

# The General Conference of 1828

by Nathan Bangs

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*The General Conference of 1828 was a significant event in the history of the Methodist Episcopal Church, addressing various matters affecting the Church and setting a precedent for future General Conferences.*

**Scripture:** Proverbs 6:16, 1 Corinthians 1:10, Ephesians 4:3, Philippians 2:2, Colossians 3:14

**Topics:** "Church Unity", "Methodist Principles"

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## Description

Nathan Bangs preaches about the challenges faced by the Methodist Episcopal Church in dealing with internal dissension and calls for unity and adherence to the established principles of the Church. The conference in Pittsburgh in 1828 addressed issues such as lay representation, freedom of speech, and the preservation of the itinerant system. The conference highlighted the importance of maintaining unity, upholding the itinerant ministry, and resisting calls for radical changes that could jeopardize the core principles of Methodism.

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## Transcript

This conference convened in the city of Pittsburgh, May 1, 1828. Five bishops, namely, McKendree, George, Roberts, Soule, and Hedding, were present, and the conference was opened by Bishop McKendree, with reading the Scriptures, singing, and prayer, after which Dr. Ruter, book agent at Cincinnati, was elected secretary.

The following is a list of the delegates who composed this conference: --

New York Conference: 1 Heman Bangs, Nathan Bangs, Thomas Burch, Laban Clark, John Emory, Buel Goodsell, Samuel Luckey, Stephen Martindale, Daniel Ostrander, Lewis Pease, Phineas Rice, Marvin Richardson, Peter P. Sandford, Arnold Scholefield, Tobias Spicer, Henry Stead, John B. Stratten, James Youngs.

New England Conference: John Adams, Lewis Bates, Isaac Bonny, Daniel Dorchester, Daniel Fillmore, Wilbur Fisk, John Hardy, Benjamin Hoyt, Edward Hyde, John Lindsey, John Lord, Joseph Merrill, Timothy Merritt, George Pickering, Thomas Pierce, Jacob Sanborn, Joseph White.

Maine Conference: David Kilbourn, Stephen Lovell, Heman Nickerson, Elisha Streeter, Eleazar Wells, Ephraim Wiley.

Genesee Conference: Horace Agard, Israel Chamberlain, John Dempster, Isaac Grant, Loring Grant, James Hall, George Harmon, Jonathan Huestis, Josiah Keyes, Gideon Lanning, Ralph Lanning, Seth Mattison, Edmond O'Fling, Zechariah Paddock, Robert Parker, George Peck, Morgan Sherman, Manley Tooker.

Canada Conference: Samuel Belton, Wyatt Chamberlain, John Ryerson, William Ryerson, William Slater.

Pittsburgh Conference: Henry B. Bascom, Charles Elliott, Thornton Fleming, Henry Furlong, William Lambdin, Daniel Limerick, James Moore, David Sharp, Asa Shinn, William Stevens.

Ohio Conference: Russel Bigelow, John Brown, John Collins, Moses Crume, James B. Finley, Greenbury R. Jones, James Quinn, Leroy Swormstedt, John F. Wright, David Young, Jacob Young.

Missouri Conference: Jesse Haile, Andrew Monroe.

Illinois Conference: James Armstrong, Peter Cartwright, John Dew, Charles Holliday, John Strange, Samuel H. Thompson.

Kentucky Conference: William Adams, Peter Akers, Benjamin T. Crouch, George C. Light, Marcus Lindsey, Henry McDaniel, George W. McNelly, Thomas A. Morris, Jonathan Stamper, Richard Tidings, John Tivis.

Holston Conference: James Cumming, William S. Manson, Samuel Patton, William Patton, Elbert F. Sevier, Thomas Stringfield, Thomas Wilkerson.

Tennessee Conference: Joshua Butcher, James Gwin, John Holland, James McFerrin, William McMahan, Francis A. Owen, Robert Paine, Ashley B. Roszell, Finch P. Scruggs.

Mississippi Conference: John C. Burruss, Benjamin M. Drake, Thomas Griffin, Robert L. Kennon, Barnabas Pipkin, William Winans

South Carolina Conference: Robert Adams, James O. Andrew, William Arnold, Henry Bass, William Capers, Samuel Dunwody, Andrew Hamill, George Hill, Samuel K. Hodges, William M. Kennedy, Malcom McPherson, Lovick Pierce, Elijah Sinclair.

Virginia Conference: Moses Brock, Joseph Carson, Thomas Crowder, Peter Doub, John Early, Daniel Hall, Henry Holmes, Caleb Leach, Hezekiah G. Leigh, Lewis Skidmore.

Baltimore Conference: John Davis, Christopher Frye, Joseph Frye, Job Guest, James M. Hanson, Andrew Hemphill, Marmaduke Pierce, Nelson Reed, Stephen G. Roszel, Henry Smith, Beverly Waugh, Joshua Wells.

Philadelphia Conference: Walter Burrows, Ezekiel Cooper, David Daily, Manning Force, Solomon Higgins, William Leonard, Joseph Lybrand, Lawrence McCombs, Thomas Neal, Charles Pittman, John Potts, James Smith, John Smith, Lot Warfield, George Woolley.

After the organization of the conference the following address was received from the bishops, and referred to appropriate committees: --

"Dear Brethren: -- It is our bounden duty to join in devout and grateful acknowledgments to the Father of mercies, whose gracious providence has preserved us in all our ways, and especially through the toils and dangers which have attended our journey from different and distant parts of the United States to this place. And while we acknowledge with gratitude the past interpositions of divine agency, let us unite in humble and fervent prayer for the influence of the Holy Spirit to guide us in all our deliberations, and to preserve us and the whole Church in the unity of the Spirit and in the bonds of peace.

"During the last four years it has pleased the great Head of the church to continue his heavenly benediction on our Zion. The work has been greatly extended; many new circuits and districts have been formed in different parts of our vast field of labor; but yet there is room, and pressing calls for much greater enlargement are constantly made.

"The great and extensive revivals of religion which we have experienced the last three years through almost every part of the work, furnish additional proof that God's design in raising up the preachers called Methodists, in America, was to reform the continent, and 'spread Scripture holiness over these lands.' These revivals have been the nurseries of the Church and of the ministry.

