

A WORD TO METHODISTS.

FROM BISHOP FOSTER.

The following earnest and solemn words from Bishop Foster have appeared in various Methodist Journals, and in tract form. He certainly gives his trumpet no uncertain sound.

"The Church of God is to-day courting the world. Its *members* are trying to bring it down to the level of the ungodly. The ball, the theatre, nude and lewd art, social luxuries with all their loose moralities, are making inroads into the sacred inclosure of the Church; and as a satisfaction for all this worldliness, Christians are making a great deal of Lent and Easter and Good Friday and Church ornamentations. It is the old trick of Satan. The Jewish Church struck on that rock, the Romish Church was wrecked on it, and the Protestant Church is fast reaching the same doom.

"Our great dangers, as we see them, are assimilation to the world, neglect of the poor, substitution of the form for the fact of godliness, abandonment of discipline, a hireling ministry, an impure gospel, which, summed up, is a fashionable church. That Methodists should be liable to such an outcome, and that there should be signs of it in a hundred years from the "sail loft," seems almost a miracle of history; but who that looks about him today can fail to see *the fact?*

"Do not Methodists, in violation of God's Word and their own Discipline, dress as extravagantly and as fashionably as any other class? Do not ladies, and often the wives and daughters of the ministry, put on "gold and pearls and costly array?" Would not the plain dress insisted upon by John Wesley, Bishop Asbury, and worn by Hester Ann Rogers, Lady Huntington, and many others

equally distinguished, be now regarded in Methodist circles as fanaticism? Can any one going into the Methodist Church in any of our chief cities distinguish the attire of the communicants from that of the theatre and ball goers? Is not worldliness seen in the music? Elaborately dressed and ornamented choirs, who in many cases make no profession of religion, and are often sneering skeptics, go through a cold, artistic or operatic performance which is as much in harmony with spiritual worship as an opera or a theatre. Under such worldly performance spirituality is frozen to death.

"Formerly every Methodist attended class-meeting and gave a testimony of experimental religion; now the class-meeting is attended by very few, and in many churches it is abandoned. Seldom do even the stewards, trustees and leaders of the church attend class-meeting. Formerly nearly every Methodist prayed, testified or exhorted in prayer meeting; now but very few are heard. Formerly shouts and praises were heard; now such demonstrations of holy enthusiasm and joy are regarded as fanaticism.

"Worldly socials, fairs, festivals, concerts, and such like, have taken the place of the religious gatherings, revival meetings, class and prayer-meetings of earlier days.

"How true that the Methodist Discipline is a dead letter. Its rules forbid the wearing of gold, or pearls, or costly array; yet no one ever thinks of disciplining any of its members for violating them. They forbid the reading of such books and the taking of such diversions **[R1492 : page 19]** as do not minister to godliness; yet the church itself goes to shows and frolics and festivals and fairs which destroy the spiritual life of the young as well as the old. The extent to which this is now carried on is appalling.

"The early Methodist ministers went forth to sacrifice and suffer for Christ. They sought, **[R1492 : page 20]** not places of

ease and affluence, but of privation and suffering. They gloried, not in their big salaries, fine parsonages and refined congregations, but in the souls that had been won for Jesus. Oh, how changed! A hireling ministry will be a feeble, timid, truckling, time-serving ministry without faith, endurance and holy power. Methodism formerly dealt in the great central truth. Now the pulpits deal largely in generalities, and in popular lectures. The glorious doctrine of Entire Sanctification is rarely heard and seldom witnessed to in the pulpits."

Methodist Exchange.

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That the good Bishop is not unduly alarmed about the actual state of Methodism is manifest to every observer who is not stone blind. Here are two items out of many that might be culled from both the religious and secular press substantiating the Bishop's charge. They read as follows: –

"CHURCH BOWLING ALLEYS AND BILLIARD PARLORS.

"The *Christian Nation* is our authority for the statement that 'Mr. H. W. Knight, before a recent gathering of Methodists at the Bible House in this city (New York), said that, as an adjunct to the churches, buildings should be constructed with bowling alleys and billiard parlors and the like to counteract the influence of the rum shops.'

"A great many questionable things are done in many of the churches, ostensibly in the name of religion, but we were hardly prepared to get the announcement that things had come to such a pass that the Methodist Church would even consider such a proposition. A point made very prominent in the founding of that church was the idea of plainness and an entire separation from all worldly folly, but, having grown to be a large body and

consequently popular, it is ready to entertain the proposition of having a gambling annex attached to its churches.

"Several instances are on record where young men have gained their first lessons in gambling at church socials and festivals. If they have thus learned these lessons at occasional gatherings of the church for festivity and silly games, how will it be when a permanent establishment that can be visited at any time is erected in connection with the churches? We have searched in vain for the divine commission, Go ye into all the world, and, for those who will not hear the gospel, erect bowling alleys and billiard parlors in connection with the churches, in order that they may be entertained.

