressions, man's own satisfaction must be added to the Saviour's merit. Moreover, the one eternal offering is continued on altars which man has raised and not God; in a tabernacle which God has not pitched but man. From these errors that defeat the atonement we, of course, turn away. On the other side, there is the error of those who limit the great propitiation in another manner. They make the oblation of Christ an offering in the stead of the individual objects of electing love, in whose place the Redeemer stands, satisfying every demand of justice and law for them alone, and as individuals. In opposition to these, we maintain that

the Saviour assumed the place of mankind ; that it was the sin of the race laid upon Him that He voluntarily bore in His own body to the cross ; and that His death was the reconciliation of the world as such to God.

Between these opposite errors, as we must hold them to be, there is another against which we equally protest : that of those who make the atoning sufferings of the Redeemer an expedient to work upon the human heart by a display of the Divine attributes. With some it is the justice of God, as the moral Ruler of the universe, that is displayed : in no other manner could the Eternal more impressively declare His righteousness in the forgiveness of human sin, than by first visiting it upon the soul of His Son, the voluntary representative of the race. With some it is the love of God which, in the person of the Son, sympathised with the misery of human sin, and by the might and sorrow of self-sacrifice would win man's soul from evil. Now we must needs agree with both these, for the Scripture asserts both. But they are harmonised in another, and still deeper truth. These attributes before they were displayed in the cross, were reconciled in God Himself, whose love provided the sacrifice which His justice demanded : both love and justice making the atonement an absolute necessity. If we hold any peculiarity here, it is perhaps that, while we firmly maintain this last truth, we give more full scope to the former two than most other advocates of the central doctrine permit themselves.

But it is in the administration of the finished work of Christ by the Holy Ghost that our theology stands out most distinctly. The term we use is itself conciliatory : it is not the application of redemption, which would suggest a too passive condition on the part of man ; it is not the appropriation of redemption, which would make man too active and independent. It gives the Holy Spirit His honour in the work of human salvation.

We hold that the Gospel of the grace of God is literally sent to the world ; and that the entire family of man partakes of the benefit of redemption. Our doctrine looks out upon the Court of the Gentiles, or the outer court, with assurance that there is already a light and influence there that prepares the way for that Gospel to all hearts. We believe that the Holy Spirit has been given as such to mankind ; not indeed as the indwelling Spirit, or even as the Com-

forter, but as the Spirit of conviction, sent forth from Christ to bring men back to Him. We steadfastly believe in a universal preparatory grace, the result of the presence and operations of the Holy Ghost given to Adam and his descendants, "to abide with them for ever" as the herald and forerunner of Christ. This gives to our preaching its character of catholic freeness and simple sincerity, an unreserve and alacrity and vigour which no other doctrine could inspire.

Here again we claim no monopoly. Ours is not the only confession that makes the Redeemer the "light that enlighteneth every man that cometh into the world." In this we greatly rejoice: especially in the fact that the heart of modern Christendom is, in spite of every theory, becoming constantly more and more enlarged. But, while we admit this, we still must remember our peculiarity. Many teach and preach a universal Gospel, which is nevertheless fettered and cramped by some secret theory of reserve in God's decrees: from the necessity of such violent compromises between theory and practice we are happily exempt. Others, and in far larger numbers, agree with us in the universality of the benefit of redemption, but carry their catholicity of spirit to a latitudinarian excess. They do not look out into the court beyond as the abode of utter darkness and death until the Spirit here and there kindles the spark of life and light. So far they speak our language, and seem to be one with our doctrine. But, alas, they go to the opposite extreme. They make the common benefits of redemption all its benefit. The voice they send out into the world is not, "Come out and be ye separate, and I will receive you!" but "Ye are all children of God through Christ, the root and life of humanity!" Thus we have to protest against both these forms also of error; the truth lying here as usual between two extremes. We insist on it that there are the preparations for life which are not life itself; that there is a veil or wall of partition between the region of preliminary grace and the inner sanctuary. We meet both errors by asserting that the preparations of the heart of man for regenerating grace are everywhere, while at the same time those influences are only the preparations for a renewal of the soul which is beyond conviction and repentance and even conversion to God.

