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BEFORE THE

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NOVEMBER 29, 1921

By REV. THOMAS E. MORRIS

BY-PRODUCTS OF METHODISM

Silent But Powerful Influences

We will think together this evening on some of the by-products of Methodism. Of course, we cannot mention them all, for the very good reason that we do not know them all. Moral and spiritual influences are too subtle to be gathered up and labelled. We may visualize things that are material; but not always the finer and higher things of life. Some of the most powerful forces are silent and invisible. You cannot see the wind. It "bloweth where it listeth." You hear the sound and see the effects, but not the wind itself. No man has seen the force of gravity; but it is, perhaps, the most powerful of all physical forces. It holds the universe in order and guides millions of planets in their trackless marches through space.

Operation of Second Causes

And then, too, the operation of second causes may intercept our vision of original energy. I place a row of balls down this aisle, each touching the other, and the last one resting upon the door sill. With a hammer I strike the ball at this end of the line and the ball on the door sill falls into the street. The hammer did not touch it; but it was the impact of the hammer here that moved the farthestmost ball there. The shock was communicated from one ball to the next, until the last ball was reached and moved from its resting place. If you had been passing the door, you would have seen the ball fall into the street; but intervening objects would have hidden original energy from you. And so the influences of almost two centuries ago, have been transmitted to us through the intervening years and are felt by us to-night. Many of the things in the be-

tween are but dimly seen by us, if indeed seen at all; but they made their contribution to the world and we are **here** because they were **there**.

A Backward Glance

You will permit me to turn aside long enough to say, that it will be in every way helpful to us, to keep ourselves in touch with the simple concrete facts of our history, antecedent as well as contemporary. While all life is prospective, rather than retrospective, yet an occasional backward glance at "a day that is dead," may give us a better perspective of a day that is. In this we have as example the ancient Hebrews who never allowed themselves to forget the great outstanding characters in Jewish history. The names of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; of Moses, Joshua and David are inspiring memories to that remarkable race until this day. And so I think a knowledge of the epic days of Wesley, Asbury and McKendree will make braver and better men of us. "Remember the days of old, consider the years of many generations: ask thy father and he will show thee; thy elders and they will tell thee."

Comparisons of Human Life

Human life has been compared to the passage of a ship through the sea, leaving no trace behind it. But it is a false symbol. A better comparison is "a handful of drops caught up from the crest of a wave, by the winds, tossed into columns of spray that rise and fall back again into the bosom of the deep," only to be caught up again by the next gale that lashes the sea into motion. And so I come back to where I began: Our by-products cannot be counted to-night, because the intervening years intercept our vision of things across a chasm of centuries. Effects have themselves become causes, and the first cause has been lost to sight by us.

Methodism's Contributions to the World

But there are some great outstanding contributions that Methodism has made to the world at large, that are not counted in our assets as a denomination. The impartial historian, however, must not be allowed to forget that they had their genesis among the people called Methodists.

Wesley a Social Reformer

Very few people think of Mr. Wesley (and Wesley and Methodism are inseparable) as a social reformer and political force. We think of him as a great evangelist with a message which had to do with matters of the soul, and with a judgment to come. It is to his credit that he did not forget or neglect that side of his ministry. He insisted that men have an understanding with God, and that they keep themselves in right relations with Him. But it is equally to his credit that he insisted that men keep themselves in right relations with each other. He wrote with as much earnestness and ethical passion on things that had to do with life's everydayness as he did upon the great fundamental doctrines that relate entirely to a life that is to be. He was the apostle of a new social order in sodden England, the protagonist of the people, in all the social and political problems that agitated the currents of world thought in his day. Such subjects as the price of rents, the price of corn and oats, of beef and mutton, of pork and poultry occupied his thoughts and engaged his trenchant pen. Directly and indirectly these subjects and others like them felt the impact of his pure life and elevated teaching upon them. This is not the view of a loyal and perhaps biased disciple of Wesley. It is the verdict of impartial history. Woodrow Wilson, a maker of history, a student of history and a writer of history, in his little book, "John Wesley's Place in History," says: "He seemed a sort of revolu-

tionist: left no community as he found it: set men by the ears." Further on in the same lecture, he says: "And yet the first judgment had not been wholly wrong. A sort of revolution followed him after all. It was not merely that he came and went so constantly, and moved every country side with his preaching. Something remained after he had gone: the touch of the statesman men had at first taken him to be."

