

From the Close of the General Conference of 1828 to the Beginning of the General Conference of 1832

by Nathan Bangs

The sermon discusses the significance of the General Conference of 1828, the establishment of new academies and institutions, the missionary cause, and the establishment of the Publishing Fund to aid the Book Concern.

Scripture: Psalm 133:1, Proverbs 22:1, 1 Corinthians 1:10, 1 Peter 3:16

Topics: "Church History", "Methodist Doctrine"

Description

Nathan Bangs preaches about the controversies and challenges faced by the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1828, including the radical controversy, the formation of the Oneida conference, advancements in education, missionary work, and the establishment of the Publishing Fund. The Church faced opposition and misrepresentations regarding the character of prominent figures like Dr. Adam Clarke and John Wesley, as well as accusations about the Church's property ownership and government structure. Controversies also arose around the American Home Missionary Society and its claim to be a national institution, leading to concerns about the influence of denominations in American society.

Transcript

Our last volume closed with an account of the doings of the General Conference of 1828, including a brief history of the radical controversy, and its results. With a view to give a consecutive narrative of that affair, the chronological order of the history, in relation to that controversy, was anticipated for three or four years; and therefore no more need be said in reference to that subject than merely to remark, that great peace and harmony prevailed throughout the bounds of the Church, and the work of God was generally prosperous.

The Oneida conference was formed at the General Conference of 1828, making in all nineteen annual conferences to be attended by five bishops. As, however, the health of Bishop McKendree was very feeble, the labor of the superintendency devolved chiefly on the other four bishops; and as Bishop George died early in 1828, the remaining three bishops had work enough on their hands for the three succeeding years. The manner, however, in which they fulfilled their high and weighty trusts gave general satisfaction to the Church, and tended powerfully to keep up its union, and to promote its peace and prosperity.

The cause of education was now advancing with much more rapidity than heretofore. A very able report was adopted at the last General Conference in favor of education, tending to show the great importance of this subject to the welfare of the Church, and particularly to the rising generation. In addition to three academies heretofore noticed, it appears that at this time the Mississippi conference had established the "Elizabeth Female Academy," the name being given to it in honor of Mrs. Elizabeth Greenfield, who laid its foundation by the gift of a lot of land, and a building estimated to be worth three thousand dollars. Another had been commenced under hopeful prospects in Tuscaloosa, in the state of Alabama, and two others in Illinois, under the patronage of the Illinois conference, one in Green county, and the other in the county of St. Clair.

After some general statements on the number and character of the literary institutions then in existence under the patronage of the Methodist Episcopal Church, the report, the production of the late Dr. Fisk, contains the following very just and timely remarks: --

"In review of the whole, we find the efforts and successful operations in different conferences to promote the cause of literature and science have increased very considerably since the last General Conference. There are now six or seven promising institutions in successful operation, two of them having college charters, namely, Madison College and Augusta College, which are already prepared to take students through a regular course, and confer on them the ordinary degrees and literary honors of such institutions, and hold out encouragements and assurances that authorize us to recommend them to the patronage of our friends. Other institutions are advancing to the same standing, and several more are contemplated, and will probably soon be put into operation. And it is a matter that ought to be noticed as calling for special gratitude to God, that revivals of religion have been so frequent in our literary seminaries. And this, too, ought to stimulate our people to encourage and patronize these institutions. If God smiles on our undertakings, shall we not proceed? We have reason, indeed, to think that the minds of both ministers and people are more awake to this subject than heretofore. The importance of literary institutions is more generally felt than formerly, and a greater and more general disposition to aid in this work is manifested. But we are still too much asleep on this subject. We are in danger of not keeping up with the improvements of society. If we should fail of contributing our share in this work, we should not only fall short of our obligations to society in general, but to our own Church in particular. The subject of education ought to be considered of special importance and of special interest to Methodist preachers, both as it respects their own usefulness and the interests of their families. We do not, indeed, profess to educate young men and train them up specifically for the ministry. But it will be readily seen, that, as our ministers are raised up mostly from among ourselves, their literary character will vary according to the general character of the Church.

"We said this subject was of special interest to Methodist preachers' families. We wish this to be deeply impressed on the minds of all, and we could wish every conference would by some means make provision for the education of the children of itinerant ministers. The changeable and uncertain life of a traveling minister, the duties which call him so much from his family and domestic concerns, all show the almost imperious necessity for such a provision. Posterity will hardly suppose we have conferred a great favor upon the world, if, in our zeal to benefit others, we suffer our own children to grow up uneducated and unrestrained, a disgrace to the gospel we preach, and a reproach to their parents. If we would save the itinerant plan from falling into deserved disrepute, we must see to it that our children be not neglected in their moral culture and literary instruction."

There can be no doubt that this report gave a fresh stimulus to the cause of literature and science among us, and made many feel the obligations they were under to promote it, who had hitherto been indifferent to its success.

Such was the influence which the missionary cause was now exerting on the Church generally, that most of the new places which were occupied were entered under the patronage of the Missionary Society. This year the Red Hook mission, which embraced a territory lying on the east side of the Hudson River, the inhabitants of which were chiefly descendants of the Dutch, was undertaken in compliance with the earnest request of the late Rev. Freeborn Garrettson, whose widow contributed one hundred dollars a year toward its support.

In Steuben country, in the western part of New York, there was a considerable number of Welch people settled, who could not understand the English language; and the Rev. David Cadwalder, who was able to preach in Welch, was sent as a missionary among them. His labors were so blessed that he formed a society of sixty members, and also erected a house of worship for their accommodation.

In the western country new fields were constantly opening for gospel laborers. This year St. Marys mission was commenced. It embraced the new settlements in the northwestern counties of the state of Ohio. The labors of the missionary were blessed to the awakening and conversion of souls, and the work has gradually prospered and enlarged the sphere of its influence from that day to this. Another, called St. Clair mission, in Michigan, was also begun under favorable prospects, and it was the happy commencement of a gracious work in all that region of country.