"We know that this move will not meet the approval of the large majority of the members of the Methodist Church, but we are sorry to see that such is the tendency in the minds of many in the various churches at the present time; and while this is going on, should there not be a people who are seeking their power, not from some questionable means of worldly policy, but from the great source of all power, the world's Redeemer?"

– *Elder A. O. Tait.*

"*The Voice*," of New York, has also the following: –

THE REV. DR. F. A. LLACY GIVES ADVICE.

"The pastor of a Methodist Episcopal church in a city noted for its beer-brewing interests has been so greatly stirred by *The Voice's* Church and Saloon editorials that he was constrained to seek counsel of a brother minister of his acquaintance, asking advice as follows: –

"*Dear Brother:* My soul is stirred within me as I see this city wholly given up to the brewing interests. It would really seem

that our churches are bowing to the liquor oligarchy. What are we to do – stay in the pulpit and keep silence, or preach Prohibition and take the consequences – abuse, non-support and persecution?"

The response to this we give below:

"My Dear Young Friend: Your difficulty is one quite common to comparatively inexperienced ministers. I can fully sympathize with you in feeling as though you would like to fire broadsides of Gospel truth into the sin and iniquity that besiege the world on every hand. I used to feel that way myself in my early ministry, when I had occasional fits of 'enlargement of the conscience,' as I call it. It will require great care properly to suppress such impulses, and to keep the reins well in hand, so that you can manage the often none too pious men on whom you have to depend to supply the money for carrying on the Lord's work on an adequate scale.

"The preaching of the Gospel in a way not to offend has become a science, which it behooves a young minister to study well. It has taken centuries to evolve this science in its present perfection. We are wiser than the early Christians and those of the Middle Ages, who injudiciously butted their heads against the brass walls of prejudice. They preached against particular sins, and incurred unnecessary displeasure, when they might have preached the Gospel as the never-failing remedy for all **[R1492 : page 21]** sin, without specifying, and thus have secured the respectful attention and endorsement even of the most hardened sinners.

"It requires great wisdom and discretion to preach the Gospel in the present day in the way that most of the influential churches want it preached. The day of fishermen preachers is past. The young man who would serve a wealthy pulpit acceptably to-day must bring into it education, culture and refinement, and must

show great deference to the opinions of the men who are looked up to, and who have influence in the church and in the neighborhood.

"Regarding the particular question about which you inquire, you should be careful to make a broad discrimination between, for instance, a wealthy brewer and a wicked dive-keeper, who may, in the natural course of business, handle the former's wares and be under business obligations to him. Your congregation will probably stand by you in anything you may say about saloon-keepers, especially about those who conduct disorderly and disreputable resorts, but it would not do to imperil influence for good by attacking a respectable wholesale dealer, or classing him in the same category with common saloon-keepers.

"Then, as to Prohibition, you know that question has so many bearings, especially in its political aspects, that it is well to feel your way very carefully before committing yourself to it unqualifiedly. You can safely say that you sympathize with the objects had in view by those earnest and excellent people who have become so discouraged in their attempts to keep the business within respectable limits that they even propose to do away with it entirely. I said that myself recently and it was heartily endorsed by a wealthy wholesale dealer, whose wife is a member of my church, and who is himself one of the best paying members of my congregation. Moreover, several Prohibitionists thanked me for my courageous stand against the liquor power.

"Now, my dear brother, I have great hopes for you. I know of no young man in the denomination who stands a better chance for ecclesiastical preferment than yourself, if you will but follow the dictates of your own sober judgment guided by a few such considerations as I have mentioned. Whenever I can help you in any way, command me, and believe me,

Ever sincerely your brother in Christ,

F. A. Lacy.'''

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But Methodists are not alone in these matters. Here is another item of similar import: –

CHURCHES AND SALOONS.

"There is considerable discussion in Pittsburg religious circles over the sermon last Sunday of the Rev. W. S. Rainsford, D.D., pastor of St. George's Episcopal Church, New York, in which he advanced some very radical views as regards the regulation of saloons. Dr. Rainsford, in substance, said that he had given the saloon question a great deal of study and that he had come to the conclusion that it is impossible to suppress saloons, at least in large cities, and the best thing the church can do is to make a compromise and countenance the establishment of places by Christian men, where beer, light wines and coffee can be sold. He also favored the opening of the places on Sunday during certain hours, and thinks the attachment of reading rooms would make them attractive. Dr. Rainsford thought that these places properly conducted would in a great measure aid the cause of temperance and lessen the consumption of spirituous liquors."