If we understand by the word revolutionist, a little noisy man, disturbing communities by his radical views; whipping society into a froth of excitement by extreme utterances; tearing down established institutions and leaving nothing better in their places; and then passing away, and the temporary wave of enthusiasm passing with him, then, Wesley was no revolutionist. But if we follow Mr. Wilson in his thought until we see Wesley as a statesman grappling with the problems of the people, changing the currents of social and political life, and then passing away and leaving behind him a changed world, and a memory as sweet as the memory of a gracious dream, then Wesley was a revolutionist of the highest type. The fact that he "left no community as he found it" can mean nothing less than this. I admit that he had no political platform; no social program; that his great purpose in life was to change men, and not institutions; but in doing the one he did the other also.

Green in his "Short History of the English People" is no less generous in his treatment of the Methodist movement. In speaking of the great revival in which Wesley was the leader, he says: "In the nation at large appeared a new moral enthusiasm, which rigid and pedantic as it often seemed, was still healthy in its social tone and whose power was seen in the disappearance of the profligacy which had disgraced the upper classes, and the foulness which had infested literature ever since the Restoration. A yet nobler

result of the religious revival was the steady attempt which has never ceased from that day to this, to remedy the guilt, the ignorance, the physical suffering, the social degradation of the profligate and the poor. It was not until the Wesleyan impulse had done its work that this philanthropic impulse began A new philanthropy reformed our prisons, infused clemency and wisdom into our penal laws, abolished the slave trade, and gave the first impulse to popular education." It is a pathetic picture that Mr. Green gives of the intellectual, moral and religious destitution of the masses of the poor. "They were ignorant and brutal to a degree which it is hard to conceive, for the increase of population which followed on the growth of towns and the development of commerce had been met by no effort for their religious or educational improvement. Not a new parish had been created. Schools there were none save the grammar schools of Edward and Elizabeth, and some newly established 'circulating schools' in Wales for religious education. The rural peasantry who were being fast reduced to pauperism by the abuse of the poor laws were left without much moral or religious training of any sort. 'We saw but one Bible in the parish of Cheddar' said Hannah Moore at a far later time, and that was used to prop a flower pot." Such destitution as that could not but challenge the attention of the little restless and alert man of the eighteenth century and his associates. And the presence of need was all the appeal that was necessary to them. They accepted the challenge and undertook to meet the need.

Slavery Condemned

Some of these social reforms inaugurated and promoted in this revival deserve more than a passing notice. Perhaps no other man had as much to do with the abolition of human slavery as Mr. Wesley. As an in-

stitution, it flourished in his day, and the conscience of the world seems to have been practically undisturbed on the subject. But he rejected it with abhorrence. To his sensitive conscience it was contrary to every law of right, of justice and mercy. He was as uncompromising in his indictment of slavery as it existed among his own people, as he was in his condemnation of the traffic in human life, as it touched us on this side of the sea. There is no mistaking his attitude to this ethical subject. Hear him: "Give liberty to whom liberty is due, that is to every child of man; to every partaker of human nature. Let none serve you, but by his own act and deed, by his own voluntary choice. Away with all whips, all chains, all compulsion. Be gentle toward all men." His disciples on this side of the sea, were not silent on this subject. The stormy days of the forties led naturally to the bloody days of the sixties. I shall not say that Methodism was the only influence at work in the settlement of this troublesome question. It would not be true if I were to say it. But it is an open secret that Methodism was the most active and powerful influence that was brought to bear upon the subject.

I am not unmindful of the fact that I am addressing an audience whose fathers and forefathers were slave owners. Naturally we resent the false and sometimes ridiculous things said about our treatment of the slaves. But it has been a long time since I have heard any one undertake to defend human slavery.

Popular Education

Another reform mentioned by Mr. Green as the outgrowth of this movement must not be overlooked. He says it "gave the first impulse to popular education." Never in modern history has it been closer to fact that the people were as sheep without shepherds. Surely "darkness covered the earth and gross darkness the

people." But into this sodden mass women like Hannah Ball and Hannah Moore entered with human sympathy and left benedictions behind them. With ardor and enthusiasm they devoted themselves to the uplift of human kind. Underneath the rags and filth of the street urchin, they saw a human unfortunate, and the appealing vision met immediate response. In a letter to John Wesley, Hannah Ball says: "The children meet twice a week. They are a wild little company, but seem willing to be instructed. I labor among them earnestly, desiring to promote the interest of the Church of Christ." She was only one of a number whose genuine altruism found expression in this lowly service, and drew the sympathy of England to the poverty and crime of England's neglected classes.