This year the "Publishing Fund" was established. This originated in a consultation with the book agents and the editor of the Christian Advocate and journal, the latter of whom had prepared a constitution for the contemplated Bible Society, at the suggestion of the late Bishop Emory, who was then the senior book agent. The object was to devise ways and means to enable the Book Concern to publish Bibles and Testaments, Sunday school books and tracts, on the cheapest possible terms. When these societies were formed, the book agents had pledged themselves to furnish the books for the Sunday schools, and tracts for tract societies, as cheap as they could be purchased elsewhere; and as the American Bible, Sunday School, and Tract Societies, being largely patronized and aided by the public munificence, were able to supply the demand for their respective publications almost at cost, it was soon found that we could not compete with them in the market unless ways and means were devised to furnish the needful funds. Our Book Concern at that time was deeply in debt, and could not therefore, from its own resources, print and circulate the books for Sunday schools, and tracts, at as low prices as they were furnished by the American societies, without risking its own reputation, if not, indeed, its very existence. To remedy this defect, and to supply the deficiency in funds, at the consultation before alluded to, it was agreed to make an attempt to establish a "Publishing Fund," in connection with the Bible, Sunday School, and Tract Societies of the Methodist Episcopal Church, which was accordingly done, and the constitution, together with the address of the managers, was published in the Christian Advocate and Journal on the 17th of October, 1828.

The following extract from this address will more fully explain the principles and objects of this fund, and show that it was not intended to increase the actual resources of the Book Concern, or to add to its available funds, but simply to meet the extra expense incurred by furnishing publications on such terms as to enable our people to purchase books at their own establishment as cheap as they could be had elsewhere, without the hazard of being compelled to use books of which they could not approve. The

following is the extract: --

"The managers of these societies, in conjunction with the agents of our General Book Concern, have resolved to make a joint effort for the efficient prosecution of our common objects. God has blessed us in all our borders, temporally and spiritually. A thousand times we have exclaimed, 'What hath be wrought.' And yet the fields are opening before us, and still whitening to the harvest. The vast extent and the immense improvements of our country; its rapid growth, both in population and resources; the great and steady increase of our own denomination as a body of Christians, and our consequent obligations as stewards of the manifold grace of Him whose we are and whom we serve, and who requires us to excel in good works; our own growing resources, which ought to be consecrated to the Author of our mercies; the wants of the millions, of every age and sex, who sit in darkness or in guilt, and who must increase with the rapidly and vastly increasing population, without increased efforts for their good; the zealous and highly liberal efforts of other denominations, and our own special call, as we have from the beginning believed to be the design of God in raising us up, to aid in spreading Scriptural holiness over these lands: -- in a word, the cause of God and of our country, of the rising generation and of posterity, demand of us, at this crisis, an exertion bearing at least some ratio of proportion to our obligations and to our means.

"The present is an era in our history of unparalleled interest. In the great spiritual and moral objects avowedly contemplated by the benevolent institutions and the Christian movements of the day, we have repeatedly declared our cordial and entire concurrence. With regard to the means of accomplishing them, we have differed. For various reasons, repeatedly assigned, we have considered it our duty to decline the proposed 'national' combinations, which, in our view, threatened for a while to swallow up, and absolutely to annihilate, every other plan of operation in our country. Such a result we still believe would have been pregnant with hazard. This sentiment does not by any means necessarily imply an impeachment of the Christian motives of those who may have differed from us in judgment. Our resistance to the consolidation of denominations, in effect, has had, we believe, a happy influence. But does it free us from our responsibilities as stewards of the mysteries and of the mercies of God? Does it release us from our obligations to contribute our full share toward the great work of civilizing, moralizing, and Christianizing the world? It does not. On the contrary, it increases both, since, from the stand we have taken, it is peculiarly incumbent on us now to see to it that the great and common cause shall, at least, sustain no loss by our course. If we desire, indeed, to be 'a peculiar people,' 'redeemed from all iniquity' by the precious blood of HIM who, for this purpose, 'gave himself for us,' let us not forget that we cannot sustain this high character without being at the same time, and in a correspondent degree, 'zealous of good works,' for which also Christ died.

"The great object of the Methodist Book Concern, from the beginning, has been to serve as an auxiliary in spreading Scriptural truth and holiness. With this view it has been the medium through which our Sunday school books and tracts have been issued, and it is intended also to be the medium for the publication of our Bibles and Testaments. The well-known character and the established credit of this institution, under the direction of the General Conference, and, in the intermediate years, of the New York conference, is an ample guaranty for the faithful application of funds. Hitherto almost the whole business of our general benevolent associations has been performed through the agency of this concern, with the aid of its agents abroad. And whatever expenses, or risks, or losses have been incurred, either in the general depository, or by supplying the auxiliary depositories, were so extensive a country, have been wholly borne by this establishment. If it were practicable, as in ordinary cases, to establish the prices of such publications so as to cover all such expenses, and risks, and occasional losses, and to provide for such additional service as

may be required, this might, perhaps, still be done. But the terms on which Sunday school books, tracts, Bibles, and Testaments are now expected will not admit of this; nor, in the prospect of the vastly increased demand, will it be possible for us, in this way, to maintain any thing like a fair and honorable competition with other institutions, which were originally endowed with large funds, and are still largely assisted both by regular annual contributions and by occasional donations; whose treasuries, nevertheless, we are assured, are still usually exhausted, and their calls for further aid are frequent and earnest. The consequence to us must be, either that the Methodist Book Concern, if left single handed and unaided, must be run down, and its great and benevolent objects be defeated, or our own publications, of the description mentioned, must be 'forced out of circulation:' to prevent which, if we mean to prevent it, ways and means must be devised to aid this establishment. It only remains for us, therefore, to determine whether we will aid our own institutions, or contribute our funds elsewhere. For give we must, somewhere; and continue to give, as God shall continue to bless us, and as occasions and objects continue to rise before us. Without this we cannot, we ought not to maintain our name or standing as a Christian people. Shall we, then, refuse to give at home, and suffer our own institutions to flag or fail; and, after all, from sheer shame, if from no better principle, be compelled to give elsewhere? We say, no.

