

# From the Death of Bishop Asbury to the Close of the General Conference of 1816

by Nathan Bangs

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*The sermon discusses the controversy between Calvinists and Arminians, the impact of the controversy on the Methodist movement, and the response of Calvinists to the growth of Methodism.*

**Scripture:** Acts 20:28, 1 Corinthians 9:14, 1 Timothy 3:2-5, 2 Timothy 2:15, Titus 1:7, James 1:27, 1 Peter 5:2

**Topics:** "Church Governance", "Ministerial Support"

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## Description

Nathan Bangs preaches about the challenges faced by the Methodist Episcopal Church, including controversies with the British connection over missions in Canada, the need for additional bishops, and the importance of providing adequate support for the ministry to prevent locations and ensure qualified ministers. The conference addresses the issue of locations, partial locations, and the lack of ministerial qualifications, recommending measures to strengthen the itinerancy and secure a succession of holy and zealous ministers. The report also emphasizes the importance of providing support for distressed preachers, their families, and widows, as well as establishing a fund for their welfare.

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## Transcript

In the closing part of the last volume an incidental allusion was made to a controversy which arose in this country between us and other denominations, but more particularly the Calvinists.

It is well known that not long after Mr. Wesley began his career of usefulness, he was joined by Mr. Whitefield, whose stirring eloquence in the pulpits of the Establishment created a great sensation among both clergy and people, and drew such multitudes to hear him, that he ventured, in imitation of his Divine Master, into the fields, where he proclaimed the glad tidings of salvation to listening thousands. Wesley soon followed the example, and great was the effect produced by their joint exertions in this novel way of preaching Christ and him crucified.

Unhappily, to human appearance, a difference arose between these two great and good men. Whitefield, being much opposed and persecuted by the lukewarm clergy of the Establishment, gradually contracted an intimacy with the Dissenters, and, on his coming to America, became acquainted with the pious and talented Edwards -- afterward president of Princeton College -- then settled at Northampton, Massachusetts. Finding among these people more of the appearance of evangelical doctrine, and of experimental and practical piety, than with those of the Establishment, Whitefield soon drank in their

doctrine of predestination and its correlatives, eternal election and final perseverance. This led to a controversy between him and Wesley, which eventuated in a partial separation -- a separation in their respective fields of labor and sentiment, though not in heart and affection -- for they always esteemed each other highly as devoted Christian ministers. This took place in the year 1741, Whitefield rallying under the banner of Calvinistic decrees, patronized by Lady Huntingdon, and supported by many of what were called the evangelical clergy of the Establishment in England, and by the most zealous of the Presbyterians and Congregationalists of America -- while Wesley and his brother Charles hoisted the flag of Arminius, fortifying themselves with the standards of their own church, and defending themselves by direct appeals to the Holy Scriptures and the dictates of common sense and sound reason. This brought on a protracted warfare between the parties, both from the pulpit and the press, during which the doctrines and measures of Mr. Wesley passed through the severest ordeal of critical investigation, and most heart-searching appeals to Scripture and reason.

This brought the vicar of Madeley, the pious and peace-loving Fletcher, from his retreat in the obscure parish where he had chosen to labor for the salvation of souls, and obliged him, quite contrary to his pacific disposition, to buckle on the armor of a polemic, in which he acquitted himself with singular success. He, indeed, seemed to be providentially raised up for the crisis, and he entered the arena of controversy fully furnished by sound and various learning, by deep and genuine piety, by meekness, patience, and love, and by a power of comprehension and nice discrimination, which peculiarly fitted him to sustain with dignity, firmness, and success, the high and holy cause he was called to defend. It is not saying too much to affirm, that he vanquished all his antagonists, cleared the field of controversy of the thorns and briars of error, and at the same time maintained the spirit and temper of the Christian, while he powerfully wielded the sword of truth, and brought the warfare to a successful issue, sustaining through the entire conflict the character of an able divine, a sound moralist, a consistent minister of Jesus Christ, and an acute and conclusive reasoner.

Though assailed often by bitter railing and biting sarcasm, he maintained the gravity of the minister of Christ and the meekness of the consistent Christian. If at any time he turned the weapon of irony upon his antagonists -- as he sometimes did with most powerful effect -- it was divested of the venom of bitterness, and dipped in the sweet waters of brotherly love. His masterly defenses of Wesleyan theology remain unanswered, and, it is believed, unanswerable, and will long remain as a monument of his piety, of his devotion to the cause of truth, as well as a lofty beacon to apprise future mariners who may embark upon the rough sea of controversy, of the dangerous shoals and rocks upon which so many heedless men have been wrecked -- at the same time distinctly and accurately marking the channel of truth through which the spiritual ark may be safely guided to the harbor of eternal repose.

Armed with the panoply thus furnished them, the Wesleyan missionaries who first visited our shores were prepared to promulgate and defend the doctrines and to enforce the discipline of their founder. As before said, however, they mainly insisted on experimental and practical godliness, urging upon all, high and low, rich and poor, the necessity of a change of heart, -- such a change as should be productive of a reformation of life and conduct, in order to insure everlasting salvation. Instead of exhausting their strength in controversial preaching on those debatable points about which they differed from Calvinists, Unitarians, Arians, and Universalists, they generally contented themselves with a plain and unvarnished statement of their doctrinal views, with urging upon the people experimental and practical religion, and with defending themselves when assailed by others. This defense, however, often became necessary, more especially in the northern and eastern states, where the people were more accustomed to a critical examination of

doctrinal points, and questions of doubtful disputation.

For some time, however, the number of Methodists in this country was so inconsiderable, that other denominations affected to treat them with silent contempt; and if occasionally they condescended to notice them at all, it was more in the way of caricature and misrepresentation than by sober argument, or an attempt at a fair and direct refutation of their doctrine and usages. The High Churchman would sneer at our ordination, and, wrapping himself in the cloak of apostolical succession, with an air of assumed dignity, prate about "John Wesley's lay bishops," as though these jokes were sufficient to put us out of countenance. Others, panoplied in the stern decrees of Calvin, and priding themselves in their exclusive orthodoxy, would tantalize us with "salvation by the merit of good works, the omnipotency of free-will, and the unsoundness of our doctrine of justification;" while some would smile at "baby baptism," as an affront offered to the Deity, and an innovation upon apostolic usage. These all united to ridicule our itinerant plan of preaching the gospel, as a novelty which must soon come to an end; and, to give point and poignancy to their sarcasms, our itinerant preachers were called "circuit-riders," as if to ride a circuit were their distinguishing badge, not caring to inform the people whether as preachers or itinerant physicians.