Beginning of the Sunday School

In this connection, we must not fail to mention that the modern Sunday school had its birth among these earnest and consecrated people. Robert Raikes may have organized the movement into more permanent form; but Hannah Ball preceded him about a dozen years, and to her belongs the honor of starting the movement which now belts the globe. It has outgrown its original design of gathering together the very poor and neglected and instructing them. While millions of these are still included in our membership—and it would be a very great reproach to us if they were not—yet it is cause for thanksgiving that millions of the most intelligent and consecrated men and women of the church meet with them for the study of God's Word.

Methodism Pioneer of Higher Education for Women

If our author from whom I have quoted so freely, had been writing a history of ecumenical Methodism, and not a history of the English people, he might have

added that in this country Methodism was the pioneer in the higher education of women. The oldest chartered college for women in the United States is a Methodist College—The Wesleyan Female College of Macon, Georgia.

Wesley's Steadying Hand

This part of our subject would not be complete without the splendid tribute by Lecky to this religious movement in England, of which Wesley was the leader. It was he who more than any other man, held a steady hand upon the restless people and prevented a revolution in England similar to the French Revolution. Mr. Lecky says: "Great as was the importance of the evangelical revival in stimulating these (philanthropical) efforts, it had other consequences of perhaps wider and more enduring influence. Before the close of the century in which it appeared, a spirit had begun to circulate in Europe threatening the very foundations of society and belief. The revolt against the supernatural theory of Christianity which had been conducted by Voltaire and the encyclopaedists: the material conception of man and of the universe, which sprang from the increased study of physical science and from the metaphysics of Condillac, and Helvetious: the wild social dreams which Rousseau had clothed in such transcendent eloquence: the misery of a high spirited people ground to the dust by unnecessary wars and by partial and unjust taxation: the imbecility and corruption of rulers and priests had together produced in France a revolutionary spirit which in its intensity and proselytizing fervor was unequaled since the days of the Reformation. It was soon felt in many lands. Millions of fierce and ardent natures were intoxicated by dreams of an impossible equality and of complete social and political reorganization. Many old abuses perished, but a tone of thought and feeling was intro-

duced into European life which could only lead to anarchy, and at length to despotism, and was beyond all others fatal to that measured and ordered freedom which can alone endure. Its chief characteristics were a hatred of all constituted authority, an insatiable appetite for change, a habit of regarding rebellion as the normal as well as the noblest form of political self-sacrifice, a disdain for all compromise, a contempt for all tradition, a desire to level all ranks and subvert all establishments, a determination to seek progress not by the slow and cautious amelioration of existing institutions, but by sudden violent revolutionary changes. Religion, property, civil authority and domestic life were all assailed and doctrines incompatible with the very existence of government were embraced by multitudes with the fervor of a religion. England on the whole escaped the contagion. Many causes conspired to save her, but among them, the prominent place must, I believe, be given to the new and vehement religious enthusiasm which was at the very time passing through the middle and lower classes of the people, which had enlisted in the service a large proportion of the wilder and more impetuous reformers, and which recoiled with horror from the anti-Christian tenets that were associated with the revolution in France."

A Dead Church Revived

I turn away from these purely sociological reforms to those more nearly related to the purpose of this religious movement. The state of the church was at this time a reproach to Christendom. Religious worship at its best was little more than formalism and ritualism. Religious life as expressed in the daily lives of the people was none too seemly. Unfortunately, the clergy as a class was as destitute of moral and spiritual life as the people. They are described as "the most lifeless class in Europe. . . . The most remiss