When the penitent and believing sinner is admitted within that

veil into the experience of personal salvation, he enters into the enjoyment of privileges which we, as a community, describe generally as other Christians do, but with certain peculiarities once more for which we must earnestly plead. Like others, we regard all these privileges as one in our union with Christ, in whom we are complete; like others, we regard them as administered by the Spirit externally, and inwrought by Him within the soul: that is, we hold that they all have a forensic and imputative character, as well as an inward and moral one. Perhaps our peculiarity, however, may be thus stated. We believe, and constantly maintain, that in every department of Christian privilege the Holy Ghost imparts to the believer the full assurance of his participation. Moreover, we also maintain that in every department the same Spirit bestows the perfect enjoyment of their several privileges on all who comply with His conditions. In other words, we preach the testimony of the Holy Ghost in the heart of the believer as the common prerogative; and further, the attainableness in this life of a state of entire sanctification and acceptableness in the sight of God.

But we must consider what these privileges are. They have been arranged, classified, and set in their evangelical order after a great variety of methods. For my present purpose this one may be conveniently adopted. There is, first, a circle of blessings which belong to the Mediatorial Court of Christ, where law and righteousness reign, and the Atonement is a satisfaction to justice. Its blessings are the remission of the penalty of sin, and the positive acceptance of the sinner as righteous, in Christ the ground of his righteousness. Then the scene changes, and the Court becomes the Father's house, where the Advocate is the Brother of the race, where sonship is the mercy imparted, externally in adoption, internally in regeneration. Again the scene changes, and the house expands into a holy temple, where sanctification presides, and the Judge, who is the Father, is also the God. There, Christ is the High Priest; man, no longer at the bar, or sitting at the table, is always before the altar of his consecration. These three spheres of evangelical blessing are really one; but the phraseology pertaining to each is marked off with the most exact precision throughout the New-Testament Scriptures. But, as there is nothing peculiar here save the arrangement, I will not dwell upon this.

It is more important to justify the prominence which our theology gives to the witness of the Holy Spirit as the privilege of the believer. We give it that prominence because the Scripture gives it. Any unprejudiced reader, who opens the New Testament, and studies the descriptions of Christian experience, and marks the examples living there before his eyes, must come to the conclusion that all Christian people are supposed to be assured of their personal relation to God, knowing the things they freely receive. They are in the Lord, and they are conscious of it. So plain is this, that no Christian confession of faith has ever denied it; on the contrary, all make provision for it in some way or other. Methodist theology has no desire to appropriate this doctrine as its own in any sense. Yet, as I am speaking of peculiarities, some characteristic points in our teaching may be alluded to, having reference both to what we hold and what we deny.

The method of statement may vary; but you will recognise the old doctrine when I describe it as running through the entire circle of evangelical privilege. For instance, in the Court Mediatorial, where righteousness is supreme, the witness of the Holy Ghost is borne to the troubled spirit, "Thy sins be forgiven thee": the punishment of the sinner is remitted, his person is justified and invested with all the prerogatives of righteousness. The same Spirit leads the sinner, as it were, to the feet of the Father, and becomes within him "the Spirit of adoption," witnessing that he is a child of God, not now to his spirit but with his spirit. For the blessed feeling that cries "Father" is in the Christian's own soul; it is his own if anything can be his own: while, at the same time, it is the voice of the Holy Ghost within him. Then the same Spirit leads him to the altar, and in the temple seals him for God, according to that Scripture, "In whom, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise." When I say "then," I do not mean that there is any order and succession in these testimonies. They are one: to the conscience, as touching the law; with the spirit, in the Father's house; upon the whole person, in the holy temple. They agree in one: the witness of forgiveness is assurance concerning the past; the Spirit of adoption is an ever-present assurance; the seal of consecration points onward to the day of redemption. But, as

they agree in one, so they cannot be disjoined. The Christian who lives in the clear light of his privilege knows that he is not under condemnation ; feels a higher Spirit than his own, mingling His inspirations with the filial feeling of adoption ; and is secretly conscious that the Holy Ghost is within him, the pledge of his full redemption. Much might be said as to the various relations of this three-one testimony ; but I must pass to our differences with our brethren on the subject.

