

CHAPTER XII

Conclusion

In writing these pages and reviewing the past, what cause have I seen for praising and blessing the name of the Lord, and for humbling myself to the dust under His mighty hand! I bless God that I can say –

From sin, and grief, and fear, and shame,
I hide me, Jesus, in Thy name

But oh, what a sinner I have been! How often I have rebelled against Him, and grieved His Holy Spirit. In many a conflict with the powers of evil I have been overcome, and brought into darkness and condemnation. Again and again, years ago, I felt that I was unfit to be in the ministry, and have more than once determined to resign. I had written my resignation once and was on my way to post the letter, but the good hand of God held me back. Among the things that hindered and injured me for many years was tobacco-smoking. My conscience often troubled me about it, and I gave it up for a time, but was soon at it again. I never could smoke as some do, but I felt it was fast making me a slave. I began to look upon it as an unclean thing, and felt it was doing me harm. I praise and bless the Lord Jesus for saving me from it, about thirty-five years ago. Oh, what a blessed deliverance that was! How I have rejoiced over it many times since; and when I have gone along the street and seen boys, hardly out of their knickerbockers, with pipes or cigars in their mouths; when I have travelled in railway trains and seen men who were smoking; and when I have been in the house of God, and someone has come in smelling so strongly of tobacco as to make it very unpleasant, especially for ladies, I have wondered how I could ever have been a smoker.

I bless God that He has kept me to the great work of saving souls. If ever my piety has declined and I have lost my hold of God, then I have neglected this; but whenever my own heart has been fully right with God, then to save souls from death I have felt to be my great life-work. I have always believed, and still believe, that Mr. Wesley was right when he said, “Observe, it is not your business to preach so many times, and to take care of this and that society, but to save as many souls as you can.” I have heard some in these days dispute this, and say that Mr. Wesley’s own conduct was not according to this teaching. But surely such persons misunderstand Mr. Wesley. It is true he cared for the poor, supplying their wants, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and giving medicine to the sick; he founded schools for the orphan and the poor; he cared for this and that society; but he did all with the great object before him of saving men. It is possible to do a great deal of other work without having the great work in view; and it is possible to do much, and in all never to lose sight of it. Mr. Wesley never meant that his preachers were not to preach sermons, or care for the societies, but that they should do all with the great purpose in view, and not make these things themselves the end. Here now, in my old age, with my work nearly ended, I see the importance of this more than ever. “The ultimate design of the Gospel ministry,” says John Angel James, “is the conversion of sinners to God.” We should use “all means,” as Paul did, that we may “save some,” and nothing less than this should ever satisfy those who are called to save souls from death.

As to methods, we all admit that whatever may be used, all will be in vain without the Holy Spirit. New and strange methods without the Spirit may for a while seem to succeed, may draw crowds, and create some excitement, but, like the morning cloud and the early dew, their effect will quickly pass away. The cry of our day is for something new and more demonstrative. Ours is the age of big drums and brass bands. Although I have never used these means, yet if they are kept in their proper place, and the Spirit is looked to for all success, I have no objection to them. But the danger is of making these everything, and expecting no results without them. My reading and my own experience teach me that if a minister will preach Entire Sanctification, and in his pastoral visitation and in the various meetings will urge members of the Church to seek this; if he will gather the more earnest together for conversation on the work of God and for prayer, and thus secure a revival of holiness in the church; and he will then preach the great truths calculated to convert and save sinners; and if the members of the Church will begin earnestly to work, inviting the people to the house of prayer, and speaking to them about their souls, there will soon be true prosperity, and many will be brought to Jesus. We are always in danger of leaving the Holy Spirit out. In our religious life how little is really known of the personal "indwelling of the Holy Ghost," and how little of being "filled with the Spirit." In our work how often we grieve the Holy Spirit by trusting in our plans and arrangements, or by our want of faith in His presence and power because of the absence of some man or means or methods. Only let the ministers and members of the Church be filled with the Spirit, and, whatever methods may be used, the power of the Lord will be present to heal, and sinners will be converted to God.

