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THE  
WESLEY MEMORIAL VOLUME;

OR,

WESLEY AND THE METHODIST MOVEMENT,

JUDGED BY NEARLY ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY WRITERS,  
LIVING OR DEAD.

EDITED BY

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## METHODIST DOCTRINE.

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THE term Methodism was, some hundred years since, a watch-word of contempt for a body of fanatics supposed to hold some new religious doctrines, to profess some strange experiences, and to arrogate to themselves a peculiar commission from Heaven. To many it is a watch-word of reproach still. But it has, nevertheless, rooted itself firmly in the nomenclature of the Christian Church. Evangelical Christendom generally agrees with those who bear it to accept the term as a human designation of a system of thought and action which it has pleased the Head of the Church to take into his plans for the spread of his kingdom in these later days. Its history has produced a very general conviction that the Holy Spirit, the Lord and Giver of life ecclesiastical, has added this to the corporate bodies of our common Christianity. Meanwhile, not solicitous about the judgments of men, it is commending itself to God by doing faithfully the work appointed for it in the world. Its sound—or rather, the sound of the Gospel by its lips—has gone out into all the earth. It is slowly diffusing its leaven through almost every form of corrupt Christianity; it is silently impressing its influence, acknowledged or unacknowledged, upon the uncorrupt Churches of Christendom; while, as an independent and self-contained organization, it is erecting its firm superstructure in many lands.

This last fact implies that the system has its varieties of form. Methodism is a genus of many species. The central term has gathered round it various adjectives or predicates which express more or less important differences. But the term itself remains a bond of union among all these; a bond which will be, as it has been hitherto, permanent and indestructible, if the type of doctrine of which it is the symbol shall be maintained in its integ-

riety. For, though Methodism began as a life, that life was quickened and nourished by its teaching; its teaching has sustained it in vigor; and to its teaching is mainly committed its destiny in the future. The object of the following pages will be to indicate briefly, but sharply, that type of doctrine. It must be premised, however, that there will be no systematic exhibition of its tenets illustrated by definitions, quotations, and historical developments generally. The scope assigned to this paper in the programme of the present volume allows only of a few general remarks.

The subject takes us back to the beginning of the great movement. There are two errors which we have at once to confront: that of assigning a doctrinal origin to the system, and that of making its origin entirely independent of doctrine.

The founders of Methodism—*sit venia verbo*—did not, like the Reformers of the sixteenth century, find themselves face to face with a Christianity penetrated through and through by error. They accepted the doctrinal standards of the English Church; and the subscription both of their hands and of their hearts they never revoked. What is more, they adhered to the emphatic interpretation of these standards as contained in liturgical and other formularies. Nothing was further from their thought than to amend either the one or the other in the dogmatic sense. Though they clearly perceived that certain truths and certain aspects of truth had been kept too much in the background, and therefore gave them special prominence, they never erected these revived doctrines into a new confession. They did not isolate the truths they so vehemently preached; but preached them as necessary to the integrity of the Christian faith. The strength of their incessant contention was this, that men had ceased to see and feel what they nevertheless professed to believe. It was a widespread delusion concerning the Revival in the last century, and it is not quite exploded in this century, that its promoters pretended to be the recipients and organs of a new dispensation: modern Montanists, as it were,

deeming themselves the special instruments of the Holy Ghost, charged to revive apostolic doctrines and usages which had been lost through intervening ages. Neither earlier nor later Methodism has ever constructed a creed or confession of faith. It never believed that any cardinal doctrine has been lost; still less, that its own commission was to restore such forgotten tenets. Its modest and simple revivals of early practice are such as Christian communities in all ages have felt it their privilege to attempt; but these have never touched the hem of the garment of Christian primitive truth. To sum up in one word: Methodism, as the aggregate unity of many bodies of Christian people, is not based upon a confession, essentially and at all points peculiar to itself, which all who adhere to its organization must hold.

