

From the Close of the General Conference of 1820 to the Beginning of the General Conference of 1824

by Nathan Bangs

The Methodist Episcopal Church's missionary work among the Indian tribes faced numerous challenges, including superstitions, customs, and the corrupting influence of professed Christians, but ultimately met with success in the conversion of the Wyandot Indians.

Scripture: Psalm 96:3, Proverbs 16:3, Isaiah 6:8, Matthew 28:19, Acts 1:8, Romans 10:14, 1 Corinthians 15:58, Philippians 4:13, 2 Timothy 4:7

Topics: "Church Growth", "Missionary Work"

Description

The late General Conference created a new annual conference in Kentucky, making a total of twelve, to support the extension of the work, particularly in the west and southwest. Despite efforts to provide evangelical instruction in Louisiana, many parts remained destitute, especially among French Roman Catholics. Missionary efforts among the Wyandot Indians in Ohio showed promise, despite their unique religious beliefs and customs. The challenges of converting various Indian tribes, each with distinct languages and superstitions, were highlighted. The Methodist Episcopal Church faced internal struggles, including a secession in New York over legal incorporation issues, but many who left later returned. The sermon emphasizes the successful missionary work, revivals, and growth of the Church, despite challenges and internal conflicts.

Transcript

According to the decision of the late General Conference, there was an additional annual conference created this year called Kentucky making in all twelve. This conference, it was stated, "shall include the Kentucky, Salt River, Green River, and Cumberland districts, and that part of the state of Virginia included in the Green Brier and Monroe circuits, heretofore belonging to the Baltimore conference, and the Kenawa and Middle Island circuits, heretofore belonging to the Ohio conference."

This division of labor into twelve annual conferences gave to each effective bishop -- for, as Bishop McKendree had been released from effective labor in consequence of his debility, there were but two -- six conferences to attend, which, in the extension of the work, particularly in the west and southwest, made their labors extremely arduous. They, however, entered upon their work with diligence and zeal; and

although Bishop McKendree was not required to perform effective service, yet he attended as many of the conferences as his strength would allow, and was particularly useful in the missionary department of the work, in which he took a deep and lively interest.

Notwithstanding what had been done to supply the destitute portions of our country with the word and ordinances of Christianity, there were yet many parts unprovided for, particularly in the southwestern states and territories. The state of Louisiana, which contained at this time not less than 220,000 inhabitants, about one fourth of whom were slaves, was almost entirely destitute of evangelical instruction. About three fourths of the population were French Roman Catholics, but few of whom could either speak or understand the English language, and the greater proportion of these had never heard a Protestant minister.

In this large territory there was a presiding elder's district, including only two circuits, called Attakapas and Washataw, in which there were one hundred and fifty-one white and fifty-eight colored members, under the charge of three preachers, including the presiding elder. How inadequate they were all to meet the spiritual wants of the people, may be inferred from the fact, that one of these preachers traveled not less than five hundred and eighty miles every five weeks, in order to preach to as many of the people in their scattered settlements as he possibly could. In this state of things the few whose hearts the Lord had touched sent up a loud and urgent call to the rulers of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and made their earnest appeals to the managers of our Missionary Society for ministerial help. After consulting with Bishop McKendree in reference to the best manner of answering these earnest appeals, the managers selected a young preacher of promising talents, Ebenezer Brown, who was approved of and appointed by Bishop George, and, with a view to qualify himself for his work, he entered upon the study of the French language. He went finally to his field of labor, but the enterprise proved a failure. Such were the prejudices of the French population, fomented as they were by priestly influence, that the missionary could gain no access to the people; and hence, after spending some time in preaching to an English congregation in New Orleans, he returned to the New York conference, in which he continued until he located.

But though these efforts to send the gospel in that direction, like many others of a similar character which had been made to benefit the Catholic population, were unsuccessful, the prospects in other places, particularly among the aborigines of our country, were more flattering. These long neglected people, the original lords of the soil, began to attract the attention of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and by one of those singular providences which so strikingly indicate the wisdom and power of God in selecting the means for the accomplishment of his purposes of mercy, a work of grace had been commenced among the Wyandot Indians in Upper Sandusky, in the state of Ohio.

That the reader may duly estimate the difficulties with which the missionaries had to contend, in their efforts to convert these savages to the Christian faith, it is necessary that he should know something of their superstitions, customs, and manner of living, as well as the great diversity of languages which are spoken by the several tribes.

Within the bounds of the United States and territories there were remaining, according to the most accurate estimate which could be made of all the numerous tribes which once inhabited this land, only about one hundred and thirty thousand; and there were supposed to be in the Canadas, chiefly of the Chippeway [sic], Mohawk, and Missisauga tribes, about fifty thousand more. Such inroads had disease, wars, and intemperance made upon this once numerous and powerful people, the aboriginal lords of the soil, that these several tribes of Indians were but fragments of what they once were, scattered about in

small insulated groups, some of them half civilized, and many melted down to mere handfuls in comparison to their former numbers.

These one hundred and thirty thousand were divided into not less than sixty-five different tribes, speaking almost as many languages, some reduced to as few as thirty in a tribe, while the largest number did not exceed thirty thousand in any one tribe. What a difficulty does this single circumstance present in the way of their conversion! And how hopeless must their case have appeared to all who looked at them merely with the eye of human reason! But the faith of the Christian surveyed them with very different feelings, and prompted him to adopt measures for their melioration and salvation.

Though each tribe may have some religious notions and customs, as well as modes of life, peculiar to itself, yet in the general outline of heathen superstitions and manner of savage life they all agree; and hence a general description of these things may answer the purpose of conveying an accurate idea of their character and religious and social condition.

Though most of them believe in one supremely good Spirit, whom they call Ke-Sha-Muneto, yet as they think he is goodness itself, they conclude he can do no evil, and therefore they neither fear nor offer to him any propitiatory sacrifice. To the evil spirit, who is called Manche-Muneto, they offer sacrifices, as an object of fear and dread, that they may appease his wrath.