I thank God for the Methodist Church, for my connection with it, and for what it has done for me and for the world. I praise God for raising up our honoured Founder; for the succession of noble men who have been faithful to the high trust committed to them; for our Missions, Home and Foreign; for the great multitude saved in heaven, and the goodly company on their way thither; for our Church's triumphs in the past, and for what she is doing today. We may well say, "The Lord hath done great things for us," and we may well be glad and bless His holy name. But there are some things that are hindering us in our work now, and that will, if allowed to continue and grow, one day rob us of our power and glory as a Church. May I, with all charity, but at the same time with all fidelity, refer to a few of these things.

1. Our ministers have too much work of a kind that diverts their attention from the all-important work of saving souls. What a blessing it would be to our Church if they could be relieved from so much of table-serving, and so be able to give themselves more fully to what is their great business. In many Churches the minister has to be connected with all business arrangements in the interests of the Church. Then we are becoming a great financial corporation, and have so many committees, on which our ministers have to sit devising ways and means for carrying on the work, that many have little time, and sometimes little heart, for doing work that cannot be neglected if the cause of God is to prosper.
2. We rely too much on special services and special agents. If the Church is cold and dead, special services may be the very thing for securing a revival of religion. If God should pour out His Spirit at some service, let meetings be held night after night, and all done that can be done to carry on the blessed work. But to hold these special services at some given time every year, and

have a little stir, and a few conversions, and then let the Church run down into its former cold and feeble state till the time for special services comes round again, is in the end to weaken, if not destroy, the Church. Some are forever looking out for a new Evangelist, without whom they think little can be done. They never think of praying for a blessing on their own minister's labours, but to pray for the stranger they will get up in the early morning or meet at the midnight hour. I have no doubt that this is the cause of the little real prosperity in some Circuits. There are no doubt some men who are peculiarly fitted for revival work, and when God sends them to us we ought to be thankful; but He can use any instrumentality. If the Church is only right, He will make the weak to be as David, and David as an angel of the Lord.

3. The growing worldliness of the Church is a great hindrance to our success. The desire today seems to be for less prayer an exposition of the word of God, and for more amusement, more entertainments in the church. Look at our Monday evening prayer-meetings, and our week evening services! In most places very few attend; in some these meetings have had to be given up altogether. Let it be announced that an entertainment will be given, and people will flock to it; but to call to prayer there will be little or not response. If it be true that the Monday evening prayer-meeting is the barometer of the Church's piety, then we need to be humbled and alarmed. I have heard it said over and over again, that we, by neglecting to provide amusement for our young people, have been driving them elsewhere to seek it. This charge cannot be made against all, for in some places there has been more than enough of amusement to satisfy even the most "advanced." But are there more of our young people converted where the Church is catering most for their amusement, and is their piety of a higher order? I am fully convinced, from all that I have seen, that the provision of so much amusement in the Church for the young is giving them such a love and relish for it as sends them where they can get it of a higher class than the Church can give. I do not advocate a dull, long-faced, strait-laced religion. I would have frequent social meetings for the members of the Church, where conversation, recitations, and music, with praise and prayer, shall all contribute to make a cheerful and happy gathering; but I dread the light, frothy, semi-theatrical meetings which are too common in our day, and which are, in my opinion, doing immense mischief among the young.
4. Our theology, so scriptural and clear, we have firmly held for many years. Whatever agitation there has been at any time in our Church, it has not been about our creed. The different bodies that have gone out from us have taken the grand old doctrines with them. For years scarcely a whisper was heard of any weakness here. From first to last our ministers were believed to be sound in the faith. But is it so today? I fear not. The question we ask every year of every minister is, "Does he believe and preach our doctrines?" It is not enough that he preach them: he must believe them. It is not sufficient that he believe them: he must preach them. Each minister has to answer that question for himself. Now and then we hear a brother honestly answer in the negative, and he must bear the consequences. But it is sometimes to be feared that the question is answered with some mental reservation. That the punishment of the wicked will be strictly and literally eternal is the doctrine of the Wesleyan Church; but some have for years had their doubts about this, and consequently

do not, and cannot, preach it as they should. This is known and yet allowed, and so is doing great harm in many ways.