These reproaches were borne with as much patience as possible, and our ministers continued to deserve them more and more by persevering in their peculiar work, and by endeavoring to prove their falsity by a faithful exhibition of the true doctrines of their church, and also to refute the slanderous representations of their mode of life and manner of preaching, by the exemplariness of their conduct. To those who became intimately acquainted with them from personal intercourse, they commended themselves for the depth and uniformity of their piety, as well as by the soundness of their doctrine and the laboriousness of their lives. In all such a confidence was inspired in the strictness of their integrity, as well as in the wisdom of their plans of doing good to the souls and bodies of men.

But, as before said, these controversies and modes of defense were confined chiefly to the pulpit, and to a republication of a few of Wesley's and Fletcher's doctrinal and practical tracts and sermons, the reading of which was confined mostly to our own societies and their immediate friends.; we had no writers of note on this side the Atlantic, and no periodical through which we could speak to the public ear; for, as I have before remarked, after the discontinuance of the Arminian Magazine, in 1790 -- two volumes only having been published -- with the exception of a few straggling pamphlets, which scarcely survived the day of their birth, our press was as silent as the grave in respect to uttering a sentiment from an American author, and the Magazine was not resumed until the year 1818, and even then, as its respected editor announced, with much fear and trembling for its success.

Yet, as the Methodists increased in number and respectability, and their influence upon the public mind was proportionately augmented, other denominations began to awake from their slumber, to look about them for other means than those heretofore used for offensive warfare, as well as to defend themselves against the inroads which Methodism was making upon their congregations, and the impression it produced upon the public mind. For these "circuit-riders" were no idle shepherds. They not only rode circuits, but they "went everywhere preaching the kingdom of God," breaking over parish lines, entering into every open door, and with a loud, distinct voice, proclaiming to all they could prevail on to hear them, that they must "fear God and give glory to his name." Hence the opposition to our distinctive doctrines and modes of procedure became more serious and systematical; our opponents began to feel the necessity of meeting us in the field of argument with more fairness; and instead of drawing ridiculous caricatures for the amusement of themselves and their readers, to state our doctrines as we hold them. This, we say, became necessary, for the eyes of the public were becoming somewhat enlightened in respect to what

Wesleyan Methodists really believed and taught, and were thence led to hear, and read, and compare for themselves. The consequence was, that the offensive features of Calvinism were becoming more and more repulsive, and the creed by which its nominal followers were distinguished underwent some modifications, better suited, as was thought, to the temper of the times. Thus, instead of ascribing the final destinies of mankind to an omnipotent decree, the subtle distinction was introduced between the natural and moral abilities of men, making the latter the only potent barrier to the sinner's salvation. This theory, which for some time was confined to comparatively few, seems to have been an improvement upon President Edwards's system "On the Will," and was invented by Dr. Hopkins, of Newport, R. I., and thenceforth called, by way of distinction, Hopkinsianism. This, it was thought by many, would enable them to meet and obviate the objections which were brought against the doctrine of unconditional election and reprobation, by placing the criminality of all sinful actions in the perversity of the human will, called "moral inability," especially as they contended that the sinner possessed a "natural ability" to do all which God required. Hence the doctrine of eternal decrees, as taught by John Calvin, though still held in theory, was studiously kept out of sight by those who embraced these new views, and the theory of "natural ability and moral inability" was substituted in its place.

This subtle theory, however, by no means answered the proposed end. The Methodists still insisted that this "natural ability," however potent, could never overcome the efficient operation of an immutable decree, which had fixed the destinies of all mankind before the worlds were made -- nor would the moral ability or inability alter that which had been made unalterable by the eternal fiat [determination -- DVM] of the Almighty.

These conflicting theories somewhat changed the points of controversy between the Calvinists and Arminians. While Wesley and Fletcher were compelled, from their position, to meet their antagonists on the old points of controversy which had been mooted in the Protestant world from the days of John Calvin, his system had now assumed, under the improving hands of some of his most distinguished followers, so many new traits, that new arguments of defense were called for by the advocates of universal atonement and conditional salvation. Under these circumstances, many, on both sides of these controverted points, thought it their duty to enter the field of theological discussion. This they did with all the ardor of new recruits. And among those who distinguished themselves in conducting this theological warfare, might be mentioned men who had grown gray in the cause of Christ, as well as others of younger years, whose youthful temperament may have betrayed them into a harshness of expression, on some occasions, incompatible with the meekness and soberness of the Christian minister -- faults of human beings, for which the Christian system alone provides an adequate atonement and mode of forgiveness.

At length circumstances led the author of this History into a public debate with a Presbyterian minister, which was held in the town of Durham, N.Y., May 10, 1810. The discussion involved the "Five Points," so long mooted by Calvinists and Arminians, and some of the other subjects of dispute already indicated. Not long after, the pastor of the congregation in whose church the debate was conducted, the Rev. Ralph Williston, published a volume of sermons, in which he entered into a discussion of the topics which had been the subjects of controversy in the public debate, and concluded the whole with an examination into the character of "Satan's ministers," in which it was broadly insinuated that our ministers, on several accounts, might be classed under that denomination. As it was thought by many that these sermons gave a distorted view of some of our doctrines, and must exert an injurious influence upon our ministry, a reply was published in 1815, in six letters addressed to the author of the sermons, in which an attempt was made to rectify his mistakes, to refute his arguments in favor of the Calvinistic and Hopkinsian theory, and

to vindicate the doctrines and ministry of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Some portions of these letters were severely animadverted upon by the Rev. Mr. Haskil, of Vermont, to which an answer was published in a small book, called "Predestination Examined." Soon after, Mr. Williston sent out a second volume, in reply to the "Errors of Hopkinsianism," the title of the book containing the letters addressed to that gentleman, called "A Vindication of some of the essential Doctrines of the Reformation." This attempt to identify the peculiarities of Hopkinsianism with the essential doctrines of the reformers, called forth "The Reformer Reformed," the title being suggested by the impression, that if the Reformation carried with it errors of such a pernicious consequence, as it was believed must flow from the doctrine of an efficient operation of universal and immutable decrees, the Reformation itself needed reforming -- a sentiment not retracted on more mature consideration.

