

A PLAIN ACCOUNT
OF
THE PEOPLE CALLED METHODISTS:
IN A LETTER TO THE
REVEREND MR. PERRONET,
VICAR OF SHOREHAM, IN KENT.

Written in the year 1748.

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR,

1. SOME time since, you desired an account of the whole economy of the people commonly called *Methodists*, And you received a true, (as far as it went,) but not a full, account. To supply what I think was wanting in that, I send you this account, that you may know, not only their practice on every head, but likewise the reasons whereon it is grounded, the occasion of every step they have taken, and the advantages reaped thereby.

2. But I must premise, that as they had not the least expectation, at first, of any thing like what has since followed, so they had no previous design or plan at all; but every thing arose just as the occasion offered. They saw or felt some impending or pressing evil, or some good end necessary to be pursued. And many times they fell unawares on the very thing which secured the good, or removed the evil. At other times, they consulted on the most probable means, following only common sense and Scripture: Though they generally found, in looking back, something in Christian antiquity likewise, very nearly parallel thereto.

I.

1. About ten years ago, my brother and I were desired to preach in many parts of London. We had no view therein, but, so far as we were able, (and we knew God could work by whomsoever it pleased him,) to convince those who would hear what true Christianity was, and to persuade them to embrace it.

2. The points we chiefly insisted upon were four:

First, that orthodoxy, or right opinions, is, at best, but a very slender part of religion, if it can be allowed to be any part of it at all; that neither does religion consist in negatives, in bare harmlessness of any kind; nor merely in externals, in doing good, or using the means of grace, in works of piety (so called) or of charity; that it is nothing short of, or different from, “the mind that was in Christ;” the image of God stamped upon the heart; inward righteousness, attended with the peace of God; and “joy in the Holy Ghost.”

Secondly, that the only way under heaven to this religion is to “repent and believe the gospel;” or, (as the Apostle words it,) “repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Thirdly, that by this faith, “he that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, is justified freely by his grace, through the redemption which is in Jesus Christ.” And,

Lastly, that “being justified by faith,” we taste of the heaven to which we are going; we are holy and happy; we tread down sin and fear, and “sit in heavenly places with Christ Jesus.”

3. Many of those who heard this began to cry out that we brought “strange things to their ears;” that this was doctrine which they never heard before, or at least never regarded. They “searched the Scriptures, whether these things were so,” and acknowledged “the truth as it is in Jesus.” Their hearts also were influenced as well as their understandings, and they determined to follow “Jesus Christ, and him crucified.”

4. Immediately they were surrounded with difficulties; — all the world rose up against them; neighbors, strangers, acquaintance, relations, friends, began to cry out amain, “Be not righteous overmuch; why shouldest thou destroy thyself?” Let not “much religion make thee mad.”

5. One, and another, and another came to us, asking, what they should do, being distressed on every side; as every one strove to weaken, and none to strengthen, their hands in God. We advised them, “Strengthen you one another. Talk together as often as you can. And pray earnestly with and for one another, that you may ‘endure to the end, and be saved.’” Against this advice we presumed there could be no objection; as being grounded on the plainest reason, and on so many scriptures both of the Old Testament and New, that it would be tedious to recite them.

6. They said, “But we want you likewise to talk with us often, to direct and quicken us in our way, to give us the advices which you well know we need, and to pray with us, as well as for us.” I asked, Which of you desire this? Let me know your names and places of abode. They did so. But I soon found they were too many for me to talk with severally so often as they wanted it. So I told them, “If you will all of you come together every Thursday, in the evening, I will gladly spend some time with you in prayer and give you the best advice I can.”

7. Thus arose, without any previous design on either side what was afterwards called *a Society*; a very innocent name, and very common in London, for any number of people associating themselves together. The thing proposed in their associating themselves together was obvious to every one. They wanted to “flee from the wrath to come,” and to assist each other in so doing. They therefore united themselves “in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they might help each other to work out their salvation.”

8. There is one only condition previously required in those who desire admission into this society, — “a desire to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from their sins.”²⁷

They now likewise agreed, that as many of them as had an opportunity would meet together every Friday, and spend the dinner hour in crying to God, both for each other, and for all mankind.

9. It quickly appeared, that their thus uniting together answered the end proposed therein. In a few months, the far greater part of those who had

begun to “fear God, and work righteousness,” but were not united together, grew faint in their minds, and fell back into what they were before. Meanwhile the far greater part of those who were thus united together continued “striving to enter in at the strait gate,” and to “lay hold on eternal life.”