On the other hand, it is no less an error to disregard the theological character which was stamped from the very beginning on this branch of the great Revival. Never was there a work wrought by the Holy Ghost in the Christian Church which was not the result of the enforcement of Christian truth; and never was such a work permanent which did not lay the foundations of its durability in more or less systematized doctrine. Now it was one of the peculiarities of Methodism that it threw around all its organization, and every department of it, a doctrinal defense. The discourses which produced so wonderful an effect in every corner of England were, as delivered, and are now, as preserved, models of theological precision. There is not one of them which does not pay the utmost homage to dogmatic truth; and it is a fact of profound importance in the history of this community, that the very sermons which, under God, gave the movement its life, still form the standard of its theological profession. No more remarkable tribute to the connection between ecclesiastical life and ecclesiastical doctrine can be found in the history of Christendom. It is customary to ascribe the stability of the new economy to the wonderful organizing genius of its founder; it may be questioned



whether his zeal for solid dogma has not a right to be included. Certain it is, that early Methodism had a sound theological training ; theology preached in its discourses, sang in its hymns, shaped its terms of communion, and presided in the discussions of its conferences. Hence its stability in comparison of other results of the general awakening. The mystical Pietists of Germany, quickened by the same breath, threw off, to a great extent, the fetters of dogmatic creed ; they retired from the external Church, disowned its formularies, gathered themselves within a garden doubly inclosed, cultivated the most spiritual and unworldly personal godliness, but made no provision for permanence and for posterity. Methodism, on the other hand, while steadily aiming at the perfection of the interior life kept a vigilant eye on the construction of its peculiar type of theology. That was always in steady progress. It had not reached its consummation when the old Societies of the eighteenth century were consolidated into the Church of the nineteenth. But all the elements were there : some of them, indeed, indeterminate and confused ; some of them involving troublesome inconsistencies ; others of them giving latitude for abiding differences of opinion ; but on the whole supplying the materials of what may now be called a set type of confessional theology.

For that type no name already current can be found ; in default of any other, it must be called the Methodist type. But that term is no sooner written than it demands protection. It may seem at once to suggest the idea of an eclectic system of opinion. But, apart from the discredit into which this word eclectic has fallen, whether in the philosophical or in the theological domain, it is not applicable here. The staple and substance of Methodist theology is essentially that of the entire Scripture as interpreted by the catholic evangelical tradition of the Christian Church. It holds the three Creeds, the only confessions of the Faith which ever professed to utter the unanimous voice of the body of Christ on earth ; and, so far as these three Creeds were ever accepted by universal Christendom, it accepts

them, with only such reservations as do not affect doctrine. Among the later confessions—the badges of a divided Christendom—it holds the Articles of the Church from which it sprang: holds them, that is, in their purely doctrinal statements. The eclectic hand has done no more than select for prominence such views of truth as have been neglected; never has it culled from this or that Formulary any spoil to make its own. It has no more borrowed from the Remonstrant Arminians than it has borrowed from the Protestant Lutherans. It agrees with both these so far as they express the faith of the New Testament; but no further. It has had, indeed, in past times a conventional connection with the name Arminian; but its Arminianism is simply the mind of the Catholic Church down to the time of Augustine; and with the historical Arminianism that degenerated in Holland it has no affinity. It might be said, with equal propriety or want of propriety, that it has learned some of its lessons from Calvinism. Certainly it has many secret and blessed relations with that system; not with its hard, logical, deductive semi-fatalism, over which Absolute Sovereignty reigns with such awful despotism, but with its deep appreciation of union with Christ, and of the Christian privileges bound up with that high principle.

But to return. The simple fact is, that any truly catholic confession of faith must seem to be eclectic: for there are no bodies of professed Christians, even to the outskirts of Christendom, which do not hold some portions of the truth; while it may be said that many of them hold some particular truth with a sharper and more consistent definition of it than others. But a really catholic system must embrace all these minor peculiarities; and in proportion as it does so, it will seem to have borrowed them. In this sense, the defenders of Methodist theology admit that it is eclectic. They claim to hold all essential truth; to omit no articles but those which they consider erroneous; and to disparage none but those which they deem unessential. This, of course, is a high

pretension, but it is not a vainglorious one; for surely it is the prerogative of every Christian community to glory in holding "the faith once delivered to the saints." And as it is with the doctrines, so it is with the spirit, of Methodist teaching. In this also it is, after a fashion, eclectic, as it sympathizes with those who make it their boast that they know no other theology than the biblical, and is as biblical as they. It also agrees with those who think that divinity is a systematic science, to be grounded and organized as such; while with almost all its heart it joins the company of Mystics, whose supreme theologian is the interior Teacher, and who find all truth in the experimental vision and knowledge of God in Christ.