"In view of the facts and premises above stated, the managers of the Bible, Sunday School, and Tract Societies of the Methodist Episcopal Church have resolved, jointly, to co-operate with the agents of the Book Concern, and their auxiliary agencies, to raise a fund to be vested in that concern, as a permanent and certain resource for the accomplishment of their common objects. And they have resolved to aim at a foundation broad and strong, in view not only of the wants immediately pressing on us, but also of those of which the vast prospect opens before us; and to erect a superstructure from which, with the divine favor, streams of blessing may flow to generations yet unborn.

For the buildings requisite for depositories, agents' offices, printing office, bindery, and for the transaction of the general business of the three societies, and for stereotype plates, binders' and printers' presses, and all the requisite apparatus for printing and binding, on the scale contemplated, a sum not less than fifty thousand dollars will be requisite. For these objects a debt of nearly one fourth of that sum has already been incurred by the Book Concern, without any charge whatever for personal services. And yet we can scarcely be said to have more than commenced in the operation of these Societies; and with regard to the Bible Society, hardly to have made a beginning, except in the preparation of a few sets of stereotype plates, in anticipation.

To conduct our operations to the extent intended, and to which, with united exertion, we are amply adequate, much greater sums must yet be raised. It will doubtless be found necessary to introduce power presses, with other improvements, both to increase the rapidity of publishing, and to reduce the prices. In view of all which, after conferring together, in deliberate consultation, we are of opinion that it is not safe, for the purpose of enabling the three societies to make the necessary preparations, to name to our friends a less sum than that above mentioned.

After these preparations shall have been made, it must be recollected, however, that considerable annual and current expenses still must necessarily be incurred, in the service necessary for preparing, packing, carting, and forwarding books and tracts, with the requisite clerkship, fuel, lights, insurance, ground rent, and postage, the latter item of which alone will probably increase to perhaps not less than from one thousand to fifteen hundred dollars per annum. All such expenses have heretofore been borne by the Book Concern, which, consequently, has been obliged to fix the prices of the publications so as, in a measure at least, to cover those expenses, or else to sustain heavy actual loss.

With a view, therefore, still further to lessen the prices, by having respect, in fixing them, to the actual cost of paper, press-work, and binding only, on the most economical principles, it is judged indispensable that a fund be raised, and be vested in the Book Concern, the use or interest of which shall be permanently appropriated to cover the above or any other unavoidable items of current expense and in consideration of which investments, when made, the said concern has pledged itself to submit to the managers of the above societies respectively, in conjunction with the agents, the determination of the prices at which their respective publications shall be furnished, on the principles above stated.

And on this plan only, in our opinion, can they be furnished at the very low rates at which they are called for, and must be supplied. The further sum necessary for these purposes, on the enlarged and extensive plan contemplated, cannot be safely estimated at less than fifty thousand dollars, the interest of which alone, namely, three thousand dollars per annum, it will be observed, is to be applied to cover the items of annual and contingent expenses above-mentioned, or which I may unavoidably occur in the course of business.

In all of which, however, it may be proper to mention, that it is not intended that an addition of one cent shall be made, out of any of these funds, to the support already allowed, agreeably to Discipline, to the regular agents of the Book Concern; and that they are intended solely to cover the extra expenses incurred by the extra business of these societies, whose publications are issued in connection with that concern. It was with a view to the extra labor caused by such publications, in part, that an additional agent was appointed at the last General Conference; and as our operations shall be extended, further help, in various ways, will undoubtedly be found indispensably requisite."

It will be perceived that this fund was to be vested in the Book Concern, and the interest alone used to meet the unavoidable expense of publishing the requisite books for the above-mentioned societies. And though it was in contemplation to raise one hundred thousand dollars, the fund, even now, (1841,) amounts to only about forty thousand. Comparatively small, however, as it is, it has done much good, and the Book Concern has been enabled to fulfill its obligations in supplying the books on as low terms as they could be purchased at other depositories. The dissolution of the Bible Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, by which the concern has been relieved from publishing Bibles and Testaments on those terms, will be noticed in its proper place.

Twelve deaths are recorded; fifty were located; seventy returned supernumerary; one hundred and one superannuated; and three had been expelled.

Among those who had died this year was Enoch George, one of the bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church. The following is taken from the Minutes of the Conferences for 1829: --

"He was born in the state of Virginia, Lancaster county, in the year 1767 or '68. His mother died when he was young, and he was left in the care of an elder sister. During his minority his father removed to the state of North Carolina. At about the age of eighteen or nineteen he became, through the instrumentality of the Methodist ministry, deeply convinced of sin, and sought and obtained the pardoning mercy of God, through our Lord Jesus Christ. He was soon called to the exercise of public prayer and exhortation; and after fruitless struggles to suppress the impression of duty which increasingly rested upon his mind, with great diffidence he entered the field of labor as a preacher. He traveled a short time with Philip Cox, and was then sent, by Bishop Asbury, to assist Daniel Asbury in forming a circuit on the head waters of the Catawba and Broad Rivers.

"In 1790 he was received into the itinerant connection on trial, and appointed to Pamlico circuit; and in 1791 to Caswell. In 1792 he was admitted into full connection, ordained deacon, and appointed to Guilford circuit; and in 1793 to Broad River. In 1794 he was ordained elder, and appointed to Great Pee Dee. The next year he was appointed to Edisto, with instructions to labor three months in Charleston, South Carolina; and the two years following he filled the office of presiding elder.

In 1798, on account of ill health, he traveled to the north as far as New York. Having measurably recovered his health, in 1800 he resumed his labors, and was appointed presiding elder of Potomac district, in the Baltimore conference. His health failed a second time, and he located in 1801. In 1803 he again entered the itinerant field, and was appointed to Frederick circuit; in 1804 to Baltimore district; 1805, Alexandria district; 1807, Georgetown, D.C.; 1808, Frederick; 1809, Montgomery; 1810, Baltimore circuit; 1811, Potomac district; and in 1815 to Georgetown district.

"At the General Conference held in Baltimore, May, 1816, he was elected and ordained bishop. In the active discharge of the arduous duties of this highly responsible office he continued until his death. He died at Staunton, Va., August 23, 1828, in the peace and triumph of gospel faith, and with his latest breath giving 'glory to God.'

Bishop George was a man of deep piety, of great simplicity of manners, a very pathetic, powerful, and successful preacher, greatly beloved in life, and very extensively lamented in death."