"Perhaps it deserves to be regarded as an extraordinary interposition of the divine mercy in behalf of the Church, that the year ending with this date has been peculiarly distinguished by the abundant outpourings of the Holy Spirit, and the increase both in the ministry and membership.

"While we are fully persuaded that, under God, our itinerant system has been the most effectual means of carrying on this great and blessed work, we recommend it to you to guard against whatever measures may have a tendency to weaken the energies of this system, or to locality in any department of the traveling ministry.

"Our missionary work has been greatly increased since the last session of the General Conference. Many parts of our extensive frontiers and newly acquired territories have received the gospel of salvation by the labors of missionaries. The importance and necessity of maintaining this efficient missionary system are sufficiently demonstrated by the blessed effects which it has produced. vast regions of country, almost entirely destitute of the gospel ministry, have by this means, and at a small expense from the missionary funds, been formed into circuits, and embraced in our regular work.

"Missions have been established in several Indian nations, most of which have succeeded beyond our highest expectations. And although, in some cases, we have had much to discourage us, and many difficulties to encounter and overcome in the prosecution of this work, we consider it of indispensable obligation to continue our efforts with increasing interest, for the salvation of this forlorn and afflicted people.

"Our attention has been called to South America, and to the American colony and surrounding nations in Africa. But hitherto we have not been able to send missionaries to either place.

"We invite the attention of the General Conference to this important subject. And while we cannot but regard the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church as a very efficient auxiliary to our itinerant system, and happily calculated to diffuse the blessings of the gospel among the poor and destitute, we recommend it as a subject of inquiry whether it be necessary to adopt any further measures to render this important institution more extensive and harmonious in its membership, and more abundant and permanent in its resources; and if any, what measures will be best calculated to promote these

desirable ends.

"Since the last session of this body, the 'Sunday School Union and Tract Societies of the Methodist Episcopal Church have assumed an important and interesting character, and appear to promise great and lasting benefits to the community in general, and to the rising generation in particular. Your wisdom will dictate wherein it is necessary to give any additional direction and support to these benevolent and growing institutions.

"As the right of all the members of the Methodist Episcopal Church to trial and appeal, as prescribed in the form of Discipline, is sacredly secured by the acts of the General Conference of 1808, it may not be improper to institute an inquiry, at the present session, whether any rule in the Discipline may be construed or applied so as to militate against such acts; and if so, remedy the evil.

"We invite your attention to a careful examination of the administration of the government, to see if it has been in accordance with the strictness and purity of our system.

"Through a combination of circumstances, we have failed to comply with the instructions of the last General Conference relative to the appointment of a delegate to the British conference. We deeply regret this failure. And it would be far more afflictive were we not assured that it has not been occasioned, in the least degree, by any want of affection and respect for our British brethren, or any indisposition to continue that medium of intercourse with them. We therefore recommend it to you to supply our lack of service by appointing, in such a manner as you shall judge proper, a representative and messenger to visit the British conference at its next session.

"May the God of peace be with you, and with the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ committed to your care.

"Yours with affection and esteem in the bonds of the gospel."

There were several important matters which came up for adjudication before this conference, affecting both the doctrines and government of the Church, as well as the character of some individuals. The first -- that which affected the doctrines of the Church -- was presented in an appeal, by the Rev. Joshua Randell, from a decision of the New England conference, by which he had been expelled for holding and propagating doctrines inconsistent with our acknowledged standards

In denying that the transgressions of the law, to which we are personally responsible, have had any atonement made for them by Christ.

Maintaining that the infinite claims of justice upon the transgressor of the divine law may, upon the condition of the mere acts of the transgressor himself, be relinquished and given up, and the transgressor pardoned without an atonement."

On these two specifications, both of which the defendant acknowledged that he held, the New England conference had first suspended him, and given him one year to reflect, and, if convinced of his error, to retract; and then, on finding that, at the end of the year, he persisted in his belief in these two propositions, and had endeavored to sustain them, both from the pulpit and the press, they had expelled him from the Church. From this solemn decision he had appealed to this General Conference, where he appeared in his own defense, and was allowed to vindicate his views to his entire satisfaction, it being stated in the journal of the General Conference that "he considered the case as having been fairly represented, and that he had nothing in particular to add."

The respondent to Mr. Randell, on behalf of the New England conference, was the Rev. Wilbur Fisk, whose able argument carried a full conviction to the judgments of all, with one solitary exception, that the above propositions contained doctrines adverse to the doctrines of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and that the proceedings of the New England conference on the case had been legal and orderly. After a full, and, as was acknowledged by the defendant himself, an impartial examination and hearing of the case, the decree of the New England conference was affirmed by a vote of one hundred and sixty-four out of one hundred and sixty-five who were present and voted on the question, two members, at their own request, being excused from voting either way.

It appears that Bishop Hedding had been misrepresented in a paper published by the Reformers, called "Mutual Rights."<sup>2</sup> This arose out of an address which he delivered to the Pittsburgh conference, in Washington, Pa., August 22d, 1826, on the duty of its members in reference to the discussions with which some portions of the Church were then much agitated on the subject of a church reform, then in contemplation by a number of individuals. This address, which gave offense to those who were in favor of the proposed measures of the "Reformers," so called, had been reported by one of the members of said conference, in the "Mutual Rights," and sentiments imputed to Bishop Hedding which he disavowed, as injurious to his character. He had accordingly written to the "Mutual Rights," contradicting the slanderous misrepresentation, and demanding reparation. This not being satisfactorily done by the offending brother, the bishop felt it to be his duty to present the subject to this General Conference, and to request that it might be investigated; and hence the whole affair was referred to the committee on the episcopacy, before whom the bishop, the writer of the offensive article, and the delegates of the Pittsburgh conference appeared; and after a full examination of the entire subject, they came to the following conclusion: That, after an interview with the person who wrote the article in the "Mutual Rights," and the delegates of the Pittsburgh conference, in whose presence the bishop had delivered the address respecting which the offensive article had been written, and hearing all that could be said by the parties concerned, it was believed that the writer had injuriously misrepresented Bishop Hedding in what he had published. This the writer himself; after hearing the explanations of the bishop, frankly acknowledged, and acquiesced in the decision of the committee respecting its injustice, and the propriety of making reparation by publishing the report of the committee, which report concludes in these words: -- "That the address of Bishop Hedding, as recollected by himself and the delegates of the Pittsburgh annual conference, not only was not deserving of censure, but such as the circumstances of the case rendered it his official duty to deliver."