In addition to these two great and powerful beings, they believe in the existence of a multitude of subordinate deities, who are distinguished by the simple name of Muneto. These are, like the gods of the ancient heathen, local deities, who have their abodes in caves of the earth, in great waterfalls, in large and dangerous rivers and lakes, which, together with whatever natural phenomenon is calculated to inspire the mind with awe and dread, are under the control of these inferior and local deities. To the care of these subordinate gods the souls and bodies of individuals are committed, and it is a subject of much solicitude for each person to ascertain to which of the Munetos his destinies are to be consigned, that he may render to it the proper homage. For the purpose of acquiring this knowledge they go through a most painful process of fasting and other bodily austerities for several days in succession, and when reduced by this means to great physical weakness, they become perturbed in sleep, and the thoughts which flit through their minds in that state are interpreted in such way as to lead them to infer that either a bear, a deer, a snake, or some other animal is to be the representative of their guardian Muneto; and thenceforward the animal selected by the individual becomes the object of his superstitious reverence through all the vicissitudes of his future roving life.¹

But they have also their priests, who hold a preternatural intercourse with the invisible world, and interpret the will of the gods unto the people. These are called Paw-waws, or Conjurors. These profess to hold a correspondence with invisible and absent spirits, whether dead or alive, and teach the deluded people to believe that they can inflict punishment upon their enemies, even though at a great distance from them -- that they can, by their conjurations, cure diseases, expel witches and wizards, and control the power of evil spirits. These conjurors have their medicine-bags, with which they perform a variety of antic tricks, beating their tum-tum, a sort of drum, and singing their monotonous tunes over the sick, attempting by this means to drive away the evil spirit and restore the patient to health; but they more frequently increase the sufferings or hasten the dissolution of the diseased person than effect his cure.

In addition to these ordinary priests there is another order of a peculiar character, -- whose business is to guard the "Council Fire." This is kept by each tribe in a place selected for that purpose, where an altar,

something in the form of a rude oven, is erected, and here the eternal fire, as it is called, is kept perpetually burning. That it may not be extinguished or desecrated by rude or vulgar hands, four persons, two males and two females, husbands and their wives, are appointed as its guardians. The wives are required to cook and do the domestic work, while their husbands, who are destined more especially to the sacred duty of guarding the council fire, are likewise engaged in hunting and providing all needful things for the household. These four persons are relieved from all secular cares, that they may the more entirely devote themselves to the holy trust confided to them. In this priesthood a perpetual succession is kept up by the appointment of the head chief and his spouse, the former selecting the husband and the latter the wife of the survivor. And so sacred is the duty of guarding the eternal fire considered, that death is inflicted as a punishment upon him who violates his trust.²

The custom of ridding themselves of the encumbrance of the aged and infirm, by putting an end to their life, is continued among these heathen with all its shocking barbarities. The following, as corroborative of the truth of this, is related on the authority of the Rev. William Case, whose labors among the Indians of Upper Canada, and intimate acquaintance with their customs, entitle him not only to credit, but also to the thanks of the whole Christian community. He says: "Many years since an aged respectable gentleman, being at the head of the Bay of Quinte, found an assemblage of Indians. On inquiring the cause, he was informed that they had assembled to perform one of their ceremonies. Out of respect to our informant they permitted him to witness the scene. They were ranged in Indian file, at the head of which was an aged man, and next to him a lad, his son, with a hatchet in his hand. They all moved slowly until they arrived at a place nearly dry in the ground. Here they halted. The old man kneeled down. The son stood for a moment, and then deliberately stepped up and struck the tomahawk into his father's head. He fell under the stroke, was buried, and the ceremony ended by drinking freely of ardent spirits." In justification of this inhuman conduct, they alleged that this was not a punishment for any crime, but merely because the old man could no longer follow them in their wanderings. So powerfully does the selfish principle predominate over filial love and obedience.

But these superstitions are not the worst things with which the Christian missionary has to contend. Had these heathen been left in their native condition, their conversion to Christianity might be effected with much more ease. It is, indeed, lamentable to reflect, that their proximity to the white population, and their intermingling with them for purposes of traffic, instead of bettering their condition, have made it far worse, and furnished them with an argument against Christianity of peculiar point and force. I allude to the introduction of ardent spirits by mercenary traders, to the custom of profane swearing, to gambling, and to those diseases to which they were heretofore strangers. These things have debased their minds, corrupted their morals, impoverished their tribes, thinned their ranks, and hardened them against the truths of the gospel. And this is the more to be lamented, because these evils have been superinduced by those who have called themselves Christians, and professed to enjoy the advantages of civilization. In consequence of these things, the semi-civilized Indians, who skirt our settlements, and have intermingled with their white neighbors, are the worst, to whom the appellation of "miserable, half-starved Indians" most appropriately belongs to those in the interior, far removed from civilized life, being much more industrious, better clad, enjoy better health, and are more easily reached by gospel truth.

This state of things renders it imperative for the missionary, on his first introduction to these semi-barbarians, to remove the objections to Christianity arising from the corrupting example of those professed Christians who have cheated them, made them drunk with "fire waters," and turned the edge of the sword against them, until they have been compelled to seek a shelter from the hot pursuit of their

enemies by plunging farther and farther into the trackless wilderness -- by leaving their paternal inheritances, and taking up their abodes amidst bears and wolves, and other wild beasts of the forests. To do this -- to meet and obviate their objections arising out of this inhuman treatment, by distinguishing between a cause and its professed advocates, between nominal and real Christians, and by discriminating between pure Christianity and that corrupted form of it which has been made to accommodate itself to the debased passions of men -- to do this effectually and satisfactorily to the inquisitive mind of an Indian requires no little ingenuity and patient perseverance. And yet it must be done before an entrance can be gained to his heart by the truth. He must be convinced that the missionary is honest in his purpose, and then the latter must adapt himself, in his mode of instruction, to the condition, the intellect, and the moral habits of his pupil.

Such were the difficulties existing among the Indian tribes to whom the gospel was sent by the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church about this time; and yet it met with a success unparalleled among Indian missions.

The Wyandot Indians, among whom the reformation commenced, called by the French Hurons, were once a powerful nation, the most ancient settlers and proprietors of the country on both sides of the Detroit river, extending northwest as far as Mackinaw. By frequent wars, however, and the destructive influence of those vices contracted by their contiguity to the white population, they had now become greatly reduced in number and influence, and were at this time settled on a reservation of land in Upper Sandusky.

This reservation was about nineteen miles in length from east to west, and twelve in breadth from north to south, containing in all nearly one hundred and fifty thousand acres of land. This tract, through which the Sandusky river winds its way, together with five miles square at the Big Spring, includes all the soil remaining to this once numerous and powerful tribe, whose dominion had extended, in their more palmy days, over such a vast region of country. Their chief settlement, where the mission was commenced, and the mission premises have been established, is about four hundred and seventy miles north of Columbus, the capital of the state of Ohio.