A more minute and extended memoir of this servant of God may be seen in the Methodist Magazine and Quarterly Review for 1830.

That which distinguished Bishop George among his fellows was the warmth of his zeal, and the quickness of his movements. This no doubt arose from the depth of his piety. He seemed, indeed, to live and walk in God. This was evident from the uniformity of his devotions, as well as from his general deportment, both before the public and in his more private intercourse with his friends. He always rose early in the morning, and, if circumstances permitted, would spend the morning before breakfast in a solitary walk in the field, for meditation and private devotion; and in these lonely rambles he delighted in the contemplation of the Deity, as he is seen in his works and ways, and in holding communion with him in praise and prayer.

He was naturally eloquent, and his eloquence was all natural. He never sought to embellish his subjects with those artificial tinsels of pulpit oratory substituted by some for those overflowings of the heart which proceed from being filled and fired with the truth which the lips utter. Hence his "preaching was not with the enticing words of man's wisdom," but it was in "demonstration and power," and "with much assurance in the Holy Ghost." He was more distinguished, however, for affecting the heart and moving the passions, than for enlightening the understanding and informing the judgment. Whenever, therefore, you saw him begin to rub his eyes with his fingers, as if wiping thence the gushing tear, you might expect a pouring forth of those streams of gospel truth, generally of that declamatory or hortatory character, which were calculated to move the hearer to weep or shout, according to his predominant feeling. And he seldom concluded a sermon without greatly moving his audience in either of these ways, because he was first moved himself by those sacred and heavenly emotions which were evidently produced by the energetic workings of the Holy Spirit.

Viewing him, therefore, simply as an ambassador of God, sent peculiarly to awaken the conscience of the sinner, and to alarm or to strengthen the faith of the believer, and quicken him in the divine life, he was most eminently qualified for his great work. In addition to the holy pathos with which he breathed out the

"words of truth and soberness," his voice was exceedingly musical, shrill, and clear, his action natural, and expressive of the feelings of his heart, and all calculated to impress the hearer with the solemn truths which fell from his lips. If, however, we were to judge him by other tests of a pulpit orator, we should detect some defects. In education he was quite deficient, and his general reading was very limited. For this lack of acquired knowledge he might be considered as furnishing more than a substitute in the pointedness of his appeals, and the manner in which he fortified all his positions by direct appeals to the sacred Scriptures. And if he dealt in detached sentences instead of following a consecutive order and arrangement of argumentation, he was abundantly compensated in the blessed effects which he saw produced in the hearts of those who heard him, and knew how to appreciate the value of a sermon more from its unction than its argument. His premises were found, where every minister of Christ should find them, in the Bible; and his conclusions were thence drawn without much regard to logical arrangement, and certainly without any circumlocution, direct, and with a force it was hardly possible to resist. And from the earnestness of his manner, some have entirely mistaken his objects and motives. Beholding the emotions which were very generally produced in the pious part of his hearers, sometimes expressed in loud shouts of praise, those who were mere outward court worshipers, or uninterested hearers, have retired from the sanctuary under a conviction that Bishop George was acting the part of a mountebank, speaking for the purpose of gaining shouts of applause. A sad mistake this. He ascended the pulpit, not as a stage-player mounts the stage, but as an ambassador of Christ, commissioned to declare his counsel unto the people, and to negotiate a

"Peace 'twixt earth and heaven."

And in the fulfillment of this commission he did not trifle with the awful realities of time and eternity, but poured forth from a full heart the solemn truths of God, in a manner which penetrated the conscience and drew forth the confession, by sobs and shouts, that God was with him of a truth.

Such was Bishop George in the pulpit. In the chair of the conference he was less acceptable. Though he was always intent on accomplishing the greatest amount of good by the best possible means, he often defeated his purpose by the haste with which he endeavored to dispatch the business. His manner, also was sometimes abrupt and undignified, and of course did not always command that respect which every conscientious mind would wish to feel and pay to a superior. Nor were his decisions always made with that wisdom and deliberation needful to produce a conviction of their correctness in all cases. He appeared, therefore, to much greater advantage in the pulpit than in the chair of the conference; and had he lived and died simply as an itinerant Methodist preacher, he had commanded more respect than was felt for him as a general superintendent of the church. These defects, however, detract nothing from his moral worth, nor render him less worthy of affection as a Christian bishop, or as a man deeply and seriously devoted to the best interests of the human family; for who is perfect in every respect?

But in whatever light we view him, he will long be remembered with affection, as one of our early pioneers in the ranks of the itinerancy, as an indefatigable laborer in his Lord's vineyard, who won many sinners to Christ, and was always a son of consolation to God's believing people.

The warmth of his affections won him many friends, and the affability of his manners endeared him to them as a brother beloved, who might be approached at all times with a cheerful confidence.

His death was sudden and unexpected. Its announcement, therefore, spread a temporary gloom over the Methodist community. But death did not find him unprepared. He met this "last enemy," not only with meek

submission, but with a holy triumph, and a well-grounded hope of eternal life. As the words, "Glory to God!" had often fell from his lips in the pulpit, so in his last moments, in full view of the invisible world, he shouted forth the praises of God, and no doubt went to the abodes of bliss and immortality.

The following statement of the numbers will show that the work was generally prosperous.

Numbers in the Church: Whites This Year: 359,533; Last Year: 327,932; Increase: 31,601 -- Colored This Year: 58,856; Last Year: 54,065; Increase: 4,791 -- Indians This Year 4,501; Last Year 4,209; Increase: 292 -- Total This Year: 418,927; Last Year: 382,520 -- Increase: 36,407 -- Preachers This Year: 1,642; Last Year: 1,576; Increase: 66.

1829

We have before alluded to a controversy which arose between us and some other denominations of Christians; and as it came to its height during this and the two following years, that the reader may have a clear and full understanding of its character and results, it is thought expedient to give a short account of it in this place. It has been before remarked, that for a long time after our establishment in this country, very little was done to enlighten the public mind from our press, except the republication of some of Wesley's and Fletcher's sermons, Checks, and tracts, and the biographies of a few eminent servants of God. But in 1818 the Methodist Magazine was resumed and in 1826 the Christian Advocate and Journal made its appearance. The extensive circulation of these two periodicals, and the publication of numerous tracts, of a doctrinal, experimental, and practical character, and the continual augmentation of books on a variety of subjects, together with the prosperous state of our missions in various parts of our country, seemed to awaken the attention of others, and to call forth strictures upon our doctrines and general economy, of such a character as called for defense on our part.