10. Upon reflection, I could not but observe, This is the very thing which was from the beginning of Christianity. In the earliest times, those whom God had sent forth “preached the gospel to every creature.” And the **οι ακροαται**, “the body of hearers,” were mostly either Jews or Heathens. But as soon as any of these were so convinced of the truth, as to forsake sin and seek the gospel salvation, they immediately joined them together, took an account of their names, advised them to watch over each other, and met these **κατηχουμενοι**, “catechumens,” (as they were then called,) apart from the great congregation, that they might instruct, rebuke, exhort, and pray with them, and for them, according to their several necessities.

11. But it was not long before an objection was made to this, which had not once entered into my thought: — “Is not this making a schism? Is not the joining these people together, gathering Churches out of Churches?”

It was easily answered, If you mean only gathering people out of buildings called churches, it is. But if you mean, dividing Christians from Christians, and so destroying Christian fellowship, it is not. For,

- (1.) These were not Christians before they were thus joined. Most of them were barefaced Heathens.
- (2.) Neither are they Christians, from whom you suppose them to be divided. You will not look me in the face and say they are. What! drunken Christians! cursing and swearing Christians! lying Christians! cheating Christians! If these are Christians at all, they are devil Christians, as the poor Malabarians term them.
- (3.) Neither are they divided any more than they were before, even from these wretched devil Christians. They are as ready as ever to assist them, and to perform every office of real kindness towards them.
- (4.) If it be said, “But there are some true Christians in the parish, and you destroy the Christian fellowship between these and them; “I

answer, That which never existed, cannot be destroyed. But the fellowship you speak of never existed. Therefore it cannot be destroyed. Which of those true Christians had any such fellowship with these? Who watched over them in love? Who marked their growth in grace? Who advised and exhorted them from time to time? Who prayed with them and for them, as they had need? This, and this alone, is Christian fellowship:

But, alas! where is it to be found? Look east or west, north or south; name what parish you please: Is this Christian fellowship there? Rather, are not the bulk of the parishioners a mere rope of sand? What Christian connection is there between them? What intercourse in spiritual things? What watching over each other's souls? What bearing of one another's burdens? What a mere jest is it then, to talk so gravely of destroying what never was! The real truth is just the reverse of this: We introduce Christian fellowship where it was utterly destroyed. And the fruits of it have been peace, joy, love, and zeal for every good word and work.

II.

1. But as much as we endeavored to watch over each other, we soon found some who did not live the gospel. I do not know that any hypocrites were crept in; for indeed there was no temptation: But several grew cold, and gave way to the sins which had long easily beset them. We quickly perceived there were many ill consequences of suffering these to remain among us. It was dangerous to others; inasmuch as all sin is of an infectious nature. It brought such a scandal on their brethren as exposed them to what was not properly the reproach of Christ. It laid a stumbling-block in the way of others, and caused the truth to be evil spoken of.

2. We groaned under these inconveniences long, before a remedy could be found. The people were scattered so wide in all parts of the town, from Wapping to Westminster, that I could not easily see what the behavior of each person in his own neighborhood was: So that several disorderly walkers did much hurt before I was apprised of it.

3. At length, while we were thinking of quite another thing, we struck upon a method for which we have cause to bless God ever since. I was talking with several of the society in Bristol concerning the means of paying the debts there, when one stood up and said, "Let every member of the society give a penny a week till all are paid." Another answered, "But many of them are poor, and cannot afford to do it." "Then," said he, "put eleven of the poorest with me; and if they can give anything, well: I will call on them weekly; and if they can give nothing, I will give for them as well as for myself. And each of you call on eleven of your neighbors weekly; receive what they give, and make up what is wanting." It was done. In a while, some of these informed me, they found such and such an one did not live as he ought. It struck me immediately, "This is the thing; the very thing we have wanted so long." I called together all the Leaders of the classes, (so we used to term them and their companies,) and desired, that each would make a particular inquiry into the behavior of those whom he saw weekly. They did so. Many disorderly walkers were detected. Some turned from the evil of their ways. Some were put away from us. Many saw it with fear, and rejoiced unto God with reverence.

4. As soon as possible, the same method was used in London and all other places. Evil men were detected, and reprov'd. They were born with for a season. If they forsook their sins, we received them gladly; if they obstinately persisted therein, it was openly declared that they were not of us. The rest mourned and prayed for them, and yet rejoiced, that, as far as in us lay, the scandal was rolled away from the society.