As an act of justice to Bishop Hedding, the entire report, as adopted by the conference, was published in the Christian Advocate and Journal, and may be seen in that paper for May 30, 1828.

Another subject of a more general character, and of no little importance, came up for consideration before this conference. We have already seen that the Canada brethren had manifested much dissatisfaction on account of the relation which they sustained to us, and the desire they had manifested at times to become independent. This desire, however, did not arise out of any dissatisfaction with the conduct of the brethren in the United States toward them, but chiefly from the opposition evinced by statesmen in Upper Canada to their being subject to the control of a foreign ecclesiastical head, over which the civil authorities of Canada could exercise no jurisdiction; and as most of the preachers in Canada were formerly from the United States, and all of them subject to an ecclesiastical jurisdiction in another nation, it was contended by the Canadian authorities that they had no sufficient guarantee for their allegiance to the crown of Great Britain, and to the civil regulations of Canada; and hence the Methodist ministers in Canada had suffered civil disabilities, and had not been allowed to celebrate the rites of matrimony, not even for their own

members.

These arguments, and others of a similar character, had induced the Canada conference, which assembled in Hallowell, in 1824, when Bishops George and Hedding were both with them, to memorialize the several annual conferences in the United States on the subject of establishing an independent church in Upper Canada, requesting them to recommend the measure to this General Conference. Accordingly, the subject came up at this time by a memorial from the Canada conference, which was presented by its delegates, and referred to a committee.

The deliberations of the conference resulted in the adoption of the following preamble and report: --

"Whereas the Canada annual conference, situated in the province of Upper Canada, under a foreign government, have, in their memorial, presented to this conference the disabilities under which they labor, in consequence of their union with a foreign ecclesiastical government, and setting forth their desire to be set off as a separate church establishment: and whereas this General Conference disclaim all right to exercise ecclesiastical jurisdiction under such circumstances, except by mutual agreement: --

Resolved, therefore, by the delegates of the annual conferences in General Conference assembled, that the compact existing between the Canada annual conference and the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States be, and hereby is, dissolved by mutual consent.

That our superintendents or superintendent be, and hereby are, respectfully advised and requested to ordain such person as may be elected by the Canada conference a superintendent for the Canada connection.

That we do hereby recommend to our brethren in Canada to adopt the form of government of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States, with such modifications as their particular relations shall render necessary.

That we do hereby express to our Canada brethren our sincere desire that the most friendly feeling may exist between them and the connection of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States.

That the claims of the Canada conference on our Book Concern and chartered fund, and any other claims they may suppose they justly have, shall be left open for the negotiation and adjustment between the two connections."

It was afterward resolved that the managers of our Missionary Society should be allowed to appropriate the sum of seven hundred dollars annually for the support of the Indian missions in Upper Canada.

There is an important principle involved in the above agreement to dissolve the connection which had so long subsisted between the Methodists in the United States and Upper Canada, which it seems expedient to explain. When the subject first came up for consideration it was contended, and the committee to whom it was first referred so reported, which report was approved of by a vote of the General Conference, that we had no constitutional right to set off the brethren in Upper Canada as an independent body, because the terms of the compact by which we existed as a General Conference made it obligatory on us, as a delegated body, to preserve the union entire, and not to break up the Church into separate fragments. Hence, to grant the prayer of the memorialists, by a solemn act of legislation, would be giving sanction to a principle, and setting a precedent for future General Conferences, of a dangerous character -- of such a character as might tend ultimately to the dissolution of the ecclesiastical body, which would be, in fact and

form, contravening the very object for which we were constituted a delegated conference, this object being a preservation, and not a destruction or dissolution of the union. These arguments appeared so forcible to the first committee, and to the conference, that the idea of granting them a separate organization on the principle of abstract and independent legislation was abandoned as altogether indefensible, being contrary to the constitutional compact.

But still feeling a desire to grant, in some way, that which the Canada brethren so earnestly requested, and for which they pleaded with much zeal, and even with most pathetic appeals to our sympathies, it was suggested by a very intelligent member of the General Conference, the late Bishop Emory, that the preachers who went to Canada from the United States went in the first instance as missionaries, and that ever afterward, whenever additional help was needed, Bishop Asbury and his successors asked for volunteers, not claiming the right to send them, in the same authoritative manner in which they were sent to the different parts of the United States and territories; hence it followed that the compact between us and our brethren in Canada was altogether of a voluntary character -- we had offered them our services, and they had accepted them and therefore, as the time had arrived when they were no longer willing to receive or accept of our labors and superintendence, they had a perfect right to request us to withdraw our services, and we the same right to withhold them.

This presented the subject in a new and very clear light, and it seemed perfectly compatible with our powers as a delegated conference, and their privileges as a part of the same body, thus connected by a voluntary and conditional compact, either expressed or implied, to dissolve the connection subsisting between us, without any dereliction of duty or forfeiture of privilege on either part. It was on this principle alone that the above agreement was based.