Another thing seemed to put us in somewhat of an awkward position before the public. The organization of a separate sabbath school for the Methodist Episcopal Church made it necessary to provide means to supply our schools with suitable books. This led to the preparation and publication of sabbath school books from our own press; but as Bibles and Testaments formed the principal basis of sabbath school instruction, and as the American Bible Society was an institution in which all denominations were supposed to have an equal interest, it was thought that we had a right to claim a share from that society, in Bibles and Testaments, for the use of our Sunday schools. We accordingly petitioned the "Young Men's Bible Society" of the city of New York, which had been constituted for the express purpose of supplying sabbath schools gratuitously with the Holy Scriptures, and to which the Methodists, as well as others, contributed, for a supply of Bibles and Testaments for the use of our sabbath schools but our petition was rejected, merely because, as was stated by the secretary of that society, we were sectarians, and therefore came not within the legitimate range of their charities.

This rejection of our petition compelled us, either to suffer our schools to languish for want of suitable books, or to devise ways and means to supply them from our own resources; and hence a proposition for forming a separate Bible Society was submitted to the General Conference of 1828, and the conference recommended its organization in the city of New York. In conformity with this recommendation, the Bible Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church was formed, with the view of obtaining a supply of Bibles and Testaments for our sabbath schools, and for the poor members of our own congregations. This separate organization, together with the steps which led to it, provoked no little opposition from various quarters, particularly from writers in the Presbyterian and Congregational Churches, by whom our motives, being

misunderstood, were misrepresented. These things tended to keep alive the spirit of controversy. And as religious newspapers were now very generally patronized by the several Christian denominations, and agents employed for the several societies now in operation were traveling extensively through the country, each one zealous for his own sect, many things were written and published in those periodicals, implicating our character, impugning our motives, denouncing our doctrines and usages, and calculated to bring our institutions into contempt.

As Dr. Adam Clarke's Commentary had obtained an extensive circulation, and Wesley's translation of the New Testament, accompanied with his notes, was also published and circulated by our Book Concern, an attempt was made by a writer in the west, and his efforts were seconded by several editors of the periodical press, to bring these two writers into disrepute, by endeavoring to prove that they had altered, with a view to sustain their peculiar tenets, the sacred text, and thereby corrupted the word of God. As this was a heavy charge, and, if sustained, must impeach their moral character and Christian integrity, it was considered no more than a sacred duty we owed to their characters, and to the Church which delighted to honor them, to rescue their memories from this undeserved reproach.

Indeed, we had reason to suspect that there was a combination among certain sects, if possible, to destroy our influence. This we inferred from the fact, that the presses under the control of Calvinistic editors, in different parts of the country, almost simultaneously uttered the same language against Methodism, without at all mitigating the severity of their censures by an acknowledgment of the good we had been instrumental in accomplishing. The Christian Spectator, a Quarterly Review conducted by an association of gentlemen connected with Yale College, in a "Review on the Economy of Methodism," commenced a rude and unprovoked attack upon our doctrine, discipline, and general economy, which was copied into other papers, accompanied with remarks as hostile to our Church, as they were untrue and unkind. This systematical and simultaneous attack upon us as a church was conducted with unsparing severity, and led us to conclude that a war was commenced upon our economy, as unjustifiable as it might be injurious in its results. Indeed, it was by no means confined to argumentative assaults upon our doctrines and usages, but the character of our ministers was assailed, their motives impugned, and they were represented as even hostile to the civil institutions of the country, and also of exercising a lordly despotism over the consciences of our own people.

Let us, however, classify these objections, and notice the answers to them.

Dr. Adam Clarke was accused of introducing into his Commentary unauthorized criticisms upon the original text.

To this it was answered, that he scrupulously followed, throughout, the present authorized version; and if at any time he dissented from it, he very modestly did it in his notes, assigning his reasons, and leaving every reader to judge for himself of the correctness of his opinions. But even allowing that he had altered the common English Version in some obscure places, with a view to render the text more intelligible, he did but follow the example of such men as Campbell, Houbigant, Macknight, and others, most of whom were Calvinistic commentators. This, therefore, was a groundless accusation, only calculated to raise the popular prejudice against Dr. Clarke, for the purpose of circumscribing his usefulness as a most able and pious commentator of the Holy Scriptures.

Wesley also was accused of mutilating the sacred text in such a glaring manner as to make "nonsense of some of the plainest texts in the Bible," and several instances were adduced to sustain this heavy charge.

And as this controversy may be revived at some future time, or may be referred to in an unfavorable point of light, I think it proper to insert here the answer to these objections to Mr. Wesley's translation of the New Testament. It is as follows: -- -

"The following texts are produced by the Religious Intelligencer, to show that Wesley 'has made nonsense of some of the plainest texts in the Bible:'

JOHN 6:64

COMMON VERSION: -- But there are some of you that believe not. For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who should betray him.

WESLEY'S ALTERATION: -- But there are some of you who believe not. (For Jesus had known from the beginning who they were that believed not, and who would not betray him.)

ACTS 4:27, 28

COMMON VERSION: -- For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel. were gathered together, for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.

WESLEY'S ALTERATION: -- For of a truth both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and people of Israel, were gathered together against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel before determined to be done.

JUDE 4

COMMON VERSION: -- For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and Our Lord Jesus Christ.

WESLEY'S ALTERATION: -- For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were of old described before, with regard to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

REV. 22:19

COMMON VERSION: -- And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

WESLEY'S ALTERATION: -- And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part of the tree of life, and the holy city, which are written in this book.

1 PET. 1:19, 20

COMMON VERSION: -- But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot; who Verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you.

WESLEY'S ALTERATION: -- But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot; who verily was foreknown before the foundation of the world. but was made in the last times for you.