5. It is the business of a Leader,

- (1.) To see each person in his class, once a week at the least, in order to inquire how their souls prosper; to advise, reprove, comfort, or exhort, as occasion may require; to receive what they are willing to give, toward the relief of the poor.
- (2.) To meet the Minister and the Stewards of the society, in order to inform the Minister of any that are sick, or of any that are disorderly and will not be reprov'd; to pay to the Stewards what they have received of their several classes in the week preceding.

6. At first they visited each person at his own house; but this was soon found not so expedient. And that on many accounts:

- (1.) It took up more time than most of the Leaders had to spare.
- (2.) Many persons lived with masters, mistresses, or relations, who would not suffer them to be thus visited.
- (3.) At the houses of those who were not so averse, they often had no opportunity of speaking to them but in company. And this did not at all answer the end proposed, — of exhorting, comforting, or reproving.
- (4.) It frequently happened that one affirmed what another denied. And this could not be cleared up without seeing them together.
- (5.) Little misunderstandings and quarrels of various kinds frequently arose among relations or neighbors; effectually to remove which, it was needful to see them all face to face. Upon all these considerations it was agreed, that those of each class should meet all together.

And by this means, a more full inquiry was made into the behavior of every person. Those who could not be visited at home, or no otherwise than in company, had the same advantage with others. Advice or reproof was given as need required, quarrels made up, misunderstandings removed: And after an hour or two spent in this labor of love, they concluded with prayer and thanksgiving.

7. It can scarce be conceived what advantages have been reaped from this little prudential regulation. Many now happily experienced that Christian fellowship of which they had not so much as an idea before. They began to “bear one another’s burdens,” and naturally to “care for each other.” As they had daily a more intimate acquaintance with, so they had a more endeared affection for, each other. And “speaking the truth in love, they grew up into Him in all things, who is the Head, even Christ; from whom the whole body, fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplied, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, increased unto the edifying itself in love.”

8. But notwithstanding all these advantages, many were at first extremely averse to meeting thus. Some, viewing it in a wrong point of light, not as a

privilege, (indeed an invaluable one,) but rather a restraint, disliked it on that account, because they did not love to be restrained in anything. Some were ashamed to speak before company. Others honestly said, "I do not know why; but I do not like it."

9. Some objected, "There were no such meetings when I came into the society first: And why should there now? I do not understand these things, and this changing one thing after another continually." It was easily answered: It is pity but they had been at first. But we knew not then either the need or the benefit of them. Why we use them, you will readily understand, if you read over the rules of the society. That with regard to these little prudential helps we are continually changing one thing after another, is not a weakness or fault, as you imagine, but a peculiar advantage which we enjoy. By this means we declare them all to be merely prudential, not essential, not of divine institution. We prevent, so far as in us lies, their growing formal or dead. We are always open to instruction; willing to be wiser everyday than we were before, and to change whatever we can change for the better.

10. Another objection was, "There is no scripture for this, for classes and I know not what." I answer,

- (1.) There is no scripture against it. You cannot show one text that forbids them.
- (2.) There is much scripture for it, even all those texts which enjoin the substance of those various duties whereof this is only an indifferent circumstance, to be determined by reason and experience.
- (3.) You seem not to have observed, that the Scripture, in most points, gives only general rules; and leaves the particular circumstances to be adjusted by the common sense of mankind. The Scripture, for instance, gives that general rule, "Let all things be done decently and in order." But common sense is to determine, on particular occasions, what order and decency require.

So, in another instance, the Scripture lays it down as a general, standing direction: "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God." But it is common prudence which is to make the application of this, in a thousand particular cases.

11. “But these,” said another, “are all man’s inventions.” This is but the same objection in another form. And the same answer will suffice for any reasonable person. These are man’s inventions. And what then? That is, they are methods which men have found, by reason and common sense, for the more effectually applying several Scripture rules, couched in general terms, to particular occasions.

12. They spoke far more plausibly than these, who said, “The thing is well enough in itself. But the Leaders are insufficient for the work: They have neither gifts nor graces for such an employment.” I answer,

- (1.) Yet such Leaders as they are, it is plain God has blessed their labor.
- (2.) If any of these is remarkably wanting in gifts or grace, he is soon taken notice of and removed.
- (3.) If you know any such, tell it to me, not to others, and I will endeavor to exchange him for a better.
- (4.) It may be hoped they will all be better than they are, both by experience and observation, and by the advices given them by the Minister every Tuesday night, and the prayers (then in particular) offered up for them.

III.