We have to say a few words upon certain peculiarities in the doctrinal position of Methodism. But it is a pleasant preface to dwell for a moment on the broad expanse of catholic evangelical truth, concerning which it has no peculiarities, or no peculiarities that affect Christian doctrine. To begin where all things have their beginning, with the being, triune essence, and attributes of God; his relation to the universe as its Creator and providential Governor; his revelation of himself in nature: this supreme truth it holds against all atheism, antitheism, pantheism, and materialism. The unity of mankind, created in the image of God; fallen into guilt and depravity in Adam; restored through the intervention of the Son of God, who offered a vicarious atonement for the whole race, and is now carrying on the holy warfare for man, and in man, and with man, against the personal devil and his kingdom of darkness: this it holds against all who deny the incarnation of the divine Son, one Person in two natures forever. The divinity and economical offices of the Eternal Spirit of the Father and the Son, the source of all good in man; the inspirer of all holy Scripture; the administrator of a finished redemption to sinful men convinced by his agency on their minds, justified through faith in the atonement which he reveals to the heart, and sanctified to the uttermost by his energy within the soul, operating through

the means of grace established in the Church over which he presides, and revealing its power in all good works done in the imitation of Christ: all this it holds against the Pelagian, Antinomian, and Rationalist dishonor to the Holy Ghost. The solemnities of death, resurrection, and eternal judgment, conducted by the returning Christ, and issuing in the everlasting severance between good and evil, the evil being banished from God's presence forever, and the good blessed eternally with the beatific vision: all this, too, it holds with fear and trembling, but with assured confidence that the Judge will vindicate his righteousness forever. In this general outline we have all the elements of the apostles' doctrine and the truth of God. And with regard to these substantial and eternal verities, the system of doctrine we now consider is one with all communions that may be regarded as holding the Head.

But while it is true that these everlasting verities can undergo no change, they may all of them undergo certain modifications of statement in the gradual development of confessional theology. It is needless to ask why the Spirit of truth has permitted this; we have only to accept the fact that this has been his will. In the earliest ages of the Church he overruled the decisions of synods and councils for the defense and clearer manifestation of Christian doctrine. In later times we see, with equal and even more distinctness, the operation of the same law. He has administered the affairs of the kingdom of Christ on the principle of raising up distinct societies or denominations rivaling and emulating each other, rallying round their respective expositions of the common faith, and turning their distinct and distinctive charisms to the profit of the universal cause. For these diversities of teaching he is to some extent responsible, but not for their mutual contentions; and he knows how to educe, through the process of ages, the perfect truth from our discordant confessions. We must not ask if he will ever reduce them all to harmony; or whether, which is more probable, the Lord's personal coming shall supersede them all.

Our business is to guard well the deposit committed to us in our several communions ; differing charitably where we differ ; seeking to give and receive all the light we can ; and waiting for the coming day, which will be a day of general revelation.

Meanwhile, let us note a few of those peculiar aspects of the several doctrines mentioned above which Methodism humbly and reverently, but confidently, regards as part of its appointed testimony. The attempt to sketch these is one of great difficulty, and of all the greater difficulty because of the brevity which is necessary. It would not be a hopeless task to exhibit the salient points of this type of doctrine at length, and with abundant use of the ample material which a century has provided. Such a task must one day be accomplished ; but it is probably reserved for the next generation. It will have to locate Methodist doctrine generally in its true place in confessional theology ; to adjust it with the other great formularies of Christendom ; to study its own development from point to point ; to reconcile it on some subjects with itself, and to show how, amid some vacillations in certain doctrines, it has, nevertheless, steadily converged to one issue, even as it regards those doctrines themselves ; to mark the deviations of which some bodies bearing the generic name have been guilty, or seem likely to be so ; to aim at some such clear accentuation of contested points as shall make their common teaching more emphatically one ; and, finally, what is perhaps most important of all, to indicate the specific effect which its specific doctrines have had upon the whole constitution, agency, work, and successes of the general system called Methodism. But all this is in the future. What the present paper aims at, is only to note a few peculiarities, which the reader must expand for himself. And it may be as well to add, that the writer of it is only expressing his own conviction. He has, of course, an objective standard before him in a variety of standards. But the subjective standard must needs be applied even to them, and accordingly he must be responsible for his own judgments.