in their labors in private and the least severe in their lives." They were a pleasure-loving, fox-hunting set bent on getting the most out of this life, that this world can give. By their moral and spiritual delinquency, they had lost not only the confidence of the world, but its respect. It is a revolting and sickening record. No wonder the world "laughed" when religion was mentioned. But to the leaders in this new religious movement sin was not a misfortune that loads men with disabilities; but a dreadful calamity that destroys. The world was not a play-house nor a wine cellar; but God's dwelling place. Life was not a frolic, but an opportunity for glorifying God. Wesley gives us in a sentence the dominating purpose of his ministry: "I have thought, I am a creature of a day passing through life, as an arrow through the air. I am a spirit come from God; just hovering over the great gulf; till a few moments hence, I am no more seen. I drop into an unchangeable eternity. I want to know one thing, the way to heaven, how to land safe on that happy shore." To him and those associated with him, life and death, heaven and hell, God and eternity were solemn realities. And from their preaching and from their practicing the world caught a vision of a new light and felt the throb of a new life. The result was a vitalized church, and a quickened religious life throughout Christendom. The old dead religion began to live again. Light and hope and faith and joy began again to stir the hearts of men. May the light never fail until dimmed by the brighter light of the "unsetting sun."

Rediscovery of the Layman

Another by-product of Methodism was the rediscovery of the laymen as an asset in the activities of the Church. I say "rediscovery" because that is what it was. It was not the bringing into use of a new force, but the recovery of a lost asset.

The employment of laymen in Church activities is as old as the Church itself. Most of the prominent character in the Old Testament history were laymen. Moses, Joshua, David and scores of others who made the largest contributions to Jewish history, had no connection with the priestly office. One of the most striking things about our Lord's selection of his disciples is that there was not a preacher in the number. They were plain business men who did not hesitate to lay aside their business engagements at the call of their Lord and enter upon His work. It is true they received from Him the highest and holiest of all consecrations when "He breathed on them and saith unto them Receive you the Holy Ghost: whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them: and whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained"; but it is also true they had no valid orders from the Church. They were plain business men.

The Friars

In the middle ages the Friars did the real work of the Church. They had their limitations; but the fanatical notions were but perversions of high and noble instincts. Back of their mistakes were hearts that were loyal to God, and God was willing to use them.

"Saint John of Epworth"

But the apostles were dead, and the Friars were inactive in the eighteenth century and God raised up "Saint John of Epworth" whose wide awake eyes discovered this lost asset. Was it an accidental discovery? Perhaps so. We have spoken of Wesley as a reformer. But he was such because conditions forced him to be such. "No man ever stood at the head of a great revolution whose temper was so anti-revolutionary." He loved his Church with a sincere devotion

and passionately clung to all her traditions. He broke with his Church only when his Church broke with God. He condemned and fought against the employment of laymen as preachers because his Church condemned and fought against it. But he soon found himself with none but laymen as his helpers, and it was either to use them or stand alone in the great work upon which he had entered. His cool common sense and his absolute loyalty to God led him to accept the latter course. The result is before us. The "Layman's Movement" to-day is but the fruitage of the seed sown in the stirring days of the eighteenth century. Methodism itself is nothing more than the natural result of a movement which set the laity at work.

The Centenary Movement

You would leave here this evening with a feeling of disappointment if indeed not of protest, if I were not to mention the lead that Methodism took in her recent program for the reconstruction, or, if you prefer, the regeneration of a devastated and heart-broken world. I refer, of course, to our Centenary Movement. While the earth was still trembling under the roar of cannon, the bursting of shells, the shriek of machine guns, and before the awful baptism of gas had passed away the vision of the world's need came. The vision, like an awful nightmare, was accentuated by the moans of dying soldiers, the tears of weeping mothers, the sobs of heart-broken widows. The civilization of the world hung upon the "hinge of history." World conditions furnished the occasion for a new world program, and the Church that had thought in terms of thousands began to think in terms of millions. At last responsibility answered to opportunity and the world was startled by the result. This spirit of optimism and courage was caught by other Churches which at once followed our lead, and some of them went beyond us. We are glad

they did. But we are also glad that Methodism went before and blazed the way. But I need not and will not dwell upon a movement so fresh in our memory.

A Closing Word

A closing word needs to be said. In the heroic days of Greece, the runner in the races, carried a lighted torch in his hand, and when he had reached his bounds, he passed it into the hands of the next runner. It is a rich heritage that has been handed down to us, by those who have gone before. They labored and we have entered into their labors. It is for us to see that the trust which came to us is transmitted to those who follow after us. May the succession go on, and on, and on, "until the stars grow old."