

# From the Close of the General Conference of 1800, to the End of the Year 1803

by Nathan Bangs

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*The sermon recounts the story of a great revival that swept through the Methodist Church in the early 19th century, marked by the outpouring of the Spirit of God and the conversion of thousands of souls.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 126:5, Isaiah 40:31, Acts 14:2, Romans 8:18, 2 Corinthians 4:16, Philipians 1:6, 1 Thessalonians 1:5, 1 Peter 5:10

**Topics:** "Revival History", "Spiritual Growth"

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## Description

Bishop Asbury and Bishop Whatcoat travel extensively, presiding over annual conferences and spreading the gospel, despite facing hardships and enduring long journeys. Revivals of religion, marked by outpourings of the Spirit of God, occur in various parts of the country, leading to the conversion of many souls. Camp meetings play a significant role in these revivals, with powerful displays of God's grace and the sanctification of believers. The work of God extends to new circuits, resulting in the addition of thousands of members to the Church. Despite challenges and opposition, the preachers remain steadfast in their mission, witnessing the transformative power of God's love in the lives of many.

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## Transcript

Having, in the preceding chapter, detailed the doings of the General Conference of 1800, we will return to the annual conferences, and endeavor to give an account of the work of God in the various parts of their extensive fields of labor. This year and the two following were eminently distinguished for the outpouring of the Spirit of God, and the enlargement of his work in various directions. The heavens and the earth, indeed, appeared to be shaken by the mighty power of God, and very many sinners were brought to feel their need of Christ, to seek and to find him as their only Saviour.

It seems that during the session of the General Conference much good had been done by the public and private labors of the preachers; and as they separated with much harmony of feeling, the Spirit of God wrought by their means in many of the places where they were stationed the present year.

During the conference, a work of God commenced in that section of Baltimore called Old Town. Meetings were held here in private houses, which were attended by some of the preachers while not engaged in the business of the conference, by which means several souls were brought to the knowledge of the truth. From this beginning, the work spread in different directions though the city, in the churches as well as in

private houses. Such a glorious work had not been seen in Baltimore for several years, and the old professors were much excited and encouraged at beholding their children and neighbors coming into the fold of Christ.

About two weeks after the adjournment of the General Conference, an annual conference was held at Duck Creek Cross Roads, where many of the young converts, and some of the more experienced Christians from Baltimore, came for the purpose of attending the meetings. Here the Lord wrought powerfully. While the members of the conference were transacting their business in a private house, some of the younger traveling and some local preachers were almost constantly engaged in preaching to the people exhorting and praying with them; and such was the intenseness with which they pursued their work, that at the church, the meeting was held without intermission for forty-five hours.<sup>1</sup> Often, during these meetings, the voice of the preacher was drowned either by the cries of the distressed or the shouts of the redeemed.

As these effects were new to many, they at first looked on with silent astonishment, until, before they were fully aware of it, both saints and sinners would be seized with a shaking and trembling, and finally prostrated helpless upon the floor. The result of these exercises was, that not less than one hundred and fifty souls were converted to God during the session of the Conference. Such a time of "refreshing from the presence of the Lord" had never before been witnessed in that part of the country.

From this the work spread with great rapidity though the Eastern Shore of Maryland, and into the lower counties of the state of Delaware, bowing, in its course, the hearts of many stubborn sinners, who were brought to God by faith in Jesus Christ. Both preachers and people, in whose hearts the fire of Divine love had been kindled at these meetings, carried the sacred flame with them wherever they went, and thousands have doubtless praised God and are now praising him for the consolations of that blessed revival of godliness. It continued, indeed, to extend its hallowing influence on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, and in some other places, through the remainder of the summer.

As the result of this glorious work in the little village of Duck Creek, no less than one hundred and seventeen persons joined the Church.

Nor was the revival confined to this part of the country. In Philadelphia, in various circuits in the vicinity of Baltimore, in the state of Vermont, in some portions of Canada, Connecticut, and New Hampshire, the Spirit of the Lord was poured out, and many, very many, sinners were brought to the knowledge of the truth. It seems, indeed, that most of the preachers had received a new baptism of the holy Spirit -- like that which had been showered upon Calvin Wooster, and others in Canada, the preceding year; and wherever they went they carried the holy fire with them, and God wrought wonders by their instrumentality. But the most remarkable work was going on in the western country.

Last year, 1799, was distinguished for the commencement of those great revivals of religion in the western country, which introduced the practice of holding "camp meetings." And as these revivals were characterized by signal displays of the power and grace of God, and eventuated in the conversion or thousands of souls, it will naturally be expected that a particular account should be given of their rise and progress.

This work commenced under the united labors of two brothers by the name of McGee, one a Presbyterian and the other a Methodist preacher. The former, who had preached for some time in North Carolina and in the Houston country, moved into West Tennessee in the year 1796 or 1797, and in 1798 was settled over

a congregation in Sumner county. In the year 1798, he latter, John McGee, moved into West Tennessee, and settled in Smith county. Though belonging to different denominations, those doctrines and usages by which each was distinguished from the other by no means interrupted the harmony of brotherly love. Hence they cordially united in their meetings, and strengthened each other's hands in the work of the Lord.

In the year 1799 they set off on a tour though what was called the "Barrens," toward the state of Ohio, and on their way they stopped at a settlement on the Red River, to attend a sacramental occasion in the congregation under the pastoral charge of the Rev. Mr. McGready, a Presbyterian minister. On being introduced to him, Mr. John McGee was invited to preach, with which he complied; and he preached with great liberty and power. He was followed by his brother, the Presbyterian minister, and the Rev. Mr. Hoge, whose preaching produced such a powerful effect that tears in abundance attested that the people felt the force of the truths delivered. While Mr. Hoge was preaching, a woman in the congregation was so powerfully wrought upon that she broke through all restraint, and shouted forth the praises of God aloud. Such was the movement among the people, evidently under the impulses of the divine Spirit, that, though Messrs. McGready, Hoge, and Rankins, Presbyterian ministers, left the house, the two yoke-fellows, the McGees, continued in their places watching the "movement of the waters." William McGee soon felt such a power come over him that he, not seeming to know what he did, left his seat and sat down on the floor, while John sat trembling under a consciousness of the power of God. In the meantime there were great solemnity and weeping all over the house. He was expected to preach, but instead of that he arose and told the people that the overpowering nature of his feelings would not allow of his preaching, but as the Lord was evidently among them, he earnestly exhorted the people to surrender their hearts to him. Sobs and cries bespoke the deep feeling which pervaded the hearts of the people.