The doctrine of the most Holy Trinity might seem to be one in which there is no room for variety of sentiment among those who hold it: that is, the great bulk of the Christian world. But that doctrine is deeply affected both in itself and in its relation to the universe generally, and the economy of redemption in particular, by the view taken of the eternal Sonship of the second Person. Those who would efface the interior distinctions of generation and procession in the Godhead surrender much for which the earliest champions of orthodoxy fought. They take away from the intercommunion of the divine Persons its most impressive and affecting character; and they go far toward robbing us of the sacred mystery which unites the Son's exinanition in heaven with his humiliation as incarnate on earth. Now, we lay claim to no peculiar fidelity here, nor would this subject be mentioned, were it not that Methodism has had the high honor of vindicating the eternal Sonship in a very marked manner. It has produced some of the ablest defenses of this truth known in modern times; defenses which have shown how thoroughly it is interwoven with the fabric of Scripture, how vital it is to the doctrine of the incarnation, and how it may be protected from any complicity with subordinational Arianism. The transition from this to the person of Christ in the unity of his two natures is obvious. And here two remarks only need be made: first, that our doctrine—we may say henceforward our doctrine—is distinguished by its careful abstinence from speculation as to the nature of the Redeemer's self-emptying, simply holding fast the immutable truth that the Divine Son of God could not surrender the essence of his divinity; and, secondly, that in the unity of his Person he was not only sinless but also incapable of sin. Any one who watches the tendencies of modern theology, tendencies which betray themselves in almost all communities, and watches them with an intelligent appreciation of the importance of the issues involved, will acknowledge that this first note of honest glorying is not unjustified.

Turning to the mediatorial work which the Son became incarnate to accomplish, we have to note that the Methodist doctrine lays a special emphasis on its universal relation to the race of man, and deduces the consequences with a precision in some respects peculiar to itself.

For instance, it sees in this the true explanation of the vicarious or substitutionary idea, which is essential to sound evangelical theology, but is very differently held by different schools. There are two extremes that it seeks to avoid by blending the truths perverted by opposite parties. The vague generality of the old Arminian and Grotian theory, which makes the atonement only a rectoral expedient of the righteous God, who sets forth his suffering Son before the universe as the proof that law has been vindicated before grace begins to receive transgressors, was very current in England when Methodism arose. This was and still is confronted by the vigorous doctrine of substitution, which represents Christ to have taken at all points the very place of his elect, actually for them and only them, satisfying the dreadful penalty and holy requirements of the law. Throughout the whole current of Methodist theology there runs a mediating strain, which, however, it would take many pages to illustrate. It accepts the Arminian view that the holiness of God is protected by the atonement; but it insists on bringing in here the vicarious idea. The sin of Adam was expiated as representing the sin of the race as such, or of human nature, or of mankind: a realistic conception which was not borrowed from philosophic realism, and which no nominalism can ever really dislodge from the New Testament. "Christ gave himself as the mediator of God and men, a ransom for all before any existed; and this oblation before the foundation of the world was to be testified in due time, that individual sinners might know themselves to be members of a race vicariously saved as such." This free paraphrase of St. Paul's last testimony does not overstrain its teaching, that the virtue of the great reconciliation abolished the sentence of

death, in all its meaning, as resting upon the posterity of Adam. In this sense it was absolutely vicarious: the transaction in the mind and purpose of the most Holy Trinity did not take our presence or concurrence, only our sin, into account. Therefore the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world was, as it respects the race of Adam, an absolutely vicarious sacrifice. The reconciliation of God to the world—the atonement proper—must be carried up to the awful sanctuary of the Divine Trinitarian essence. When the atonement is translated into time, set forth upon the cross, and administered by the Spirit, the simple and purely vicarious idea is modified. Then come in the two other theories, which, as resting upon the background of the former, have great value; but, as displacing that, are utterly misleading. God, as the righteous protector of his law, declares his justice while he justifies the believer, and will not justify him save as he makes Christ's death his own through a faith which cries, "I am crucified with Christ." And God, as the Father of infinite love, commends his love in the sacrificial gift of his Son, not as if that alone should move us to lay down our opposition to his grace, but that the Spirit, teaching us how much it cost the Father to be reconciled to the world, might shed abroad that love in our individual hearts, and awaken in us the love that will imitate the Saviour's sacrifice and enter into the fellowship of his death to sin. With these modifications, as it respects the individual believer, does Methodism hold fast the doctrine of a universal vicarious satisfaction for the race. But marked prominence must be given to the consistency with which the universal benefit of the atonement has been carried out in its relation to original sin and the estate of the unregenerate world before God. Methodism not only holds that the condemnation of the original sin has been reversed; it also holds that the Holy Spirit, the source of all good, is given back to mankind in his preliminary influences as the Spirit of the coming Christ, the Desired of the nations. The general truth that Christ is the Light of the