It by no means becomes me to express an opinion of the character or results of this protracted discussion, though I may be allowed to indulge a hope that it had its use in bringing our doctrines more prominently before the public, in rectifying some erroneous impressions respecting our ministry and usages, and in awakening public attention to the precise points of difference between us and our Calvinistic brethren. The subject, however, has been thus introduced here, because these things belong properly to the history of the times, and also to show the position we occupied in the ecclesiastical affairs of the country, as well as the duties which seemed to devolve on us to defend, as far as we were able, our doctrines and usages from all unjust imputations. It will be found in the sequel that we were called upon to sustain an arduous conflict with our brethren of other denominations, as well as with some of our own household, who, for various reasons, "went out from us," in order to rescue our ministry from reproach, and our doctrines, government, and usages from the numerous objections which were preferred against them.

Another thing tended about this time to direct our attention to the general state of the religious affairs in our country. Allusion has already been made to the "Charitable Society for the Education of pious Young Men for the Ministry of the Gospel," and of the commission which was sent to explore the western country, and to report the religious state of things in that portion of our republic.

To awaken public attention to the necessity and importance of sustaining this society, Dr. Lyman Beecher, in behalf of the society, issued an address to the churches, calling on them for pecuniary aid, to support and educate indigent pious young men for the ministry, assigning, among other reasons, the peculiar fitness of such young men, from their more hardy character and habits of life, to enter upon this rugged field of labor. To make the deeper and more powerful impression upon the Christian community in favor of the object proposed, the address went into a statistical account of the religious state of the several portions of our country, and concluded by a most rousing appeal to the sympathies and liberality of the people in behalf of the Education Society. In describing the moral and spiritual desolation of these United States, the address disclosed the astounding fact, that, in addition to those already in the services of the sanctuary, there were wanting "five thousand competent ministers," to supply the entire population of our country with the word and ordinances of the gospel.

At the announcement of this fact, the Christian community awoke as from a deep slumber. They began to look around them for the data on which this calculation was founded. On examination, it was ascertained that the address assumed the necessity of one minister to every one thousand souls -- that, as there were at time eight millions of inhabitants in the United States and territories, and as there were, says the address, only three thousand educated ministers in the land, there remained five millions of the inhabitants destitute of a competent ministry. This was an alarming conclusion.

Among others who published strictures on this strange production, the late Rev. Freeborn Garretson wrote a small pamphlet, in which he showed the effect which the statements set forth in the address must have upon other denominations. He, as well as others who examined the statistics of Dr. Beecher, concluded that he meant to exclude all other ministers than those of the Calvinistic order from being "competent" to the work in which they were engaged; for, on a very moderate calculation, there were even then more than three thousand ministers belonging to the Presbyterian, Dutch Reformed, and Congregational churches; and it is believed that among the Baptist, Lutheran, Protestant, and Methodist Episcopal Churches, without saying any thing of the minor sects, there were more than five thousand ministers, many of whom would by no means suffer from a comparison with their brethren of the other denominations; hence, allowing the accuracy of this calculation, there was at that very time more than one minister for every one thousand human souls; the irresistible conclusion therefore was, that the address excluded from the catalogue of competent ministers all except those who belonged to one or the other of the Calvinistic churches above named. And this conclusion is strengthened by the fact, that the address dwelt so emphatically upon the necessity of "an educated ministry" as being essential to the efficient discharge of its duties, as it is well known that most of the other churches, however highly they might appreciate human learning, do not consider it an essential prerequisite to a gospel ministry.

Such a disclosure of opinions, so deeply implicating the character and competency of so many ministers, many of whom had furnished the most irrefutable evidence of their efficiency in spreading the doctrines of God our Saviour, taken in connection with the report from the commission sent to explore our western country, might well alarm the apprehensions of all concerned; and hence a deep tone of dissatisfaction was heard throughout the churches, and a general burst of indignation against the assumptions of the address was simultaneously expressed by the several denominations who felt that their ministry were proscribed by its unwarrantable conclusions. The zeal, too, with which the address urged its claims upon the churches more immediately interested in its objects, showed that a mighty effort was making to carry into practical effect its comprehensive plans. As an evidence of this take the following extract: --

"To produce such a combination and such an effort, the wretched state of our country must be made known. The information contained in this address may with propriety, it is believed, be communicated on the sabbath to all our worshipping assemblies, and the investigation commenced in it be continued, until a regular and minute account be given of the religious state of our land. The newspaper, the tract, and magazine must disclose to our slumbering countrymen their danger. The press must groan in the communication of our wretchedness; and from every pulpit in our land the trumpet must sound long and loud. The nation must be awakened to save itself by its own energies, or we are undone."

We have no right, nor have we any wish, to decide upon the character of men's motives, any further than their words and actions proclaim it. And allowing that the end proposed by the gentlemen who wrote and sanctioned this address was purely the salvation of souls from sin, and the salvation of our country from its ruinous consequences, the means used were highly laudable, and the stirring language of the address, a fair sample of which is found in the preceding extract, was admirably calculated to arouse the slumbering energies of the church to a zealous activity in the cause of reform. Yet it could not but seem somewhat strange to us, that they should not have awakened to this all-important subject until just then -- at a time too when other denominations, and particularly the Methodists, had been blessed with the most extensive revivals of religion which had been witnessed in any age or land since the apostolic days. This is fully attested by the preceding volume of this History. Were the authors of this address ignorant of these facts? We had reason to believe that it was a knowledge of them which aroused their dormant energies, and led

them just then to put forth their strength to counteract the growing influence of Methodism. For it was to the western country chiefly, and in the southern states, that this society were about to direct their efforts to supply the lack of ministerial service. And it was in the west more especially that our ministry had been so abundantly blessed. It was here, where the inhabitants from the older states and from Europe were pouring in with unparalleled rapidity, that, through the agency of camp meetings, and a general itinerant ministry, Methodism had already wrought wonders, and was still going forward, keeping pace with the extension of the settlements, and bowing the hearts of sinners to the yoke of Jesus Christ. Had we not, therefore, reason to suspect that our ministry especially were denounced as incompetent, and that the fear was the country would become deluged with the bitter waters issuing from the corrupt fountain of Methodism! Whether true or false, such was the impression, and therefore, in conjunction with others who felt themselves deeply implicated by the assumptions of this remarkable address, we felt ourselves authorized to enter our protest against its doctrines, and to furnish the people with an antidote to its injurious insinuations. This, as I have before said, was done by Mr. Garrettson; and the following extract from his pamphlet will show the successful manner in which he exposed and refuted the erroneous calculations of the address. Addressing himself directly to Dr. Beecher, he thus shows the fallacy of his arguments: --