This great and unusual work so excited the attention of the people that they came in crowds from the surrounding country, to inquire what these things meant; and this was the beginning of that great revival of religion in the western country which introduced camp meetings. The people came with horses and wagons, bringing provisions and bedding, and others built temporary huts or tents, while all, Presbyterians Baptists, and Methodists, united together in prayer, exhortation, and preaching, exerting all their energies to forward this good work.

The good effects resulting from this meeting, thus casually, or rather providentially convened, induced them to appoint another on Muddy River, and then another on what was called the Ridge. Here a vast concourse of people assembled under the foliage of the trees, and continued their religious exercises day and night. This novel way of worshipping God excited great attention. In the night the grove was illuminated with lighted candles, lamps, or torches. This, together with the stillness of the night, the solemnity which rested on every countenance, the pointed and earnest manner with which the preachers exhorted the people to repentance, prayer, and faith, produced the most awful sensations in the minds of all present. While some were exhorting, others crying for mercy, and some shouting the praises of God in the assembly, numbers were retired in secluded places in the grove, pouring out the desire of their wounded spirits in earnest prayer. It often happened that these were liberated from their sins, and their hearts filled with joy and gladness while thus engaged in their solitary devotions; and then they would come into the encampment and declare what God had done for their souls. This information, communicated to their brethren in the artless simplicity of "new born souls would produce a thrill of joy which could hardly be suppressed: and thus they reciprocated with each other in their sorrows and joys, and excited one another to the exercise of faith in the promises of God, and to perseverance in the good

work.

The result of this last meeting was, according to the best estimate which could be made, the conversion of not less than one hundred souls.

A still greater meeting of the same character was held soon after on Desha's Creek, near the Cumberland River. Among the many thousands of people who attended this extraordinary meeting, many, very many, were made partakers of the grace of life. It is said by an eye witness,<sup>2</sup> who himself largely participated of these solemn exercises, that at these meetings the people fell under the power of the word, "like corn before a storm of wind," and that many who were thus slain, "arose from the dust with divine glory beaming upon their countenances," and then praised God in such strains of heartfelt gratitude as caused the hearts of sinners to tremble within them. But no sooner had this first feeling of ecstasy subside than those young converts began to exhort their relatives and neighbors to turn to God and live. And truly it was difficult to resist the power of their words, for they spoke of what they felt, and their words were sharper than a "two-edged sword," piercing the heart, and extorting the cry, "What shall I do to be saved?"

Many of these were children of praying parents, and though uneducated, they spoke with a power and eloquence which "confounded the wisdom of the learned," and extorted the confession from many an unhumiliated Pharisee, that "God was with them of a truth."

Among others who were brought to the knowledge of the truth at this meeting, was John Alexander Granade, who after an exercise of mind for a considerable time bordering on despair, came forth a "burning and shining light," as a the advocate for the cause of Christ. He soon became distinguished among his brethren as the "western poet," and the "Pilgrims' Songs" were among the most popular hymns which were sung at those camp meetings, and perhaps became the fruitful source whence singing the numerous ditties with which the Church was, for some time, almost deluged. These songs, though they possessed but little of the spirit of poetry, and therefore added nothing to true intellectual taste, served to excite the feelings of devotion, and keep alive that spirit of excitement which characterized the worshippers in those assemblies. Both Granade and Caleb Jarvis Taylor contributed much by their energetic labors to fan the flame of piety which had been kindled up in the hearts of the people in that country.

It is not to be supposed that these meetings went on without opposition. This would be calculating too favorably of human nature in its present state of moral perversity. Not only the openly profane, the nonprofessor of godliness, but many of those who "had a name to live, but were dead," as well as some whose piety was unquestionable, looked on these meetings and beheld these strange exercises with mingled emotions of pity and abhorrence. The natural enmity of the carnal mind, in the first, mingled with the pride of philosophy of the second, and the prejudices of religious education, alloyed with some portion of religious bigotry in the third, created, altogether, a formidable array of opposition, which showed itself in all the variety of ways which the peculiarity of views and feelings in the above characters might dictate. Some would scoff, others would philosophize, while the latter would dogmatize in no stinted terms of religious intolerance, while they beheld those manifestations of what the friends of the cause justly believed to be the power and grace of God.

But there was one argument which silenced them all. Often those very persons who were most violent in their opposition, most vociferous in their hard speeches against what they denominated "wild fire," would become so warmed by its heat, that their hearts were melted within them, and "falling down on their faces,

they would worship God, and report that God was in them of a truth." This argument was irresistible. It was demonstration. And many such were presented during the progress of these meetings. In such cases, those who before had been blasphemers, and mockers, persecutors, and bigoted dogmatizers, were not only struck dumb, but the "tongue of the dumb was made to sing," and those very opposers of the work became the living witnesses for its divine and genuine character, and stood forth as its bold and fearless defenders.

In the meantime the numbers attending these meetings were continually increased, -- some from a sincere desire to be benefited; others were attracted from curiosity, and not a few from motives of speculation, to arm themselves with arguments of resistance to their progress. What tended not a little to give them notoriety, and to excite the public attention toward them, was, the newspapers of the day were teeming with accounts of these camp meetings, some in favor and some against them -- and all, whether friends or foes, were eager to gratify their curiosities, or benefit their soul, by becoming eye and ear witnesses of the manner in which they were conducted.

Accordingly, in 1801 the numbers who attended those which were held in Kentucky were immense, some as occasional visitors, and others as residents on the ground through the progress of the meetings. The numbers varied, of course, according to the density or sparsity of the population in their immediate neighborhoods; and they have been estimated from three to twenty thousand. At one held in Cabbin Creek a Presbyterian minister who was present, and zealously engaged in promoting its objects, estimated the number at not less than twenty thousand.