world, enlightening every man that cometh into it—the spring of benefits to man that go out to the utmost circumference of his race—is held by our theology in common with many other schools. But we have our shades of peculiarity here; some rescuing the doctrine from unreality, and some protecting it from latitudinarian perversion. With regard to the former, Methodism affirms the restoration of the Spirit to have been an actual fruit of redemption, mitigating from the very beginning the consequences of original sin, whether as the curse of the law or as the transmission of a corrupt bias. It will not tolerate the irreverent distinction between common grace and special grace; believing that all grace was purchased at the cost of Christ's most precious blood, and is intended to lead to salvation. It therefore looks out upon the court of the Gentiles with catholic eyes: not regarding it as the sphere of absolute darkness and insensibility and death until the Spirit, administering the electing counsel, kindles here and there the spark of life to go out no more forever. It believes in a preparatory grace reigning in all the world; in a prevenient grace anticipating the gospel in every heart; and in both as a most precious free gift to mankind, answering in some sense to the dire gift of original sin. With regard to the latter, that is, the latitudinarian perversion, the Methodist doctrine lays great stress on the insufficiency of this preliminary grace. It does not allow, with some, that Christ is the seed of light and life in every man that cometh into the world, and in this sense the root and center of all human nature. He was, indeed, and is, the desire of the nations to whom he was not revealed; but not a desire attained and fulfilled until he was manifested in the flesh. How he will deal with the multitudes of the human race who have had only this subordinate and comparatively faint attraction—how and in what ways unknown to us he has responded to it or will respond to it—are questions which must be left to the “Lord of the dead and the living,” the Shepherd of those “other sheep.” He is, and will ever be, “Jesus Christ the

righteous." So with regard to the secret influence that prepares for him in every heart; which is stimulated by the spirit of conviction into vehement penitent desire. This preparation of preliminary grace develops into much vigorous life; but we hold it not to be regenerate life until the Son is formed in the heart. Until then, let the latitudinarians say what they will, the word of Scripture holds its truth: "If any man be in Christ he is a new creature;" a word spoken, be it remembered, in connection with the apostle's assertion of the general reconciliation of God to the world.

The blessings of the Christian covenant, administered and imparted by the Holy Ghost, which constitute the state of grace, are so simply set forth in the New Testament that there is not much room for difference of opinion among those whose views of the atonement are sound. We hold them, in common with all who hold the Head, to be **one great privilege flowing from union with Christ**, in whom we are complete; and that this great privilege of acceptance is administered both **externally** and **internally**. But, as we are dwelling on shades of difference, we may observe that the Methodist theology lays more stress than most others upon the fact that in every department of the common blessing there is both an external and an internal administration. Every one of them bears at once a forensic, or imputative, or declaratory character; while every one of them bears also a moral, or internal, or inwrought meaning. If there is a forensic justification, declaring in the mediatorial court where law reigns unto righteousness, and the atonement is a satisfaction to justice; there is also a principle of obedience implanted, through which the righteousness of the law is to be fulfilled. These are inseparable in time and eternity: none but those who have a finished righteousness imparted will be hereafter pronounced righteous for Christ's sake; and when righteousness is so complete as to bear the scrutiny of Heaven, it will need to be sheltered from the unforgetting law by an imputed righteousness and an eternal pardon.

Remembering this always, Methodism holds very light the Romanizing disparagement of justification by faith on the one hand, and the Calvinistic disparagement of justification by works on the other. The righteous God is one, and there is but one righteousness: that which man's guilt needs, Christ has provided in his atonement; that which God's holiness demands, the Holy Spirit of Christ will accomplish. The same may be said with regard to the believer's relation to the Father through his union with the incarnate Son. It has its external and declaratory character as an investiture with certain specific privileges, all of which are summed up in the word "adoption;" but these would have no meaning—they would, in fact, be an unreality—unless there was inwardly imparted also the gift of regenerate life, which is the Son of God formed in the soul by the Holy Ghost. Similarly, with regard to the blessing of sanctification, which carries us into the temple of God, as justification carries us into the mediatorial law court, and regeneration into the Father's house. Perhaps our Methodist theology has not been so definite as to the external and internal character of this third order of evangelical privilege. The term "sanctification" has been generally referred to the interior operations of grace, by a conventional consent that is easily explained. But really, though somewhat informally, this distinction has been observed. There is the consecration to God on the altar, which corresponds to justification at the bar: the sprinkled soul, with all that it has and is, is accepted of God, is dedicated to him in act inspired by the Holy Ghost, and is sanctified to his service. It is regarded as set apart from sin and the world, though as yet the severance may not be, what it will be, absolute and complete. It is counted as *entire* sanctification, though the *sanctification* may not be entire. Around these three centers of blessing—one in Christ Jesus—revolve, according to this theology, as according to the New Testament, all the privileges of the new covenant. The soul is set right with the law, is received as a son, and is sanctified in the temple. In the first,

Jesus is the advocate and his atonement a satisfaction ; in the second, he is the first-born among many brethren, and his atonement is the reconciliation ; in the third, he is the high-priest, and his atonement is a sacrifice for sins. In the court of law the Holy Spirit is the convincer of sin to the transgressor, assuring him of pardon ; in the home he is the Spirit of adoption to the prodigal, witnessing, together with his regenerate spirit, that he is a child of God ; and he is in the temple the silent, indwelling seal of consecration.

