

I hope that in my humble manner I shall be able to repay a part of that debt

Three weeks ago, I attended the Peninsula Annual Conference at the Bethesda Church in Salisbury. At that time, I recalled the story that is told of the Rev. Joshua Thomas, who more than a century ago was preaching the Christian gospels and the doctrines of Wesley, Strawbridge and Asbury in the fishing and farming communities of the lower Eastern Shore. In my section of the State, the saintly Joshua, called the Parson of the Islands, is a figure of tale and legend. There are many of you here who are conversant with the early annals of Methodism in Maryland, and so you will know that Brother Thomas rode his circuit in a log canoe which he appropriately named "The Methodist." He sailed his little vessel in and out of the creeks and rivers and bays, preaching, exhorting and converting wherever he went. He often put in at Crisfield, the town in which I was born and in which I have spent all my life.

The story I like to repeat about him is this. He was preaching once in a little place called Rockawalking, and the topic was religious denominations and their place in the greater Church of Christ. Brother Thomas's statement, as recounted by those who heard him, was this:

"Not one branch of the true vine but brings forth some good fruit. I love all the people who love my God in sincerity. But I love the Methodists a little more than any other."

He went on to say that during all his days he had always sought the best light. He knew there was light in Christianity everywhere, but he found "the best light" with the Methodists. There are those of us here who have shared the experience of Brother Thomas, and there are those of us here who are in accord with his sentiments. I have always found inspiration and sustenance in the character of these early Methodist evangelists, and it is this trait, of tolerance with strength, that has impressed me most profoundly. They were respectful and understanding of the beliefs and sacraments of others, but they adhered unyieldingly to their own opinion of Christian salvation and to their own manner of worshipping God. A strong revival of that spirit in the hearts of men would, I believe, work wonders in the world we live in today.

There is, of course, much more to admire and revere in the character of these plain people who so firmly implanted their faith in the soil of this State and this nation. Something of the wholesome simplicity of the Man of Nazareth was to be found in the nature and bearing