We do not strictly link this witness with sacramental means and ordinances. There is a widespread theory of assurance which makes it dependent on priestly absolution, either with or without a new sacrament devised for the purpose. Even then there is a certain limitation in the sinner's confidence ; there is a difference between the eternal penalty and the temporal, and the assurance varies accordingly. Our doctrine does not depend on any sacrament or human absolving word : it is the direct witness of the Spirit, as alone having in His power the things of Christ—the supreme and only Confessor, the supreme and only Absolver. On the other hand, our doctrine is very far from sympathising with the mystical assurance that is quite independent of the means of grace. We hold that the sacraments are abiding pledges of the Divine grace within the Church ; and that the individual believer receives his blessings through the word of promise applied to him by the Spirit who uses that word as His first ordinary instrument. There are to be found multitudes in the Christian Church who rush, as men's wont is, to the opposite extreme from that of sacramentalism. Their ambition is, to hold direct communion with God ; they seek, as it were, prematurely to behold Him face to face ; they rise above all subordinate means ; even the Bible is beneath their feet ; Jacob's ladder between heaven and earth is not ethereal enough for them. Hence their assurance is always liable to the penalty of presumption. The inward light may sometimes thus arise in the soul ; but that is not the ordinary manner of the Lord God with man. Our teaching sends sinners where you, Sir, sent them last night : to the Spirit, with the cry on their lips, " We would see Jesus ! " whose Person and work, as we then heard, are the foundation of the word of promise, which faith inwrought of the Holy Ghost, lays hold on.

Our peculiarities do not end here. We do not believe, as many around us do, that this assurance is ordinarily separated from the living conviction of a perfect faith: though faith is not itself assurance, the one follows so hard upon the other, that they are in the supreme blessedness of appropriating trust indistinguishable. "Who loved me, and gave Himself for me" is a solitary expression in St. Paul's writings concerning finished faith as to its object, exercise, and prerogative of assurance. We do not hold that the privilege of assurance is bestowed as a special blessing, vouchsafed to God's elect as the fruit of long discipline, and the Divine seal of long perseverance. In this our doctrine goes immeasurably beyond the teaching of some confessions of faith. But these same confessions go beyond us in another respect. When they teach assurance, it is an assurance made too sure; it is all embracing and eternal, including past, present, and future in one transcendent confidence which nothing in the future, the present, or the past, can ever avail to disturb. Our doctrine of assurance makes it no more than the assurance *of faith*, for the time that now is; all that concerns the future belongs to assurance, indeed, but only the assurance *of hope*. Probation governs all our theology. We do not believe that God has taken man from under that original law of test in which he was originally created. Final perseverance is a grace, an ethical privilege, the result of probationary diligence under grace; but not an assured provision of the covenant of redemption.

Before passing from this, let me be permitted to speak a word to the congregation gathered with us. You know, brethren, how incessantly this elect privilege of the Elect of God is set before you; great is your responsibility in hearing. Let me urge you not to live without it. Ask that Divine Person whose office it is to bestow it, to give to you, to preserve in you, this sacred assurance. Be not content with dim, uncertain, and cloudy apprehensions of Christ, and of your relation to Him, and of His relation to you. If you are in the midway condition which "sees men as trees walking," seek that second touch which will enable you to "see every man clearly," to see your Saviour clearly. It is the will of the Holy Ghost to manifest the Son, even as the Son has manifested the Father; not more did the Redeemer rejoice in ministering to our redemption, than the Spirit will rejoice to apply it to your souls.

Let us all keep in memory the earnest words by which the Ex-President has lately made Pentecostal blessing familiar to our thoughts; and those other earnest words by which one well known to us all has impressed on our hearts the mystery of the "Tongue of fire." What is still better, let us habitually go to the Day itself to learn its lessons. There we see the ancient symbol appearing for the last time before it gave place to the great reality which abides with us for ever, the sealing Spirit which rested upon each and all, both ministers and people, in that first assembly. May we all be baptised afresh with this unction of the Holy One! each assured of his acceptance, each having within him the sanctifying fire, and each having his lips touched afresh to declare in the Church, and to the world, the wonderful works of God.