1. About this time, I was informed that several persons in Kingswood frequently met together at the school; and, when they could spare the time, spent the greater part of the night in prayer, and praise, and thanksgiving. Some advised me to put an end to this; but, upon weighing the thing thoroughly, and comparing it with the practice of the ancient Christians, I could see no cause to forbid it. Rather, I believed it might be made of more general use. So I sent them word, I designed to watch with them on the Friday nearest the full moon, that we might have light thither and back again. I gave public notice of this the Sunday before, and, withal, that I intended to preach; desiring they, and they only, would meet me there, who could do it without prejudice to their business or families. On Friday abundance of people came. I began preaching between eight and nine; and

we continued till a little beyond the noon of night, singing, praying, and praising God.

2. This we have continued to do once a month ever since, in Bristol, London, and Newcastle, as well as Kingswood; and exceeding great are the blessings we have found therein: It has generally been an extremely solemn season; when the word of God sunk deep into the heart, even of those who till then knew him not. If it be said, “This was only owing to the novelty of the thing, (the circumstance which still draws such multitudes together at those seasons,) or perhaps to the awful silence of the night:” I am not careful to answer in this matter. Be it so: However, the impression then made on many souls has never since been effaced. Now, allowing that God did make use either of the novelty or any other indifferent circumstance, in order to bring sinners to repentance, yet they are brought. And herein let us rejoice together.

3. Nay, may I not put the case farther yet? If I can probably conjecture, that, either by the novelty of this ancient custom, or by any other indifferent circumstance, it is in my power to “save a soul from death, and hide a multitude of sins,” am I clear before God if I do it not, if I do not snatch that brand out of the burning?

IV.

1. As the society increased, I found it required still greater care to separate the precious from the vile. In order to this, I determined, at least once in three months, to talk with every member myself, and to inquire at their own mouths, as well as of their Leaders and neighbors, whether they grew in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. At these seasons I likewise particularly inquire whether there be any misunderstanding or difference among them; that every hindrance of peace and brotherly love may be taken out of the way.

2. To each of those of whose seriousness and good conversation I found no reason to doubt, I gave a testimony under my own hand, by writing their name on a ticket prepared for that purpose; every ticket implying as strong a recommendation of the person As whom it was given as if I had

wrote at length, “I believe the bearer hereof to be one that fears God and works righteousness.”

3. Those who bore these tickets, (these *συμβολα* or *tesserae*, as the ancients termed them, being of just the same force with the *επιστολαι συστατικαι*, *commendatory letters* mentioned by the Apostle,) wherever they came, were acknowledged by their brethren, and received with all cheerfulness. These were likewise of use in other respects. By these it was easily distinguished, when the society were to meet apart, who were members of it, and who not. These also supplied us with a quiet and inoffensive method of removing any disorderly member. He has no new ticket at the quarterly visitation; (for so often the tickets are changed;) and hereby it is immediately known that he is no longer of the community.

V.

The thing which I was greatly afraid of all this time, and which I resolved to use every possible method of preventing, was, a narrowness of spirit, a party zeal, a being straitened in our own bowels; that miserable bigotry which makes many so unready to believe that there is any work of God but among themselves. I thought it might be a help against this, frequently to read, to all who were willing to hear, the accounts I received from time to time of the work which God is carrying on in the earth, both in our own and other countries not among us alone, but among those of various opinions and denominations. For this I allotted one evening in every month; and I find no cause to repent my labor. It is generally a time of strong consolation to those who love God, and all mankind for his sake; as well as of breaking down the partition-walls which either the craft of the devil or the folly of men has built up; and of encouraging every child of God to say, (O when shall it once be!) “Whosoever doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.”

VI.

1. By the blessing of God upon their endeavors to help one another, many found the pearl of great price. Being justified by faith, they had “peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.” These felt a more tender affection than before, to those who were partakers of like precious faith;

and hence arose such a confidence in each other, that they poured out their souls into each other's bosom. Indeed they had great need so to do; for the war was not over, as they had supposed; but they had still to wrestle both with flesh and blood, and with principalities and powers: So that temptations were on every side; and often temptations of such a kind, as they knew not how to speak in a class; in which persons of every sort, young and old, men and women, met together.

2. These, therefore, wanted some means of closer union; they wanted to pour out their hearts without reserve, particularly with regard to the sin which did still easily beset them, and the temptations which were most apt to prevail over them. And they were the more desirous of this, when they observed it was the express advice of an inspired writer: "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed."

