

**SOCIAL SCIENCE AND SERVICE: REPORT
OF THE OXFORD CONFERENCE OF THE
WESLEYAN
METHODIST UNION FOR SOCIAL
SERVICE FOR THE CONSIDERATION OF
SOCIAL PROBLEMS, EASTER, 1909**

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VARIOUS

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FOR SOCIAL SERVICE FOR THE CON-
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EASTER, 1909

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PREFACE

THE Oxford Conference of the Wesleyan Methodist Union for Social Service, the Report and Papers of which are here presented to the public, was not only an unequivocal success, but it may be said to mark an epoch in the history of the Wesleyan Methodist Church. It was the first Conference of the kind ever held in Methodism. It was presided over, from first to last, by the President of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference himself, and that not merely in his capacity as President of the Union for Social Service, but as representing, in his person and office, the rising tide of social sympathy in the Wesleyan Methodist Church. It was attended by a large number of Methodist women, many of whom took an invaluable part in the proceedings; also by some young Wesleyan ministers, by general admission, amongst the ablest, most eloquent, and most promising in the Wesleyan Church, who took an active share in the Conference. This Union of Social Service Easter Conference at Oxford may be said to signify the entry of the Wesleyan Methodist Church into the arena of constructive social reform. It is but a beginning—but it *is* a beginning, and there is now no drawing back. There is nothing before it, for the future, but an ever greater participation in the definite promotion of a really Christian civilization.

PREFACE

The first general Conference of Wesleyan Methodists on constructive Christian social reform was rightly held at Wesley's University city. Nothing was done with greater alacrity, or with clearer conscience and a more cheerful heart, than the visit paid by the members of the Conference, in the interval of sessions, to Wesley's rooms in Lincoln College. There was no manner of doubt amongst them of the fact that they were in the line of the truly apostolic succession of those Oxford Methodists who visited the sick and those in prison, and who preached the gospel to the poor.

It may be useful to preface this Report with a brief statement of the purpose for which the Union for Social Service exists. Its objects, in the words of the Constitution,¹ are 'the collection and study of social facts, the pursuit of social service, and the discussion of social problems and theories from the Christian standpoint, with the view to educate public opinion and secure improvement in the conditions of life.' Membership of the Union commits no one 'to the support of any political party, social theory, or to the opinion of any individual member.'² In its operations 'it directs the personal efforts of its members in those works of practical benevolence which all religious activity is making increasingly necessary. It collects and studies the facts of human life. It seeks to record and circulate information obtained by the inquiries and personal investigations of its members as to the social conditions of the people. It promotes the study of the knowledge that has already been obtained and published by students of economic problems and social

¹ Rule 2.

² Rule 3.

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questions. It seeks to train young people for positions of responsibility which they may possibly occupy in later life in private and public. Finally, it is convinced that real progress and right development can only follow when such service is rendered from the love of God, by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and under the guidance and with the aid of the Holy Spirit of love and truth and power.¹

The Union can already claim that it has helped to crystallize Methodist public opinion upon the subject of social reform. It has gathered into one focus the scattered rays of social light and influence in the Wesleyan Methodist Church. It has inspired and instructed thousands of young people through meetings, reading circles, and literature. It has convinced hundreds of working men that Christianity bears a vital relation to social reform, that it is indispensable to it. It has led to the formation of similar societies in the Primitive Methodist Church, in the Methodist Episcopal Church of the United States of America, and in the Methodist Church of New South Wales, Australia. Its handbook on social questions—*The Citizen of To-morrow*—has had a circulation of *fourteen thousand* copies! Yet the Union only came into existence at the Bristol Conference of 1905.

The beginning and the end of the Oxford Conference were alike important. Prefaced by the celebration of the Holy Communion—a deliberately significant confession of faith in the Redeeming and Risen Lord—the Conference opened with a manifesto by the President, Dr. Scott Lidgett, upon 'The Church and Social

¹ Leaflet 5.

PREFACE

Problems.' It set forth in a reasoned statement the duty of the modern Christian Church, the inevitable connexion of spiritual and social reform, and the inherence of social principles in the Christian faith. It is an address which must be answered by those who would disjoin these things.

The papers and the discussion on 'The Moralization of Economic Relations' went to the very root of matters. For the first time in Methodism there was a public discussion by representative Methodists of the relative merits of the competitive and the collectivist systems of society. The value of the papers read is that they give both sides of the subject from the Christian point of view, and afford readers material for a considered and impartial judgement. The spirit and temper, earnestness and moderation of the whole Conference were admirable, and worthy of the Christian Church.

The Writers of the papers are gratefully thanked for them by the Executive of the Union. It also presents its hearty acknowledgements to the Master and Fellows of Balliol College for their gracious hospitality; to the Trustees of the Wesley Memorial Church, and to the Revs. Grainger Hargreaves and R. Martin Pope, M.A., for their kindness and courtesy. It desires also to express its special sense of indebtedness to Mr. J. J. Stark—the Hon. Secretary of the Conference—for his strenuous service and successful management. The Editor also thanks the Rev. Ernest Dennis for his condensed account of the several discussions.

S. E. KEEBLE,

WESLEY MEMORIAL CHURCH, OXFORD.

Easter, 1909.

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