"You have placed your church in Connecticut on the highest scale among the several states in the Union. You have given a short history of it, and have, in your way, prostrated the southern part of our country. Probably you are a native of Connecticut; I was born in Maryland; and as you have, among other southern states, undertaken to degrade the religious character of the people of this state, I am willing to compare them with those of your state. I am well acquainted with about every part of both; and as you have fixed your eye on the Congregational Church in Connecticut, I shall fix mine on the Methodist Episcopal Church in Maryland.

"You say that you have upward of 200 congregations, averaging 50 members each, making about 10,000 church members. I have looked over our church records, and find that we have in Maryland<sup>1</sup> more than 25,000 church members, who have the pure word of God preached, and the sacraments duly administered."

It was, moreover, the opinion of many, that the address had a political object in view. This opinion was founded on the following extract, taken in connection with the conclusion which seems to be warranted from the general tenor of the address, that ministers of other denominations were proscribed as being incompetent. After speaking of the defective character of the general government, on account of its not containing adequate provisions for its own permanency, the address adds

"A remedy must be applied to this vital defect of our national organization. But what shall that remedy be? There can be but one. The consolidation of the state governments would be a despotism. But the prevalence of pious, intelligent, enterprising ministers through the nation, at the ratio of one for a thousand, would establish schools, and academies, and colleges, and habits and institutions of homogeneous influence. These would produce a sameness of views, and feelings, and interests, which would lay the foundation of our empire on a rock. Religion is the central attraction which must supply the deficiency of political affinity and interest. Religion is the bond of charity, which in storms must undergird the ship."

We accord to the soundness of these sentiments, provided they apply to Christianity as a system of universal good-will to men, and as designed and calculated to connect the hearts of all together in one

common brotherhood, and finally to produce, by its action on the heart and conduct, a conformity to its holy precepts. But the general contents and manifest tendency of the address seemed to forbid such a construction, and to place its authors in the position of strong sectarists, who were laboring to build up a particular denomination at the expense of all the rest. This "homogeneous influence" -- this "sameness of views, and feelings, and interests," were to be produced by the multiplication of "educated and competent ministers," who should be trained up in the school of this society, who should receive their lessons of instruction from Andover, and thence go out clothed with authority to propagate Calvinism, whether under the form of the Old or New School Divinity, whether in the guise of Congregational or Presbyterian theology; while it appeared manifest that all others were proscribed as heterodox and incompetent, and therefore could not contribute to throw around the national ship, in time of a tempest, the strong cords of pure religion, and thus save the nation for a political wreck.

We do not indeed say that this was the real design of the authors of this address; but if it were not, it was most unhappily worded, and should have been either corrected or disavowed, neither of which, so far as is known to the present writer, has ever been done, although I believe that the inferences which were drawn from it, and the general indignation it produced in a great portion of the religious community, caused its authors to withdraw it from circulation.<sup>2</sup>

Thus much I have thought it a duty to say in respect to this controversy, because of its immediate bearing on the interests of our Church, and its more remote tendency upon its future history. It certainly tended to keep alive the fire of contention between us and the Calvinistic churches, and thus to widen the breach already existing between the two great families, the Calvinists and Arminians.

There was another event of general interest which occurred this year, and which had a favorable bearing upon our affairs, particularly in the state of Connecticut. In this state the original charter, which was received from the king of England on the first settlement of the country, had been the only constitution the state had possessed up to the time of which we now speak. It is well known that in the early settlement of that colony, provision was made by law that no person should vote at an election, or hold a civil office, unless he were a member of the church. This severe and impolitic law was afterward so far relaxed as to allow those who joined the "half-way covenant," in order to obtain Christian baptism for their children, to be eligible to civil offices, and to exercise the right of suffrage. Still, however, the law was exclusive in its demands, making it essential, in order to possess civil rights, to be either in the "half-way covenant," that is, members of the Congregational society, or otherwise to become full members of that church. By these civil regulations the Congregationalists were established by law, and were supported by a regular tax, while other sects were held under civil disabilities, being obliged, in addition to supporting themselves, to contribute their quota for the maintenance of the established clergy, at the same time that they were disfranchised from the privileges of freemen, by an exclusion from all offices of trust and profit. Nor could the clergy of the Dissenters perform the rites of matrimony even for members of their own congregations.

These severe and unjust regulations were so far modified from time to time as to allow those who belonged to dissentient sects the privilege of depositing a certificate in the town clerk's office of their having separated themselves from the "standing order," and they were thereby exempted from paying ministerial tax for the maintenance of the established clergy. They were also entitled to hold offices in the state, and to vote at the elections.

Such was the general state of things in Connecticut, when some circumstances happened which resulted in the overthrow of this legal hierarchy, and placed all the religious sects upon an equal standing, both in

civil and religious affairs.

During the war of 1812-1815, the militia of that state were called out, by order of the general government, to defend the people against the apprehended depredations of the enemy. The authorities of the state, however, refused to let their militia serve under United States' officers, but they were marshaled under those appointed by the state. The consequence was, that the general government refused to pay the expense of the campaign. After the restoration of peace, the state of Connecticut petitioned Congress to refund the amount which the state had expended in paying for the services of the militia during the late war, a part of which was granted by the general government, and paid into the treasury of the state. The legislature of Connecticut, with a view to conciliate all parties, resolved that the money thus refunded should be divided among the several religious denominations, which was accordingly done; but, in the estimation of the Protestant and Methodist Episcopalians and Baptists, the division was so unequal, such an undue proportion being given to the Congregationalists, that they took offense, some of them refusing to receive what was awarded to them, and all united to protest against the proceedings as illiberal, unequal, and unjust. This led to a union of effort between the dissatisfied denominations against the standing order; and, seizing upon the occasion as an auspicious moment to assert their rights, they succeeded in calling a state convention, by which the old charter of Charles II was abrogated, a bill of rights promulgated, and a new constitution framed and adopted, which abolished church taxes and exclusive privileges, and put all sects upon an equality in respect to civil and religious rights; and thus they enfranchised the proscribed portion of the community, making all alike dependent on the voluntary principle for the support of the clergy and other incidents of divine worship.