"Now whether Wesley's translation be more in accordance with the original or not, we believe it is at least equally plain, and easy to be understood.

"In respect to the first cited text, the chief difference is in the last clause, 'and who would not betray him,' though even this is very far from making 'nonsense.' Having never noticed this variation before we saw it produced in the Charleston Observer, we were not a little surprised that it should exist. To ascertain whether Mr. Wesley so translated the passage -- knowing that the original would not admit of it -- we searched the different editions of his Testament, with notes, and the result is that it is a mere typographical error. In the English edition, printed in London in the year 1795, the negative particle (not) is not found. Neither is it found in the American edition, containing his notes, which was printed in the year 1812 -- three years before the Testament which contains the error was printed.

"In regard to the second and following passages, we wonder not that our Calvinistic friends are offended at the version made by Mr. Wesley, for some of them strike at the root of the peculiarities of their creed. To be satisfied whether Wesley can be justified in his translation, it is necessary to examine the original Greek text.

"In the first mentioned text, 'For of a truth both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and people of Israel, were gathered together against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel before determined to be done,' although the difference is very considerable, we think Mr. Wesley is fully sustained by the original text. The Greek verb "poiasai" is in the infinitive mood, and therefore may agree with either Herod, Pontius Pilate, &c., or with the singular, thy holy child Jesus. Allowing this to be correct, it does not follow that the inspired penman meant to say that those wicked people were gathered together to do what the hand and counsel of God before determined should be done; but that it was 'the holy child Jesus whom God had anointed to do' what he had before the foundation of the world determined he should do, for the redemption and salvation of mankind.

"The whole context requires this interpretation, we will not say to prevent its speaking 'nonsense,' but from speaking blasphemy. According to the present rendering and the Calvinistic interpretation of the text, it is brought to prove that Herod, Pontius Pilate, and the people of Israel who clamored for the life of Christ, in all their wicked and blasphemous conduct, did nothing more than fulfill the eternal and unalterable counsel and will of God! The reader may now see the reason why our Calvinistic friends are so exceedingly displeased with John Wesley, merely because he has so rendered this text that we need not necessarily infer that all this evil conduct of the persecutors and murderers of Jesus Christ was according to the predetermination of God -- although in doing so he has only followed the Greek text, by preserving the infinitive form of the verb "poiasai," to do; -- whereas had he done otherwise he might justly have been accused, as we shall presently see Beza may be, of corrupting the text. Although it does not appear from his comment on the passage that Wesley made the transposition from a conviction that it materially affected the sense, yet the zeal of his opposers seems to be kindled into a flame whenever such an interpretation is given, however fairly, which goes to question their favorite theory respecting God's having determined, and as now influencing, men to all their sinful actions.

" We said that the context requires that the text should be so construed as to attribute the works which God had before determined should be done, to Jesus Christ, and not to Herod and his wicked associates. Those who 'lifted up their voice' on this occasion said, quoting from the second Psalm, 'The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord.' Now if those infatuated people were acting against the Lord, how could they at the same time be fulfilling his counsel and will? Do people fulfill the counsel of the Lord in acting against him? And must they be consigned to eternal burnings for thus acting? This would be a hard case indeed.

"Look also at the 29th and 30th verses, -- 'And now, Lord, behold their threatenings; and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, by stretching forth thy hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.' The true state of the case appears to be this: God had ordained that when Jesus Christ should be manifested in the flesh, in addition to his dying for the sins of the world, 'signs and wonders should be done' by him; that he should 'stretch forth his hand to heal' the sick, to restore sight to the blind, raise the dead, &c; for this purpose he had been anointed, that he might do the things thus before determined in the eternal counsel should be done; and hence the apostles, after stating that Herod and his wicked associates had gathered together to oppose the Lord's anointed, and to frustrate this gracious determination of God, pray that as their malevolent attempts had been so far defeated by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, that even now 'signs and wonders' may be done; that thus a full demonstration may be given to all that Jesus is the Christ, the true Messiah promised in the Old Testament.

"It is probably on account of the manifest absurdities involved in the contrary supposition, that led Episcopius and many other commentators to adopt a similar construction to that of Wesley's. And to show that Wesley is by no means singular in his translation, we may observe that the French version of the New Testament, 'printed from the London stereotype edition, and according to the edition of Paris for the year 1805, said to be 'reviewed and compared with the Hebrew and Greek texts,' and 'printed under the inspection of the New York Bible Society, renders this text precisely as Wesley has done. The following is the translation

"Car en effet Herode et Ponce Pilate, avec les Gentils et le peuple d'Israel, se sont assemblees contre ton saint Fils Jesus, que tu as oint, Pour faire toutes les choses que ta main et ton conseil avoient auparavant determine' devoir etre faites.' It will be perceived by those who understand the French, that the translators have transposed the sentences in the same manner that Wesley has done, preserved the infinitive form of the verb "poiasai," by rendering it 'pour faire,' to do, and connected it closely with the nonn, 'ton saint Fils Jesus,' "thy holy on Jesus," thereby allowing us to refer the works to be done to Jesus Christ, and not necessarily to his enemies who were gathered together against him.

"The Latin version of Montanus follows the common English version, and preserves the infinitive form of the verb, Facere quaecumque, "to do" whatsoever, &c.

"It is somewhat singular that Beza, to whom we referred in our former number as having been accused by the indefatigable Macknight of corrupting the sacred text to support his own contracted Calvinistic views, in the translation of the passage under consideration, has changed the form of the verb from the infinitive to the subjunctive plural, (facere,) with a view to make it agree exclusively with Herod, Pontius Pilate, and the people of Israel!