5. The scriptural doctrine of Entire Sanctification is emphatically the doctrine of the Methodist Church, and Mr. Wesley declares over and over again that its success at first was in connection with the frequent preaching of the doctrine, and its enjoyment by many of our people. In our day it is not so frequently preached, and very seldom urged as something now to be obtained by faith. In our class meetings very little is said about it; and how few profess to enjoy it! Outside the Methodist Churches there is very much said about holiness; but I have heard much that is very hazy and indefinite. The doctrine of two natures is widely held: that we can never be made clean in ourselves, but that a new Christlike nature is brought in, covering over our corrupt, polluted nature like a covering of snow on a filthy heap; that our old nature is never changed, but remains till death; and that a constant struggle goes on between the old and the new natures until the end comes.

I was once invited to take part in a holiness meeting, and was requested to speak on "Salvation from all sin." I gave our Methodist view, which is, I firmly believe, the scriptural one. When I had finished, a good old minister, who did not see with me at all, rose and said, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us," and sat down again. No sooner had he taken his seat than another rose and said, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness," and he sat down. Then a brother in the middle of the hall rose and said, with deep feeling, "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." Not another word was said on the subject. It seems to me that there is no appeal from that. It either means what it says, or it does not. If it does not, we make God a liar; but if it does, then there is deliverance from *all* sin. I heard a brother who was pleading hard for indwelling sin use some strange illustrations. He told us of his lawn, and the weeds that troubled him, and how he pulled them up, and did all he could to destroy them, and yet, when the spring came round, every year they were as bad as ever. "So," said he, "it is with us. The corrupt nature is there, and it will come up." As if all lawns were as bad as his, and as if God could do His work no better than he could. God's work is perfect: when He cleanses, there is cleanness; when He pulls up the weeds, He does it effectually; and He says, "I will cleanse you," and "Ye shall be clean." The brother then spoke of crucifying the flesh. "Our old nature," said he, "is to be crucified with Christ. You know crucifixion is a long, lingering death; therefore this means that our corrupt nature is to be nailed to the cross, and kept there, writhing, struggling, dying, all the days of our life." A strange crucifixion! That terrible mode of punishment generally did its work in two or three days. Jesus was crucified, dead, and buried in a few hours; and we are to be not only crucified, but dead and buried with him. Another illustration was this: "Think that you are living in India. One evening, at dusk, a great tiger comes into your house, and hides beneath the sofa, and goes to sleep. There is that fearful monster; fast asleep, it is true, but still there. Move softly; go about the house on tip-toe; speak in whispers; for if you once arouse him there will be dreadful work. That is like indwelling sin. It is there: sleeping now, perhaps, but still there. Now, whatever you do, be careful; do not for the world wake that slumbering evil, or the

consequences will be sad indeed.” I thought when I heard that, Who could rest a moment with a tiger in his room? If I were the owner of that house I would soon say, “Go about the house on tip-toe, and speak with bated breath, indeed! No, no; that wretch shall not live another hour in this house. Where is my rifle?” I would make short work with that Bengal tiger.