3. In compliance with their desire, I divided them into smaller companies; putting the married or single men, and married or single women, together. The chief rules of these bands (that is, little companies; so that old English word signifies) run thus: —

"In order to 'confess our faults one to another,' and pray one for another that we may be healed, we intend,

- (1.) To meet once a week, at the least.
- (2.) To come punctually at the hour appointed.
- (3.) To begin with singing or prayer.
- (4.) To speak each of us in order, freely and plainly, the true state of our soul, with the faults we have committed in thought, word, or deed, and the temptations we have felt since our last meeting.
- (5.) To desire some person among us (thence called a Leader) to speak his own state first, and then to ask the rest, in order, as many and as searching questions as may be, concerning their state, sins, and temptations."

4. That their design in meeting might be the more effectually answered, I desired all the men-bands to meet me together every Wednesday evening, and the women on Sunday, that they might receive such particular instructions and exhortations as, from time to time, might appear to be

most needful for them; that such prayers might be offered up to God, as their necessities should require; and praise returned to the Giver of every good gift, for whatever mercies they had received.

5. In order to increase in them a grateful sense of all his mercies, I desired that, one evening in a quarter, all the men in band, on a second, all the women, would meet; and on a third, both men and women together; that we might together “eat bread,” as the ancient Christians did, “with gladness and singleness of heart.” At these love-feasts (so we termed them, retaining the name, as well as the thing, which was in use from the beginning) our food is only a little plain cake and water. But we seldom return from them without being fed, not only with the “meat which perisheth,” but with “that which endureth to everlasting life.”

6. Great and many are the advantages which have ever since flowed from this closer union of the believers with each other. They prayed for one another, that they might be healed of the faults they had confessed; and it was so. The chains were broken, the hands were burst in sunder, and sin had no more dominion over them. Many were delivered from the temptations out of which, till they, they found no way to escape. They were built up in our most holy faith. They rejoiced in the Lord more abundantly. They were strengthened in love, and more effectually provoked to abound in every good work.

7. But it was soon objected to the bands, (as to the classes before,) “These were not at first. There is no Scripture for them. These are man’s works, man’s building, man’s invention.” I reply, as before, these are also prudential helps, grounded on reason and experience, in order to apply the general rules given in Scripture according to particular circumstances.

8. An objection much more boldly and frequently urged, is, that “all these bands are mere Popery.” I hope I need not pass a harder censure on those (most of them at least) who affirm this, than that they talk of they know not what; they betray in themselves the most gross and shameful ignorance. Do not they yet know, that the only Popish confession is, the confession made by a single person to a Priest? — and this itself is in nowise condemned by our Church; nay, she recommends it in some cases.

Whereas, that we practice is, the confession of several persons conjointly, not to a Priest, but to each other. Consequently, it has no analogy at all to Popish confession. But the truth is, this is a stale objection, which many people make against anything they do not like. It is all Popery out of hand.

VII.

1. And yet while most of these who were thus intimately joined together, went on daily from faith to faith; some fell from the faith, either all at once, by falling into known, wilful sin; or gradually, and almost insensibly, by giving way in what they called little things; by sins of omission, by yielding to heart-sins, or by not watching unto prayer. The exhortations and prayers used among the believers did no longer profit these. They wanted advice and instructions suited to their case; which as soon as I observed, I separated them from the rest, and desired them to meet me apart on Saturday evenings.

2. At this hour, all the hymns, exhortations, and prayers are adapted to their circumstances; being wholly suited to those who *did* see God, but have now lost sight of the light of his countenance; and who mourn after him, and refuse to be comforted till they know he has healed their backsliding.

3. By applying both the threats and promises of God to these real, not nominal, penitents, and by crying to God in their behalf, we endeavored to bring them back to the great “Shepherd and Bishop of their souls;” not by any of the fopperies of the Roman Church, although, in some measure, countenanced by antiquity. In prescribing hair-shirts, and bodily austerities, we durst not follow even the ancient Church; although we had unawares, both in dividing **οι πιστοι**, the believers, from the rest of the society, and in separating the penitents from them, and appointing a peculiar service for them.

VIII.

1. Many of these soon recovered the ground they had lost. Yea, they rose higher than before; being more watchful than ever, and more meek and lowly, as well as stronger in the faith that worketh by love. They now

outran the greater part of their brethren, continually walking in the light of God, and having fellowship with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

2. I saw it might be useful to give some advices to all those who continued in the light of God's countenance, which the rest of their brethren did not want, and probably could not receive. So I desired a small number of such as appeared to be in this state, to spend an hour with me every Monday morning. My design was, not only to direct them how to press after perfection; to exercise their every grace, and improve every talent they had received; and to incite them to love one another more, and to watch more carefully over each other; but also to have a select company, to whom I might unbosom myself on all occasions, without reserve; and whom I could propose to all their brethren as a pattern of love, of holiness, and of good works.

