

VIEWS FROM THE TOWER.

WE called attention recently to the fact that Methodism is being considerably shaken internally. The people, or, as they term them, the "laity," are getting awake to the fact that they are being ruled by a clerical oligarchy, whose wire-pulling for place and power and title among themselves much resembles the methods of political parties; while the *people*, the Church en masse, have almost no voice in the councils of the church, but all the expenses to bear.

The following extracts are from a prominent article which appeared recently in the *Chicago Chronicle*, and which has excited considerable comment. It is headed –

"METHODISM AND REFORM."

"The old polity that was established in the time of Asbury, and that has been trimmed a little here and there by the general conferences, is as ungainly as a seventeenth century dress. Reform is abroad in the air....

"The laymen are evidently waking up to the fact that as they are payers they ought to have more voice in the matter of church government.

"At present their voice, what they have, is so limited that a consciousness of it produces nausea and disgust. They are beginning to clamor for a "*magna charta*," and as England's king was compelled to grant the people's request, so here the general conference of '96 in Cleveland will be obliged to heed and obey. They demand that the church members elect their own officers and that they be not the tool of the pastor and a self-perpetuating official board. They realize that every member is a stockholder, and ought to have his stock represented

by vote. This encroachment will be fought bitterly by the 'big ones' and the bishops.

"It is hard to yield power once possessed. The bishops do not claim unlimited power, but it amounts to the same thing, and is so exercised as to bring about the results obtained....

..."The present mode is for the bishop to appoint [elders]. What does he know of men, except hearsay, or uncertain popularity? And yet they do this, in consultation with a cabinet of presiding elders, who piously declare the bishop appoints them.

"If he does do so, in opposition to his cabinet, he is tyrannical. Any misfit is attributed to the bishop, who is in a position to snap his finger at impotent rage. Methodist ministers are loyal, or they would not stand such ridiculous assumption of power. The laymen are taking pity on the poor minister whose position is by the grace of his lordship, the bishop, and his cabinet. The laymen demand a free, untrammled use of speech and action. Another step and we elect our pastors. At present, contrary to all law, a few churches do elect their pastors. This is demanded for all the churches. Election or selection of all churches in regard to their pastors is a settled fact. It is coming, it must come, or the earth will open and swallow us up....

"The spoken and unspoken actions and utterances of the laity were to curb the power – in fact to stop the "band wagon" long enough to climb in and ride. They already demand representation in equal numbers to all deliberations and conferences of the church. Their hitherto loyalty and devotion to their church has made them spectators rather than participants. Now they plan participation or alienation. No longer presiding elders and preachers ruled and controlled by bishops, and the laity in turn ruled and controlled by preachers.

"The bones of John Wesley must almost turn in their grave to see it. The old lumber wagon is doing good work, but a more modern vehicle is demanded. The greatest church in Protestantism has arisen,

and will put on her beautiful garments. It looks revolutionary, but reform is always that. It is a strange fact that British Methodism, triumphant, is more American by far than the church in America....

"A good shaking up is necessary and it is coming. We are now weak, where to-morrow we will be strong. Let us pray for the day when we get down to a basis we can commend to the people – our church free from the shackles of an imperial ecclesiasticism."

[R1883 : page 248]

The Church of Christ has probably suffered more from pride and ambition for leadership than from any other one cause. The disciples were reprov'd time and again for disputing which should be considered greatest, until finally our Lord told them plainly that such a spirit of self-exaltation would be sure to keep all who possessed it out of the promised Kingdom. He said, also, "Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant, even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." – Matt. 20:25-28.

The highest position in Christ's Church was to be "servant," and he declared himself the chief servant or minister of the Church. And surely – if "*all ye are brethren*," then all the brethren should have an *equal right* to express their judgment of the Lord's will respecting the leadership of meetings, and all other matters related to the welfare of the Lord's cause. There should be no rulership, lordship or masteries amongst those whom the one Master, even Christ, has put upon a common level. The division of the Church in the dark ages into "clergy" and "laity" came not from the Lord and the Apostles, **[R1884 : page 248]** but from ambition, fostered by the great enemy, Satan.

We trust that the brethren and sisters who rejoice in the present truth will be on guard against conditions which have done so much in the past to injure the Lord's cause, and which grow from almost imperceptible beginnings, until *custom* becomes a chain which perverts God's order and hinders the development of the talents of many of his children and permits one or two in the congregation to exercise lordship over God's heritage, without so much as recognizing the right of the Church to decide for themselves (under the guidance of the holy spirit) who are those who possess the qualifications for the service specified in God's Word.

We urge upon all the brethren, in every place, possessed of zeal and qualifications for the service of God's flock, that they carefully avoid trenching upon the liberties wherewith the Lord has made free his people. We commend that modesty which in honor prefers one another, and seeks to help forward into active service every other one in proportion as he seems to have requisite talents; and which would refuse to lead even a small group except with the expressed desire that he do so, by at least a majority of those professing faith in the ransom and full consecration to the Lord's service. And this choice should not be perpetual: an opportunity to know the mind of God's people should be sought at least yearly, and oftener if there be reason to believe that a change would be desirable to the majority. Protect the liberties of the flock, because they are not yours but the liberties of Christ's cause. "One is your Master, even Christ, and all ye are brethren."