This result was hailed as an auspicious period by the friends of equal rights, both in and out of the churches, as it did away the odious distinction between the privileged order, who had been so long established by law, and the various sects which had sprung up in the state, some of whom were nearly as numerous as were the Congregationalists themselves, and, when united with the others, formed a decided majority.

This was breaking the last link of legal tyranny in religious matters in our country -- with the exception, perhaps, of some of its relics which are dangling upon the civil code of Massachusetts -- by proclaiming to all the rights of conscience, according to the laws of nature, of God, and the fundamental principles of our national constitution.

Having noticed these matters, because they had and still have a bearing upon our history, I shall now proceed in the narration of the affairs of our Church in their regular order.

The death of Bishop Asbury, as related in the preceding chapter, left us with only one superintendent, Bishop McKendree, and he was in a very delicate state of health. He continued, however, to discharge his official duties, and was much supported in his labors by the good countenance of his brethren in the ministry and membership.

The number of Church members for 1816 shows that the increase was small, as the country had not yet fully recovered from the shock it had received from the late war, nor was the spirit of revival and reformation in that holy and vigorous exercise, by which it had shown itself at some former periods. Indeed, a disputatious spirit, in respect to some points of church government, engrossed too much of the time and attention of many, it is to be feared, to the neglect of the "weightier matters of the law, judgment, justice, and the love of God."

Numbers in the Church: Whites This Year: 171,931; Last Year:167,978; Increase: 3,953 -- Colored This Year: 42,304; Last Year: 43,187; Decrease: 883 -- Total This Year: 214,235; Last Year: 211,165 -- Increase: 3,070 -- Preachers This Year: 695; Last Year: 704; Decrease: 9.

It will be perceived from the above that there was a decrease of nearly nine hundred colored members. This was owing to a defection among the colored people in the city of Philadelphia, by which upward of one thousand in that city withdrew from our Church and set up for themselves, with Richard Allen, a colored local preacher and elder in the Methodist Episcopal Church -- at their head.

We have already had occasion to notice the labors of the Methodist ministry in behalf of the colored population of our country, both free and enslaved. Many thousands had become members of the Church, and were in general orderly and exemplary in their conduct; and some of those who were free had acquired wealth and respectability in the community. Among these converted Negroes a considerable number, possessing gifts for the edification of their brethren, had received license to preach, and several had been ordained deacons, and a few to the office of local elders.

Among the latter was Richard Allen, of Philadelphia. By habits of industry and economy, though born a slave in one of the southern states, he had not only procured his freedman, but acquired considerable wealth, and, since he had exercised the office of a preacher and an elder, obtained great influence over his brethren in the Church. By his assistance, and the assistance of their white brethren, they had built them a decent house of worship, and were regularly organized into a Christian church, according to our disciplinary regulations, and were put under the pastoral oversight of a white elder, stationed by the bishop presiding in the Philadelphia conference.

Under this state of things all seemed to go on well and prosperously. Mutual affection and confidence between the white and colored congregations, not in that city only, but also in most of the populous cities and villages in the Union, promised the most happy results of their united endeavors to promote their temporal and spiritual welfare. This harmony, however, was, by some untoward circumstances, interrupted. Mutual distrust and dissatisfaction succeeded, until finally Allen, and those who had been brought under his influence, separated themselves from the Methodist Episcopal Church. This occurred in the month of April, 1816.

At the secession they organized themselves into an independent body, under the title of the "African Methodist Episcopal Church," adopting our doctrines as their standards, and, as far as their circumstances would seem to allow, our form of discipline for their government. At their first General Conference, held in April of this year, Richard Allen was elected to the office of a bishop, and was consecrated by prayer and the imposition of the hands of five colored local elders, one of whom, Absalom Jones, was a priest of the Protestant Episcopal Church. Though the circumstances which led to this secession produced some exasperation of spirit on both sides, at the time, yet it is stated by one of their first ministers, that they have prospered considerably in various parts of the country. At their conference in 1828, one of their elders, Morris Brown, was elected and ordained a joint superintendent with Richard Allen; and after the death of the latter, in 1836, Edward Watters was set apart with the usual forms of consecration, as a joint superintendent with Mr. Brown.

Whether they are better or worse off than they would have been had they remained in connection with the Church and ministry to which they were indebted for their spiritual and ecclesiastical existence, is more than we have the means of knowing. Be this as it may, the secession created for the time considerable

uneasiness among our colored congregations in New York city and some other places, which resulted in their separation also, although they did not all arrange themselves under the banners of Allen. They adopted the itinerant mode of preaching, and have spread themselves in different parts of Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Maryland, and Delaware states, though it is believed that their congregations, out of the city of Philadelphia, are generally small, and not very influential. There are also some in the western states, and a few in Upper Canada. The exact number belonging to this party I have not been able to ascertain.

In the more southern states, the "Allenites," as they were called, by way of distinction, could make no favorable impression, as their preachers were not recognized by the laws of the states, and the slave population who were members of our Church had the character of our white ministry pledged as a guarantee for their good behavior.

#### General Conference of 1816

This conference assembled in the city of Baltimore, on the first day of May of this year, and was composed of the following delegates: --

New York Conference: William Anson, Nathan Bangs, Laban Clark, Samuel Draper, Nathan Emory, Freeborn Garrettson, Aaron Hunt, Samuel Merwin, Daniel Ostrander, William Phoebus, Peter P. Sandford, Eben Smith, Henry Stead, Thomas Ware, Ebenezer Washburn, Elijah Woolsey.

New England Conference: Oliver Beale, Elijah Hedding, Asa Kent, David Kilborn, Joseph A. Merrill, Philip Munger, George Pickering, Martin Ruter, Solomon Sias, Joshua Soule, Charles Virgin, Eleazar Wells.