While there is much that is very misty and uncertain among some others, I am afraid that many in our own Church are very imperfectly informed on this great subject, and make many mistakes about it. There are very many who think of it as something to be attained unto, not obtained; some state into which we have to grow, confounding purity with maturity, cleansing with growth. Whereas there is all the difference between the two: the one being something removed, the other something added; the one before the other, and necessary to it. I was once talking to a good man, a leader of our Church, on this most important subject, and he said to me, “I could just as soon believe that my son could go to Wesley College tomorrow not knowing a figure in arithmetic, and come home at night a complete mathematician, as that a man can become a perfectly matured Christian in a single day.” I said to him, “My brother, you are confounding things that differ: you are speaking of one thing; I of another. If your son were to go to Wesley College tomorrow and were put into ‘simple addition,’ and all the year, and at the end of two or three years, he were in simple addition still, what would you say?” “Why,” he replied, I should say there was something wrong with the boy or the master, or both.” “That,” I said, ‘is just what I am trying to make you see: that this indwelling sin is hindering our growth, keeping us for years mere babes in Christ, and that this hindering thing must be removed, and will be the moment we are willing to let the Lord do it and we have faith in Him.’”

If it be true, as Mr. Wesley repeatedly said, that we as a people were raised up to spread scriptural holiness through the land, and if, as few will deny, our success as a Church has been in proportion as we have answered this great design, then any decline or departure from this is a most serious matter, and must, if it continue, injuriously affect our prosperity in the future.

6. Another danger than threatens us is connected with our polity. There seems every now and then to come on some members of our Conference a great desire for new legislation – for altering the existing laws and regulations of our Church. I do not plead for holding to Church forms when they are in the way of Church progress. I believe in the wise and careful adaptation of our system to meet peculiar circumstances, but without touching those great principles which lie at the foundation of our Church, which are, we believe, in thorough accord with the Sacred Scripture, have had the approval of the greatest men our Church has ever known, and have done so much to make Methodism what it is today.

The Class Meeting question¹ has been discussed over and over again during the last ten or fifteen years, and we were becoming thoroughly divided as a Church. At the General Conference of 1891 the legislation on the Class Meeting seemed to give general satisfaction. The monthly meeting for

¹ It will be remembered that the allusions in this paragraph are to Australasian Methodism. The argument, however, is not without its significance for English Methodism. – Ed.

fellowship, oversight, and testimony then arranged for has been very successful in some Circuits where it has been properly worked, and will, we have no doubt, have like results in all if our ministers will work it. But just there is the danger. The want of discipline and careful attention in connection with our weekly class meetings has had much to do with causing the necessity for any new legislation, and we fear lest by neglect in the future this attempt to meet the case should also fail. One thing is certain: love for the Class Meeting or Christian fellowship is sadly decreasing among us. Very many who are reckoned as members seldom, if ever, attend Class. Some have been allowed to remain in the Church for years without once going to Class, and some of these are office-bearers, and have been sent as delegates to our Conferences; all of which is against our laws. No surer way could be found to damage and ruin our Church than to allow all discipline to be set at nought, and our laws and regulations broken with impunity. The loss of love for Christian fellowship is a serious matter: it means loss of spirituality. Let there be a revival of religion, and there is no need then to press people to go to Class. They delight to meet together to speak good of the name of the Lord. A gentleman who has to do with large financial matters in Melbourne said to me one day, "Whatever some may say, it is not any objection we have to the Class Meeting that keeps us back, but our being immersed in business affairs and wholly given to them." I believe with Dr. Gregory, "That the year which should witness the sacrifice of the Society-structure of our Church in favour of sounding statistics, and of officials who are strangers to the deeper fellowship of our Church, would indicate to future historians the chronological point when the great tidal flow of revival began to recede."

And now I have done, and I would close praising my blessed Lord for all His love and mercy to me in the past; for sparing me to this my seventy-ninth year; and for still employing me in His glorious work. For the future I can fully trust Him: He will do all things well. If it be His will that my life and work shall soon be ended, I will praise Him, for I know that then

I shall behold His face,
I shall His power adore,
And sing the wonders of His grace
For evermore.

If it seem good to Him to keep me here a little longer, that He may use me in winning a few more souls for Jesus, I will bless His holy name, for

'Tis worth living for this,
To administer bliss
And salvation in Jesus' name.