3. They had no need of being incumbered with many rules; having the best rule of all in their hearts. No peculiar directions were therefore given to them, excepting only these three: —

First. Let nothing spoken in this society be spoken again. Hereby we had the more full confidence in each other.

Secondly. Every member agrees to submit to his Minister in all indifferent things.

Thirdly. Every member will bring, once a week, all he can spare toward a common stock.

4. Every one here has an equal liberty of speaking, there being none greater or less than another. I could say freely to these, when they were met together, "Ye may all prophesy one by one," (taking that word in its lowest sense,) "that all may learn, and all may be comforted." And I often found the advantage of such a free conversation, and that "in the multitude of counselors there is safety." Any who is inclined so to do is likewise encouraged to pour out his soul to God. And here especially we have found, that "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much."

IX.

1. This is the plainest and clearest account I can give of the people commonly called *Methodists*. It remains only to give you a short account of those who serve their brethren in love. These are Leaders of classes and bands, (spoken of before,) Assistants, Stewards, Visitors of the sick, and Schoolmasters.

2. In the third part of the "Appeal," I have mentioned how we were led to accept of Lay-Assistants. Their office is, in the absence of the Minister,

- (1.) To expound every morning and evening.
- (2.) To meet the united society, the bands, the select society, and the penitents, once a week.
- (3.) To visit the classes once a quarter.
- (4.) To hear and decide all differences.
- (5.) To put the disorderly back on trial, and to receive on trial for the bands or society.
- (6.) To see that the Stewards, the Leaders, and the Schoolmasters faithfully discharge their several offices.
- (7.) To meet the Leaders of the bands and classes weekly, and the Stewards, and to overlook their accounts.

X.

1. But, long before this, I felt the weight of a far different care, namely, care of temporal things. The quarterly subscriptions amounted, at a mean computation, to above three hundred pounds a year. This was to be laid out, partly in repairs, partly in other necessary expenses, and partly in paying debts. The weekly contributions fell little short of eight pounds a week; which was to be distributed as every one had need. And I was expected to take thought for all these things: But it was a burden I was not able to bear; so I chose out first one, then four, and after a time, seven, as prudent men as I knew, and desired them to take charge of these things upon themselves, that I might have no incumbrance of this kind.

2. The business of these Stewards is,

To manage the temporal things of the society. To receive the subscriptions and contributions. To expend what is needful from time to time. To send relief to the poor. To keep an exact account of all receipts and expenses. To inform the Minister if any of the rules of the society are not punctually observed. To tell the Preachers in love, if they think anything amiss, either in their doctrine or life.

3. The rules of the Stewards are,

- (1.) Be frugal. Save everything that can be saved honestly.
- (2.) Spend no more than you receive. Contract no debts.
- (3.) Have no long accounts. Pay everything within the week.
- (4.) Give none that asks relief, either an ill word or an ill look. Do not hurt them, if you cannot help.
- (5.) Expect no thanks from man.

4. They met together at six every Thursday morning; consulted on the business which came before them; sent relief to the sick, as every one had need; and gave the remainder of what had been contributed each week to those who appeared to be in the most pressing want. So that all was concluded within the week; what was brought on Tuesday being constantly expended on Thursday. I soon had the pleasure to find, that all these temporal things were done with the utmost faithfulness and exactness; so that my cares of this kind were at an end. I had only to revise the accounts, to tell them if I thought anything might be amended, and to consult how deficiencies might be supplied from time to time; for these were frequent and large, (so far were we from abundance,) the income by no means answering the expenses. But that we might not faint, sometimes we had unforeseen helps in times of the greatest perplexity. At other times we borrowed larger or smaller sums: Of which the greatest part has since been repaid. But I owe some hundred pounds to this day. So much have I gained by preaching, the gospel!

XI.

1. But it was not long before the Stewards found a great difficulty with regard to the sick. Some were ready to perish before they knew of their illness; and when they did know, it was not in their power (being persons generally employed in trade) to visit them so often as they desired.

2. When I was apprised of this, I laid the case at large before the whole society; showed how impossible it was for the Stewards to attend all that were sick in all parts of the town; desired the Leaders of classes would more carefully inquire, and more constantly inform them, who were sick; and asked, “Who among you is willing, as well as able, to supply this lack of service?”

3. The next morning many willingly offered themselves. I chose six-and-forty of them, whom I judged to be of the most tender, loving spirit; divided the town into twenty-three parts, and desired two of them to visit the sick in each division.