It will be perceived, therefore, that this mutual agreement to dissolve the connection heretofore subsisting between the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and the Canada conference cannot, with justice, be pleaded for setting off any one conference or any number of annual conferences in the United States, as their relations to each other and to the General Conference are quite dissimilar to that which bound the Canada conference to us. The conferences in the United States are all bound together by one sacred compact, and the severing any one from the main body would partake of the same suicidal character as to sever a sound limb from the body. The General Conference has no right, no authority, thus "to scatter, tear, and slay" the body which they are solemnly bound to keep together, to nourish, to protect, and to preserve in one harmonious whole. If an annual conference declare itself independent, out of the pale of the Methodist Episcopal Church, it is its own act exclusively, and therefore the responsibility rests upon itself alone, for which the General Conference cannot be held accountable, because it was not a participant in the separation. I do not say that the General Conference may not disown an annual conference, should it become corrupt in doctrine, in moral discipline, or in religious practice. Should, for instance, an annual conference, by an act of the majority of its members, abjure any of our essential doctrines, such as the atonement of Christ, or justification by faith, or should renounce the sacrament of baptism or the Lord's supper, or strike from its moral code any of the precepts of morality recognized in our general rules, it might become the duty of the General Conference to interpose its high authority, and cut off; or at least to withdraw its fellowship from, the offending members. Yet such an act of excision, or of disnaturalization, if I may so call it, could be justified only as a dernier resort, when all other means had failed to reclaim the delinquents from their wanderings--just as the surgeon's knife is to be withheld until mortification endangers the life of the patient, when death or amputation becomes the sole alternative. How else can the Church be preserved--supposing such a case of delinquency to exist -- from a general

putrefaction? For if a majority of an annual conference become heterodox in doctrine, or morally corrupt in practice, the minority cannot control them, cannot call them to an account, condemn, and expel them. And in this case, must the majority of the annual conferences, and perhaps also a respectable minority of that very annual conference, be compelled to hold these apostates from truth and righteousness in the bosom of their fellowship, to treat them in all respects as brethren beloved, and publicly to recognize them as such in their public and authorized documents? This would be a hard case indeed! an alternative to which no ecclesiastical body should be compelled to submit.

These remarks are made to prevent any misconception respecting the principle on which the above connection was dissolved, and to show that it forms no precedent for a dissolution of the connection now subsisting between the annual and General Conferences in the United States. Analogical arguments, to be conclusive, must be drawn from analogous facts or circumstances, and not from contrast, or opposing facts or circumstances. And the relation subsisting between the annual conferences in the United States to each other, and between them and the General Conference, stands in contrast with the relation which did subsist between the Canada and the General Conference; and therefore no analogical argument can be drawn from the mutual agreement by which this relation was dissolved in favor of dissolving the connection now subsisting between the annual conferences in the United States, by a solemn act of legislation on the part of the General Conference, except for the reasons above assigned; and those reasons, let it be remembered, make the contrast still greater between the two acts, and justify the difference of the procedure; for the dissolution of the compact between us and the Canada brethren from the jurisdiction only, Christian fellowship still subsisting -- while the supposed act of excision would be a withdrawing of Christian fellowship from the offending members.

There were also other great principles of ecclesiastical economy involved in the above resolutions, which it may be well to develop and dwell upon for a moment.

It has been seen that the General Conference authorized our bishops, or any one of them, to ordain a bishop for Upper Canada. It was also provided that if such bishop should be so ordained his episcopal jurisdiction should be limited to Canada -- that he should not be allowed to exercise his functions in the United States. In favor of both of these positions, namely, the ordaining a bishop for Canada, and then restricting him in his episcopal functions to that country, or the not allowing him to exercise them in the United States, the following precedents were adduced

It was pleaded that the bishops of England ordained bishops for the United States exclusively: that when Wesley and others ordained Dr. Coke, it was only for the United States: and hence neither of these functionaries was allowed to exercise his episcopal powers in Great Britain. Here, then, were precedents, from our own and another church, both for consecrating men for other countries, and for restricting them, in the exercise of their official duties, to the countries for which they were designated in their certificates of ordination. It was furthermore stated -- and truly too -- that when it was contemplated to consecrate the late Rev. Freeborn Garrettson a bishop for Nova Scotia and the West Indies, it was proposed to withhold from him the privilege of being a bishop, by virtue of that election and consecration, in the United States.

And as to ordaining men for foreign countries, on special occasions, church history was full of examples, all which might be adduced as sound precedents for the authority conferred upon our bishops in regard to ordaining a man on whom the choice of the Canada conference might fall for their superintendent.

There was one other subject disposed of at this conference, more important, in many respects, than either of those already mentioned, inasmuch as it involved principles and measures which must, had they been carried into effect, have produced a radical change in both the legislative and executive departments of our church government, and were therefore considered revolutionary in their character and tendency.

That this subject may be placed in such a point of light as to be clearly understood, it is necessary to enter into some historical details.

We have already seen that there had been considerable uneasiness manifested in some portions of our Church on the subject of a lay representation in the General Conference. At first the discussions upon this subject were confined to private circles, though some of the traveling and more of the local preachers, as well as a few of the lay members, had been and were now of the opinion that such a representation ought to be granted. At length, however, those who were most zealous for this measure commenced a periodical publication, called the "Wesleyan Repository," in which they began, at first with apparent moderation, to discuss the principle of lay representation. The headquarters of this publication, which was commenced in 1820, were Trenton, in the state of New Jersey; and though its editor was known, the greater portion of its writers appeared under the mask of fictitious signatures, by which they eluded individual responsibility. The strictures upon our church government, which became uncommonly severe, were more calculated to irritate the passions than to convince the judgment, and they soon degenerated into personal attacks, in which some of our bishops and chief ministers were dragged before the public in a way to injure their character, and consequently to circumscribe their usefulness. And though we had a monthly periodical, it was thought, by the most judicious among our ministers and people, that its columns ought not to be occupied with such a thriftless controversy, much less as the writers in the Repository lay concealed beneath fictitious signatures; and moreover, instead of sober argument, they frequently resorted to biting sarcasm, to personal criminations, and to a caricature of some of those institutions which we, as a church, had long held sacred. Though it was believed that most of the writers in the Repository were local preachers and laymen, yet it was known that several of the traveling preachers themselves were favorable to the proposed innovation, and therefore lent the weight of their influence in its behalf by writing occasionally for its columns.

With a view to concentrate their strength and harmonize their views as much as possible, the friends of the innovating measures formed a "Union Society" in the city of Baltimore, elected officers and a committee of correspondence, inviting all who were with them in sentiment to form auxiliary societies throughout the country, that there might be a general cooperation among the advocates of lay representation.