"Beza also introduces a clause -- which, to be sure, is not of much consequence, either way -- into his version not found at all in the common Greek text, in hoc civitate, 'in this city.' The following is his translation of the two verses under consideration . --

" 'Coacti sunt enim in hac civitate vere adversus sanctum Filium tuum Jesum quem unxisti, Herodes et Pontius Pilatus cum Gentibus et populis Israelis, Ut facerent quaecumque manus tua et consilium tuum prius definierat ut fierent.' By thus rendering the verb in the plural number, making it to agree only with a plural nominative, Beza's translation amounts to a comment on the text, which, to those who understand no other language than the Latin, is a manifest deception. We grant, indeed, that the grammatical construction of the sentence, as the infinitive mood of the verb may agree with either a singular or plural noun, does not necessarily require our interpretation or the contrary, but leaves the reader to adopt that which from the context appears most agreeable to the analogy of faith; and this consideration makes the conduct of Beza the more censurable; it is the same as if any one on the opposite side should render the passage thus -- Thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed that he might do the things thy hand and counsel before determined should be done; -- and although we believe this is the genuine sense, we are far from thinking ourselves warranted in taking such liberties with the sacred text. However Calvinistically inclined our English translators may have been, they did not feel themselves authorized to follow Beza's translation, but have given a literal rendering of the verb "poiasai," to do.

"Now could Wesley be convicted of such rashness as Beza was guilty of, his enemies might well triumph. But Beza was a Calvinist. and therefore, in the estimation of his followers, who approve of his translation, he may be considered guiltless. Perhaps they may think that, being of the elect, God did not 'behold iniquity in' him; but poor John Wesley, being an Arminian reprobate, must have his name blotted from the book of life! For what, think you, gentle reader? For altering the sacred Scriptures? No, surely. This he never did; but for abjuring Calvinism -- for taking off the mask by which its modest friends had endeavored to conceal its haggard visage. This is his sin -- the offense for which he is now so severely castigated.

"But whatever corrections Mr. Wesley may have introduced in his version, we are persuaded that they do not affect, in the smallest degree, any fundamental doctrine of Christianity. To this sentiment we think all will subscribe except those who believe that the distinctive feature of Calvinism, namely, unconditional predestination, comprehending unconditional election and reprobation, is a fundamental doctrine.

"And although some have affirmed, in the heat of controversy, that unless we believe that doctrine according to the Calvinistic interpretation, we cannot be in a state of grace, yet we can scarcely persuade ourselves that any one, in his calm and sober moments, I say that all who demur at receiving this doctrine, thus explained, must inevitably be condemned at last. If any should assume such a position, we should despair of reasoning with him with any hope of success.

"When we speak of fundamental doctrines, we mean those by which the Christian system is eminently distinguished from all other systems of religion; but more especially the fall and depravity of man; the redemption of the world by the atoning merits of Jesus Christ; the necessity of regeneration by the Holy Spirit; holiness of heart and life, and all those collateral truths which are connected with or necessarily accompany these doctrines. Now if any man will show us a single text in Wesley's translation which invalidates, or in the smallest degree weakens any one of these essential truths of Jesus Christ, or strikes at his real Godhead, or at the unity in trinity of the Deity, we will in that particular abandon him as our leader; we will believe in that instance he was under a mistake, and that he deserves the severe criticisms and censures of his adversaries.

"Believing that we shall not be called upon to controvert this point with our polemical friends, we proceed to notice the other texts which have been produced to prove that Wesley has made 'nonsense of some of the plainest texts of the Bible.' The first in order is,

Jude 4

COMMON VERSION -- For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

WESLEY'S TRANSLATION -- For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were of old described before, with regard to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

"Now we presume that the material words in Wesley's translation to which our opponents in this controversy object, are, 'of old described before,' which Wesley has substituted for 'of old ordained,' in the common version; which is much nearer the original than the other.

The Greek text reads, "oi pulai progegrammenoi," the most literal translation of which would be, 'of old before written;' for the word "progegrammenoi" is derived from "pro," before, and "grapho," to write, or "gramma," a letter or character of writing; though some have supposed that it means here, before proscribed, believing that the apostle meant to say that the ungodly characters he was about describing assimilated in their character and conduct to those ungodly persons who had long since, in the sacred writings, been proscribed and condemned. Whichever of these meanings may be put on the word here, it cannot be made to mean foreordained, as the word justly so translated has an entirely different meaning, and comes from a totally different root. The word which the lexicons and our translators have rendered foreordained, comes from "proopizw," and this from "pro," before, and "opizw," to bound, limit, or decree, and hence the compound word signifies to limit, bound, or decree beforehand, or, as very properly translated in the sacred Scriptures, to foreordain, or before appoint.

"Macknight, whom we have before quoted, and who was a professed Calvinistic minister in the Church of Scotland, gives the following translation of this passage: 'Who long ago have been before written.' His comment upon the passage is thus: 'Jude means that those wicked people had their punishment before written, that is, foretold in what is written concerning the Sodomites and rebellions Israelites, whose crimes were the same as theirs, and whose punishment was not only a proof of God's resolution to punish sinners, but an example of the punishment which he will inflict on them. According to some, the words have an allusion to the ancient custom of writing laws on tables, which were hung up in public places, that the people might know the punishment annexed to breaking the laws.'

"To this rendering of Macknight the French version agrees: 'Dont la condamnation est escrete depuis longtems,' -- whose condemnation has been written a long time since.

"The Latin version of Montanus, which usually accompanies Leusden's Greek Testament, translates -- 'Olim praescripti in hoc judicium,' the literal English of which is, "of old before written, or described," which is a faithful translation of the Greek, and a justification of the version of Wesley.

"It is somewhat of a singular coincidence, that in this passage Wesley and Beza exactly agree in their translation; so that if Wesley has had his name blotted from the book of life for altering the sacred

Scriptures in this place, he will be in the company of one of the leading champions of the Calvinistic forces. Beza translates, 'prius jam olim descripti ad hanc damnationem,' 'before of old described to this damnation.'

"None of the versions, indeed, to which we have had access, except our English translation, have rendered the word in question ordained; and we may say with Dr. Adam Clarke, that it is as ridiculous as it is absurd to look into such words for a decree of eternal reprobation, &c., such a doctrine being as far from the apostle's mind, as that of Him in whose name he wrote.'

"As to the text in Rev. xxii, 19, the only material deviation from the common version is, that Wesley translates, 'his part of the tree of life,' and the common version, the 'book of life;' and how this can affect the meaning at all we are at a loss to see, as the person who has not his part in the tree of life, will hardly have his name in the book of life. Wesley, however, is sustained by Griesbach, who gives the word "xulon," tree, as the true reading, referring to the margin for the word "biblon," as being according to the commonly received text. We trust, therefore, that neither justice nor candor requires Wesley to be condemned for this emendation, especially as it does not at all affect the sense, and is justified by so high an authority as Griesbach.