As early as the year 1816, John Steward, a free man of color, born and raised in Powhatan county, in the State of Virginia, visited these people in the character of a Christian teacher. Having been brought to the "knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus," and become a member of our Church, it was deeply impressed upon his mind that it was his duty to travel somewhere northwest in search of some of the "lost sheep of the house of Israel." So strong were his convictions on this subject that he could have no rest in his spirit until he yielded obedience to what he considered the call of God. Unauthorized by any church, and in opposition to the advice of many of his friends, Steward took his departure from his "home and kindred," and continued his course until he arrived at Pipe Town, on the Sandusky river, where a tribe of the Delaware Indians dwelt. After holding a conference with these friendly Indians, and, through an interpreter, delivering to them a discourse on the subject of religion, impelled on by his first impressions, the next morning he bade them an affectionate adieu, and pursued his journey toward Upper Sandusky, and soon arrived at the house of Mr. Walker, United States sub-agent, to whom Steward related his Christian experience, and the reasons which had induced him to come among them. Being finally satisfied that he was actuated by pure motives, Mr. and Mrs. Walker, both of whom could speak the Wyandot language, encouraged and assisted him much in his work. His first sermon was delivered to one old Indian woman. But recollecting that his Lord and Master had preached successfully to the woman of Samaria alone, Steward preached as faithfully to her as if there had been hundreds present. At his next appointment, "on the morrow," he had the satisfaction to find added to his congregation an old man. To these he addressed

himself with such effect that they both were soon converted to the Christian faith.

In this small way, and by these comparatively inefficient means, the work of reformation began among these people in the month of November, 1816, and by the faithful labors of Steward, assisted occasionally by some local preachers, who took an interest in their spiritual welfare, before any regular missionary was pointed to take charge of them, a large society of converted natives had been formed, all zealous for the salvation of their heathen brethren. Among these were several influential chiefs of the nation, Between-the-logs, Mononcue, Hicks, and Scuteash, together with two of the interpreters, Pointer and Armstrong; the first of whom, Between-the-logs, was one of the chief counselors of the nation, a man of vigorous intellect, who soon became an eloquent advocate for the Christian cause; nor was Mononcue much inferior to him in mental strength and useful labors.

In 1819, the very year in which the Missionary Society was formed -- a coincidence not unworthy of notice -- this mission was taken under the superintendence of the Ohio conference, which held its session that year in Cincinnati, August the 7th, and the Rev. James B. Finley, who was appointed to the Lebanon district, took the Wyandot mission under his care. At a quarterly meeting, held in November of this year, on Mad river circuit, forty-two miles from Upper Sandusky, about sixty of these native converts were present, among whom were the four chiefs above mentioned and the two interpreters. And that the reader may judge for himself in respect to the genuineness of the work which had been wrought in the hearts and lives of these people, I will insert the following account of the manner in which some of them related their Christian experience. Between-the-logs arose first in the love-feast, and lifting his eyes to heaven, streaming with tears of penitence and gratitude, said: --

"My dear brethren, I am happy this morning that the Great Spirit has permitted us to assemble here for so good a purpose as to worship him, and to strengthen the cords of love and friendship. This is the first meeting of the kind which has been held for us, and now, my dear brethren, I am happy that we, who have been so long time apart, and enemies to one another, are come together as brothers, at which our Great Father is well pleased. For my part, I have been a very wicked man, and have committed many great sins against the Good Spirit, was addicted to drinking whisky and many evils: but I thank my good God that I am yet alive, and that he has most perfectly opened my eyes by his ministers and the good book to see these evils, and has given me help to forsake them and turn away from them. Now I feel peace in my heart with God and all men; but I feel just like a little child beginning to walk; sometimes very weak, and almost ready to give up; then I pray, and my Great Father hears me, and gives me the blessing; then I feel strong and happy; then I walk again; so sometimes up and sometimes down. I want you all to pray for me, that I may never sin any more, but always live happy and die happy. Then I shall meet you all in our Great Father's house above, and be happy for ever.' This speech was attended with great power to the hearts of the people.

"The next who arose was Hicks, who had become a most temperate and zealous advocate for the Christian religion. His speech was not interpreted entire; but after expressing his gratitude to God for what he then felt, and hoped to enjoy, he exhorted his Indian brethren to be much engaged for a blessing, and enforced his exhortation in the following manner: -- 'When I was a boy, my parents used to send me on errands, and sometimes I saw so many new things to attract my attention, I would say, By and by I will ask, until I would forget what I was sent for, and have to go home without it. So it may be with you. You have come here to get a blessing, but if you do not ask for it you will have to go home without it, and the wicked Indians will laugh at you for coming so far for nothing. Now seek, now ask, and if you get the blessing you will be happy, and go home light, and then be strong to resist evil and to do good.' He

concluded by imploring a blessing upon his brethren.

"Scuteash next arose, and, with a smiling and serene countenance, said, 'I have been a great sinner, and such a drunkard as made me commit many great sins, and the Great Spirit was very mad with me, so that in here -- pointing to his breast -- 'always sick -- no sleep -- no eat -- walk -- walk--drink whisky. Then I pray to the Great Spirit to help me to quit getting drunk, and to forgive me all my sins; and God did do something for me -- I do not know from whence it comes nor where it goes, but it came all over me'--Here he cried out, 'Waugh! Waugh!' as if shocked with electricity -- 'Now me no more sick. Me sleep, eat, and no more get drunk -- no more drink whisky -- no more bad man. Me cry -- me meet you all in our Great Father's house, and be happy for ever.'

At the conclusion of the love-feast there were not less than three hundred white people assembled from the neighboring frontier settlements, to whom Mr. Finley preached with great effect. The manifest attention in the appearance and general deportment of the Indian converts, together with the preaching, had a most salutary effect upon the audience.