Genesee Conference: Dan Barnes, William Case, Abner Chase, George Gary, Charles Giles, George Harman, Chandley Lambert, Seth Mattison, Isaac Puffer, Henry Ryan

Ohio Conference: Charles Holliday, Benjamin Lakin, Marcus Lindsay, Samuel Parker, Isaac Quinn, James Quinn, John Sale, David Young, Jacob Young,

Tennessee Conference: James Axley, Peter Cartwright, Thomas L. Douglass, Samuel Sellers, Jesse Walker.

South Carolina Conference: Daniel Asbury, Henry Bass, Solomon Bryan, Samuel Dunwody, John B. Glenn, Hilliard Judge, William M. Kennedy, Thomas Mason, Lewis Myers, James Norton, Anthony Senter, Alexander Talley, Joseph Tarpley, Reuban Tucker.

Virginia Conference: John C. Ballew, Philip Bruce, Thomas Burge, Edward Cannon, Matthew M. Dance, Ethelbert Drake, Cannellum H. Hines, William Jean, Thomas Moore, Minton Thrift.

Baltimore Conference: Thomas Burch, Christopher Frye, Enoch George, Alfred Griffith, Jacob Grober, Andrew Hemphill, Hamilton Jefferson, Nelson Reed, Stephen G. Roszel, William Ryland, Asa Shin, Henry Smith, Beverly Waugh, Joshua Wells.

Philadelphia Conference: William Bishop, Henry Boehm, John Emory, Sylvester Hill, Stephen Martindale, Lawrence McCombs, Robert Roberts, Solomon Sharp, John Sharpley, Asa Smith, Joseph Totten, John Walker, George Woolley.

The first thing which arrested the attention of all, and which seemed to spread a melancholy gloom over the house, was the absence of our venerated senior bishop, whose death and character I have recorded in the preceding volume.

After making preparations for the removal of his remains from the place of their first sepulcher, his valedictory address was read to the conference, which appeared to have been left in an unfinished state, containing merely the heads of what he would probably have drawn out at greater length, had his declining health permitted. It shows, however, the same intense and enlarged desire for the permanency and prosperity of the Church by which he had so long been characterized, expressed in his usually sententious [pithy, concise, moralizing -- DVM] style, and concluded with an earnest exhortation to the conference to hold fast the doctrines and discipline under the influence of which they had been hitherto bound together, blessed, and prospered.

After the conference was organized, by the appointment of a secretary, and attending to the usual preliminary business, Bishop McKendree, who, by the death of Bishop Asbury, was the only surviving superintendent, delivered to the conference an address -- a copy of which I have not been able to find in the general state of the work, and the necessity of adding strength to the episcopacy. He also made such suggestions as he thought fit in respect to future movements for the general peace and prosperity of our extended work. This address, and Bishop Asbury's valedictory, were referred to appropriate committees, the reports of which will be noticed in due time.

The Rev. Messrs. Black and Bennett, of Nova Scotia, attended this conference as delegates from the British conference, in order to adjust, if possible, certain difficulties which had arisen in Canada, particularly in the lower province, out of what had taken place during the late war. As this sanguinary conflict had occasioned a temporary separation between us and the brethren in that country, the societies in Montreal and Quebec had petitioned the mission committee in London to supply them with preachers, and their petition had been granted and preachers sent. This occasioned some uneasiness in the minds of our preachers in that country, and led to unhappy collisions between the two bodies of Methodists, which resulted finally in the separation of the Methodists in those provinces from the jurisdiction of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and their union with the Wesleyan Methodists in England.

Some correspondence had taken place between our bishops and the Wesleyan Methodist conference, in relation to this unhappy affair; and at this General Conference the following letter was received from the missionary committee of London, and submitted to the conference, in connection with communications from the Rev. Messrs. Black and Bennett, in behalf of the British connection, and Rev. Messrs. Ryan and Case, in behalf of the brethren in Canada. The letter, which follows, it appears, was addressed to Bishop Asbury, in answer to one they had received from him. It is as follows: --

"New Chapel, City Road, London, Feb. 7, 1816

"Very Dear Sir: -- It is by the particular request of the last British conference that we, as members of the missionary committee, address you, and our brethren in the United States, whom we very highly esteem as fellow-citizens of the saints, and fellow-laborers in the vineyard of our common Lord; most fervently wishing that peace, righteousness, and joy in the Holy Ghost may abound in you and by you, to the praise of God and the glory of his grace.

"On reading your last very kind and affectionate letter, we sympathized with you, knowing how much it must have affected your mind, after being favored with so much spiritual prosperity, to have to lament a

'decrease of members in your societies;' but we trust, since it hath pleased Divine Providence to cause the terrors of war to cease, and to restore the invaluable blessing of peace between the two countries, that by this time you hail the dawn of a more auspicious day, and see the returning glory of the Lord revealed, and the quickening power of the Spirit diffusing its reviving influence, and that the voice of joy and rejoicing is heard in the congregations of the righteous, 'Glory to God in the highest, peace upon earth, and good-will toward men.' Our united prayer and supplication for you is, 'O Lord, we beseech, O Lord, we beseech, send now prosperity!'

It is with gratitude to the Lord of all that we can say, he is still extending his kingdom among us, by the instrumentality of the preached word; and his servants have had much consolation in their labors, by seeing sinners powerfully convinced of sin, penitents born of God, and believers sanctified by the Spirit. God has lately been reviving his work in various places, particularly in the city of Bristol, at Salisbury, &c.: in the former place several hundreds have been brought to the knowledge of God their Saviour. We can assure you we love this 'good, old-fashioned religion,' of a deep conviction for sin, a clear sense of justification by faith, and entire sanctification of the soul from all moral pollution, as well, if not better than ever. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us, and does even now bless us, with these spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: and we ever pray with increasing desire, 'Thy kingdom come.'

"Our blessed Lord has greatly favored us with success in our missionary efforts, particularly in our new stations in the eastern world, Ceylon, &c., though this has been attended with its afflictive circumstances. Since the death of our venerable, highly esteemed, and much lamented friend and brother, Dr. Coke, our beloved brother Ault has been removed from a sphere of useful labor to his great reward. The other brethren are still preserved in their useful labors. A Buddhist priest of considerable learning has been converted to Christianity, and is now engaged in translating the Scriptures into two of the native languages. Several Moormen or Mohammedans have also received the truth, and are becoming useful preachers of the word of life; and thousands of the poor heathen flock to hear the joyful tidings of the gospel. Our missionaries have begun to build a large chapel, house, school, printing-office, &c., at Columbo, and have received the liberal support of the inhabitants. These buildings are to cost seven thousand dollars, six thousand of which have been already subscribed by the inhabitants. We have lately sent five more missionaries to that quarter of the globe, and one more is shortly to sail for Bombay. Thus the Lord is enlarging his kingdom, 'even from the rivers to the ends of the earth.'