Things went on in this way until near the meeting of the General Conference in 1824, when the male members of the Church in the city of Baltimore, which had now become the center of operations for the "Reformers," with a view to allay, if possible, the heat of party spirit, were called together for the purpose of attempting to effect a compromise. This effort grew out of the fact that there were many conflicting opinions among those who were favorable to "reform," and a strong desire among the warm friends of the Church to avert the calamities of a separation, which they saw must inevitably result from this feverish excitement, unless some pacific measures could be adopted to cool it down. In this meeting it was proposed, as the basis of the compromise, to memorialize the General Conference on the subject of a lay delegation, provided the question of a right to such representation were waived, and the privilege should be asked on the ground of expediency alone. This was assented to by the leading men among the "Reformers," and a memorial was accordingly prepared in accordance with these views, the part relating to lay representation being expressed in the following words

"Under these views we have been led to turn our attention to the subject of a lay delegation to the General Conference. In presenting this subject to your consideration, we would waive all that might be urged on the natural or abstract right of the membership to this privilege. We are content to admit that all governments, whether civil or ecclesiastical, ought to be founded, not on considerations growing out of abstract rights, but on expediency, that being always the right government which best secures the interests of the whole community. With regard to the expediency of the measure, then, we may urge that such a delegation would bring into the conference much information with regard to the temporal affairs of the Church which the ministry cannot well be supposed to possess. They would feel less delicacy in originating and proposing measures for the relief of the preachers' families than the preachers themselves, as they could not be subjected thereby to the imputation of interested motives, and they would, by being distributed everywhere among the membership, and, by their personal exertions and influence, the success of such measures. and awaken, more generally than has hitherto been done, the attention of the Methodist community to the great interests of the Church.

"We are aware of the constitutional objections to this change in our economy. We know that you are clearly prohibited, by the very first article of the constitution under which you act, from adding to the conference any delegation not provided for in that rule; but we believe that an Opinion expressed by the conference, and approved by the episcopacy, would induce the annual conferences to make the necessary alteration in the constitution: and we submit the consideration of the whole matter to the calm and deliberate attention which we are persuaded its importance demands, and which we do not doubt it will receive, determined cheerfully and cordially to submit to your decision."

During the session of the conference in May, 1824, some of the "Reformers," becoming dissatisfied with the principles of the compromise, formed a separate society, and claimed a representation in the General Conference as a natural and social right, deprecating its rejection by the General Conference as an evidence of a spiritual despotism utterly unworthy the character of the ministry of Jesus Christ. To effect their objects with the greater certainty, they immediately issued proposals for establishing a new periodical, called "Mutual Rights," its title being well calculated to impress the unwary reader with the erroneous idea, so much harped upon in those days of agitation, that the "Reformers" were the exclusive advocates of the "rights" of the lay members of our Church.

The formation of these societies, and the publication of this periodical, in which most inflammatory declamations were poured forth against our ministry and established usages, were considered, by the more sober and thinking part of our community, as incorporating the very schism in the Church which they deprecated as one of the worst evils with which it could be afflicted, except, indeed, its inundation by immorality. The fate, however, of those measures, so far as the General Conference was concerned, has been seen in the account given of the doings of the General Conference in 1824. The prayer of the memorialists was rejected, and the ground of right to a lay representation denied.

It is not necessary to trace the history of this unpleasant affair, in all its minutiae and various ramifications over different parts of the country, from that time until the secession was fully consummated, and a separate community established. Suffice it therefore to say, that matters went on from bad to worse, until it became necessary, in the opinion of those who watched over the Church in Baltimore, to save it and its institutions from dissolution, to call the malcontents to an account for their conduct.

At the Baltimore conference, in 1827, the Rev. D. B. Dorsey, who had connected himself with the "Reformers," was arraigned before his conference for recommending and circulating the "Mutual Rights;"

and during the course of his trial he avowed such principles, and made such declarations respecting his independent rights, as could not be approved of by the conference; and they therefore requested, as the mildest punishment they could inflict, the bishop to leave him without an' appointment for one year. From this decision he took an appeal to the General Conference; but, instead of waiting patiently until this ultimate decision could be had, he loudly censured the acts of the Baltimore conference in reference to his case, through the columns of "Mutual Rights," thus appealing from the constituted authorities of the Church to the popular voice, invoking from this very equivocal tribunal a decision in his favor. All this had a tendency to widen the breach, and to make a reconciliation the more hopeless.

One of the leading champions of this "reform" was the Rev. Nicholas Snethen, who had been a very useful and influential traveling preacher for many years, but was now located, and lived in the neighborhood of Baltimore. He was recognized as the writer of several articles, under fictitious signatures, in the "Wesleyan Repository" and "Mutual Rights," in which severe strictures were made upon our economy; and now, since action had commenced against the malcontents in the Baltimore conference, by which it was foreseen that others, implicated in the same warfare against the authorities and usages of the Church, would be called to answer for their conduct, Mr. Snethen avowed himself the author of these pieces, vauntingly placed himself in front of the reforming ranks, shouting, "Onward! brethren; onward!" pledging himself to suffer or triumph with them—thus exhibiting a spirit of moral heroism worthy of a better cause, and more befitting other times than those which called only for a bloodless warfare.

This conduct, however, brought forth a champion from the ranks of the local preachers, who, as he himself acknowledged, had been friendly to some slight changes in the structure of our church government, provided such changes should be thought expedient by the General Conference, and could be effected by pacific measures, without producing a convulsion in the body. He had long been an intimate and personal friend of Mr. Snethen, and therefore it was with some reluctance that he yielded to the paramount duty of sacrificing his personal friendship for the purpose of defending the "ancient landmarks," and of placing himself in opposition to the innovations in contemplation by the "Reformers." I allude to Doctor Thomas E. Bond, of Baltimore. In 1827 he published his "Appeal to the Methodists, in Opposition to the Changes proposed in their Church Government," which was prefaced by an epistolary dedication to the Rev. Nicholas Snethen. This appeared to take Mr. Snethen and his friends by surprise, as they seemed to expect least of all such an appeal from the source whence it came, while it acted as a charm upon the minds of those who loved the institutions and prayed for the perpetual union and prosperity of the Church. The able manner in which Dr. Bond treated the subject, and refuted the arguments and exposed the pretensions of the "Reformers," showed that he had thoroughly digested the questions at issue, had "counted the cost," and was prepared to abide the results of the contest. Having, therefore, balanced the weight of the arguments for and against the proposed innovation, and fully made up a judgment in favor of the Church and its institutions, he wrote from the fullness of his heart, and the following passage from his "Appeal" will show the confident manner in which he anticipated the result of this severe and long-protracted struggle. After giving the outlines of our church government, and the general system of itinerant operations, he introduces the following spirited remarks