"The next evening, at the earnest request of the natives, the meeting was resumed. After an exhortation from Mr. Finley, Mononcue arose and exhorted his brethren to look for the blessing they sought now. He then addressed the white brethren as follows: --

" 'Fathers and brethren, I am happy this night before the Great Spirit that made all men, both red, white, and black, that he has favored us with good weather for our meeting, and brought us together that we may help one another to get good and do good. The Great Spirit has taught you and us both in one thing, that we should love one another, and fear and obey him. Us Indians he has taught by his Spirit; and you, white men, he has taught by your good book, which is all one. But your book teaches you, and us by you, more plainly than we were taught before, what is for our good. To be sure we served our Great Father sincerely, (before we were told by the good book the way,) by our feasts, rattles, and sacrifices, and dances, which we now see were not all right. Now some of our nation are trying to do better; but we have many hindrances, some of which I mean to tell. The white men tell us they love us, and we believe some do, and wish us well; but a great many do not, for they will bring us whisky, which has been the ruin of our people. I can compare whisky to nothing but the devil; for it brings with it all kinds of evil -- it destroys our happiness; it makes Indians poor; strips our squaws and children of their clothes and food; makes us lie, steal, and kill one another. All these and many other evils it brings among us; therefore you ought not to bring it among us. Now you white people make it, you know its strength and use, Indians do not. Now this whisky is a curse to yourselves why not quit making it? This is one argument used by wicked Indians against the good book; If it is so good; why do not white men all do good? Another hindrance is, white men cheat Indians, take away their money and skins for nothing. Now you tell us your good book forbids all this; why not then do what it tells you? then Indians do right too. Again, you say our Great Father loves all men, white, black, and red men, that do right; then why do you look at Indians as below you, and treat them as if they were not brothers? Does your good book tell you so? I am sure it does not. Now, brothers, let us all do right; then our Great Father will be pleased, and will make us happy in this world, and when we die then we shall all live together in his house above, and always be happy.' "

At the Ohio conference, which was held this year, 1820, in Chillicothe, the chiefs of the Wyandots presented a petition to the conference for a regular missionary to be appointed over them. It will doubtless be both pleasing and edifying to the reader to know the orderly method by which the whole affair of preparing and presenting this petition was conducted, as it will show that these people were governed by

the principles of democracy in coming to a final determination of any important question, while the executive authority was confided to their chief men. The following is Mr. Finley's' account of this transaction: --

"Sunday, 16th July, in the Wyandot council house, Upper Sandusky, at the close of public worship, was my last address to the Wyandots by the interpreter. 'My friends, and you chiefs and speakers in particular, I have one word more to say; I expect to meet our good old chiefs and fathers in the church at Chillicothe before I come to see you again, and they will ask me how you come on in serving the Lord, and if you want them to keep sending you preachers any longer, to tell you the good word, or if you have any choice in preachers to come and teach you.'

"The answer. -- 'Our chiefs are not all here, and we must have all our chiefs and queens together, and they must all speak their minds, and then we will let the old father know.'

"They appointed to meet me at Negro town on Wednesday evening, on my return from Seneca town; and, having returned, found them assembled and prepared to answer. On entering in among them a seat was set in the midst of the room, and I requested to take the seat, which I declined; but took my seat in their circle against the wall, and directed the interpreter to take the middle seat, which was done. After a short silence I spoke. 'Dear friends and brothers, I am thankful to find you all here, and am now prepared to hear your answer.'

"Mononcue, chairman and speaker for them all, answered: --

" 'We let our old father know that we have put the question round which was proposed on Sunday evening in the council house, and our queens give their answer first, saying,

" 'We thank the old father for coming to see us so often, and speaking the good word to us, and we want him to keep coming and never forsake us; and we let him know that we love this religion too well to give it up while we live, for we think it will go bad with our people if they quit this religion; and we want our good brother Steward to stay always among us, and our brother Jonathan too, and to help us along as they have done. Next we let the old father know what our head chiefs and the others have to say. They are willing that the gospel word should be continued among them, and they will try to do good themselves and help others to do so too; but as for the other things that are mentioned, they say, We give it all over to our speakers; just what they say we agree to; they know better about these things than we do, and they may let the old father know their mind.'

"The speakers reply for themselves: --

" 'We thank the fathers in conference for sending us preachers to help our brother Steward, and we desire the old father to keep coming at least another year when his year is out; and we want our brother Armstrong to come as often as he can, and our brothers Steward and Jonathan to stay among us and help us as they have done; and we hope our good fathers will not give us up because so many of our people are wicked and do wrong, for we believe some white men are wicked yet, that had the good word preached to them longer than our people; and our great heavenly Father has had long patience with us all; and we let the old father know that we, the speakers, will not give over speaking and telling our people to live in the right way; and if any of us do wrong we will still try to help him right, and let none go wrong; and we will try to make our head chiefs and all our people better, and we are one in voice with our queens, and we all join in giving thanks to our good fathers that care for our souls, and are willing to help our people;

and we want them all to pray for us, and we will pray for them, and we hope our great heavenly Father will bless us all, and this is the last.' "

Their request was granted, and Moses Hinkle, senior, was appointed a missionary to Upper Sandusky. Being aided and encouraged by so many influential chiefs, and others of the tribe who had embraced the Christian faith, the missionary entered upon his work with a fair prospect of success; nor was he disappointed in his expectations, though it required much labor and skill to bring them into gospel order, according to our disciplinary regulations.

While these prospects were looming up before us in this and some other places, the Church in the city of New York was convulsed by an eruption which had been secretly working, and sometimes venting itself in low murmurings and disputings, for a considerable time before it broke forth in the manner now to be described. It would doubtless be tedious, and probably uninteresting to the reader, for me to enter into a minute detail of all the circumstances which led finally to a secession of a traveling preacher and upward of three hundred members, including three trustees and quite a number of class-leaders.

In contests of this character there is generally more or less of blame on both sides in respect to the manner in which the controversy is conducted, while only one can be right in regard to the main principle contended for, or as it respects the measures and things to be sustained or sacrificed. And that in the discussions which arose on the present occasion there were hasty expressions and precipitate measures on the one side as well as the other, I have good reason to know, while I am equally well convinced that the seceders themselves had no just cause for their complaints, and the means which they employed to accomplish their ends.

The origin of the difficulty may be traced to the rebuilding of John Street church, in the year 1817, although long prior to this there had appeared a jealousy between the uptown and downtown people, and more particularly between the east and west portions of the city. But the manner in which this church was re-edified, being a little more neat and costly than the other churches in the city, furnished a plausible opportunity, for those who seemed to want one, to censure the conduct of the trustees and those preachers who favored their plan of building, and thus the spirit of discontent among the members of the Church was much increased. Unhappily for the peace of the Church, the malcontents were strengthened in their opposition at the first by at least one preacher, who made no secret of his dissatisfaction at the measures which had been pursued in relation to the John Street church, and other matters connected with the administration of discipline.