"The only remaining text to be examined is 1 Peter i, 20, where Wesley translates the word "proegnwsmenou," foreknown, instead of foreordained, as it is in the common version. On this we need not say much, as the merest tyro [beginner, novice] in the Greek language knows that this is the literal, grammatical meaning of the word; and that there is no more authority for rendering it foreordained, than there is for saying that because I know that this rendering of Mr. Wesley is accurate, I therefore decreed it; for the radix [origin] for the above word, "ginwskw," signifies to know, and can never be made to mean to ordain, or decree.

Is it not a little strange, that those Calvinists who contend that there is so slight a difference between foreknowledge and decree, that the one necessarily implies the other, should so vehemently reprimand Wesley for giving the literal translation of this word? If there be no difference between knowledge and decree, as they contend, how has Wesley altered the meaning of Scripture, even allowing that the original word here had been "proorizw", which it is not, by translating it foreknown?"

Not only were the characters of Wesley and Clarke thus ungenerously assailed, but the integrity of our ministry also was called in question. The Christian Spectator had said, "Nor can we here so much as begin to speak of the misrepresentations, and the many cunningly devised artifices, by which the doctrine and discipline of Methodism are so assiduously propagated." This, indeed, was a grievous accusation. But how did they attempt its support? How! Why, by merely vague conjectures. It was wittingly surmised that we had immense funds at our command, by which our ministry was supported independently of the people; that even these funds were so dexterously managed that our own people themselves did not know; being kept in ignorance by our "cunningly devised artifices," either their extent or application. This unfounded and cruel charge was met, refuted, and fully put down, by an appeal to facts. It was demonstrated that the funds of the Church -- derived, as was alleged, from the Book Concern and Chartered Fund -- so far from being immense, did not yield over three dollars a year to each claimant; and that those supernumerary and superannuated preachers, widows, their children and orphans, who were the legal claimants upon these funds, did not receive, including what they derived from the voluntary contributions of the people, over 25, 50, or seventy-five percent of that which was allowed them by the Discipline, which was one hundred dollars for such preacher or widow, and not over twenty-four dollars a

year for each dependent child; and that, so far from concealing from the people either the amount of the revenues of the Church, or their application, the whole was annually published in the Minutes of our conferences.

This complete refutation of such a groundless charge seemed to silence our inconsiderate opponents, and to make their friends ashamed of their temerity in bringing it against us in so public a manner.

Another complaint was brought against the manner in which our Church property was held. It was alleged that it was deeded to the General Conference, and that therefore the people had neither a right in nor control over it. To this it was replied, that the statement was false in point of fact. Church property, instead of being secured to the conference, and therefore the property of the preachers, was held by trustees appointed by the people -- where the laws of the states in which the property was located provided for that manner of their appointment, and in other places as the Discipline of the Church directs -- in trust for the use of the members of the Methodist Episcopal Church in that place.

This, it was justly contended, placed the legal right of the property where it should be, in the hands of the people, and not in the conference, as our accusers had asserted. Our mode of Church government was represented, not only as unscriptural, but as being set up and vindicated in "contempt of Scripture authority." This led to a Scriptural defense of our Church government, of our itinerancy, and general method of conducting our affairs; and finally to a comparison between Methodist Episcopacy and Presbyterianism and Congregationalism, as well as a defense of our entire economy.² Another subject of controversy arose out of the representations of the state of things in the valley of the Mississippi.

We have before noticed the origin of the society for the education of pious young men for the gospel ministry. Out of this arose the "American Home Missionary Society," which was organized in 1826. This society was composed of members and friends of the Presbyterian, Dutch Reformed, and Congregational Churches, and as altogether a voluntary association; that is, it was not a church organization, not being recognized as the exclusive property of any particular denomination, nor under the control of its church judicatories.

And as the missionaries who were in the employ of this society were taken from either or all of the above-mentioned denominations, they were instructed to form churches according to the principles of either the Presbyterian or Congregational plan of church government, as might best suit the people; and to give greater efficiency to their labors, and a wider range to their operations, a "Plan of Union" was formed between these two denominations, so as to admit commissioners into the General Assembly from those churches which might be established on Congregational principles.

Comprehending these three large denominations in this society, under the name of American Home Missionary Society, its patrons gave it the name of a national institution, as though in it were represented the Christianity of America. To this assumption of a national society, we of course, entered our protest because it was calculated to mislead the public mind, especially in foreign countries. To say nothing of the Baptists, who were more numerous than either of the above denominations, the Protestant Episcopalians, the Lutherans, and numerous other sects, all of whom were exerting less or more influence in favor of Christianity, the Methodists were more numerous than either.

It seemed, therefore, unjust to select a single society, made up of those three denominations, which represented not one fourth of the Christians in the United States, and call it a national society, thereby accounting all the others as nothing.

We had other objections. This society, by assuming a national character, was contrary to the genius of American institutions, which acknowledged no national religion. It seemed, therefore, like an effort to force public opinion to recognize the existence of a national church, in direct opposition to the declared intention of all our civil institutions.

This assumption of a national society, together with the avowed intentions of some of the reports of the American Sabbath School Union, respecting the circulation of their books, and the influence which it might have upon our state and general elections, excited an alarm in some minds, lest comprehensive plans were forming to secure the patronage of the state for the support of those denominations which were committed for the support of this society. And though this might have been a groundless alarm. it tended to awaken attention to the subject, and led other denominations to look about them, and watch over the welfare of their own institutions. And it is somewhat remarkable, that the very measures which were taken by this society to combine so many discordant materials in the range of their operations, and to make an impression abroad of the nationality of its character, should have led eventually to the dissolution of the union of the Presbyterian Church; for there can be no doubt that the Plan of Union," by which that church permitted Congregational principles to become incorporated into their judicatories, was the entering wedge which finally split that church asunder; so that the means adopted to make themselves great, and to impress upon the minds of others that they represented the religion of the nation, were the very means of lessening their number and influence, and

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