

1887

# The latest phase of Methodism

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The Latest Phase of Methodism.

By

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Methodism, in the genuine sense, is as old as Christianity, for it found its best exponent in the apostles and their work.

The doctrines of Paul and primitive Christianity are the doctrines of Methodism.

Methodism, in this sense, was not born at Oxford in the Holy Club, but it may be said there to have been born again, and there to have received its christening, and from thence to have gone forth on its later mission.

"Methodism is a spirit and a doctrine"

or as Dr. Chalmers puts it, "Christianity  
 in earnest" - It was not a schism, not a  
 creed well and carefully wrought out, not a  
 new commandment, not even a formal  
 organization - until it yielded to the inevita-  
 ble force of circumstances, and from then  
 down to the present, a considerable portion  
 of true Methodism - remembering that  
 Methodism is a Spirit - has been at work  
 outside the formal body. And this element  
 of Methodism - its spirit spreading beyond  
 its own borders and affecting other bodies of  
 Christians - has been on the increase un-  
 til it is now become a potent factor in the  
 religious development of the times -

To estimate the influence of Methodism on  
 the religious history of the world is a difficult,  
 yea an impossible task, yet an effort in that  
 direction may prove <sup>a</sup> fruitful study.

The rise and spread of the Methodist-revival is now generally conceded to be the most important event in ecclesiastical history since the Reformation. Less than a hundred years ago this fact was not generally admitted; but now even the critics and enemies of the movement are compelled to make the concession. The favorable estimate of Wesley's work has grown with time, and he never held so warm a place in the hearts of Christians of every name as he holds to-day.

The Churches in both England and America have been learning this lesson, especially within the last-half century.

Wesley is gone. The heat of opposition and antagonism so common in his time has passed away; the marvellous success of the Methodist Church remains, together with all the silent and unperceived influence

of Methodism on other denominations:

Here a more fair and dispassionate view of Wesleyanism is possible. A. Bonaparte, lecturer said: "The great Wesleyan revival of personal religion - a revival which began within the Church of England; but which the leaders of the Church at that time had not the fidelity or the skill to know how to employ to her advantage; and so they thrust it out from them, to swell the ranks, and revive the dying, establishments of dissent."

Another English writer says, "The Church of Rome in her deep sagacity would have seized the opportunity, and drawn Wesley into closer union, and made him the instrument of reviving a languishing cause."

These are straws; many similar statements - some more pronounced in favor of Wesley are constantly coming from loyal churchmen.

We may well inquire what makes such statements as the foregoing possible in the Anglican church. The answer is Methodism. The lesson of "Methodism" has been at work, often unperceived by the very ones who were being affected by it. "Nothing succeeds like success." It was that made it possible for the Independent - a journal not disposed to favor Methodism - to say, "American Methodism is the greatest religious fact of the age"; and for a leading clergyman of the Presbyterian church to publicly say, "Methodism is the greatest blessing the Presbyterian church in America has ever received." It is certainly safe to assert that no other denomination in this country has given so much to other churches as Methodism and in turn received so much from them. This must needs be true from the nature of

the case, since the Methodist movement was so unlike the other sects. Between the Congregational and Presbyterian churches there was not much opportunity for reciprocal influence because they were already much alike at the start. Likewise the Baptist church was for the most part Calvinistic. Not so with Methodism. It were strange indeed if some of the features of Methodism were not copied by sister churches, and some of them dropped or greatly modified. Such is the fact.

To day the difference between Methodism and her neighbors is comparatively small. The change is in both. Methodist doctrine is precisely the same as in the beginning, and has been preached all the way long with no important variation. In government and social life there has been change, more negative than positive, more destructive than

constructive. Methodism has done much of the dredging for other churches, especially for the Congregational Church in New England. The condition of things is not unlike the Roman conquest of Greece - Rome, though victor, submitted to the dominance of Grecian ideas. Our revival methods have been copied - lay preaching, congregational singing, experience meetings, women's work in the church, the witness of the Spirit and even sanctification - while Calvinism has fallen into disrepute or been utterly neglected. Methodism has given <sup>us</sup> the electric current which has sent a stream of revival influence all along the line of the churches. Our distinctive features are being picked <sup>up</sup> and used most effectively by them. The influence of Methodism on other denominations is varied. It has softened this



theology, vitalized their preaching and  
 revolutionized their methods of work; it  
 serves as a feeder for them by its revivals,  
 sending as it does a constant stream of converts  
 out from its altars into the laity of these  
 less active churches, and not a few ministers  
 to fill their leading pulpits. New England  
 Congregationalism if it has not been saved,  
 has received a wonderful quickening from  
 Methodism. Methodism is less Methodistic,  
 other churches are more Methodistic and  
 this fact explains their increased success,  
 for in proportion as they adopt the theology  
 and the methods of Methodism do they succeed  
 and in proportion as Methodism fails to em-  
 phasize true Methodism does she fall short  
 of success.