These things continued to distract the councils of the Church, and to disturb its peace and harmony more and more, until the session of the New York conference in 1820, when the conference adopted measures to remove, if possible, the source of the difficulties, by advising our people to petition the state legislature for such an act of incorporation as should "recognize the peculiarities of our form of church government," and thereby protect the administrators of discipline in their ecclesiastical rights and privileges. Though the conference meant nothing more than the removal of legal barriers, which they then thought existed, out of the way, yet the dissatisfied party seized hold of this circumstance with peculiar avidity, and made it subserve their purposes by raising the cry of "legal establishment," an "attempt to coerce the people by civil laws," &c., &c. Though all this was but idle gossip, yet it had its effect in raising a prejudice in the minds of many sincere members of our Church, and induced them to believe that their preachers were adopting measures to enslave them, or to deprive them of their just rights and privileges.

It is believed that the measures of the conference, though well meant, were unnecessary, even for the attainment of the end proposed, as subsequent experience has proved that the constitutions, both of the general and state governments, amply secure to all denominations the full enjoyment of all their peculiarities, and the free and unrestrained exercise of their disciplinary regulations, provided they behave as peaceable citizens, and do not infract any law of the land. This principle has been settled by the highest tribunals of justice, and therefore no special act is necessary to remove any legal barrier out of the way of the exercise of discipline, provided as above, because all such barriers, did they exist, are unconstitutional, and are therefore null and void.

But this act of the New York conference, perfectly innocent in itself, and which was never carried into effect, furnished a plausible pretext to the discontented party, and was used with admirable effect in raising a prejudice against the constituted authorities of the Church. It finally ended, as before remarked, in the secession of a preacher, William M. Stillwell, and about three hundred members of the Church, some of whom were men of long standing and considerable influence. They formed themselves into an independent congregation, adopting the substance of our general rules for their government, and our doctrines as articles of faith, professing at the same time an attachment to the itinerating mode of spreading the gospel, and, drawing others after them in some portions of the country, formed an annual conference, made up chiefly -- for I believe no traveling preacher joined them except Stillwell -- of local preachers, and those who had been exhorters in our Church. Their itinerancy, however; was of short duration, for those who seceded in the city of New York soon settled down upon the Congregational plan of church government, allowing even the females a voice in all matters of administration.

As it will not be necessary to advert to these things again, except incidentally, it is proper to remark here, that most of those who left us at that time have since returned to the church of their first love. Having sufficiently tested the quality of the "new wine" to find it unsavory, and becoming restive under their new regimen, they made application to be restored to the privilege of drinking again the "old wine," and to the government from which they had expatriated themselves. Some afterward joined the "Reformer," improperly so called, and a few only of those who seceded remain attached to Stillwell. Two out of the three trustees who left us, most of the class-leaders, together with their members, have been, at their own request, restored to their former fellowship, in a way equally satisfactory to all concerned. Mr. Stillwell, however, remains over a congregation, made up chiefly of those who have been gathered in since the secession, and, so far as they may promote "the common salvation," we wish them success.

Notwithstanding these difficulties occurred in the city of New York and a few other places which were affected by these movements, by which many a sincere heart was made to palpitate with sorrow, and some of our ministers to suffer a temporary reproach, the work of God was generally prosperous, and great peace reigned among those who remained unmoved in the city of New York.

It was no small satisfaction to the projectors and friends of our Missionary Society to find that their labors were duly appreciated by their brethren, and that the spirit of missions was gradually diffusing itself throughout our ranks, exerting in its course a hallowing influence in the Church, and calling forth a spirit of liberality highly creditable to all concerned. Many of the annual conferences formed themselves into auxiliary societies, and adopted energetic measures to establish branches throughout their bounds, with a view to supply the pecuniary means needful to support those men of God who volunteered their services for the salvation of men. Numerous testimonies in favor of these measures, sent to the managers to cheer them on the way, might easily be adduced; but I shall content myself with inserting the following from the Rev. Thomas L. Douglass, of the Tennessee conference: --

"The plan," he remarks, "proposed in the Address of the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, places things on very advantageous ground. The men to be aided and sanctioned as missionaries are to be approved by our annual conferences, and to act under the direction of our bishops. Men who, renouncing ease and worldly prospects, devoted to God and his Church, and qualified for the divine work in which they are engaged, will spread the word of life; and by uniting precept with example they will plant the standard of Immanuel, and diffuse light to thousands in regions where darkness now reigns. O! could our venerable father, Bishop Asbury, the apostle of America, have witnessed such a plan matured and carried into operation by his sons in the gospel, his great soul must have felt such rapture, that, like Simeon, he would have exclaimed, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace! Admirable system! The strength of Jehovah must be felt by the powers of darkness in the operation of such a plan.

"I think the publication of the Methodist Magazine and the establishment of the Missionary Society, both engrafted on the old itinerant missionary plan, are calculated to impart such energy and spirit to the whole connection, that we shall not only keep up the life and power of religion where it is already planted, but renewed exertion and unequalled success, since the apostolic age, in saving souls from death, will be the resulting consequences.

"Nashville is certainly the most central as well as the most populous town within the limits of this conference, and therefore ought to be the place for the location of an auxiliary society, which I shall use my endeavors to establish as soon as possible."

Events have verified the truth of these anticipations respecting the blessed results of this society. An enlightened zeal distinguished the conduct of those who entered the most heartily into the missionary work, and the spirit of revival pervaded many portions of the Church during this and succeeding years. An auxiliary missionary society had been formed in Lynn, Mass., and the Rev. J. A. Merrill, who was appointed by the bishop as a missionary in the bounds of the New England conference, went to the upper Coos, along the upper waters of the Connecticut river, a tract of country almost entirely destitute of the gospel. God accompanied his labors with the energies of the Holy Spirit, so that many sinners were awakened and brought to the knowledge of the truth. He extended his labors into Vermont, some parts of New Hampshire, and Maine, and everywhere found a people eager to hear the word. The following extract from one of his letters will show the extent and effect of his labors: --

"Since my last communication I have made two visits into the upper Coos country, and am happy to state that the prospect still brightens. In Lunenburg there is a gracious work of religion. I have attended a number of meetings in that place, and the power of God was evidently manifested among the people. The tears and sighs of mourners clearly discovered that the word was not delivered in vain. At one time nearly the whole assembly rose and requested prayers, and after the congregation was dismissed a number of mourning and weeping souls tarried, and still desired we should pray for them. They readily prostrated themselves at the foot of the cross, while our prayers were offered to God in their behalf. Several have professed faith in the Lord Jesus, and others are still struggling for deliverance.