Though at this meeting the Methodists appeared to be the most actively engaged in the work, yet some of the Presbyterian brethren engaged heartily with them, while, others stood aloof, not knowing what judgment to form of it. Being, however, encouraged by the example of others, many of them united with zealous hearts in the cause, and at this great meeting the Methodists and Presbyterians joined their forces to push forward the work, and they seemed to bear down all opposition. The scene is represented as being indescribably awful! An eye witness thus writes concerning it: --

Few, if any, escaped without being affected. Such as tried to run from it, were frequently struck on the way, or impelled by some alarming signal to return. No circumstance at this meeting appeared more striking than the great number that fell on the third night; and to prevent their being trodden under foot by the multitude, they were collected together and laid out in order, on two squares of the meeting house, till a considerable part of the floor was covered. But the great meeting at Cane Ridge exceeded all. The number that fell at this meeting was reckoned at about three thousand, among whom were several Presbyterian ministers, who, according to their own confession, had hitherto possessed only a speculative knowledge of religion. Here the formal professor, the deist, and the intemperate, met with one common lot, and confessed, with equal candor, that they were destitute of the true knowledge of God, and strangers to the religion of Jesus Christ."

In consequence of such a vast assemblage of people, it was impossible for any one voice to reach the whole of them with intelligible language: hence they were divined into several groups, and addressed by as many different speakers, while the whole grove, at times, became vocal with the praises of God, and at other times pierced with the cries of distressed penitent sinners. As before said, the scene was peculiarly awful at night. The range of the tents -- the fires reflecting lights through the branches of the trees -- the candles and lamps illuminating the entire encampment -- hundreds of immortal beings moving to and fro -- some preaching -- some praying for mercy, and others praising God from a sense of his pardoning mercy

-- all these things presented a scene indescribably awful and affecting.

As an instance of the manner in which some of those who attended these meetings from a sportive disposition were arrested and brought to a better state of mind, the following is related: -- A gentleman and a lady, of some standing in the gay circles of life, attended the above meeting with a vow to divert and amuse themselves at the expense of those whom they considered as deluded with a strange infatuation. With these thoughts they agreed that if one of them should fall the other should not desert him or her. They had not been long on the ground before the woman fell! The merry gentleman, instead of keeping his promise, frightened at the sight of his female friend on the ground, fled with great precipitancy. He did not, however, proceed more than two hundred yards, before he also was prostrate upon the ground, and was soon surrounded by a praying multitude.

In 1801 this work was greatly aided by the energetic labors of the Rev. William McKendree (afterward bishop) who was this year appointed to the Kentucky district. Having been in the midst of the revivals in the lower part of the state, and having his soul fired with the sacred flame which was burning with such intensity among the people, he went up into the center of the settlements and carried the tidings among them of what God was doing by means of those extraordinary meetings. His congregations, composed chiefly of Methodists and Presbyterians, were powerfully affected when he gave them, at the conclusion of his sermon, an animated account of the commencement and progress of this work. It is said that while he held up before them the truths of the gospel, intermixed with narrations of the work of God at these meetings, his whole soul seemed to be filled with glory and with God," and that his very countenance beamed with brightness. While he related with artless simplicity, and with glowing warmth, the manner in which God wrought upon the souls of the people, the many happy conversions which had been witnessed, and the astonishing effects which attended the preaching of God's word, the hearts of God's people begin to beat in unison with his own, while sinners were weeping in every direction under the melting influence of the Spirit of God.

By this means these same meetings were introduced into the center of the state, and spread though all the settlements in the western country; and such was the eagerness of the people to attend, that the roads were literally crowded with those that were pressing their way to the groves; so much so that entire neighborhoods would be forsaken, for a season, of their inhabitants. And as the Methodists and Presbyterians were generally united together in these meetings, they took the name of "General Camp Meetings." By these means they spread all through Tennessee, Kentucky, and some parts of Ohio, carrying with them fire and destruction into the enemy's territories, and bowing the hearts of God's people as the heart of one man to the yoke of Jesus Christ. Of their subsequent progress, and the influence they have exerted on society, I need not here speak, as these things are known to all.

Among the traveling preachers who entered into this work in those days, we may mention William Burke, John Sale, Benjamin Lakin, and Henry Smith, with a number of others, whose zealous efforts contributed greatly to spread the gospel in these new settlements. Mr. McKendree was the life and soul of this army of itinerants. Wherever he went, both by precept and example, he aroused the lukewarm to diligence, confirmed those who stood in the faith, and alarmed the fears of careless sinners by his powerful appeals to their consciences. By his means many local preachers who had moved into the country were induced to forsake their secular employments, and enter the ranks of the itinerancy, and they became powerful instruments of extending the revivals though the land. Despising alike the luxuries of life, and the frowns or flatteries of the world, they went forth under the banners of truth, everywhere proclaiming in the ears of the people that they must "fear God and give glory to his name, for the hour of his judgment is come."

It will be seen by the preceding remarks that these camp meetings were not the result of a previously digested plan, but like every other peculiarity of Methodism, were introduced by providential occurrences, and were embraced and followed up by God's servants because they found them subservient to the grand design they had in view, namely, the salvation of the world by Jesus Christ. Indeed, they did not originate with the Methodist, but upon a sacramental occasion among the Presbyterians, at which time there was such a remarkable outpouring of the Divine Spirit in the people as inclined them to protract their exercises to an unusual period; and then this being noised abroad brought others to the place, and finally so many that no house could hold them; this induced them to go into the field, and erect temporary shelters for themselves, and to bring provision for their sustenance; and finding that God so abundantly blessed them in these meetings, they were led to continue them, until they at length became very general among the Methodists throughout the country.

In order to give a connected view of the rise of camp meetings in the west, I have a little anticipated the regular date of the history, and shall therefore conclude what I have to say on this subject for the present, with a few reflections.

I have simply related the facts in respect to this extraordinary work as I find them recorded in the historical sketches of those times. No doubt many now, as then, will be skeptically inclined in regard to the genuineness of the work. To remove the skepticism from the minds of candid inquirers after truth, (for such only will be convinced,) let it be remarked,

That as to the facts themselves, they are indubitable -- that is, there can be no room to doubt that such meetings were held as above narrated, and that sinners were prostrated to the earth under the preaching of God's word -- that they cried for mercy -- were delivered in answer to prayer -- and that such, as well as old professors of religion, often shouted aloud the praises of God -- and that many of these, perhaps most of them, afterward led "peaceable lives, in all godliness and honesty." These facts are as well attested as any we have upon the pages of history.

It is admitted that in such vast multitudes, assembled in the open air, under circumstances of such peculiar excitement, and many of them not well instructed in science or morals, there must have been some disorder, some mingling of human passions not sanctified by grace, and some words and gesticulations not in accordance with strict religious decorum. Every action, therefore, and every thing which was said and done, I am by no means careful to defend or pledged to justify.