"We rejoice in the ardent Christian affection you express toward your brethren in this country; and be assured they entertain the same lively feelings and sentiments of brotherly love toward you and your fellow-laborers in the Lord; and should we be favored with a visit from you or them, it would give us inexpressible pleasure to give you the right hand of fellowship, and every expression of our sincere Christian regard.

"To preserve a mutual good understanding, and the unity of the Spirit, and, as far as possible, a co-operation in promoting the good work of the Lord, we feel it our duty to state to you a subject of local difference, which to us has been painful, and which we feel a delicacy in stating, but to which we are compelled from the necessity of the case, that the word of the Lord be not hindered. In consequence of application being made to the British conference from the society at Montreal, a missionary was sent to that place, and received as the messenger of the gospel of peace; but we are sorry to learn that some misunderstanding has taken place between brothers Strong and Williams, our missionaries, and brother Ryan, your presiding elder for Lower Canada. From the former we have received a statement of their

proceedings, and from the latter a letter of complaint. We have also received a letter from brother Bennett, the chairman of the Nova Scotia district, who has visited Montreal, &c., and reported to us his proceedings.

"Upon a review of the whole, and from the most serious and deliberate consideration we are led to conclude that, considering the relative situation of the inhabitants of Montreal and of Canada to this country, and particularly as a principal part of the people appear to be in favor of our missionaries, it would be for their peace and comfort, and the furtherance of the gospel, for our brethren to occupy those stations, especially the former, and to which we conceive we have a claim, as a considerable part of the money for building the chapel and house was raised in this country. We trust our American brethren will see the propriety of complying with our wishes with respect to those places; not to mention their political relation to this country, which, however, is not of little importance, for we are conscious that their general habits and prejudices are in favor of English preachers, being more congenial to their views and feelings, which should certainly be consulted, and will tend to facilitate the success of the gospel, and their spiritual prosperity. As your and our object is mutually to diffuse the knowledge of him whose kingdom is not of this world, and by every possible means to promote the immortal interests of men, let us not contend -- we have one Master, even Christ -- but give place to each other, that the word of the Lord may have free course, run, and be glorified. We cannot but hope, that from the contiguity of the labors of the brethren belonging to the two conferences, the spirit of unity and love will be promoted, and by this measure a more perfect reciprocal intercourse established. As you have kindly invited our esteemed brethren, Messrs. Black and Bennett, to take a seat in your conference, we have directed them to pay you a visit at Baltimore for this purpose, and to amicably arrange and settle this business, whom we trust you will receive as our representatives and as brethren.

"Praying that our mutual love may abound yet more and more, and that we may ever enjoy and rejoice in each other's prosperity, till the whole earth is filled with the glory of God, we remain your truly affectionate brethren in Christ Jesus.

(Signed for and in behalf of the committee.) "James Wood, Treasurer, Joseph Benson, James Buckley, Secretary."

This letter, together with the written and verbal communications from the brethren above mentioned, was referred to a committee, and the following report, which was concurred in by the conference, will show the result of their labors: --

"The committee appointed by the General Conference to confer with Messrs. Black and Bennett, delegates appointed by the London Methodist Missionary Society to represent the British connection to this conference, and, if possible, to make an amicable adjustment of certain differences between our Church and the British connection, relative to Upper and Lower Canada, beg leave to submit the following report, viz.: --

Your committee have had several friendly interviews with the above-mentioned delegates on those subjects, and they are happy to state that there appears to be an earnest desire to have all existing difficulties terminated to the peace and mutual satisfaction of both parties, and to perpetuate the Christian union and good understanding which have hitherto existed.

It appears from written communications, as well as from verbal testimony, that unhappy dissensions have taken place in Montreal between certain missionaries sent (at the request of a few official members of the

society in that place, in time of the last war) by the London Missionary Society, and some American preachers, which have terminated in the division of that society.

Although the late hostilities between the two countries separated, for some time, those provinces from the immediate superintendency of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America, yet all the circuits (except Quebec) were as regularly supplied as circumstances would admit of with American preachers.

It furthermore appears, from written and verbal communications, that it is the desire of the great majority of the people in Upper and Lower Canada to be supplied, as heretofore, with preachers from the United States.

In the two provinces there are twelve circuits and one station, (Montreal,) which have eleven meeting-houses, which have been hitherto supplied by American preachers.

"These things being duly considered, together with the contiguity of those provinces to the western and northern parts of the United States, your committee respectfully submit the following resolutions: --

"Resolved by the delegates of the Annual Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, in General Conference assembled,

That we cannot, consistently with our duty to the societies of our charge in the Canadas, give up any part of them, or any of our chapels in those provinces, to the superintendence of the British connection.

That a respectful letter be addressed to the London Methodist Missionary Society, explaining the reasons for the above resolution."

A letter was accordingly addressed to the missionary committee of London, explanatory of the reasons which led to the conclusions stated in the above report, and requesting that the preachers of each connection might be permitted to occupy in peace their respective fields of labor; but, whatever might have been the pacific disposition of the two bodies of Methodists in Great Britain and the United States, and however sincere and ardent their desire for mutual good understanding and brotherly affection, there were local feelings existing in the societies in some places, particularly in Montreal and Kingston, which could not be so easily satisfied; hence the society in the former place remained in a divided state, one party being supplied from England, and the other from the United States: and thus Judah continued to vex Ephraim, until, after a lapse of some years, an amicable arrangement was made between the British and American connection.

It was beyond all controversy that the present state of the work required an additional number of bishops. Accordingly the committee on the episcopacy reported as follows in reference to this subject, which was concurred in by the conference: --

"1. It is the opinion of your committee that the state of the superintendency, in consequence of the ever to be lamented death of our venerable father, Bishop Asbury, and the impaired state of the health of Bishop McKendree, and the increasing extent of the work, is such as require immediate and adequate strengthening;" and hence they recommended that two additional bishops be elected and consecrated."

