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J. W. Kilgo

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SOME THINGS THAT BELONG TO METHODISM



ADDRESS BEFORE THE
HISTORICAL SOCIETIES

of the

South Carolina Conference

Florence, S. C., November 1, 1932

and the

Upper South Carolina Conference

Greenville, S. C., November 15, 1932

By Rev. J. W. KILGO, D. D.

Some Things That Belong to Methodism

It has been said that Methodism has been too busy in making history to find time for making an orderly record of her history. A criminal carelessness in the preservation of a written record has ever characterized the church. I refer to the individual church, its register of members and its record of church conferences; the quarterly conference and its minutes and the district conference and its record. Where can be found a complete record in any one of these organizations? Yet a record was supposed to have been made in each one. The fault must be acknowledged and criticism brought against those to whom were entrusted the preservation of them. How can a historian write a history of Methodism from lost records. The result has been that Methodism has had taken her birthright from her by other churches, they claiming to be the originators of world movements that had their conception and birth in Methodism. Through all the years since God raised up Methodism as an evangelical force, refusing, as did St. Paul, to build on another's foundation, she has pioneered her way and established her organizations. Where is there today any great enterprise or organization universally adopted by the protestant church within the last one hundred and seventy-five years that did not have its origin in Methodism?

Methodism arose by an endowment of power by the Holy Ghost as did the apostolic church. It was a small company that met in Oxford-England, hungering for holiness that formed a nucleus out of which the Holy Spirit gave power to the formation of Methodism. John Wesley's ministrations had not, nor could it have had power until in a small prayer meeting the Spirit regenerated his soul and witnessed to him that his sins were forgiven, resulting in an experience of his "heart being strangely warmed." Then he realized as he declared that he had been preaching to convert others when he himself had not been converted. From then on through all her history has Methodism declared as one of her cardinal doctrines the office of the Holy Spirit in regeneration and witnessing to His power that one is born again and made a child of God.

Christ had said to His disciples, "It is expedient that I go away." If I go away I will pray the Father and He shall give you another Comforter which is the Holy Ghost. He shall teach you all things and bring all things to your remembrance whatsoever I have said unto you." Hence before He ascended He commanded His disciples to tarry at Jerusalem until they were endued with power. In obedience to their Lord they tarried. They prayed they were empowered by the descent of the Holy Spirit upon them. So did the Holy Spirit descend upon Mr. Wesley in that little prayer meeting and endue him with power. He began at once to emphasize the place of the Holy Spirit in the church and in the setting up the Kingdom of God. Other churches were failing to empha-

size or to recognize His place in the church. From her beginning she has urged that her ministry tarry on their knees until they are endued with power. She has ever insisted that sinners tarry praying until the Holy Spirit regenerates their hearts and witnesses to them that they are the children of God. May I not ask are we today as insistent in emphasizing this doctrine as were our fathers? I fear we may so neglect Him in our preaching that the people, as did those of Ephesus, when asked by St. Paul: "If they had received the Holy Ghost since they believed, replied, 'We have not so much as heard that there be a Holy Ghost.'" In a number of evangelical meetings I have attended I did not hear the Holy Ghost referred to. Rarely do we hear Him preached in Methodist pulpits today. It has always seemed to me that the predominant preaching of our honored president, Bishop Candler, was on the offices of the Holy Spirit. How often do we hear him declared to be one of the great preachers of America. Whoever honors the Spirit him will the Spirit honor. It is well for us to study the conditions of the apostolic church in that upper room that brought to them an endowment of power. They were all in one accord, no discord, they were all in one place, the entire church, they arranged no program for the Holy Spirit to follow, they appointed no hour for Him to appear. The church of today is prone to make plans and programs for her work until there is more danger of a dependance upon plans and programs than upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

From that upper room the disciples did not go out to select their field of labor. Christ before He left them gave them their first appointment. They were to begin at Jerusalem where our Lord had his bitterest enemies. They were to tell the man who pierced His brow with thorns; those who drove the nails in His hands and feet; the man who thrust the spear into His side, that one drop of blood left on the point of those cruel instruments applied to their souls would cleanse them from all sin. From Jerusalem they were sent out to preach to all people in all lands. When Mr. Wesley was empowered in that little prayer meeting his first appointment was found at the entrance of coal mines where were assembled multitudes who had not heard the gospel preached, a wandering flock without a shepherd. Methodism from her very beginning became a militant force. Her preachers were sent, not called. In early Methodism no preacher was permitted to select his field of labor; no church called its pastor. A Methodist preacher is no hireling. He makes no contract in wages for his services. Whether paid him what had been promised by the church or not, there has never been a civil or ecclesiastical authority to which he might appeal. He goes wherever appointed without price, and generally without money. Methodism has been charged as an autocracy because her preachers have been sent to churches that had no choice in the selection of a pastor. Such was the case in the apostolic church and the Holy Spirit organized that church. We hear much of democracy today. It seems to make its appeal to the world and may be the best form of government for this world, but Christ came to set up a kingdom on earth with the Holy Spirit its prime minister and God the Father its King. I think history will confirm the fact that when Metho-

dism more nearly conform to the apostolic church she had her greatest revivals. Do we not need to gather and tarry for a renewal of power?