When we look into the book of God, we find some instances on record of persons having been affected in a similar way, who were manifestly under the divine influence. Thus Daniel says of himself, that when he saw the vision, "there remained no strength in me; for my comeliness was turned in me into corruption, and I retained no strength" and when the Lord had spoken to him he "stood trembling". see Daniel x., 8-11. So Saul of Tarsus, when saluted by the voice from heaven, fell helpless upon the ground, was struck blind, and remained so for three days. And may not the strong cries and tears of those persons who were struck under conviction at those camp meetings, have been produced from a cause similar to that which is recorded in Mark ix, 26, where it is said, "that the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him?"

In examining the history of the work of God in his church at different periods, we find similar instances of mental and bodily exercises on record. Read, for example, President Edwards' account of the revival in New England, and Mr. Wesley's Journal, particularly from 1739 to 1742, and his correspondence with the Rev. Ralph Erskine of Scotland, in relation to this subject.

In reference to the work in New England, in the early part of the eighteenth century, we have the following testimony of a convention of Congregational ministers, who assembled in Boston, July 7, 1743, for the express purpose of considering and reporting on the nature of this work. The following is an extract from their report:

"We never before saw so many brought under soul concern, and with distress making the inquiry, 'What must we do to be saved?' and these persons of all characters and ages. With regard to the suddenness and quick progress of it, many persons and places were surprised with the gracious visit together, or near about the same time and the heavenly influence diffused itself far and wide, like the light of the morning. Also in respect of the degree of operation, both in a way of terror and in a way of consolation, attended in many with unusual bodily effects. Not that all who were accounted the subjects of the present work have had these extraordinary degrees of previous distress and subsequent joy: but many, and we suppose the greater number have been wrought on in a more gentle and silent way, and without any other appearances than are common and usual at other times, when persons have been awakened to a solemn concern about salvation, and have been thought to have passed out of a state of nature into a state of grace. As to those whose inward concern has occasioned extraordinary outward distresses, the most of them when we came to converse with them, were able to give what appeared to us a rational account of what so affected their minds, viz., a quick sense of their guilt, misery, and danger; and they would often mention the passages in the sermons they heard, or particular texts of Scripture, which were sent home upon them with such a powerful impression. And as to such whose joys have carried them into transports and ecstasies, they in like manner have accounted for them, from a lively sense of the danger they hoped they were freed from, and the happiness they were now possessed of; such clear views of divine and heavenly things, and particularly of the excellences and loveliness of Jesus Christ, and such sweet tastes of redeeming love as they never had before. The instances were very few in which we had reason to think these affections were produced by visionary or sensible representations, or by any other images than such as the Scripture itself presents unto us.

"And here we think it not amiss, to declare, that in dealing with these persons, we have been careful to inform them, that the nature of conversion does not consist in these passionate feelings; and to warn them not to look upon their state as safe, because they have passed out of deep distress into high joys, unless they experienced a renovation of nature, followed with a change of life, and a course of vital holiness. Nor have we gone into such an opinion of the bodily effects with which this work has been attended in some of its subjects, as to judge them any signs that persons who have been so affected were then under a saving work of the Spirit of God. No: we never to much as called these bodily seizures convictions, or spoke of them as the immediate work of the holy Spirit. Yet we do not think them inconsistent with a work of God upon the soul at that very time; but judge that those inward impressions which come from the Spirit of God, those terrors and consolations of which he is the author, may, according to the natural frame and constitution which some persons are of, occasion such bodily effects; -- and therefore that those extraordinary outward symptoms are not an argument that the work is delusive, or from the influence and agency of the evil spirit."

This document is said to have been signed by no less than sixty-eight ministers, all of whom concurred in the views therein expressed, while only fifteen refused their assent to an article in the same report which accorded to the practice, at that time a novelty in New England, of itinerating from place to place to preach the gospel -- a practice introduced by Mr. Whitefield, and followed by a few others who had been awakened to activity by his zealous labors.

With these facts and examples before us, are we not justified in believing, that persons under the powerful operations of the Spirit of God, either convicting them suddenly and strongly of sin, or filling their souls with his own pure love, may have their animal functions suspended for a season, so that there shall "remain no strength in them?" Is there any thing either unscriptural or incredible in all this? Will it be denied by any believer in divine revelation, or even by a deist, that God can, and often does, so work upon the mind of man, as to make that mind fully conscious of his presence?

He who affects to doubt this might as well throw off all disguise at once, and turn an open atheist, and deny that there is any God who presides over the destinies of men, or exercises any control over their understandings and affections. As the mind and body are so intimately connected that the one acts upon the other, is there, after all, any thing so very extraordinary in the supposition that under the strong excitement produced upon the one by the sudden flashes of truth, the other should be equally and suddenly affected in the manner already described?

How common are the instances in which persons have been known to swoon away by receiving sudden news either of a joyful or an alarming character? Either great anguish or excessive joy has often been the means of depriving individuals of their physical strength. And what sorrow is equal to that which an awakened sinner feels when he is suddenly brought to see himself as he in reality is, a rebel against his God, and consequently exposed to wrath and hell! And must not the joy of such a person be proportionally great when he finds himself instantaneously delivered from that load of guilt, and filled with a "peace unknown to sensual minds?"

It is frequently objected to exercises of this sort, that the passions are chiefly wrought upon. This indeed may be the case in many instances. And I would by no means plead for a religion which does not enter into the judgment, and influence the understanding as well as the affections. But yet, man is a creature of passions as well as of intellect. And as Christianity is not intended to destroy, but only to regulate the passions, as well as to enlighten the understanding and sanctify the heart, we must expect the passions to be moved, and the emotions of fear, hope, love, and joy to be excited in religious as well as in all other exercises.

To these passions Christianity certainly addresses itself, as well as to the judgment, and moves man to action from fear, from hope, and from the promises of pardon, comfort, and protection, as well as from that eternal reward hereafter, which makes the Christian joyfully anticipate the pleasures of the future life. Those therefore who address themselves to the understanding only, as if men were merely intellectual beings, avail themselves of not one half of the motives with which the gospel furnishes its servants, to induce sinners to repent and believe in Christ, and to encourage believers to persevere in the path of duty.