Whatever may be the secret of the  
 success of Methodism, it is fast becoming

evident - that the secret of the success of  
 some other churches is <sup>in recent years</sup> Methodism.

They have caught her spirit and have entered  
 upon a new lease of life. What they once  
 despised, now they copy; and we commend  
 their shrewdness for it. They see what makes  
 for success and they want it. If we have  
 lost, others have gained, if indeed they have  
 not profited by our loss. If Methodism  
 is losing her grip on the masses, some other  
 bodies are beginning to learn how to reach  
 them. If it be a fact - as Prof. Phelps recently  
 maintained, that the clergy and the people,  
 both in England and America, are drifting  
 asunder, it is also a fact that a third party,  
lay workers are bridging this chasm between  
 priest and people. But the present truth  
 of Prof. Phelps' statement is not now admitted.  
 It may have been true ten years ago and not

be true to day. Lay assistance is receiving more attention in the Presbyterian churches to day, and lay workers are coming to the front. There can be little doubt that there is more vitality, but far less Calvinism now, in the Calvinistic churches of America than existed fifty years ago.

As evidence of the work of the lesson of Methodism during all these years, mark the increased emphasis being given to evangelical truth, and the consequent appearance of the revival spirit in the churches even the most conservative. This is the most striking fact in the religious history of the past few years. Ten years ago Missions Aitken could not have come to New York and done the work he did last year.

There is an increasing degree of revival spirit in the Church of England and in the Protestant

Episcopal Church in this country...

The "Church Army", an <sup>organization</sup> akin to the "Salvation Army", under the management of two archbishops and fourteen Bishops of the Church of England, has gathered over six hundred adult communicants from the street corners and slums. A prominent man recently made the public statement that the Established Church was doing more for the masses than any other church in England.

The condition of things that makes that state possible, even though it be not absolutely true, is highly significant. Protestant Christendom is undergoing a great change. Even on the Continent in France & Germany, encouraging signs of the evangelizing spirit appear. This growth of evangelical spirit which is becoming more marked every year, only keeps pace with the prominence which

they give to the doctrines which Methodism  
 has always preached in Churches that a  
 few years ago opposed revivals now seek  
 them. For them it is conspicuous all this is  
 probably ascribed much for the present.  
 Dr. Poutecot's recent able paper before the  
 National Council of Congregational Churches  
 voiced the thought not only of his own  
 heart but of that which has pressed heavy  
 on other hearts, when he said, "We must evan-  
 -gelize the masses". We must erect churches  
 not for the personal comfort and conveni-  
 -ence of the members but for the salvation  
 of the masses. This sentiment is spread-  
 ing among the churches and gives us a  
 hopeful outlook for the Church of Christ.  
 A careful study of the trend of theological  
 thought in countries where Calvinism  
 has been strong, reveals a positive re-

action against it. All the Calvinistic churches have felt it, & while Methodism—always distinctly Arminian—has been wholly free from it, Dr. Abel Stevens has shown that this revolt against the Calvinistic dogmas has not passed at Evangelical Arminianism—if indeed it went by that name at all—but on the Continent at least, has degenerated into Rationalism and outright infidelity.

In New England the reaction has given us Unitarianism, Universalism and such like, and it may be responsible for what ever is objectionable in the Andover departure. In England there resulted Unitarianism. The Low Church movement which, as Dr. Stevens shows, sprang largely from the impulse of Methodism, but because it held on tenaciously to

Calvinism has about ~~run~~ <sup>and</sup> its course <sup>ended</sup> in failure. Meanwhile Methodism has been free from it, for the agitating cause <sup>dogmatic</sup>. Calvinism does not exist there. Other sects have experienced it in proportion to the stiffness of their Calvinism, and escaped it as they have shared the evangelistic spirit of Methodism.

The conclusion seems inevitable that Methodism has done and is doing much to stay the tide of rationalism among the churches, and that if Methodism had had the same hold in Germany that it has in England and America, different results would appear to day. Other causes are at work but none more potent than this one, and the general revival of Methodist theology and Methodist methods among the great sisterhood of churches, may certainly

be attributed in no small degree to the silent yet effective working of Methodist heaven. Thus it appears that the mission of Methodism has been not alone or chiefly to the unchurched but to the churches; to which it has come as a timely voice calling them to the simplicity of early Christianity.