"It is this system of church government, so simple in its structure and efficient in its operation, so tested by experience and justified by success, and, withal, so sanctified in the feelings and affections of our people by the endearing associations with which it stands connected, that we are now called upon, not to modify, but radically to change; not to mend in some of its less important details, but to alter in its fundamental principles, and to substitute for it a speculative scheme of government, inapplicable to our circumstances,

and therefore impossible to be effected; -- a scheme founded on abstract notions of natural rights, but which none of its advocates have attempted to exhibit in any visible or tangible shape or form, and therefore they have carefully avoided the discussion of the parts most important in any system, namely, its practicability and expediency. Happy for us, the scheme is not new. In Europe it has had its day of noise and strife, and has ceased to agitate the Church; and in this country Mr. O'Kelly started it more than thirty years ago, left the Church, and drew off several of the preachers with him. He lived to see the ruins of the visionary fabric he had labored to erect, and to mourn over the desolation which he had brought upon that part of the vineyard, where, as a Methodist preacher, he so faithfully and usefully labored, but which he had afterward turned out to be ravaged and destroyed by "republican Methodism." The formidable phalanx now arrayed against us may, it is feared, do us much harm, but we will take protection under that strong Arm which has heretofore defended us. Hitherto our history has shown that the great Head of the church had appointed us for a special work in his vineyard, and that he superintended and directed the labor, opening the way before our ministry, qualifying and sustaining them in their arduous labors, under circumstances which would have discouraged any but such as were assured of divine support, and who were prepared to believe in hope against hope. Great conflicts await us, but out of all the Lord will deliver us: while he is with us, the more we are oppressed, the more we shall multiply and grow. Let us be faithful to our calling -- let us watch unto prayer. The present revolutionary scheme of our disaffected members will share the fate of all the similar projects which have preceded it. Our children will read of it in history, but, ere they take our places in the Church, the troubled waters shall have heard the voice of Him who says to the winds and the waves, Be still, and they obey his voice."

This strong appeal, written throughout with a spirit and a style of argument which did honor to the head and heart of its author, exerted a most salutary influence upon all who had not fully committed themselves to the principles and measures of the "Reformers." While it drew the lines more distinctly which divided the contending parties, it tended to cement closer together those who had so long cherished the institutions of Methodism, and to arm them with weapons of defense. Hitherto there had been some neutralists, who were looking on, not indeed with cold indifference, but with an anxious suspense, watching the result of the movements, and weighing the respective arguments, for the purpose of forming an intelligent decision. These acknowledged themselves much indebted to Dr. Bond for throwing additional light upon this subject, and thus saving them from lapsing into the sickly spirit of "reform:" and the Appeal doubtless had the greater weight for having been issued from the local instead of the traveling ministry, because it was supposed that the former had identified themselves more generally than the latter with the reforming party.

In the mean time a pamphlet had been issued, as was erroneously supposed at the time under the sanction of the Union Society, by Rev. Alexander McCaine,<sup>3</sup> in which he attempted to prove that surreptitious means had been used in the establishment of our Church; that our episcopacy was spurious, gotten lip against the wishes and without the knowledge of Mr. Wesley thus impugning the motives and impeaching the honesty of such men as Coke, Asbury, Whatcoat, and all those venerable men who composed the General Conference of 1784, and assisted in the organization of our Church. This appeared to be the climax of absurdities in the doings of the adverse party, and to reveal designs upon the integrity and the very existence of our episcopacy, and all those regulations and usages which connected themselves with that feature of our Church economy, which could not be any longer tolerated with impunity. It was therefore thought, by the friends of order and the advocates of our Church authorities, that the time had fully come for action -- for such action as should test the solidity of our ecclesiastical structure, and the permanency of its foundation.

Indeed, these ungenerous attacks upon the best of men, most of whom were now dead, and therefore could not speak for themselves, aroused the spirits of those who had hitherto stood aloof from this controversy, and decided some who had been supposed to be friendly to the spirit of "reform" against the measure, inasmuch as they judged -- most conclusively, it is thought -- that a cause which could enlist in its behalf such unjustifiable means of attack and defense, could not be holy and good. This brought forth the late Bishop Emory, who was at that time an assistant book agent; and the "Defense of our Fathers" proved his competency to defend those venerable men from the aspersions thrown upon them by the author of the "History and Mystery of Methodist Episcopacy." This masterly defense of the men who organized our Church, and of the organization itself, its principles, measures, and results, procured for its author that need of praise that is justly due to a faithful son of the Church, to an acute and able reasoner, and to one whose industry in collecting and arranging facts for the basis of his argumentation evinced the depth and accuracy of his research. This production was therefore hailed with delight by the friends of the Church, and tended, with some others of a similar character, published about the same time, to prove that the theory of the "Reformers" was a visionary scheme, indefensible by any arguments drawn from Scripture, from the ancient records of the Church, from the analogy of things, or from any improper means used in either the organization or naming of the Methodist Episcopal Church. This complete refutation of the groundless assumptions of Mr. McCaine's book was read with great avidity, and procured for its author the thanks of all who wished well to our Zion.

But while these things tended to calm the fears of the timid, to confirm the wavering in the truth, and to strengthen the hearts of all who had heretofore reposed in the wisdom and integrity of our fathers in the gospel, they by no means satisfied those who appeared bent on carrying their measures at all hazards. On the contrary, their leaders seemed to struggle hard under disappointment, and to redouble their efforts in rallying their forces, and preparing them for victory or defeat, whenever the warfare should terminate. They had heretofore most evidently calculated on carrying with them many who now took a decided stand against them. This was a source of severe disappointment.<sup>4</sup> These showed, when the alternative was presented to their choice, that they loved Methodism better than its proposed substitute. The former they had tried, and found savory and healthful; the latter was an untried experiment, and judging from the fruit it had already produced, that it was not "good to make one wise, they declined the proffered boon as unworthy of their acceptance.