These things being so, is it any matter of wonder that, when the awfully sublime and truly affecting subjects of Christianity are presented to the mind, corresponding effects should be produced upon the passions, and that these, when violently agitated with either religious fear or joy, should also affect the body? But we do not place dependence upon these external signs as evidences in themselves of either penitence, conversion, or sanctification. As there may be a fear, a hope, and a love, which is not well founded, so there may be much bodily exercise without any spiritual profit.

These things may or may not be. If a person who has had these exercises profess, in the meantime, to have experienced a change of heart, if he bring forth the fruit of righteousness in his subsequent life, we may then safely conclude that the work was effected by the Spirit of God; but if otherwise, if he still

manifest the unhumiliated spirit of the Pharisee, or bring forth the "works of the flesh," his profession cannot save him from the condemnation of the hypocrite, or the misery of the self-deluded.

These remarks are submitted to the candid reader with the hope that they may assist him in making up an unbiased judgment in respect to these things; and though, in the course of our history, we shall be compelled to admit the humiliating fact, that some of the subjects of the above revivals brought forth fruit unto death, yet it will be equally plain that the influence of others on society generally was of a very hallowed character.

Not less than twenty-four preachers were located this year, three withdrew, and four had died in peace. These latter were, William Early, Thomas Haymond, Benton Riggan, and Robert Benham. These had all been faithful in their labors, and died in the Lord.

Numbers in the Church: Whites This Year: 51,442; Last Year: 49,115; Increase: 2,327 -- Colored This Year: 13,452; Last Year: 12,236; Increase: 1,216 -- Total This Year: 64,894; Last Year: 61,351 -- Increase: 3,543 -- Preachers This Year: 287; Last Year: 272; Increase: 15.

1801

There were only seven annual conferences held this year, the first commencing in Camden, S. C., January 1, and the last in Lynn, Mass., July 17.

The work of God which had commenced last year under such favorable auspices, and which has been so fully detailed, continued this year, in many places, with increased rapidity and power. Bishop Asbury and his colleague, Bishop Whatcoat, made their annual tour of the continent, not only in visiting and presiding in the conferences, but also preaching to the people in the various cities, towns, and villages, as well as the new and scattered settlements through which they were enabled to pass. The revivals of religion which had been witnessed, the unabated confidence and attachment which had been manifested toward Bishop Asbury by the conference, and the relief afforded him in his arduous labors by the consecration of Mr. Whatcoat as a colleague seemed to put new life into him, so that he remarks, after attending a conference in Philadelphia, "My health is restored to the astonishment of myself and friends."

"Surely," he says in connection with his allusion to the Philadelphia conference, "we may say our Pentecost is fully come this year."

Having so fully narrated the progress of the work of God in the western country under date of 1800, it is not necessary to add any thing in respect to it here. In other parts of the country, however, the work went on under somewhat different circumstances, but with equal indications of divine power and goodness. In New Hampshire and Vermont there were signal displays of the grace of God in the awakening and conversion of souls. One of the preachers writes in the following strain respecting the state of things there:

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"Landaff circuit, in New Hampshire, is all in a flame. Upward of one hundred have been converted to God; and the work goes on still in a glorious manner. In Chesterfield circuit nearly one hundred have joined our society, and the prospect is now brighter than it has been. In Vershire circuit, in Vermont, there is a good work. More than one hundred have joined society, and the power of the Lord is remarkably displayed; many fall down, being overwhelmed with the power of the Lord. Weathersfield circuit has been gradually gaining ground the whole year, and now the times of refreshing are come from the presence of the Lord.

In the town of Athens we had a most melting time. The power of the Lord was present to heal, and eighty-three joined society on that day, although there was no society there before."

It seems that the revivals in Canada and the western country began to exert an influence in other parts of the work, and lead to a similar method in promoting the cause of God. In the latter part of May of this year, in the town of Dover, Delaware state, a meeting was held for several days, at which time the Lord wrought powerfully upon the hearts of the people, so that on the last day of the meeting one hundred and thirteen persons united with the Church. Many more took their departure to their homes under a deep conviction of their sinfulness, and earnestly groaning for redemption in the blood of Christ.

In the Baltimore district, which included a number of large circuits, it was estimated that upward of a thousand souls were converted to God in the space of a few months. In Annapolis, the metropolis of the state of Maryland, many were brought to the knowledge of salvation by the remission of sins, and there was great joy in that city.

In Upper Canada, the glorious revival which has been already mentioned had extended along up the shore of Lake Ontario, even to the head of the lake, to Niagara, and thence to Long Point on the northwestern shore of Lake Erie, including four large four weeks' circuits. The district this year was under the charge of the Rev. Joseph Jewell, who traveled extensively through the newly settled country, preaching in log houses, in barns, and sometimes in groves, and everywhere beholding the displays of the power and grace of God in the awakening and conversion of sinners, as well as the sanctification of believers. A great work of God was carried on this year under the preaching of Joseph Sawyer, whose faithful labors on the Niagara circuit will be long and gratefully remembered by the people in that country; and it was during this revival that the present writer, after four or five years of hard struggling under a consciousness of his sinfulness, was brought into the fold of Christ; and here he wishes to record his gratitude to God for his distinguished grace, in snatching such a brand from the fire, and to his people for their kindness, and more especially to that servant of God, the Rev. Joseph Sawyer, under whose pastoral oversight he was brought into the Church.

Nor should the labors and privations, the prayers and sufferings in the cause of Christ of that faithful servant of God, the Rev. James Coleman, be forgot. Ten. He preceded Mr. Sawyer in the Niagara circuit<sup>3</sup> and though not distinguished for shining talents as a preacher, he was beloved by the people of God for his fidelity in the work of the ministry, and for his deep devotion to their spiritual interests, evinced by his faithful attention to the arduous duties of his circuit. He had many seals to his ministry. And the writer of this remembers with gratitude the many prayers which James Coleman offered up to God in his behalf while a youthful stranger in that land, and while seeking, with his eyes but half opened, to find the way of "peace and pleasantness."

The work also prevailed on the Bay of Quintie and Oswegochie circuits, under the labors of Sylvanus Keeler, Seth Crowell, and others. The latter was a young preacher of great zeal and of the most indefatigable industry; and going into that country he soon caught the flame of Divine love which had been enkindled by the instrumentality of Messrs. Wooster, Coate and Dunham. He entered into the work with great energy and perseverance, and God blessed his labors with much success. So greatly had God prospered the labors of his faithful servants in this province, that there were returned in the minutes of conference for this year 1,159 members of the Church. It had, indeed, extended into the lower province, on the Ottawa River, an English settlement about fifty miles west of Montreal. This new circuit was traveled by John Robinson and Caleb Morris, and they returned forty-five members in the Church.