Another doctrine which is in some sense peculiar to us is that which declares the entireness of Christian sanctification, the most glorious privilege of the life of faith upon earth. We believe that the Divine Spirit who administers redemption is as mighty in administering it as the incarnate Son was in accomplishing it: the atonement is not more certainly a finished work than the application of it is finished, so far as concerns the removal of iniquity. But this implies the putting away of sin in the present life; for the atonement, as such, ends its history before the return of Christ, who, when He comes a second time, will come without the imputation of human sin, and without the means of its expiation. We need no other argument: the Spirit's "It is finished" must needs follow the Son's, and in a voice that speaks on earth. Taking it as a whole, and in the various forms the doctrine assumes, it is undoubtedly one of our prerogatives to defend and teach it. I do not say, long may it continue so; rather, may all Christian men soon join with us.

Meanwhile, we must hold it fast, and declare it all the more tenaciously because many whose theology has been an honour to Christianity, and their lives an honour to their theology, are our most determined opponents; opposing us here, strange to say, more vehemently than anywhere else. Let us, as guardians of Methodist theology, teach it in our seminaries; let us preach it from our pulpits: yes, preach it, all of us, even though we preach it as a blessing which we see yet as it were afar off; provided always that

we have set the desire of our hearts where our experience is hoping to follow. If this profound desire is in our hearts, it is enough ; otherwise, indeed, this and all other doctrines must needs be out of place on our lips. If we are bent on knowing the full power and perfect work of the Divine Spirit, then we must preach this privilege of the Christian covenant. In this case the law is not, "We speak that we do know, and testify that which we have seen," in our own personal experience. That law is not universal ; ill for the Christian Church if it were.

But we must be careful to learn from our enemies what those evils are in our teaching that fairly expose the doctrine to misconception. We must preach what we find in the Scripture on this subject, and as we find it there. There is no one point on which we ought to be more careful of that precise fidelity to the Word of God which is our safeguard. Where a tenet is disputed, let us adhere to Scriptural phraseology : then we are safe. And in this case the Bible is our strength. Let us not establish peculiarities beyond those which are forced upon us. Let us not erect the means of attainment, the instantaneousness or otherwise, the evidences which seal it, into doctrines of our faith. Suffice that we know that the body of sin is to be destroyed ; that the perfected operation of the love of God within us may enkindle perfect love in return ; and that the Word of God acknowledges a state of perfect holiness as the result. The most exact New-Testament exposition will defend us at all points ; and we need not be afraid of any argument that may be brought against us. Entire sanctification from sin, perfect consecration to God, and Christian or evangelical perfection of holiness, are terms we need not be afraid boldly to maintain. The word "perfect" is not one that any Christian would use of himself ; but the term "perfection" we need not shrink from, when protected by those two adjectives. With God all things are possible.

But the matter of supreme importance here is, to vindicate our doctrine by making the attainment of this entire redemption from sin, consecration to God, and holiness of life, the object of our steadfast pursuit. We may theologically sustain our positions ; and it is our duty to defend this most precious provision of the covenant of grace from the hands of its enemies. But the best argument in its defence is the silent assertion of its truth in our lives. We must

make a distinction here between the assertion of the doctrine and the profession of the experience : we cannot too earnestly and openly profess our faith in the truth ; but none among us should be in haste to make redemption from the corruption of the heart, or his perfect love to God, the subject of his confession. The great point is to reach this state ; not to declare that we have reached it. The only confession it admits is the negative one : that of a life not inconsistent with the fact. Let us then resolve, by Divine grace, to take courage from the promises, and perfect holiness in the fear of God. Let us not despond because of many failures ; we have failed, possibly, because we have not sought our privileges in the right way. Either we have expected too much from the instant act of the Spirit, or we have thought too much of our own effort. We must look for the consummation of grace to the more abundant effusion of the love of God in our hearts, even to perfection ; and this is the sovereign act of Divine grace. But we must look for it in the way of entire obedience, self-renouncing imitation of Christ in charity, and the habitual dwelling in God by the devotion of living faith. "Herein," says St. John, our great teacher on this subject, when speaking of these three methods, "is our love made perfect : " made perfect, that is, not by our own effort, but by Divine power. Strong in the assurance, brethren, that our doctrine is true, let us each intently resolve this day to prove its truth.

Between the peculiarities of our doctrine, and the peculiarities of our fellowship, there is a strict connection ; the term fellowship being used in the wide acceptation in which it is found in the Scripture. Here again we are marked out among the communities of Christendom ; standing alone in many things, whether for admiration or for reproach.