The task set for Methodism was not local but world wide. Wesley and his preachers were made to see the world as their parish. The militant feature of her itinerancy has resulted in sending her men to all lands so that now Methodism has encompassed the globe and in nearly all languages of the earth is the story of the cross told. No other protestant church led her or showed her the way into foreign fields. Like Paul, she heard the unconscious cry of Macedonia calling to her to come over and help them. Not waiting for an organized missionary society to raise funds and guarantee support. her men responded as in the days of the apostolic church, responded without purse or scrip. It has been published and generally accepted that William Carey was the first man to be sent to a foreign field by a protestant church. We would not lessen the honor due Mr. Carey. but years before Mr. Carey went to India Bishop Coke had crossed the Atlantic again and again looking after the mission work established in the West Indies and in Nova Scotia. A man said to your speaker once that Mr. Carey was the first protestant missionary to go to a foreign field. I called his attention to Bishop Coke. He said Mr. Carey was the first to be sent out by a missionary society. Granted, but the apostles had no missionary society to assure their support, nor did Mr. Coke. It reported that after spending his possessions which were considerable. and that of his wife, which were more considerable, he became an irresistible beggar. In a certain seaport a captain of a vessel called to another and asked, "Did a man run to you for money this morning for what he called a mission?" "Yes, he is a heavenly-minded little devil; he got my last penny." Nor was there a missionary society to send Bishop Coke to sail the Indian Ocean to carry the gospel to the people of Ceylan's Sunny Isle. The God of all life met him en voyage and transferred him to an appointment in the church triumphant; leaving his body to be entombed beneath the rolling tides of that ocean. Pericles said, "The whole earth is the tomb of the great." It was fitting that the ocean entomb one whose soul touched all lands, and whose waves sweeping over his body should widen until they have washed the shores of all continents. Other protestant churches were much older than Methodism, why did they wait until God called Methodism upon the scene of action and began to blaze the way showing them how before they followed? A true history should ever record the fact that the Methodist church led the protestant churches into what has grown the great efforts of the churches in missionary operations.

At home thousands were neglected and to them no gospel was being preached. As has been stated, among the first appointments of Mr. Wesley was to the coal fields and to other industrial plants where many were assembled. Thus in highways and hedges did Methodism assemble her first congregations in England and Ireland. What Methodism did in preaching the gospel to these neglected multitudes historians have declared saved England from ruin.

Bishop Asbury, coming to America, found the few Methodist preachers

of that day like the preachers of other churches, disposed to locate themselves in and about towns, while hundreds of the people had moved out into the wilds of America beyond the reach of the gospel. Asbury said they shall not perish, we shall go after them and "I will show you the way." Mounting his horse he initiated the itinerant movement which has ever since been the fixed plan of his church's ministry. This movement kept apace with the movement of the people, nor were they permitted to cease hearing the gospel preached. In a country so vast, removed so far from the seat of government, with communication all but impossible, the people must need have lapsed into indifference to the government and to lose all sense of patriotism. The Methodist itinerant with his horse as a means of travel and his saddle bag as a store house, filled with tracts and books, the people were kept reading and informed as to what was occurring in the outside world. But for the Methodist preacher moving with the van of moving people, they would have lapsed into infidelity, and much of America of that day would have become paganism. The very civilization of America was thus saved and historians accord the honor to Methodism of saving the nation. The Hon. Walter H. Page, speaking of Methodism, substantially said, "I regard our pioneer preachers among our greatest men. They were men of large mold. They knew the human heart and dealt with the fundamentals. Their influence was greater than that of our statesmen and leaders of industry and business." But for the itinerant going after the people, the question is what kind of a nation could the Almighty God have made out of America? In this movement no other protestant church led the way. There were no churches in which to assemble the people. In wilderness homes, under shade trees or bush arbors meetings were held and hundreds were converted. The answer Christ gave to the disciples of John the Baptist who were sent to ask Him "If He were the one sent or to look we for another." He replied, "Go tell John the poor have the gospel preached to them." Surely Methodism preaching to the poor in the outlying regions of America gave evidence of Christ's messiahship. An old man many years ago said to your speaker that the Methodist church had become very respectable. That he remembered when its people were poor and when it was called a negro church. He did not know what he regarded a badge of degradation was really a crown of glory. Her work among the slaves in rice plantations is too well known to discuss it here. The question is: have we not fallen in Heaven's regard as we have risen in the world's idea of respectability? God have mercy on us if we have become so refined as to blush when called a church that gave the gospel to negroes. May we ever be such a church.