Like the new settlements in the western country, Upper Canada was at that time but sparsely populated, so that in riding from one appointment to another, the preachers sometimes had to pass through wildernesses from ten to sixty miles' distance, and not infrequently had either to encamp in the woods or sleep in an Indian hut; and sometimes, in visiting the newly settled places, they have carried provender for their horses over night, when they would tie them to a tree to prevent their straying in the woods; while the preachers themselves had to preach, eat, and lodge in the same room, looking at the curling smoke ascending through an opening in the roof of the log house, which had not yet the convenience of even a chimney.

But in the midst of these labors and privations, they seemed to be abundantly compensated in beholding the blessed effects of their evangelical efforts, and the cordiality and high gratification with which they were received and treated, more especially by those whose hearts God had touched by his Spirit. For though these people were in the wilderness, and many of them poor, they seemed to be ripe for the gospel, and it was no less gratifying to its messengers than it was pleasurable to its recipients to behold its blessed effects upon the hearts and lives of such as "believed with a heart unto righteousness." While those who resisted the truth, often manifested their enmity by persecuting those who proclaimed it, such as did receive it in the love of it," evinced their affection and gratitude to those who published it, by making them welcome to their habitations, and entertaining them in the very best manner they could. For these self-denying labors, and sacrifices of these early Methodist preachers, thousands of immortal beings in Canada will doubtless praise God in that day "when he shall come to make up his jewels."

A very serious affair occurred in Charleston, South Carolina, about this time. In 1801 and 1802 the Rev. Messrs. George Dougherty and John Harper were stationed in that city. Hearing that Mr. Harper had received some pamphlets from the north, containing resolutions to memorialize the legislature against slavery, notwithstanding the offensive documents were burned in presence of the mayor of the city, a lawless mob collected to avenge themselves on the person of Mr. Harper. He, however, providentially escaping from their fury, they seized on Mr. Dougherty, dragged him through the street to the pump, and having placed his head under the spout, commenced pumping water upon him, and in all probability they would have suffocated him, had not a pious woman, a Mrs. Kingsley, interfered in his behalf. With an intrepidity worthy of all praise, she resolutely placed herself between the infuriated populace and their intended victim, and stuffed her shawl into the mouth of the spout, and thus stopped the flowing of the water. This heroic act filled the persecutors of Dougherty with astonishment. In silent amazement they paused from their murderous work. At this moment of suspense, a gentleman with a drawn sword stood in the midst of them, and, taking Dougherty by the hand, boldly declared his intention to protect him from their violence at all hazards; and he then led him away, no one daring to interfere. Thus completing the victory which the "weaker sex" had so daringly begun, the man of God, thoroughly wet by the water of the pump, was rescued from the hand of violence, and restored to his friends in safety -- although it is said that his sufferings in this cruel affair laid the foundation of that pulmonary disease with which he afterward died. It is furthermore stated, that of all those concerned in this persecution not one prospered; most of them died miserable deaths, and one of them acknowledged that God's curse lighted upon him for his conduct in this affair.

Thirty-two preachers located this year, three were returned supernumerary, and four, namely, James Tillotson, Abraham Andrews, Salathiel Weeks, and Charles Burgoon, after a faithful discharge of their duties as ministers of Christ, had died in the hope of everlasting life.

Numbers in the Church: Whites This Year: 57,186; Last Year: 51,442; Increase: 5,744 -- Colored This Year: 15,688; Last Year: 13,452; Increase: 2,236 -- Total This Year: 72,874; Last Year: 64,894 -- Increase: 7,980 -- Preachers This Year: 307; Last Year: 278; Increase: 29.

There was no account rendered of the numbers in Kentucky and Tennessee, where those great revivals of religion had occurred, otherwise the increase would have appeared much larger than it does. As it is, however, it shows the blessed results of those revivals which have been before detailed.

On the 29th day of January of this year, the Rev. Devereaux Jarratt departed this life in the 69th year of his age; and though he was never in connection with the Methodists, yet as he favored them in the early period of their ministry, and was greatly instrumental in promoting the work of God in Virginia in those days, it seems proper to give some account of his character, labors, and death. Mr. Jarratt was born in New Kent county, in Virginia, on the 6th of January, 1732, O. S. He was awakened to a sense of his lost and guilty condition by the reading of one of Mr. Flavel's sermons, and after a long course of mental discipline, a severe struggling against the inordinate corruptions of his heart, when about twenty-eight years of age, he was made a partaker of justifying faith in Jesus Christ. In his 30th year he began to prepare for orders in the English Church, and after due preparation he went to England and received consecration on Christmas day, in the year 1762. Before his return he preached several times in London, and such was the zeal with which he spoke in the name of his divine Master, that he even then was called by some a Methodist, an appellation commonly given to those who manifested more than usual zeal in their ministry.

On his return to America, in 1763, he was settled in the parish of Bath, Dinwiddie county, Virginia, and became a zealous and evangelical minister of Jesus Christ, by which means he incurred the displeasure of the lukewarm clergy of his own Church, a well as of those members who had "the form of godliness, but denied the power thereof."<sup>4</sup> This, no doubt, led him to seek for spiritual associates elsewhere, and we accordingly find him, as we have already seen, receiving and aiding the Methodist preachers when they came into his neighborhood -- for which service they to several instances recorded their gratitude.

Mr. Jarratt continued his friendship for his Methodist brethren in general until the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1784, when he manifested, if we may believe in the genuineness of the letters attributed to him which were published after his death, no little displeasure in their proceedings, and uttered some hard things against Dr. Coke, Bishop Asbury, and some others.

But while he was dissatisfied with the Methodists, on account of their becoming an independent Church, he seemed equally as much so with most of the clergy of his own Church, because of their dereliction from the doctrines of their Church, and their manifest want of a conformity to the formularies of their religion, and especially those parts which enjoined experimental and practical piety. In this frame of mind he laments, in pathetic strains, the low state of religion in his Church, the want of evangelical zeal and enlightened piety in her clergy, and the general deadness to spiritual things throughout the country.