The first use of the word in the history of the New-Testament Church requires us to understand it of the bond that binds ministers and people in the ordinances and polity of the Christian religion. It is our privilege to combine in our system most of the advantages of other systems, without their exaggerations and incongruities. We protest vehemently, and cannot too vehemently protest, against the hierarchical theory with its assumptions ; but we have an organisation of our own that in some respects, and taken as a whole, its evils balanced by its good, is as fine and finished a

specimen of evangelical church order as the world has seen. Far from perfect, either in the things or in the names given them, it is as near the ideal as it has been permitted to visible Christian politics to go. The best of every several form meets in this. We have an episcopacy which is more like that of the Epistles and first Christian century than the diocesan episcopacy of later times. Yet we are thoroughly Presbyterian, as witness our present synodical assembly. We are not Congregationalists: we are very far removed from their theory; and yet every one of our societies has its own internal self-governing functions and prerogatives. Whatever opinion may be formed of the aggregate result, or of the nomenclature adopted, we have every reason to rejoice over the combination of elements. We avoid the extremes, and lose nothing that belongs to the mean between them. We have no priesthood; we have no lay-eldership. We have not three orders; but we have the threefold office. Let us rejoice over our peculiarities, as they serve well the common interest of the one kingdom that is more than all organisation.

We have, however, our own conventional idea of fellowship, of which, doubtless, all are thinking while I speak. Throughout the world, but especially in Great Britain, the Methodist people hold fast the tradition of a Christian communion which confesses the name of Jesus not only before men generally, as in the Eucharist, but in the assemblies of the brethren themselves. Not that we have a monopoly of this kind of fellowship. Meetings for mutual confession, and edification, and counsel, have been always aimed at in the purest ages and purest forms of the Church; but we are the only community that has incorporated them in the very fibre of our constitution. Growing out of our society character, this institution we have aimed to interweave with the organisation of the Church also: not yet with perfect success, but with results that encourage the hope of perfect success. As it is rooted in our ecclesiastical economy, so it is rooted in the affections of our people. No form in which the social element of Christianity has found expression has enlisted more universal enthusiasm in its favour than the old class meeting. Other forms of confederation have been gloried in, lived for, and sometimes died for, in the history of Christendom. But I question if any institution, grafted on Scriptural precept, has ever commanded such widespread and pervading homage of all

orders of the devout, or approved itself by such practical and irresistible evidences of good, as the Methodist class-meeting. This is of itself, or ought to be, its sufficient defence. Incautious and unskilful hands have been meddling with it of late; but in vain. It may admit of much improvement in detail and in administration, but its foundations are secure and inviolable.

In our zeal for this characteristic of our fellowship, we are, perhaps, in danger of forgetting another; that, namely, of the common bond that unites our members in the service of religion. This is that "fellowship unto the Gospel" of which St. Paul to the Philippians speaks. It has been our peculiarity from the beginning to make all our people fellow-labourers in our general work. The entire machinery of our system is set in motion by one Spirit, who gives to every man a "manifestation to profit withal." We hold that the differing gifts of the Holy Ghost are distributed throughout the Church; and that every man, and every woman too, has a distinct vocation, and a distinct responsibility. We always remember that the Pentecostal symbol which rested upon each became to each a tongue of fire: that all who were sealed, were sealed for service. Not that we stand alone in this, or suppose ourselves superior to others. It is a peculiarity which we rejoice to share with many other churches; some of which have, perhaps, learned our lesson, and in some respects may have "bettered their instruction." Be that as it may, we must never forget our law of fellowship for universal service. As ministers we must mark and use our people's gifts, as well as watch over their souls. As members of the general body, we must seek to consecrate our several abilities to the common good. This has been hitherto our strength, and in this may our glorying never be made void!