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The foregoing arraignments by Bishop Foster, not only Methodists, but Presbyterians, Baptists, Episcopalians and members of all denominations may well ponder, for they apply to all alike. They come from one of the oldest bishops in the Methodist denomination. Had they come from one outside of Methodism they might be regarded as malicious reproach, but coming as they do from one high in official capacity within the denomination, they must be regarded as his honest convictions in view of the broad observation of Methodism as a whole which his position as bishop furnishes.

Its confessions ought indeed to be startling to every Methodist particularly, and to others in so far as they realize the same conditions. The Bishop accuses the membership of the [R1493 : page 21] Methodist church (1) of trying to bring the church down to the level of the ungodly by encouraging "the ball, the theatre, nude and lewd art, and social luxuries with all their loose moralities." What a charge! what a confession! Can the spirit of Christ, the love of the truth, or the joys of hope and of communion with God dwell in hearts that are so led of the spirit of the world? But does the Bishop mean that only a few such have crept into the Methodist church, while the great majority are [R1493 : page 22] otherwise minded? Evidently not, for he speaks of the membership of the Methodist church as a whole. He seems to see plainly that the whole Methodist field is overrun with tares, and that the true wheat – the saints who are actuated by the spirit of Christ – are numerically so insignificant as to be unworthy of mention.

(2) He accuses them of trying to make satisfaction for this worldliness by giving more attention to the outward forms of godliness – the keeping of Lent and Easter and Good Friday, and attending to church-decorations, etc. – in other words of having "a form of godliness without the power."

(3) He shows how the early zeal, enthusiasm, sobriety, consistency and devotion of Methodism have given place to pleasure-seeking with the world – how they are now "lovers of pleasure more than of God."

But what word of commendation has he for a faithful ministry that bravely endeavors to stem this fearful tide of worldliness in the ranks of Methodism? None whatever. On the other hand, his testimony agrees with that of the Prophet Isaiah (28:7. See also S.S. Lesson on Isa. 28:1-13, in TOWER of Jan. 15, 1892), that the ministry as well as the membership have become

intoxicated with the spirit of the world, and are, therefore, as far out of the way as the people. He speaks of them as "a hireling ministry – timid, truckling, time-serving, without faith, endurance and holy power;" says they have forsaken the great central truth of Christianity and deal in generalities and popular lectures.

What an arraignment of Methodism. Doubtless the good Bishop would make some honorable exceptions among the ministry, as well as among the membership of Methodism, were he not speaking here of his outlook over Methodism as a whole. This can only be understood as his general view of the rank and file both of the ministry and membership of the great Methodist organization. In his estimation and from his specially favorable standpoint of observation, having a full acquaintance with the workings of the whole system and necessarily a large personal acquaintance with both the ministry and the membership, he plainly describes the rank and file of both as "tares" – mere imitation Christians, Christians in outward appearance, but not at heart. And, pointing to the fact that the society is only a little over a hundred years old, he declares that such a fall from the original devotion and zeal of Methodists for God "seems almost a miracle of history," and adds, "But who that looks about him to-day can fail to see *the fact?*"

It is high time, in view of these things, that any of the Lord's true people who still abide in the midst of Methodism and who support it with their influence, their presence and their means, should awake and consider what the Lord would have them do. We are now living in "the harvest" or "end" of the Gospel age, when the wheat and the tares which the Lord allowed to grow together all through the age must be separated. (Matt. 13:30.) The great mass of tares is to be bound yet more tightly than ever in bundles preparatory to the burning (symbolic) in the great time of trouble predicted by the Lord and the prophets and the apostles to

occur within this harvest period, and which therefore can be only a very few years in the distance.

The sickle which the Lord is making use of to accomplish the separation is the truth due in this harvest period – the truth concerning the divine plan of the ages, showing both scripturally and philosophically the glorious outcome of the work of redemption in the grand "restitution of all things, spoken by the mouth of all the holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 3:19-21); and showing also the "high calling" of the Gospel Church – not the mixed company of wheat and tares which constitute the nominal gospel church, but the true and faithful saints," whose names were "written in heaven," and which have never been "blotted out" because of unfaithfulness: "The Lord knoweth them that are his." The divine plan of the ages shows how those called, chosen and faithful" ones (Rev. 17:14) are to be joint-heirs with Christ, how they are to reign with him over the earth for a thousand years, and how they with him constitute the promised "Seed of Abraham" which is to bless all the families of the earth. – Rom. 8:17; Rev. 5:10; 20:6; Gal. 3:16,29; Gen. 28:14. [R1497 : page 23]

THE TRUE CHURCH.

I.

One Sabbath morn I roamed astray,
And asked a pilgrim for the way:

"O, tell me, whither shall I search,
That I may find the one *true Church?*"

He answered, "Search the world around;
The one true Church is never found.

"Yon ivy on the abbey wall

Makes fair the falsest church of all."

But fearing he had told me wrong,
I cried, "Behold the entering throng!"

He answered, "If a Church be true,
It hath not many, but a few!"