"There is a good work in the Congregational society in this town. At a meeting not long since, the preacher, after giving an invitation to the people to rise to be prayed for, and counting forty, urged the importance of their kneeling, from the example of Christ and the apostles; he then kneeled, and was joined in this Scriptural and rational act by nearly all the congregation.

"About one hundred have been added to the societies on Stratford circuit since the last conference, and perhaps more than that number on Landaff circuit.

"I have made a tour of about five weeks into Maine; preached in the towns of Shelbourn, Rumford, Bethel, Livermore, Augusta, Sidney, Gardner, Litchfield, and Vienna. In some of these towns I preached four and five times, and have reason to think the labor will not be lost. The prospect in several towns is good; -- in Vienna about sixty have experienced religion of late, and the attention in most of these places is considerable.

"You observe in your letter that several wished to know how many miles I have traveled and how many sermons I have preached since my appointment. I am not much in favor of this practice, generally; but as it is the wish of my friends, and has been a practice among missionaries, I shall here state, for the satisfaction of the society, that I have visited and preached in seventy towns, traveled three thousand six hundred and seventy miles, (in about eight months,) and preached two hundred and forty sermons; but how many families I have visited I cannot tell."

In the town of Bristol, R. I., there was a gracious work of God. The following particulars respecting the commencement and progress of Methodism in this place will doubtless be interesting to the reader. About the year 1791 a sea captain, a citizen of Bristol, was brought to the saving knowledge of the truth under Methodist preaching in the city of New York. On his return to his native place he made known to some of his neighbors what God had done for his soul. Though many who heard these things treated them with contempt, others believed his testimony and received it with joy. Being encouraged by these, the captain, whose heart burned with love to the souls of his fellowmen, invited the Methodist preachers to visit Bristol; and though much opposition was manifested by some, yet others received the word with joyful and believing hearts, and a society was soon formed, consisting of eighteen persons. This was the beginning of Methodism in that place, and the society gradually increased in numbers and strength, so that in 1805 they were enabled to build a commodious house of worship. In 1812, under a powerful revival of religion, about one hundred were added to their number. This year, 1820, they were favored with another outpouring of the Spirit, during which not less than one hundred and fifty gave evidence of a work of regenerating grace, so that the whole number of Church members was four hundred and eight, including twenty-two colored.

In Provincetown, Massachusetts, also, there was a remarkable work of God; -- so powerful was it in its effects, and so rapid in its progress, that it changed the entire moral aspect of the place. As this work began while many of the men were absent at sea -- the inhabitants living chiefly by fishing -- on their return they were astonished at the change which had taken place; but they soon became convinced that it was the power of God which had produced the reformation, and they also were soon made "partakers of like precious faith," whole families rejoicing together "for the consolation." About one hundred and forty in this little town were brought to God during this revival.

Chillicothe, Ohio, was also favored with manifest displays of the power and grace of God. In 1819 there had been a revival here which eventuated in the addition of three hundred and twenty to the Church. This year the work continued with increasing power, and, among others, the man who had been employed in finishing their house of worship, together with all his family, and all the hands employed on the house, were made partakers of the grace of life.

Many other places, too numerous to mention, were blessed with revivals, so that it may be said the Church very generally was in a prosperous condition.

Thirty-five preachers were located this year, fifteen were returned supernumerary, and forty-two superannuated, and three had been expelled. Two, John T. Brame and George Burnet, had died in the Lord.

Numbers in the Church: Whites This Year: 219,332; Last Year: 201,750; Increase: 17,582 -- Colored This Year: 40,558; Last Year: 39,174; Increase: 1,384 -- Total This Year: 259,8903; Last Year: 240,924 -- Increase: 18,966 -- Preachers This Year: 896; Last Year: 812; Increase: 84.

1821

The mission which had been commenced among the Wyandots continued to prosper, and the reports of its success had a most happy influence on the cause of religion generally. This year the Rev. James B. Finley was appointed to the superintendence of this mission. In addition to preaching the gospel to the adult Indians, he was instructed to establish a school for the education of the children, both in letters and in domestic economy -- to teach the boys the art of agriculture, and the girls to sew, spin, and knit, and all the duties of the household.

It is a coincidence worthy of notice, that about the time this good work commenced among the natives of our forests, the government of the United States made an appropriation of ten thousand dollars annually for the support of native schools, in which it was ordered that the children should be taught the arts of civilized life, as well as to read, write, and keep accounts. This annuity was to be divided among the several schools which might be established among the aboriginal tribes by missionary societies, and the Wyandot school received its quota. To accomplish his object Mr. Finley commenced building a house, which might serve the double purpose of a house of worship and for teaching the children, and likewise inclosed a large farm, the land having been granted by the chiefs to the mission, on which he labored with his own hands, for the purpose of setting an example to the Indians, that they might habituate themselves to an agricultural life. These movements had a salutary effect upon their physical and moral condition.

The converted natives were formed into classes, and the chiefs who embraced Christianity were appointed leaders. At the first offer that was made to receive them into class twenty-three came forward, with tears of mingled sorrow and joy, desiring to become members of the Christian church, while others stood trembling and weeping, crying aloud, "O, Shasus, Ta-men-tare!" that is, "O, Jesus, take pity on us!" In this way the good work went on during the year.

With a view to send the gospel to the Creek Indians, who inhabited a tract of country lying within the bounds of the states of Georgia and Alabama, then under the chieftainship of McIntosh, the celebrated half-breed warrior, the Rev. William Capers undertook a tour through the state of Georgia, to ascertain the feelings of its citizens toward an attempt to establish a mission among that tribe of Indians. He was favorably received by the people generally, and the proposed mission was viewed with a friendly eye. He visited and preached in the most populous towns and villages in the state, and made collections for the support of the contemplated mission, which was begun the succeeding year.