But this leads to the doctrine of the Witness of the Spirit, which has been sometimes regarded as a Methodist peculiarity. By many it is set down as a specimen of what may be called an inductive theology ; that is, as a formula for certain experiences enjoyed by the early converts of the system. Now, there can be no question that there is some truth in this. The experiences of multitudes who felt suddenly and most assuredly delivered from the sense of condemnation, enabled to pray to God as a reconciled father, and conscious of their sanctification to his service, may be said to have anticipated the confirmation of the word of God. They first read in their own hearts what they afterward read in their Bibles. For that the induction of experience coincides in this with biblical induction is most certain. That it is the privilege of those who are new creatures in Christ Jesus, and have passed from death unto life, to know the things that are freely given them of God, cannot be denied by any who, with unprejudiced eyes, read the New Testament. In fact, the general principle is admitted in all communions, the differences among them having reference either to certain restrictions in the evidence itself, or to the medium through which it is imparted. A large portion of Christendom unite this witness with sacramental means and ordinances ; making personal assurance of salvation dependent on priestly absolution, either with or without a sacrament devised for the purpose. Another, and almost equally large body of Christian teachers, make this high privilege a special blessing vouch-

safed to God's elect as the fruit or reward of long discipline and the divine seal upon earnest perseverance ; but, when imparted, this assurance includes the future as well as the past, and is the knowledge of an irreversible decree of acceptance which nothing can avail to undermine however much it may be occasionally clouded. The Methodist doctrine is distinguished from these by a few strong points which it has held with deep tenacity from the beginning. It believes that the witness of the Spirit to the spirit in man is direct and clear ; distinct from the word, and from the faith that lays hold on the word, though closely connected with both. It is not separated from the testimony which is believed ; for, implicitly or explicitly, the promise in Christ must be apprehended by faith. But faith in this matter is rather trust in a Person than belief of a record ; and that trust is distinct from the assurance He gives, though that assurance follows so hard upon it that in the supreme blessedness of appropriating confidence they are scarcely to be distinguished. While the faith itself may be always firm, the assurance may be sometimes clouded and uncertain. Neither can co-exist with lapse into sin ; and therefore the witness may be suspended, or may be indeed finally lost. It is the assurance of faith only for the present ; only the assurance of hope for the future. It may be calm in its peace, or may be quickened into rapture. But it must be confirmed by the testimony of a good conscience ; while, on the other hand, it is often the silencer of a conscience unduly disturbed. It is, to sum up, in all types of Methodist theology—whatever abuses it may suffer in some Methodist conceptions of it—no other than the soul's consciousness of an indwelling Saviour through the secret and inexplicable influence of his Holy Spirit.

Perhaps the most eminent peculiarity of the type of doctrine called Methodist is its unfaltering assertion of the believer's privilege to be delivered from indwelling sin in the present life. Its unfaltering assertion : for although varying very much on some subordinate matters of statement as to the means

of attainment and the accompanying assurance, it has always been faithful to the central truth itself. Its unflinching assertion : for in the maintenance of this it has met with the most determined hostility, not only from such opponents as deny the doctrines of grace generally, but also from those whose evangelical theology in general and whose high sanctity give their opposition a very painful character and make it very embarrassing.

It cannot be too distinctly impressed that the one element in the Methodist doctrine that may be called distinctive, is the article that the work of the Spirit in sanctifying believers from sin—from all that in the divine estimate is sin—is to be complete in this state of probation. This is the hope it sees set before us in the Gospel, and this, therefore, it presses upon the pursuit and attainment of all who are in Christ. This is, in the judgment of many, its specific heresy ; this, in its own judgment, is its specific glory. It may be said that the suppression and destruction of inbred sin, or, as St. Paul calls it, indwelling sin, is the one point where its aim is beyond the general aim. A long *catena* of ecclesiastical testimonies bears witness that a high doctrine of Christian perfection has been taught in all ages, and in many communities ; coming, in some instances, within a hair's-breadth of this, but shrinking back from the last expression of the truth. The best of the ascetics and mystics of ancient and modern times both taught and exemplified a high standard of purification from sin, interior illumination, and supernatural union with God ; but, whether from misconceived humility or lack of the highest triumph of faith, they invariably reserved the secret residue of evil as necessary to human discipline. This last fetter Methodism will not reserve ; its doctrine pursues the alien and the enemy into its most interior stronghold, and destroys it there ; so that the temple of God in the human spirit shall be not only emptied of sin, but swept also from every trace that it had been there, and garnished with all the graces of the divine image. It reads and