4. It is the business of a Visitor of the sick,

To see every sick person within his district thrice a week. To inquire into the state of their souls, and to advise them as occasion may require. To inquire into their disorders, and procure advice for them. To relieve them, if they are in want. To do any thing for them, which he (or she) can do. To bring in his accounts weekly to the Stewards.²⁸

Upon reflection, I saw how exactly, in this also, we had copied after the primitive Church. What were the ancient Deacons? What was Phebe the Deaconess, but such a Visitor of the sick?

5. I did not think it needful to give them any particular rules beside these that follow: —

- (1.) Be plain and open in dealing with souls.
- (2.) Be mild, tender, patient.
- (3.) Be cleanly in all you do for the sick.
- (4.) Be not nice.

6. We have ever since had great reason to praise God for his continued blessing on this undertaking. Many lives have been saved, many sicknesses healed, much pain and want prevented or removed. Many heavy hearts have been made glad, many mourners comforted: And the Visitors have found, from Him whom they serve, a present reward for all their labor.

XII.

1. But I was still in pain for many of the poor that were sick; there was so great expense, and so little profit. And first, I resolved to try, whether they might not receive more benefit in the hospitals. Upon the trial, we found there was indeed less expense, but no more good done, than before. I then asked the advice of several Physicians for them; but still it profited not. I saw the poor people pining away, and several families ruined, and that without remedy.

2. At length I thought of a kind of desperate expedient. "I will prepare, and give them physic myself." For six or seven and twenty years, I had made anatomy and physic the diversion of my leisure hours; though I never properly studied them, unless; for a few months when I was going to America, where I imagined I might be of some service to those who had no regular Physician among them. I applied to it again. I took into my assistance an Apothecary, and an experienced Surgeon; resolving, at the same time, not to go out of my depth, but to leave all difficult and complicated cases to such Physicians as the patients should choose.

3. I gave notice of this to the society; telling them, that all who were ill of chronical distempers (for I did not care to venture upon acute) might, if they pleased, come to me at such a time, and I would give them the best advice I could, and the best medicines I had.

4. Many came: (And so every Friday since:) Among the rest was one William Kirkman, a weaver, near Old Nichol-street. I asked him, "What complaint have you?" "O Sir," said he, "a cough, a very sore cough. I can get no rest day nor night."

I asked, "How long have you had it?" He replied, "About threescore years: It began when I was eleven years old." I was nothing glad that this man should come first, fearing our not curing him might discourage others. However, I looked up to God, and said, "Take this three or four times a day. If it does you no good, it will do you no harm." He took it two or three days. His cough was cured, and has not returned to this day.

5. Now, let candid men judge, does humility require me to deny a notorious fact? If not, which is vanity? to say, I by my own skill restored this man to health; or to say, God did it by his own almighty power? By what figure of speech this is called boasting, I know not. But I will yet no name to such a fact as this. I leave that to the Revelation Dr. Middleton.

6. In five months, medicines were occasionally given to above five hundred persons. Several of these I never saw before; for I did not regard whether they were of the society or not. In that time seventy-one of these, regularly taking their medicines, and following the regimen prescribed, (which three in four would not do,) were entirely cured of distempers long thought to be incurable. The whole expense of medicines during this time, was nearly forty pounds. We continued this ever since, and, by the blessing of God, with more and more success.

XIII.

1. But I had for some years observed many who, although not sick, were not able to provide for themselves, and had no one who took care to provide for them: These were chiefly feeble, aged widows. I consulted with the Stewards, how they might be relieved. They all agreed, if we could keep them in one house, it would not only be far less expensive to us, but also far more comfortable for them. Indeed we had no money to begin; but we believed He would provide “who defendeth the cause of the widow:” So we took a lease of two little houses near; we fitted them up, so as to be warm and clean. We took in as many widows as we had room for, and provided them with things needful for the body; toward the expense of which I set aside, first, the weekly contributions of the bands, and then all that was collected at the Lord’s Supper. It is true, this does not suffice: So that we are considerably in debt, on this account also. But we are persuaded, it will not always be so; seeing “the earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof.”

2. In this (commonly called The Poor-house) we have now nine widows, one blind woman, two poor children, two upper-servants, a maid and a man. I might add, four or five Preachers; for I myself, as well as the other Preachers who are in town, diet with the poor, on the same food, and at

the same table; and we rejoice herein, as a comfortable earnest of our eating bread together in our Father's kingdom.

