

The Why of Methodism. By Daniel Dorchester, D.D. New York: Phillips & Hunt. 1887. 16mo. pp. 182. 70 cents.

This little book in exposition and praise of the special peculiarities of Methodism, is an expansion of a sermon on this subject preached by Dr. Dorchester in the spring of 1887, as one of a course of sermons given by invitation of the pastor of the Unitarian Church in Chelmsford, Mass. It is an attempt to justify the claim that "the hand of God has been and still is in Methodism—in its inception, character, influence and polity." Making the same claim for ourselves we cheerfully concede it to the Methodists and to all other Christian sects. Abp. Whately somewhere says pithily: "Christianity itself cannot be improved, but men's interpretations of it may be greatly improved;" and we gratefully acknowledge that the world is immensely indebted to the Methodist Church both for improved interpretation and administration of the truths and office of the Gospel.

In showing that Methodism was raised up of God for the revival of modern Christianity, Dr. Dorchester draws a true but sad picture of the state of religion in the Old World and in the New a hundred and fifty years ago; and makes the point that to Methodism is due the initial movement for an awakened and active spiritual life, and that its influence was felt and manifest in renewed Christian faith and fervor among the Calvinists. Growing from this historic fact is the claim that Methodism reproduces in several essential particulars historic Christianity. The claim is valid, and is in no degree impaired by the fact that at the present time other sects can also claim that they are in the same line of effort. Methodism was the pioneer.

Dr. Dorchester also urges that Methodism "has been and still is a re-enforcement of the Church Universal." This may be said in truth both as regards the direct and the indirect influence of Methodism. The Calvinism against which, as Dr. Dorchester phrases it, "Wesley warred like a savage," is dead beyond resurrection. It has no place except in dead and unused creeds; its "horrid decrees," its extreme notions of predestination culminating in denying free-will to man, have given place to the freeness of God's offer of salvation to all, and the moral ability of every man to hear, heed and obey the call to salvation. The debt which the world owes to the pioneers of Methodism and to their numerous followers for the initiative of this work can never be fully estimated.

A large portion of the book is taken up with an explanation and vindication of the ecclesiastical polity of the Methodist Church. That polity seems to us defective in the fact that it makes such frequent changes in its pastorates; a fact which is in principle none the less defective, in our judgment, because statistics show equally short pastorates in other sects. But in one respect the Methodist polity is admirable and worthy of imitation in all churches: it leaves no vacant pastorates. Some one is found for every pulpit, and is placed and kept there to do the work of an evangelist. Would that we were as wise! Dr. Dorchester's book will be profitable reading for our own ministers and laity.