fearlessly interprets all those clauses in the charter of grace which speak of the destruction of the body of sin, of putting off the old man, of crucifying the flesh unto death, of an entire sanctification of man's whole nature, of a preservation in faultlessness, of a perfect love casting out fear, of being purified as Christ is pure, and of the love of God perfected in the human soul. Against this array of testimonies there is no argument that comes from God; there is no contradictory array of scriptural testimonies. Redemption from the flesh spiritually understood, is not made synonymous or simultaneous with redemption from the flesh physically interpreted. No sin can pass the threshold of life, for the expurgation of intermediate fires of discipline; and there is no provision in heaven for the destruction of evil. Death itself cannot take the office of the atoning blood and the purifying Spirit. Then it follows that the final stroke must be in the present life; the atonement is not more certainly a finished work than the application of it by the Holy Ghost; the Spirit's "It is finished" must needs follow the Son's, and in a voice that speaks on earth. All Scripture speaks of a holy discipline, longer or shorter, effectual in all branches of ethics and of the imitation of Christ and of charity to man, which precedes it; and of a continual advancement in every thing heavenly that follows it: but there must be a sacred moment of final deliverance from what God sees as sin in the soul. This is Christian perfection—a word which is essentially conditioned: a word which, indeed, is not affected by Methodist theology; and, when used, is always guarded by its necessary adjectives of Christian, evangelical, and relative.

Something has been said of the inductive character of Methodist doctrine generally, and with special reference to its views of personal assurance as being much built upon personal experience. Now it must be asserted that with regard to the present doctrine of an entire deliverance from sin, the induction was primarily and pre-eminently a scriptural one. Meth-

odism began to announce this high and most sacred possibility of the Christian life very early ; in fact, long before any experience of its own verified the announcement : and it has continued the testimony until now altogether apart from the vouchers of living witnesses. Its principle has been that God's word must be true, and his standard the right one, however the lives of the saints may halt behind it. At the same time, it cannot be denied that in the historical development of the Methodist doctrine itself, the induction of its own experiences has played an important part, and not always a satisfactory one. Time would fail, and it would be an ungrateful task, to explain in what sense it has been sometimes unsatisfactory. Suffice to say, that some forms of the doctrine assert, with more or less of positiveness, what cannot be maintained by the warranty of the Bible ; based upon experimental inductions not controlled by Scripture. The "second blessing" is sometimes confounded with the first, as if an entire consecration to God, which is the perfect beginning only, were an entire sanctification from all sin ; a blessing, it may be, yet far in the distance. The effusion of divine love in the soul, sometimes to so full a degree as to make the possibility of sinning a strange thought to the soul, is sometimes mistaken for that "perfected love" of which it is only the earnest. We must go to St. John's first Epistle—the last testimony of the Bible—for our doctrine on this subject. Now that Epistle gives the most explicit assurance that there is set before the aspiration of the saint a perfected and finished operation of divine love, the triumph of which is the extinction of sin and fear. But it is observable, that before the last testimony to love in man as perfected, we have three testimonies to the gradual operation of the love of God in us, which carry it into the three departments of the covenant of grace mentioned above. First, into that of law : "Whoso keepeth his wor'd, in him verily is the love of God perfected." Perfected love is, in the estimation of God, the fulfilling of the righteousness of the law, and its triumph is bound up with our habitual obedi-



ence in all things. Secondly, into the department of sonship: "If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us." Universal, boundless, self-sacrificing charity—for such is the pattern of Christ's charity—is the condition as well as the goal of perfected love. Thirdly, into the temple of consecration: "He that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him. Herein is our love"—love with us—"made perfect." Abstraction from all created desire, and supreme union with God, is also both the condition and the crown of perfected love. Much more might be written on this subject: but this is enough. Notwithstanding every drawback, it still remains that the testimony borne for a century to the highest privileges of the Christian covenant is the glory of its theology. It has stimulated the religious life of countless multitudes. It has kept before the eyes of the people formed by it the one supreme thought, that Christianity is a religion which has one only goal, whether in the Church or in the individual—the destruction of sin. And we believe the day is coming when the Church of God upon earth will have given to it an enlarged heart to receive this doctrine in all its depth and fullness.