The feelings of the managers of the Missionary Society, in view of what God had already done through their instrumentality, may be seen by the following extract from their third annual report: --

"It is now only about three years since this society commenced its operations. Combining so large a field of labor, and comprehending in its plans so large a circle, as the whole of the Methodist conferences in the United States, it was but reasonable to expect that its progress would be slow; but it has been sure. Time and patient perseverance are necessary to set so many wheels in motion, to communicate life and vigor to each, and so to direct the movements of the whole as to produce a simultaneous and harmonious co-operation. But, blessed be the God of missions! the God of Wesley and Whitefield -- those eminent missionaries of the old world -- who inspired them with sufficient energy to set the mighty machine in motion -- of Asbury and Coke, who gave it such an impulse in the new world -- blessed be his holy name for ever, that he hath so far given success to the experiment. Already the impulse is felt more or less strongly from the center to the circumference of our connection. The mustard-seed first sown about three years since has taken deep root, has extended its branches, and many are reposing under their shadow. Young branches are shooting forth in various directions, and, instead of exhausting the strength of the parent stock, are daily adding to its growth and stability. As you have already heard, the heathen tribes of our wilderness are partaking of its fruits.

"The time, indeed, is not far distant, when every man who shall have engaged in this godlike enterprise will esteem it as the happiest period of his existence, the highest honor ever conferred upon him, when he embarked in the cause of missions. The loiterers, those who have looked on with cold indifference, and with envious eye have waited the doubtful result, will stand abashed, filled with confusion at their own supineness; and will, if their zeal for God be not quite extinguished, petition the privilege to redeem their lost time, by being permitted, at last, to participate in the grand work of conquering the world by the power of truth."

The work of God was generally prosperous throughout the bounds of the several annual conferences, notwithstanding a spirit of disaffection was manifesting itself in some places among a few restless spirits. Through the agency of camp meetings in some parts of South Carolina much good was done, and a new circuit which was formed in the neighborhood of Bush river was blessed with an encouraging revival, under the labors of R. L. Edwards. An effort was also made to carry the gospel into a new field in the southwest, in what was called Jackson's Purchase, which embraced portions of the states of Kentucky and Tennessee, and Lewis Garrett and Hezekiah Holland were appointed to this service. That they were successful in their labors is evident from the fact, that there were returned on the Minutes for 1822 one hundred and forty-two whites and thirteen colored.

In the Nashville district also, through the agency of camp meetings, there were extensive revivals of religion throughout nearly all the circuits within the district, so much so that the net increase, after deducting expulsions, deaths, and removals, was one thousand three hundred and five members. The writer of this account, the Rev. Thomas L. Douglass, thus concludes his remarks: --

"The character of this revival is the least mixed with what are called irregularities or extravagances of any that I ever saw. We have had nothing of what is called the jerks, or dance, among us. The work of conviction in the hearts of sinners has been regular, powerful, and deep; their conversion, or deliverance from sin and guilt, clear and bright; and their rejoicings Scriptural and rational. I think fully half of those who have been the subjects of the work are young men, and heads of families; many of them among the most respectable in the country, men of education, men of talents. We anticipate help and usefulness from some of them in the Lord's vineyard. Upon the whole, it is the greatest work, the most blessed revival, I ever saw. The whole country, in some places, seems like bowing to our Immanuel; religion meets with very little that can be called opposition; and many who neither profess nor appear to have any desire to

get religion themselves, manifest an uncommon degree of solicitude that others should obtain it, and express a high satisfaction at seeing the work prosper. May the Lord continue to pour out his Spirit, and may the hallowed fire spread, until all the inhabitants of the earth shall rejoice in his salvation! To God be all the glory! Pray for us, dear brethren, that this year may be as the past, and much more abundantly. We look for it and expect it. The district is well supplied with preachers, men of talents, men of zeal, and in the spirit of the work. May the Lord bless their labors!"

In Carter's Valley circuit, Holston conference, there were added, during a revival that year, not less than three hundred to the Church.

In Pittsburgh, Pa., the work of reformation had been going forward without interruption for about eighteen months, during which time not less than five hundred had been added to the Church, of whom about two hundred and sixty had been received in the course of six months. The writer of this account of the work of God in Pittsburgh, the Rev. Samuel Davis, who was at that time stationed there, closes his narrative in following words: --

"To those who have been conversant with the history of Methodism in this place from its rise, and who, with lively interest, have marked its progress down to the present, the retrospect must afford matter for the liveliest feelings of gratitude to God. Yea, when they look back but a few years, and compare what they then were with what they are now, their souls, in pleasing astonishment, must cry out, 'What hath the Lord wrought!' When they consider that, about ten or twelve years ago, an apartment in a private house was sufficient to contain the society, and all who chose to assemble with them to hear the word preached; and that now that little society has swelled to a church of near seven hundred members, possessing two meeting-houses, (one of which is large,) which are well filled, on sabbath evenings especially, with serious and attentive hearers -- a review of these circumstances constrains them to acknowledge that it is indeed 'the Lord's doings, and marvelous in their eyes,' -- 'that they who were not a people should become the people of the Lord.' 'The Lord reigneth! Let the earth rejoice.'"

In some portions of North Carolina the camp meetings were rendered a great blessing to the people. In the town of Hillsborough, where the Methodists had been but little known, having only two Church members in the place, there was a society of forty raised up as the fruit of one of these meetings, and they immediately adopted measures for erecting a house of worship, much to the gratification of the people of Hillsborough. Other places shared largely in the blessed effects of these revivals, and upward of three hundred were added to the several societies in that region of country, besides a number who connected themselves with other denominations.

In the more northern conferences also the work of God was prosperous. In the New Hampshire district, in New Haven, Conn., Providence, R. I., New London district, Wellfleet, New Windsor, and Rhinebeck circuits, the Lord poured out his Spirit, and blessed the labor of his servants in the conversion of many sinners and the sanctification of believers.

In 1819 Alabama was admitted as a state into the American confederacy. It had been filling up, like the other territories in the west and southwest, with inhabitants from Europe and the older states in the Union, most of whom were destitute of the ordinances of Christianity. Into this country the Methodist itinerants had penetrated, and succeeded in forming circuits and establishing societies among the scattered population. This year, as the following account will show, there were encouraging revivals of religion in many places in that part of the country. The presiding elder, the Rev. Thomas Griffin, writes as follows: --

"At a camp meeting held on the 6th of July last, on Pearl river, a few miles from Monticello, the congregation was large and attentive, many were awakened to a sense of their need of Christ, and five or six gave evidence of a change of heart.