On May 14, Enoch George and Robert Richford Roberts were elected by ballot, the former having fifty-seven and the latter fifty-five votes out of one hundred and six that were cast. They were accordingly consecrated in due form, and, after the adjournment of conference, entered upon their peculiar work with

zeal and energy.

The effect of the numerous locations on the ministry, and the want of more efficient means for its intellectual improvement, induced this conference to appoint a committee to take these subjects into consideration, and, if practicable, provide an adequate remedy. And as the report of this committee, and the action of the conference thereon, had a very important bearing upon these interests, the report, as it was adopted by the conference, is given entire.

"The committee of ways and means, appointed to provide a more ample support of the ministry among us, to prevent locations, and the admission of improper persons into the itinerancy, have taken the subjects committed to them under serious consideration. They have found, with serious concern and deep regret, that, in the present state of things, there exist many evils, which threaten to undermine that system of itinerating preaching which, under the blessing of God, has been so successful in spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The small pittance allowed to our preachers, and, in many places, the inefficient means used to insure even that, we conceive to be one reason why so many of our useful ministers are induced to locate. Groaning under the pressure of poverty now, and looking forward to a superannuated state, without adequate means afforded them for a comfortable support in the decline of life, they sink under the melancholy prospect, and reluctantly retire from the field, that they may provide a morsel of bread for themselves, their wives, and children.

The many locations, from these and other causes, have a manifest tendency to weaken and embarrass the itinerancy, by obliging us to fill up the vacancies with persons not competent to the work assigned them, and to commit the administration, in some of its important branches, to the hands of young and inexperienced men. To the same causes we may attribute the many partial locations, that is, families of traveling preachers which are immovably fixed. Their scanty allowance furnishes an excuse (whether justifiable or not, your committee presume not to determine) for combining farming, mercantile business, &c., with the ministration of God's word.

This practice, in the opinion of your committee, exceedingly embarrasses the general superintendency, in the frequent changes which, in the discharge of its duty, are unavoidable. In consequence of this, either those whose families are thus located must be subject to distant removals from their families, or others must be exposed to the inconvenience of frequent and distant removals, to make way for those who are in this partially located state. We perceive a manifest defect among us, occasioned in some measure by the multiplicity of locations, in regard to ministerial qualifications.

Although a collegiate education is not, by your committee, deemed essential to a gospel ministry, yet it appears absolutely necessary for every minister of the gospel to study to show himself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed. Every one, therefore, who would be useful as a minister in the Church, should, to a sincere piety and laudable zeal for the salvation of souls, add an ardent desire for useful knowledge; -- he should strive by every lawful means to imbue his mind with every science which is intimately connected with the doctrine of salvation by Jesus Christ, and which will enable him to understand and illustrate the sacred Scriptures.

But the early departure of many from the work of the ministry among us, of those whose piety, zeal, talent, and mental improvement justified the expectation of their extensive usefulness in the Church, and the manifest indifference of some who remain with us to this important branch of ministerial duty, thus

stripping the Church of some of its brightest ornaments, not only exposes her nakedness, but loudly calls for the prompt and vigorous interference of the General Conference.

To obviate these evils, and to secure to the Church a succession of holy, zealous, and useful ministers, becomes at this time, in the humble opinion of your committee, the imperious duty of this conference. To accomplish these very desirable objects, your committee beg leave to recommend the following resolutions, viz.: Resolved.

That it shall be the duty of the presiding elders and preachers to use their influence to carry the rule of Discipline relating to building and renting houses for accommodation of preachers and families into effect. In order to this, each quarterly meeting conference shall appoint a committee, (unless other measures have been adopted,) who, with the aid and advice of the preachers and presiding elder, shall devise such means as may seem fit to raise moneys for that purpose. And we furthermore recommend to each annual conference to make special inquiry of its members respecting this part of their duty.

That those preachers who refuse to occupy the houses which may be provided for them on the stations and circuits where they are from time to time appointed, shall be allowed nothing for house-rent, nor receive anything more than their simple quarterage for themselves, wives, and children, and their traveling expenses. Nevertheless, this rule shall not apply to those preachers whose families are either established within the bounds of their circuits or stations, or are so situated that, in the judgment of the stewards, or the above-mentioned committee, it is not necessary for the benefit of the circuit to remove them.

That that part of the Discipline which relates to the temporal economy of our Church be so altered as to make the annual allowance of preachers one hundred dollars, and that of their wives and widows one hundred dollars.

That there be a committee appointed by the quarterly meeting conference of every circuit and station, consisting of members of the Methodist Episcopal Church, whose duty it shall be to make an estimate of the amount necessary to furnish fuel and table expenses of the family or families of the preachers stationed with them, and that the stewards shall provide, by such means as they shall devise, to meet such expenses, in money or otherwise; -- provided that the quarterly allowance of the preachers shall first be paid by the stewards.

That there be a meeting in every district of one steward from each station and circuit, to be selected from among the stewards by the quarterly conference, whose duty it shall be, by and with the advice of the presiding elders who shall preside in such meeting, to take into consideration the general state of the district in regard to temporalities, and to furnish a house and provision for the presiding elders' families, in conformity to the first and fourth resolutions of this report.

"In order more effectually to provide for the distressed traveling, superannuated, and supernumerary preachers, their wives, widows, and children, your committee earnestly recommend,

That each annual conference, in such way and manner as they may think proper, raise a fund for these purposes, according to the 6th article of the 5th section of the temporal economy of our Church.

"Thinking the Discipline sufficiently explicit on those points which relate to the Christian experience, practice, &c., of preachers, your committee deem it needless to add any thing on these subjects. But they beg leave to recommend,

That it be the duty of the bishop or bishops, or a committee which they may appoint in each annual conference, to point out a course of reading and study proper to be pursued by candidates for the ministry; and the presiding elders, whenever a person is presented as a candidate for the ministry, shall direct him to those studies which have been thus recommended. And before any such candidate shall be received into full connection, he shall give satisfactory evidence respecting his knowledge of those particular subjects which have been recommended to his consideration."

The adoption of this report, it is believed, had a salutary influence upon the ministry and membership, by exciting a spirit of liberality, and leading to a more vigorous action in respect to acquiring a greater amount of ministerial qualification.

From that time forth a regular course of study has been prescribed by the bishops for

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