Slight as this sketch has been, it has not omitted any point that may be fairly included in the differentia of the theology called Methodist. Of course, it has its specific type of presentation in the case of many articles of the creed; but it would be an endless task to dwell upon these, especially as in regard to some of them there is no definite standard among Methodist people. They claim a certain latitude in the minor developments of central truths; and are as free in the non-essentials as they are rigid in the essentials of the faith. The body of divines whose theology is thus described are far from being bound to a system stereotyped and reticulated in its minutest detail. While the slightest deviation from what may be here called orthodoxy or fundamental doctrine never fails to awaken the keenest sensibility, and any thing like vital error is infallibly detected and cast out, there is a very large tolerance on

subordinate matters. That tolerance some may think carried too far ; but be that as it may, it exists, and it always will exist. This may be illustrated by two topics, in themselves of vital importance, but the aspects of which vary to different minds. One is the inspiration of Holy Scripture. The general truth that the Bible is, from beginning to end, the fruit of the Spirit's agency and the authoritative standard of faith, directory of morals and charter of privileges, is firmly and universally held : Methodism knows no vacillation here. It is free from the error which enlarges the limits of the canon, on the one hand, with the Romanists ; and from that which contracts them by making the word of God a certain something within the Bible which men must find for themselves. It does not admit the concurrent endowment of the Church with a perpetual inspiration : thus introducing two voices, that of Scripture and that of the Church, one of which may contradict or neutralize the other. It has never shared the laxity of the Réformers and of the Arminians as to certain books and certain degrees of inspiration : no modern theology is more faithful to the plenary authority of Scripture ; none approaches nearer than it does to the high strain of the early fathers. But, inasmuch as Scripture itself never defines or gives the sense of its own inspiration, Methodism does not attempt to supply its deficiency, and define what is undefinable. It leaves, for instance, the many vexed questions which crowd around what is called verbal inspiration, and the uncertainty of the text here and there arising from the withdrawal of the autographs, and the methods of reconciling the seeming discrepancies of Scripture, to conscientious and enlightened private judgment. It allows the same latitude here, no more no less, that every evangelical community allows. But no community falls back more absolutely or more implicitly than Methodism upon the supreme defense of the entire Bible which our Lord's authority gives it : of the Old Testament Scriptures as we hold them by his own word ; of the New Testament Scriptures by his Spirit. It cannot be

said that it is more swayed than others by the self-evidencing light of the word of God ; but certainly none are more swayed by it. And it may be asserted with confidence, though without boasting, that there is no communion in Christendom the theological writings of which are so universally free from the tincture of doubt or suspicion as to the supremacy of the Bible. This is not—as some would affirm—through the lack of either independent thought or biblical culture ; this loyalty of Methodism rests upon the best of all foundations.

Another is the doctrine of the sacraments. Methodist teaching has, from the beginning, mediated here between two extremes which need not be more particularly defined : in that mediation keeping company with the Anglican Formularies, and the Presbyterian Westminster Confession, both of which raise them above mere signs, and lay stress on their being seals or pledges or instruments of the impartation of the grace signified to the prepared recipient. All its old standards, including its hymns, bear witness to this ; they abundantly and irresistibly confirm our assertion as to the sacramental idea generally. As to the two ordinances in particular, there can be no doubt that the sentiments of the various Methodist communions run through a wide range. Recoil from exaggerated doctrine has led many toward the opposite extreme ; and a large proportion of their ministers put a very free construction upon their standards, and practically regard the two sacraments as badges simply of Christian profession, the Eucharist being to them a special means of grace in the common sense of the phrase. There is a wide discretion allowed in this matter, and the wisdom of this discretion is, on the whole, justified. With that question, however, we have nothing to do here ; our only object being to state the case as it is.

But this essay must be closed, leaving untouched many subjects which naturally appeal for consideration. Something ought to be said as to the controversial aspect of this theology. But leaving that for other essays, we have only to commend

the general principles of the Methodist theology to any strangers to it who may read these pages. They will find it clear and consistent, on the whole, as a human system, worthy of much more attention than it usually receives from the Christian world; and, what is of far more importance, they will find it pervaded by the "unction from the Holy One," which is the secret of all truth and of all edification.