I have made this short record of Mr. Jarratt, 1. Because I think it due to him as an active, zealous, and successful minister of Jesus Christ, whose friendship for the Methodists when they first visited Virginia, and for a considerable time after, greatly aided them in promoting the cause of God. For a number of years he was indefatigable in his gospel labors, and was instrumental in the conversion of many sinners.

2. Because his posthumous letters have been referred to as an evidence of his regret that he had contributed so much to subserve the cause of Methodism. It is, indeed, to be lamented that any thing

should have occurred to interrupt, in any degree, that harmony of Christian fellowship which evidently subsisted between him and the Methodists, and which had been for a number of years mutually beneficial, and had, accordingly, been reciprocated with the utmost good will. But on the organization of our Church, Mr. Jarratt found himself between two fires. On the one hand, he could not approve in his judgment of that organization, while his feelings held him to his old friends; and in this conflict between his judgment and feelings, the latter became somewhat irritated, and prompted him to say things which, it may be presumed, his more sober judgment would have condemned. On the other hand, while his judgment approved of the doctrine and formularies of devotion recognized in his own Church, he could not fellowship the conduct of her lukewarm clergy and members; and hence, on perceiving this inconsistency between faith and practice, he loudly condemned the one, while he warmly applauded the other. In this dilemma, a situation much to be deprecated by every conscientious minister of Jesus Christ, he seems to have said some things which may justly be regretted by his friends in both communions.

It is not doubted, however, considering his general character, course of conduct, and the predominant tone of his writings, that his last end was "peace and assurance for ever" -- and that with Wesley and Fletcher, whom he so much admired, and with those Methodist preachers with whom he once took such sweet counsel, as well as with all those of every name who loved the Lord Jesus Christ, he is now united in ascribing salvation and honor to him who loved them and washed them in his own blood.

1802

This year there were seven annual conferences, and as they remained stationary, as to numbers, for several years; and were generally held for each section of the country about the same time of the year, I will here give the time and place of each, that the reader may see the general route taken by the superintendents every year.

Oct. 1, 1801, the conference for the western preachers was held in Ebenezer, Tennessee: Jan. 1, 1802, in Camden, South Carolina: March 1, at Salem meeting-house, North Carolina: April 1, in Baltimore, Maryland: May 1, in Philadelphia: June 1, New York: July 1, in Monmouth, Maine. There were about twenty new circuits added this year, but as circuits were almost continually increased by the addition of new, and the division of old ones, by which their names were changed, it seems inexpedient to particularize them, unless something special shall render it necessary. As an evidence of the good effects of the revivals we have noticed, we may remark that there were sixty-seven preachers admitted on trial, and only ten located.

This good work continued in various parts of the country, particularly in the west, by the instrumentality of camp-meetings, and also in some of the southern states. In Virginia, where the cause of religion had suffered severely on account of the secession and subsequent conduct of O'Kelley and his partisans, the Lord began again to show himself in mercy in the awakening and conversion of souls. At Mabry's and Merrit's chapels, and in Greenville circuit, there were remarkable displays of the power and grace of God, which eventuated in bringing hundreds of sinners into the light of the gospel. Norfolk and Portsmouth shared in the blessed work. In Rockingham an account is given of a meeting which continued not less than nine days, during which time almost all secular business was suspended, so entirely did the concerns of eternity occupy the time and attention of the people. It seems, therefore, that protracted meetings, as they have been more recently called, were not unknown in those days. The chief difference between those and such as have been held within a few past years consists in this, that the former were introduced without any previous design, but were the result of providential occurrences, while the latter were

appointed with the express intention of being continued for several days, and hence, at first, were called "four days' meetings." The result of the one mentioned above was, that one hundred and seven in the immediate neighborhood were brought into the Church, exclusive of those who came from a distance, and were benefited by the meeting.

There was also a great work of God which began last year on Flanders' circuit, in the state of New Jersey, under the labors of the Rev. Elijah Woolsey and his colleagues. Mr. Woolsey had proved himself a bold and hardy veteran in the cause of Christ, by volunteering his services for Upper Canada, in the year 1794, in company with Darius Dunham and James Coleman, where he labored for two years with much patience and industry, and saw the fruit of his efforts in the conversion of souls. In 1801 he was stationed on Flanders' circuit, and after cutting off those corrupt members of the Church who could not be reformed, he finally saw the blessed result of his labors in one of the most manifest displays of the grace of God ever witnessed in that part of the country. This work commenced at a quarterly meeting, at which it was judged there were not less than six thousand persons present. It seems that before the meeting commenced both brother Woolsey and the presiding elder, the Rev. Solomon Sharp, had a presentiment that the Lord was about to work at this meeting, and hence they went in the exercise of strong faith in the promises of God that it would be even so. When brother Woolsey arose to address the assembly, feeling "the word of the Lord like fire shut up in his bones," he informed them that God would work among them; and accordingly a shaking and trembling began to be visible in the assembly, accompanied with strong cries to God for mercy. The meeting continued until eleven o'clock at night, and some, judged, remained all night in these solemn exercises. The work thus commenced spread throughout the circuit, and great was the rejoicing of the people, both among the young converts and the old professors of religion. This revival eventuated in the conversion of many souls, and created a hallowing influence on the surrounding population.

In Alexandria, in the District of Columbia, the quarterly meeting which began on Christmas day, continued sixteen days, and terminated in the conversion of upward of one hundred souls. In the states of North and South Carolina, Maryland, and Delaware, the Spirit of the Lord was poured out among the people in such a manner that some of the meetings were continued day and night, and hundreds became the subjects of the grace of life.

In Vermont, also, the good work was extended in many places, though the labors of God's faithful ministers. Joseph Mitchell, Joseph Crawford, Elijah Chichester, and Elijah (now bishop) Hedding, had been instrumental, in the three or four preceding years, of carrying the glad tidings of salvation to the inhabitants along the shores of Lake Champlain, both in New York and Vermont, and had established many flourishing societies, which have continued gradually increasing until this day. This year William Anson was sent to form a circuit on Grand Isle, and such was his success, that there were returned for the next year one hundred and two members of the Church.

Montreal, in Lower Canada, was visited this year by Joseph Sawyer. He found a few persons there who had belonged to the Methodist society in the city of New York before the Revolutionary War, who received him cordially, and assisted him in procuring a school-room for preaching. A Mr. McGinnis and his sister, both unmarried, were among the first who attached themselves to the society in Montreal, and they remained faithful during all the vicissitudes through which Methodism was called to pass in that city until their death.