But, as before remarked, things had arrived at such a crisis in the city of Baltimore that it became necessary, in the opinion of those to whom the oversight of the Church was committed, to call some of the most prominent leaders in the work of "reform" to an account before the proper tribunals. Hence eleven local preachers and twenty-five lay members were regularly cited to appear before the preacher in charge of the Baltimore station, the Rev. James M. Hanson, to answer to the charge of "inveighing against our Discipline," "speaking evil of our ministers," and of violating the rule "which prohibits the members of the Church from doing harm, and requires them to avoid evil of every kind."

This general charge was amply sustained by a reference to the Constitution of the Union Society, by numerous quotations from "Mutual Rights," and from other sources. The delinquents were therefore found guilty, the local preachers were suspended, and the lay members expelled. While, however, these transactions were pending, before any decision was had, Dr. Bond once more threw himself in the gap, and endeavored to avert the suspended blow by acting the part of a mediator between the parties, and, if possible, thereby to prevent the storm from bursting on their heads. His efforts, however, were unavailing; the trials proceeded, and the penalty of the Discipline was finally inflicted, though with great reluctance,

upon all those who had been summoned to trial, with the exception of two lay members.

One of the specifications which was adduced to sustain the general charge was their advising and requesting the publication of the "History and Mystery of Methodist Episcopacy;" but as it was found, on further examination, that its author alone was responsible for writing and publishing that work, this specification was withdrawn in reference to all the accused except Alexander McCaine; and he therefore was summoned before another committee of local preachers, tried separately, found guilty, and accordingly suspended.

As the district conference of local preachers had been dissolved, the trial of those who had been suspended by the committee of inquiry was brought before the quarterly meeting conference of the Baltimore station. But before the trial proceeded to an issue, Dr. J. C. Green, of Virginia, volunteered his services as a mediator between the parties, and the trial was postponed for the purpose of giving ample time to test the result of the negotiation. It was, however, unavailing, and the trial proceeded, and terminated in finding guilty, and the consequent expulsion, of the accused local preachers; and as they did not appeal, as they might, to the annual conference, they were finally considered no longer members of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

To the lay members who had been found guilty before the act of expulsion was consummated, and with a view, if possible, to save himself and those concerned from the sad alternative which awaited them, Mr. Hanson sent each of the persons the following letter:--

"Baltimore, Nov. 23, 1827.

"Brother: You are hereby informed that the committee appointed to investigate the charges and specifications lately preferred against you as a member of the Union Society, have, by a unanimous decision, found you guilty of said charges, together with the first and second specifications.

"Most willingly, my brother, would I now dispense with the painful duty which devolves upon me, could I do so as an honest man, and without abandoning the interests of the Church. Or had I cause to believe that the course now about to be pursued would lead you to make suitable reparation to that Church whose ministers and discipline you have assailed and misrepresented, and to abstain from the like offenses against the peace and harmony of said Church in future, it would tend more than any other consideration to diminish the painfulness of the obligation which my present situation imposes upon me. For, be assured, whatever my own opinion may be in regard to the course you may have pursued, as a member of the Union society, I most devoutly wish and pray that you may be led by the good Spirit of God to take those steps which will leave you still in the possession of all the rights and privileges of church fellowship.

"You must be considered as the arbiter of your own destiny, my brother, in this matter. Your brethren of the committee, men who fear God, whose characters stand fair in the Church, and who have disclaimed all feeling of personal hostility against you, have pronounced you, as a member of the Union society, guilty of endeavoring to sow dissensions in the society or Church of which you are a member, and of speaking evil of the ministers of said Church. To this conclusion they have been conducted by a careful and patient examination of the documents put into their hands as evidence in the case. You must, therefore, plainly perceive, that the only ground on which expulsion from the Church can be avoided is an abandonment of the Union Society, with assurances that you will give no aid in future to any publication or measure calculated to cast reproach upon our ministers, or occasion breach of union among our members.

"Be good enough then, my brother, to answer in writing the following plain and simple questions: --

Will you withdraw forthwith from the Union Society?

Will you in future withhold your aid from such publications and measures as are calculated to cast reproach upon our ministers, and produce breach of union among our members?

"Yours, &c. James M. Hanson.

"P.S. Your answer will be expected in the course of four or five days."

After allowing sufficient time for deliberation, and receiving no answer, nor discovering any symptoms of reconciliation from any quarter, Mr. Hanson was compelled to the act, so exceedingly painful to an administrator of discipline, of pronouncing them excommunicated from the Methodist Episcopal Church. Thus was the separation, so long and so painfully anticipated, notwithstanding all the means used to prevent it, finally consummated, and the Church left to bleed under the wounds afflicted upon her by those whom she had once delighted to honor.

In the mean time similar proceedings were had in other places. We have already seen that the Union Society of Baltimore recommended that societies of the like character should be organized wherever a sufficient number of persons could be found friendly to the measures of the "Reformers." This recommendation had been complied with in a number of places; and wherever these societies existed, agitations and commotions, similar to those in Baltimore, had been the painful results. Hence, in the states of Tennessee and North Carolina, several members of these Union Societies had been tried and expelled from the Church for their refractory conduct, and for inveighing against the discipline and aspersing the character of the ministers of the Methodist Episcopal Church. And in addition to those eleven local preachers and twenty-two laymen who were expelled in Baltimore, about fifty females, friends of the excommunicated brethren, addressed a letter to the ruling preacher, Mr. Hanson, expressing their desire to withdraw from the Church, which they were permitted to do without further trial.

It may be necessary here to correct an erroneous opinion, which prevailed to some extent at the time, respecting the cause of complaint against the "Reformers," as they chose all along to call themselves.