"On the 20th we held another meeting on the river Chickasawhay, about fifty miles from the town of Mobile, where we have a large, flourishing society. There were two traveling and four local preachers, and one Presbyterian minister at this meeting. On Friday and Saturday the Lord favored us with a solemn sense of his presence. Sinners were struck with awe, and stood with respectful silence, while believers rejoiced in God their Saviour. On sabbath we administered the Lord's supper. All were solemn as night. The word of God was heard with great attention, and I believe much good was done. About ten professed justifying grace.

"On the 27th of July we held another meeting, about thirty miles from St. Stephen's, near the Tombeckbee and Alabama rivers. Though the principal part of the people were irreligious, yet they behaved with great order and decorum, and five or six professed to be converted.

"On the 2d of August we commenced a camp meeting on the banks of the Alabama river, thirty miles below the town of Cahawba the seat of government for this state. From the paucity of the inhabitants, and the affliction many were suffering from a prevailing fever, there were not many that attended this meeting. Some disorder was witnessed; but He that commanded the boisterous winds to be still appeared in our behalf, and before the exercises closed some were brought, as we have reason to believe, to the knowledge of the truth.

"August 10th another meeting began, thirty miles above Cahawba, on the bank of the above-mentioned river. A numerous concourse of people attended, and much good was done. On Tuesday morning I requested all who had obtained an evidence of their conversion to God to come forward to the altar, when thirty-seven presented themselves. The last two meetings were held in a forest, and the Indians were fishing in the river while we were preaching and praying; the bears were ravaging the cornfields, and the wolf and tiger were howling and screaming in the very woods in the neighborhood of our meeting.

"These accounts may seem unimportant to those who are accustomed to more numerous congregations, and who have the privilege of assembling in convenient houses; but to us, who are struggling with many difficulties in this newly settled country, it is highly gratifying, and fills us with a pleasing hope of yet seeing the desert blossom as the rose."

Fifty preachers were located this year, twenty-two returned supernumerary, fifty-five superannuated, and five expelled. Three, Daniel Ireland, William M. Stillwell, and William Barton, had withdrawn, the last of whom joined the Protestant Episcopal Church. Six, namely, Samuel Parker, Charles Dickinson, Archibald Robinson, John Robertson, Richard Emory, and Apheus Davis, had finished their course in peace.

Samuel Parker was eminently useful in his day and generation. He was a native of New Jersey, born in 1774, of poor parents. At the age of fourteen he was brought from darkness to light, and became a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1805 he entered the traveling ministry, and was appointed to labor in the western country. It soon appeared that God was with him. By his deep devotion to the work of God, and his eminent talents as a preacher of righteousness, he acquired the confidence of his brethren, and commanded the respect of the community generally. In 1815 he was appointed the presiding elder of the Miami district, and from thence, in the next year, was transferred to the Kentucky district, in which he continued four years. In this station he was greatly blessed in his labors, during which

time he was married to Miss Oletha Tilton.

Being called by the bishop to fill an important post in the bounds of the Mississippi conference, though his health was evidently declining, he consented to be transferred to that more distant field of labor. He soon, however, sunk under the influence of disease, and on the 20th of December, 1819, he died in peace.

The Rev. Samuel Parker was a man of deep experience, of fervent piety, of stern integrity, and possessed talents of the most useful character as a minister of Jesus Christ. His method of preaching was well calculated to soothe the mind of the believer by the sweet and rich promises of the gospel, as well as to inspire hope and faith in the broken-hearted, penitent sinner. And his general deportment as a Christian minister, among his brethren and the people of his charge, inspired such confidence in his wisdom and the purity of his motives as gave him a powerful influence over others, and he exerted it at all times for their present and future welfare. Had he lived to "threescore years and ten," no doubt he would have ranked among the first ministers in the Methodist Episcopal Church; but that God who "seeth the end from the beginning" saw fit to call him in the prime of life from the militant to the church triumphant, where he rests from his labors, and his works do follow him.

Of the others whose death is recorded, it is said that they also filled up the measure of their days in usefulness, and ended their lives in the full hope of the gospel.

Numbers in the Church: Whites This Year: 239,087; Last Year: 219,332; Increase: 19,755 -- Colored This Year: 42,059; Last Year: 40,558; Increase: 1,501 -- Total This Year: 281,146; Last Year: 259,890 -- Increase: 21,256 -- Preachers This Year: 977; Last Year: 896; Increase: 81.

1822

This year two more Indian missions were commenced, one among the Mohawks in Upper Canada, and the other among the Creeks, called the Asbury mission. As the latter, after much expense and labor, failed in the accomplishment of its objects, perhaps it may be as well to give the history of its commencement, progress, and termination, once for all, in this place.

As before stated, the charge of this mission was confided, by Bishop McKendree, to the Rev. William Capers, of the South Carolina conference. After traveling extensively through the state of Georgia, endeavoring to awaken the missionary spirit, and collect funds to defray the expense for an outfit of the mission, in the month of August of this year, in company with Colonel Richard Blount, a pious and intelligent member of our Church, he arrived at the Creek agency, on Flint river. After witnessing some debasing scenes of amusement among the females, and one of those Indian plays which was conducted with a rude display of Indian dexterity, and daring feats of ferocious gallantry, he obtained an introduction to General McIntosh, the principal man of the nation. As an instance of the lordly bearing of this chief, who prided himself for having fought the battles of his country, as a general in the ranks of the Indian allies, under the command of the hero of New Orleans,⁴ may be mentioned his refusing to converse with Mr. Capers, though he perfectly understood the English language, only through the medium of an interpreter, assuming, in the mean time, all the etiquette of a stately prince in the reception of an ambassador.

The interview resulted in an agreement between the parties for the establishment of a mission, with liberty to use so much land only as should be found necessary to raise provision for the mission family, and for building the needful houses; and the Rev. Isaac Hill, an old, tried, experienced minister was appointed in charge of the mission. But notwithstanding the favorable beginning of this laudable attempt to convey the

blessings of the gospel to these heathen, so long neglected by the Christian church, difficulties of a formidable character soon made their appearance. Some of the chiefs, who were not

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