Once more, our fellowship as a people is with the Catholic Church of the common Lord. Much as we value what we are constrained to call our peculiarities, we value our heritage in Christ and His kingdom upon earth infinitely more. What we have, and others have not, we would communicate to them if we could; we have no bread that we desire to eat in secret, save indeed that Bread which is secret to all who eat it. We have no stolen waters; we live not by a fountain sealed, or in a garden enclosed, from the common Church of the Lord. We trace our doctrine to the holy

Apostles, or, higher than that, to the Voice of eternal truth. Our traditions go up to the most sacred of all antiquity. Our specific teachings, and usages, and discipline, we believe to have been general in the days where alone authority in these matters reigns. At all points, and in all respects, we are one with the true Church of all ages. We hold communion in heart, and as occasion offers in act also, with all who have kept the faith; nor do we close our communion against any whom the Lord accepts. Our theology reaps in almost all fields; and, such as it is, has been from the beginning under obligation to almost all schools. We freely use the practical and expository writings of other churches for our edification. Perhaps no men set more value on their own type of doctrine than the ministers of Methodism; but I am sure that there are no men whose libraries generally are better supplied with representative authors of all classes. And, on the whole, it may be said that there is as much of the truly Catholic sentiment among this people as can be found anywhere in the Christian world.

Let me point an application here, especially to my younger brethren in this ministry. My subject is the *differentia*, so to speak, of Methodist doctrine, and with reference to that alone I speak now and have spoken all along. You will do well to study the things that distinguish us, as they are stated in the writings of the early Methodist divines. You will see the process by which our specific doctrines, or methods of stating doctrine, were gradually formed; and this will teach you their real importance. It will give you a warm and living interest in them; but, more than that, it will show you what they really are, to what extent they are rigidly defined, and to what extent they have the freedom rather of Biblical than of systematic theology. If you are beginning your course of Methodist theological instruction, do not descend to the moderns until you have imbued your mind with the teaching of our standard writings, not forgetting to add those of that divine who is the most influential in one department of our literature—Mr. Fletcher. The theology of the outer court is nowhere taught as he teaches it. This reminds me, brethren, of your own peculiar relations to other Christian communities in this country. Probably you are, through the operation of many causes, brought into more direct contact with certain schools of theology than any other

branch of the Methodist people. Let me entreat you to study the points of difference in their writings as well as your own ; at any rate, to study them with a catholic readiness to admit what is good in the principles of your opponents. There is a method of conducting controversy which is most serviceable to theological exactitude ; there is also one which tends to cramp the mind and rob theology of all its grace. Let yours be the better method. For instance, you are perpetually reminded of the presence of what is called Calvinism. Now, while there are some Calvinistic views of the Gospel which we, as a people, seem to have been raised up almost expressly to oppose, there are some most precious principles in that system that we ought to reverence and hold fast. The recoil to the opposite extreme is not without much harm and loss. For their defence of the reality and terror of sin, the reality and definiteness of the Atonement, and the reality and pervadingness of the believer's union with Christ, we owe the divines of that school a deep debt. Let us hold fast the good, and not surrender it simply because they have infected it with a certain evil of their own. You have opponents of a very different class ; those who defend the ancient and corrupt system which we call Romanism. Not that you have any special pre-eminence in this conflict : it has no more determined enemy than Methodism generally ; and wherever the two systems meet—they are almost equally ubiquitous—they must be in collision. Let me advise you to study this controversy also in the light of its great principles. Master the theology of the sacraments which Rome has superadded to those “ordained of Christ himself,” and you will be masters of the whole subject. Not only so, you will greatly enlarge and enrich your theology generally by the process. Above all, remember that the Roman doctrine is one that cannot be successfully encountered by anything but intelligent argument ; declamation does more harm than good. There is no system of theology more compact and dogmatic ; its worst errors are those which are most systematically defended ; and, if you would do well the good work which your fathers have transmitted to you, you must know what the teaching is that you assault. You must use arms of precision. And, so doing, the sun in the heavens is not more clear than the certainty of your final success.

I must come to a close : and where more fitly than at the feet of Christ, and of Christ crucified ! Much has been said about Methodism and its peculiarities : said with the purest intention, and with the most utter absence of sectarian feeling. But the very fact that we can speak of our peculiarities suggests the thought of that one body in Christ which has no peculiarity save the eternal blessedness of being His peculiar people. Let us come to that sacred Presence, before which St. Paul brings the sectarian Corinthians. As we approach let us remember the words which guard the access, "that no flesh should glory in His presence ;" and all that is of the "flesh" in Methodism let us forget and leave behind us. Let us adore, and receive, and bless Him "who of God is made unto us Wisdom, Righteousness and Sanctification, and Redemption : " unto us and unto all the elect people of God. Then may we arise, on the other side of the cross or the throne, and go on our way rejoicing : "Let him that glorieth glory in the Lord."