3. I have blessed God for this house ever since it began; but lately much more than ever. I honor these widows; for they "are widows indeed." So that it is not in vain, that, without any design of so doing, we have copied after another of the institutions of the Apostolic age. I can now say to all the world, Come and see how these Christians love one another!"²⁹

XIV.

1. Another thing which had given me frequent concern was, the case of abundance of children. Some their parents could not afford to put to school: So they remained like "a wild ass's colt." Others were sent to school, and learned, at least, to read and write; but they learned all kind of vice at the same time: So that it had been better for them to have been without their knowledge, than to have bought it at so dear a price.

2. At length I determined to have them taught in my own house, that they might have an opportunity of learning to read, write, and cast accounts, (if no more,) without being under almost a necessity of learning Heathenism at the same time: And after several unsuccessful trials, I found two such Schoolmasters as I wanted; men of honesty and of sufficient knowledge, who had talents for, and their hearts in, the work.

3. They have now under their care near sixty children: The parents of some pay for their schooling; but the greater part, being very poor, do not; so that the expense is chiefly defrayed by voluntary contributions. We have of late clothed them too, as many as wanted. The rules of the school are these that follow: —³⁰

First. No child is admitted under six years of age.

Secondly. All the children are to be present at the morning sermon.

Thirdly. They are at school from six to twelve, and from one to five.

Fourthly. They have no play-days.

Fifthly. No child is to speak in school, but to the masters.

Sixthly. The child who misses two days in one week, without leave, is excluded the school.

4. We appointed two Stewards for the school also. The business of these is, to receive the school subscriptions, and expend what is needful; to talk with each of the masters weekly; to pray with and exhort the children twice a week; to inquire diligently, whether they grow in grace and in learning, and whether the rules are punctually observed; every Tuesday morning, in conjunction with the masters, to exclude those children that do not observe the rules; every Wednesday morning, to meet with and exhort their parents, to train them up at home in the ways of God.

5. A happy change was soon observed in the children, both with regard to their tempers and behavior. They learned reading, writing; and arithmetic swiftly; and at the same time they were diligently instructed in the sound principles of religion, and earnestly exhorted to fear God, and work out their own salvation.

XV.

1. A year or two ago, I observed among many a distress of another kind. They frequently wanted, perhaps in order to carry on their business, a present supply of money. They scrupled to make use of a pawnbroker; but where to borrow it they knew not. I resolved to try if we could not find a remedy for this also. I went, in a few days, from one end of the town to the other, and exhorted those who had this world's goods, to assist their needy brethren. Fifty pounds were contributed. This was immediately lodged in the hands of two Stewards; who attended every Tuesday morning, in order to lend to those who wanted any small sum, not exceeding twenty shillings, to be repaid within three months.³¹

2. It is almost incredible, but it manifestly appears from their accounts, that, with this inconsiderable sum, two hundred and fifty have been assisted, within the space of one year. Will not God put it into the heart of some lover of mankind to increase this little stock? If this is not "lending unto the Lord," what is? O confer not with flesh and blood, but immediately

Join hands with God, to make a poor man live!

3. I think, Sir, now you know all that I know of this people. You see the nature, occasion, and design of whatever is practiced among them. And, I trust, you may be pretty well able to answer any questions which may be asked concerning them; particularly by those who inquire concerning my revenue, and what I do with it all.

4. Some have supposed this was no greater than that of the Bishop of London. But others computed that I received eight hundred a year from Yorkshire only. Now, if so, it cannot be so little as ten thousand pounds a-year which I receive out of all England!

5. Accordingly, a gentleman in Cornwall (the Rector of Redruth) extends the calculation pretty considerably. "Let me see," said he: "Two millions of Methodists; and each of these paying two-pence a week." If so, I must have eight hundred and sixty thousand pounds, with some odd shillings and pence, a-year.

6. A tolerable competence! But be it more or less, it is nothing at all to me. All that is contributed or collected in every place is both received and expended by others; nor have I so much as the "beholding thereof with my eyes." And so it will be, till I turn Turk or Pagan. For I look upon all this revenue, be it what it may, as sacred to God and the poor; out of which, if I want anything, I am relieved, even as another poor man. So were originally all ecclesiastical revenues, as every man of learning knows: And the Bishops and Priests used them only as such. If any use them otherwise now, God help them!

7. I doubt not, but if I err in this, or any other point, you will pray God to show me his truth. To have "a conscience void of offense toward God and toward man" is the desire of,

Reverend and dear Sir,

Your affectionate brother and servant,

JOHN WESLEY.