But we must hasten to other fields in which Methodism led. Two of which we shall notice. When Methodism became an active force, even before an organization was effected, she recognized her obligation to teach the children. That the children be gathered into a Sunday School. Sunday Schools had its inception in the mind of Mr. Wesley when, in the year 1736, in Savannah, Georgia, he gathered the children each Sunday and questioned them on the Bible. In 1769 the first trace of a regular Sunday School is found in Wycombe, England, where Hannah Ball,

a Methodist woman, opened one as was announced "For the training of children in Scripture." Twelve years later Sophia Cook, another Methodist woman, was conversing at Gloucester with Robert Raike, publisher of "The Gloucester Journal," was asked by him what could be done for a crowd of children wandering about the streets. She replied, "Let us gather them and take them to church and teach them the Bible and to read." Mark you, this was twelve years after Hannah Ball was running a Sunday School in Wycombe, England. Sophia Cook's suggestion to Mr. Raike was not original with her. Her church was then running Sunday Schools. Mr. Raike joined Miss Cook and a Sunday School was organized in Gloucester. Mr. Raike had a newspaper, Sophia Cook did not have; so Mr. Raike is accredited as the starter of Sunday Schools. It is stated he started two or three other schools in adjoining towns, but they were for boys only. We ask why were not Sunday Schools started before the arrival of Methodism? Why did not the protestant churches think of going to foreign fields and starting Sunday Schools before Methodism pioneered the way? At about the same time, or in 1784, as schools were started in England, Bishop Asbury organized schools in America. The first school was organized in Virginia, and soon after throughout the church. In 1790 the opening of Sunday Schools became a disciplinary requirement. Other churches of other denominations, seeing its value, followed in Sunday School organization. When Andrew Jackson was president of the United States he received a letter from his overseer at his Hermitage plantation in Tennessee stating the boys in the community were making various depredations on the place, and asked Mr. Jackson what to do. The president replied, "See the Methodist preacher and get him to start a Sunday School." Why the Methodist preacher?

For multiplied years each church of each denomination selected the Scripture to be taught in the Sunday School. There was no uniformity even in the same denomination. Dr. J. H. Vincent, afterwards elected a bishop, conceived the idea and put in operation the plan of a uniform work by having all schools of that branch of Methodism he represented study the same Scripture each Sunday in each Sunday School. He called his plan The Berean System. Before this plan was put into operation there was no chance to prepare Sunday School helps aiding teachers and pupils in preparing the lessons. The system practiced by the Methodists soon attracted the other denominations, and they sought to join in making the system interdenominational. Thus was the plan changed from that of the Berean System to that of the interdenominational system. So today nearly all protestant churches in all lands have taught the same Scripture lesson every Sunday in their schools.

Again did Dr. Vincent advocate and put into operation "Teachers' training schools." Other denominations were a little slow in adopting this Methodist plan, but now all protestant churches are concerned in training their teachers for efficient work. We can recall no feature in the general plan of Sunday School work adopted by the protestant churches that was not pioneered by the Methodist church.

It has been said that Methodism was born in a university. Certainly

the building of schools was cotemporary with the building of churches in early Methodism. Her founders were almost as deeply concerned in the education of the people as in their regeneration. It is easy in the memory to recall the little school house standing hard by a country church building, and especially was this true of country Methodist churches. A history of these little school buildings and their products would be interesting. A knowledge of them is necessary if a true history of the development of education in our country is to be written. They were the foundation of what we have today in magnificent school buildings. The latter are the product of the former. The demand of Methodism was not only concerned in building primary schools, but also recognizing a little learning not only to be a dangerous thing, but also a disgraceful thing at once she began to make propositions for establishing colleges. In her educational purpose there was neither male nor female, hence in preparing for her sons she did not neglect her daughters. She led in the building the first chartered college for women in the world.

At one of our annual conferences a layman pleading for one of our female colleges for aid, said, "Let us for once do something for our girls." He seemed not to know that when Wofford College was opened for boys, our South Carolina conferences opened four colleges for girls. Two of these were in South Carolina—Spartanburg and Columbia, and two in North Carolina—Davenport at Lenoir and Carolina at Ansonville. At that time that section belonged to the South Carolina Conference. Methodism has never shown a distinction in the education of her sons to the neglect of her daughters. The State of South Carolina has been a long lingering follower in establishing a college for her women. The State seemed not to have recognized that among her people were women with minds calling for development until forty years ago, when she built her first college for them. Through many generations the church alone provided that daughters should share with sons in higher education. That fact should never be forgotten by our women. Today our branch of Methodism owns and controls three universities—Southwestern in Texas, Emory in Georgia and Duke in North Carolina. The doors of each of these are open for the entrance of women, and many are our young women who sit with our young men under the tuition of skilled and prepared instructors.