The Long Point circuit, in Upper Canada, was formed the latter part of this year, chiefly through the labors of Nathan Bangs [the author of this history -- DVM], who went into the work under the direction of the

presiding elder of the district. In the towns of Burford and Oxford particularly there was a great work of God commenced under his labors which eventuated in the conversion of about one hundred souls.

In the midst of this great work which was extending over the continent, and blessing thousands with its renovating influences, Bishop Asbury and his faithful colleague, Bishop Whatcoat, were moving among the churches, "as golden candlesticks," reflecting their luster on all around them, and, by their example, exciting them to activity and diligence in the cause of God. In imitation of the primitive evangelists, these bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church itinerated through the extent of the work, east, west, north, and south, not neglecting the remotest settlements in the wildernesses. And that they might not interfere with each other, nor both travel over the same ground, we find them in the latter part of last year, after holding a council with some of their brethren, determining to meet the Virginia conference, and from thence accompany each other as far as the New York conference; after which one was to continue on east to superintend the conferences in that direction, visiting all the eastern and northern states, and on through the western section of New York state to Pittsburgh in Pennsylvania, and thence through the districts of Virginia, until he met his colleague at the Virginia conference; the bishop who took the western tour was to pass on into the western states and territories, through Kentucky, Tennessee, Georgia, North and South Carolina, and so meet, as before stated, in the center of the work in Virginia. What a diocese was this! Each bishop was to have a traveling elder to accompany him.<sup>5</sup>

According to this wise arrangement they shaped their course thereafter, spreading themselves as far as possible over the entire field of itinerant labor, and, by the aid of their traveling companions, preaching, wherever they came, to the people, and giving a vigorous impulse to the work of God. And as a sample of the manner in which their time was occupied, and the kind of fare they sometimes were obliged to put up with, take the following from Bishop Asbury's Journal: --

"Why," says he, "should a living man complain? But to be three months together upon the frontiers, where generally you have but one room and fireplace, and half a dozen folks about you, strangers perhaps, and their families certainly (and they are not usually small in those plentiful new countries) making a crowd -- and this is not all -- for here you may meditate if you can, and here you must preach, read, write, pray, sing, talk, eat, drink, and sleep, or fly into the woods. Well! I have pains in my body ... which are very afflictive when I ride; but I cheer myself as well as I may with songs in the night." It certainly may be said of those who "desire the office of a bishop" in connection with laborings and sufferings such as these, if they do not "desire a good thing," they at least desire an office, not for its temporal emolument, nor for the sake of the ease and worldly grandeur it confers. After speaking of his arrival in New York for this year, he says, --

"We advance toward the completion of four thousand miles for the present year. I have had great exercises on going through rain and continual labor; but have been blessed with great peace by my good and gracious God."

The following account of the conference which he attended in the city of Baltimore, together with his remarks respecting a portion of his journal which was printed during his life-time, is inserted as due to him as a writer, and to the benevolence of his heart as a superintendent of the Church, as they show, on the one hand, that he was not responsible for the errors in his journal, which all who saw lamented, and, on the other, that he rejoiced in the temporal as well as spiritual prosperity of the preachers under his care. He says, --

"Monday, 5. We had a day of fasting and humiliation for the conference, the continent, and the Church of God; I improved the occasion, and spoke from Acts xiv, 2:3. I was presented with a new impression of my journal; it is very incorrect; had I had an opportunity before it was put to press, I should have altered and expunged many things; the inaccuracies of grammar, and imperfections of composition incident to the hasty notices of a manuscript journal, are preserved in the printed copy. On Monday evening the conference rose: all the demands of the preachers were answered; money was advanced toward the purchase of horses; to those who had distant circuits and far to go, donations were made; and nearly two hundred dollars very liberally sent to the Monmouth conference, which is to meet in July next. Within the circling lines of this conference, we report to this sitting an addition to the society of three thousand souls and upward, besides those who may have died within the last eleven months. John Pawson's letter, and fifty copies of a volume of sermons, came safely to hand; his, and other letters, concerning the work of God, I read to my brethren."

Among other tidings which came to him while at this conference, was that of the death of his pious mother, for whom he always felt a tender and filial regard; and as she belongs, in some sense, to the history of American Methodism, by having given birth to a son who was so closely identified with its interests, I think the reader will be pleased to read the following reflections which the bishop made on receiving the news of her death. The following are his remarks:

While in Baltimore, I received an account of the death of my mother, which I fear is true. And here I may speak safely concerning my very dear mother: her character to me is well known. Her paternal descent was Welch; from a family ancient and respectable by the name of Rogers. She lived a woman of the world until the death of her first and only daughter, Sarah Asbury; how would the bereaved mother weep and tell of the beauties and excellences of her lost and lovely child! pondering on the past in the silent suffering of hopeless grief. This afflictive providence graciously terminated in the mother's conversion. When she saw herself a lost and wretched sinner, she sought religious people, but in the times of this ignorance few were 'sound in the faith,' or 'faithful to the grace given:' many were the days she spent chiefly in reading and prayer; at length she found justifying grace and pardoning mercy. So dim was the light of truth around her, from the assurance she found, she was at times inclined to believe in the final perseverance of the saints. For fifty years her hands, her house, her heart, were open to receive the people of God and ministers of Christ; and thus a lamp was lighted up in a dark place called Great Barre, in Great Britain. She was an afflicted, yet most active woman; of quick bodily powers, and masculine understanding; nevertheless, 'so kindly all the elements were mixed in her,' her strong mind quickly felt the subduing influences of that Christian sympathy which 'weeps with those who weep,' and 'rejoices with those who do rejoice.' As a woman and a wife she was chaste, modest, blameless -- as a mother (above all the women in the world would I claim her for my own) ardently affectionate as a 'mother in Israel,' few of her sex have done more by a holy walk to live, and by personal labor to support the gospel, and to wash the saints' feet; as a friend, she was generous, true, and constant. Elizabeth Asbury died January 6th, 1802, aged eighty-seven or eighty-eight years. There is now, after fifty years, a chapel within two or three hundred yards of her dwelling. I am now often drawn out in thankfulness to God, who hath saved a mother of mine, and, I trust, a father also, who are already in glory,

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Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/nathan-bangs/from-the-close-of-the-general-conference-of-1800-to-the-end-of-the-year-1803/>

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