Around a font the people pressed,
And crossed themselves on brow and breast.

"A cross so light to bear," he cried,
"Is not of Christ the Crucified!"

"Each forehead, frowning, sheds it off:
Christ's cross abides through scowl and scoff!"

We entered at the open door,
And saw men kneeling on the floor;

Faint candle, by the daylight dimmed,
As if by foolish virgins trimmed;

Fair statues of the saints, as white
As now their robes are, in God's sight;

Stained windows, casting down a beam,
Like Jacob's ladder in the dream.

The Pilgrim gazed from nave to roof,
And, frowning, uttered this reproof:

"Alas! who is it understands
God's temple is not made with hands?"

II.

We walked in ferns so wet with dew
They plashed our garments trailing through,

And came upon a church whose dome
Upheld a cross, but not for Rome.

We brushed a cobweb from a pane
And watched the service in the fane.

"Do prayers," he asked, "the more avail,
If offered at an altar rail?"

"Does water sprinkled from a bowl,
Wash any sin from any soul?"

"Do tongues that taste the bread and wine
Speak truer after such a sign?"

Just then, upon a maple spray,
Two orioles perched, and piped a lay,

Until the gold beneath their throats
Shook molten in their mellow notes.

Resounding from the church, a psalm

Rolled, quivering, through the outer calm.

"Both choirs," said I, "are in accord,
For both give praises to the Lord."

"The birds," he answered, "chant a song
Without a note of sin or wrong:

"The church's anthem is a strain
Of human guilt and mortal pain."

The orioles and the organ ceased,
And in the pulpit rose the priest.

The Pilgrim whispered in my ear,
"It profits not to tarry here."

"He speaks no error," answered I;
"He teaches that the living die;

"The dead arise; and both are true;
Both wholesome doctrines; neither new."

The Pilgrim said, "He strikes a blow
At wrongs that perished long ago;

*"But covers with a shielding phrase
The living sins of present days."*

We turned away among the tombs –
A tangled place of briars and blooms.

I spelled the legends on the stones:
Beneath reposed the martyrs' bones,

The bodies which the rack once brake
In witness for the dear Lord's sake,

The ashes gathered from the pyres
Of saints whose zeal our souls inspires.

The Pilgrim murmured as we passed,
"So gained they all the crown at last.

"Men lose it now through looking back
To find it at the stake and rack.

"The rack and stake are old with grime;
God's touchstone is the living time."

III.

We passed where poplars, gaunt and tall,
Let twice their length of shadow fall.

Then rose a meeting-house in view,
Of bleached and weather-beaten hue.

Men plain of garb and pure of heart
Divided church and world apart.

Nor did they vex the silent air
With any sound of hymn or prayer.

God's finger to their lips they pressed,
Till each man kissed it, and was blessed.

I asked, "Is this the true Church, then?
He answered, "Nay, a sect of men:

"And sects, that lock their doors in pride
Shut God and half his saints outside.

"The gates of heaven, the Scriptures say

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Stand open wide by night and day.

"So, then, to enter, is there need
To carry key of church or creed?"

IV.

Still following where the highway led,
Till elms made arches overhead,

We saw a spire, and weathercock,
And snow-white church upon a rock –

A rock, where centuries before,
Came sea-tossed pilgrims to the shore.

My sandals straightway I unbound,
Because the place was holy ground.

I cried, "One church at last I find,
That fetters not the human mind."

"This church," said he, "is like the rest;
For all are good, but none are best."

V.

Then far from every church we strayed –
Save Nature's pillared aisles of shade.

The squirrels ran to see us pass,
And God's sweet breath was on the grass.

I challenged all the creeds, and sought
What truth, or lie, or both, they taught.

I asked, "Had *Augustine* a fault?"
The Pilgrim gazed at Heaven's high vault,

And answered, "*Can a mortal eye
Contain the sphere of all the sky?*"

I said, "The circle is too wide."
"*God's truth is wider!*" he replied.

"Though Augustine was on his knee,
He saw how little he could see;

"Though *Luther* sought with burning heart,
He caught the glory but in part;

"Though *Calvin* opened wide his soul,
He comprehended not the whole.

"Not Luther, Calvin, Augustine
Saw visions such as I have seen."

While yet he spake, a rapture stole
Through all my still inquiring soul.

I looked upon his holy brow,
Entreating, "Tell me, who art THOU?"

But such a splendor filled the place,

I knew it was the Lord's own face!

I was a sinner, and afraid!
I knelt in dust, and thus I prayed:

"O Christ the Lord! end thou my search,
And lead me to the one true Church."

He spake as never man may speak –
"The one true Church thou shalt not seek.

"Seek thou, forevermore, instead,
To find the *one true Christ, its Head!*"

The Lord then vanished from my sight,
And left me standing in the light.
– *Sel.*