From her beginning Methodism has never ceased to demand an educated minister. That demand was voiced by Mr. Wesley when he declared "A call to preach was a call to prepare to preach." Like the apostolic church, Methodism in its early history was forced to use many uneducated preachers and, like in the apostolic church, the Holy Spirit used the weak to confound the mighty. But the Lord's favorite has never been an ignoramus. Methodism knew that fact and at once began to provide against it. From her beginning she provided that her itinerant preachers should pursue a course of study; nor were they admitted into the itinerant ranks nor ordained until they had passed an accredited examination on those studies. But soul-winning was Methodism's greatest concern. If a young man came to Mr. Wesley claiming to be called to preach, Mr. Wesley sent him to fill two or three appointments and then

to report. Doing so Mr. Wesley asked him if any one was converted, and if not, then he was asked if any one got mad, and if not then he was told he was not called to preach, to go back to his work.

In early Methodism preaching was regarded a failure if there were no visible results following every sermon. Her preachers permitted no obstacle to hinder them from going after the unsaved. What Methodism as a pioneer following or rather going with those into the wilds of America did to prevent the people from lapsing into infidelity and moral degradation and thus to enable the Almighty to make of this a Christian nation is known and declared by unprejudiced historians.

The apostles in the church of their day were no braver, no more loyal in declaring the gospel to a heathen world than were the preachers identified with early Methodism. They left to us not only a great legacy, but also a great example. Are we as diligent and persistent in our efforts to establish the Kingdom of God as were our fathers? Has Methodism under our ministry gone forward, stood still or retreated?

There have been many changes and modifications resting on the ministry that did not obtain forty-five years ago, when I joined the itinerancy. So radical have been some of those changes that your speaker is impressed that the Methodism of today is not the Methodism it was when he joined the itinerancy. Then the leading charges were filled by older men than today. The presiding elders were men of age and experience. Today young men are advanced more rapidly. I venture to assert there is more ambition for place by our young men than was the case forty years ago. The second conference I attended I was with four or five young preachers in the presence of an old itinerant. It was the night before the appointments were to be announced. The young men, all graduates of Wofford, were saying what kind of an appointment they wanted. I recall they each were modest in their wishes. At last the old itinerant spoke and said, "What I want the Bishop to give me is a circuit with from four to eight churches, having in its bounds a post-office and a grist mill." One might think he had no ambition for place. We all knew him to have an overwhelming desire for the saving of souls.

Forty-five years ago a preacher had a greater opportunity for two indispensable requirements that he does not have today, namely, to pray and to study. Because of the multiplication of machinery in many boards and various organizations, each having its programs, the pastor being made the key man to unlock the door and direct the forces to the success of each one is, therefore, largely denied the opportunity to pray and to study. A prayerless ministry inevitably results in a prayerless church. When Bishop George F. Pierce returned from one of his early Episcopal journeys, his father, Dr. Lovick Pierce, asked him if he prayed as much as he did before he was made a bishop. He replied, "He was on the road so much traveling and so many duties of the office to perform, that he could find no time for regular periods for prayer." His father said, "George, you have to do it. While traveling, if necessary, stop and get down in a fence corner and pray." Nothing more characterized our fathers in the ministry than that they were men much given to prayer. Much praying made them generally great preachers.

I think it not inappropriate to refer to a situation in the apostolic church akin to ours today, but making far less demand on the apostles than is made on our preachers. When the apostles called upon the church to appoint men to serve tables while "We will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word." All churches should protest against any requirement of its ministry that would interfere with what the Holy Ghost has called them to do and always be prepared to do, namely: to preach the Word. What interferes with prayer and preaching the word will weaken the ministry, and thereby weaken the church and retard the coming of the Kingdom.

One of our Bishops more than twenty-five years ago said to me that the day was not far distant when to stand in the pulpit and preach the gospel will require as much bravery as was required in the days of the apostles. The disposition of so many in the church today to conform to the world; so much cynicism uttering itself in ridicule of the holy word of God and our holy religion coming from many of our schools and so many who would substitute psychology for the Bible, pronouncing the Bible as out of date, it seems the Bishop's prophecy is fast approaching fulfillment. Our fathers were never known to turn their backs upon the enemy, however deeply entrenched nor how strong its forces might be. Who knows, my young brethren, but what you have come to the Kingdom for such a time as this as Queen Esther in her day? Our Lord trusts you to be strong, to make no compromise with His enemies. The same Lord that spoke to Joshua of old "To be strong and of a good courage" speaks to you to take His church and carry her on from victory to victory. So we pray that at the close of your generation those looking upon the church shall ask, "Who is she that looketh forth as the morning, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, and as terrible as an army with banners."