Whoever will consult the writings of those days, in reference to this subject, will find complaints, on the part of the "Reformers," that an attempt was made, by the advocates for the present order of things, to suppress inquiry, to abridge the freedom of speech and of the press, and that these trials were instituted, in part at least, as a punishment for exercising this freedom on the subjects that were then litigated. This was a great mistake. It was for an abuse of this freedom, for indulging in personal criminations, injurious to individual character, that the delinquents were tried and finally condemned. This will appear manifest to every person who will impartially inspect the charges, the specifications, and the testimony selected from the "Mutual Rights" to support the accusations, and also from the report of the General Conference on petitions and memorials. It was, indeed, expressly avowed at the time by the prosecutors, and by all who had written on the subject, that they wished to suppress freedom of inquiry, either in writing or speaking, provided only that the debaters would confine their discussions to an investigation of facts and arguments, without impeaching the character and motives of those from whom they dissented.<sup>5</sup>

The expelled members in the city of Baltimore immediately formed themselves into a society, under the tide of "Associated Methodist Reformers;" and in the month of November, 1827 a convention assembled in

that city, composed of ministers and lay delegates who had been elected by the state conventions and Union Societies. This convention prepared a memorial to the General Conference. The memorial was presented, read, and referred to a committee, and the following report, drawn up by the late Bishop Emory, and unanimously adopted by the conference, will show the result:

"The committee to whom were referred certain petitions and memorials, for and against a direct lay and local representation in the General Conference, submit the following report: --

"Of those which propose this revolution in our economy, that which has been received from a convention of certain local preachers and lay members, held in the city of Baltimore in November last, is presumed to embody the general views -- of those who desire this change, and the chief arguments on which they rely. In framing a reply, in the midst of the various and pressing business of a General Conference, it cannot be reasonably expected that we should enter into minute details. Our remarks, of necessity, must be confined to a few leading topics, in condensed, yet, we trust, an intelligible form.

"As to the claim of right to the representation contended for, if it be a right which the claimants are entitled to demand, it must be either a natural or an acquired right. If a natural right, then, being founded in nature, it must be common to men, as men. The foundation of rights in ecclesiastical bodies, in our opinion, rests on a different basis. If it be alleged to be an acquired right, then it must have been acquired either in consequence of becoming Christians or of becoming Methodists. if the former, it devolves on the claimants to prove that this right is conferred by the holy Scriptures, and that they impose on us the corresponding obligation to grant the claim. That it is not 'forbidden' in the New Testament is not sufficient; for neither is the contrary 'forbidden.' Or if the latter be alleged, namely, that it has been acquired in consequence of becoming Methodists, then it must have been either by some conventional compact, or by some obligatory principle in the economy of Methodism, to which, as then organized, the claimants voluntarily attached themselves. Neither of these, we believe, either has been or can be shown. And until one at least of these be shown, the claim of right, as such, cannot, we think, have been sustained.

"But do the memorialists mean to say that they are entitled to their claim, as a matter of right, against the judgment and the voice of a confessedly very large majority of their brethren, both of the ministry traveling and local, and also of the lay members? or that in these circumstances, on any ground, the claim ought to be admitted?. We Could not have believed them capable of so Strange a position, had they not declared the opinion as prevailing among themselves, 'that the extension of the principle of representation to the members and the local preachers of the Church, by the General Conference, in compliance with a petition of this kind, at this conjuncture of time, would do more toward conciliating good feeling, restoring lost confidence among brethren, and confirming wavering minds, on all sides, than any other measure which can be adopted.'

"Now we 'speak advisedly' when we say, that, in our judgment, such a measure, 'at this conjuncture of time,' would have a precisely contrary effect. The ministers assembled in General Conference, coming so recently from all parts of the great field of our missionary labors, and having had, throughout its whole extent, free and constant intercourse both with traveling and local preachers, and also with our lay members, are, certainly, at least as well prepared as the memorialists could have been to form L correct judgment on this point; and their calm and deliberate judgment is clearly and unhesitatingly as above-stated. This we believe, too, to be the true state of the question, after it has been so zealously discussed, on the side of the memorialists, for now nearly eight years'; during almost the whole of which time, until very recently, the discussion has been conducted almost exclusively by their own writers.

"We are aware that it has been assumed, by some at least of those writers, that this repugnance to the change proposed, on the part of so great a proportion both of our local preachers and lay members, to say nothing of the itinerant preachers, is the result of ignorance or want of intellect. This we conceive to be at least not a very modest assumption. Our opinion, on the contrary, is, while we freely admit that there are men of respectable information and intelligence who desire the change, that there are, nevertheless, very many more, of at least equally respectable information and intelligence, who are opposed to it, whether on the ground of right, of consistent practicability, or of utility.

"With regard to our local brethren particularly, it is our decided judgment that the privileges and advantages in which they have participated, in this country, have much rather exceeded than fallen short of what was contemplated in their institution, in the original economy of Methodism, as founded by the venerable Wesley, either in Europe or in America. We cannot but regret to perceive, that the addition of privilege to privilege seems only to have had the effect of exciting some of our brethren to claim still more and more; and now to begin to demand them as matters of positive and inherent right. We are happy to be able to say 'some' only of our local brethren; for of the great body, even of themselves, we believe better things, though we thus speak. If; indeed, our members generally are tired of our missionary and itinerant system, and wish a change, then we could not be surprised if they should desire to introduce into our councils local men, whose views, and feelings, and interests, in the very nature and necessity of things, could not fail to be more local than those of itinerant men. And if to so powerful a local influence should be added, as would be added, the tendencies and temptations to locality which, in despite of all our better convictions, too often exist among ourselves, from domestic and personal considerations of a pressing character, we are free to confess our fears of the dangers to our itinerant economy which, in our opinion, could not fail, in time, to be the result. Now the preservation of the great itinerant system, unimpaired, in all its vital energies, we do conscientiously believe to be essential to the accomplishment of the grand original design of the economy of Methodism, to spread Scriptural holiness over these and other lands.

"The memorialists, we know, disavow any intention or desire to impair those energies, or to injure this system. Be it so. They can, however, only speak for themselves. They know not what may be the views of those who may come after them. And, in any event, our argument is, that the change proposed would, in its very nature, and from the inevitable connections of causes and effects, tend, gradually perhaps, yet not the less uncontrollably, to the results which we have mentioned.

"We know also that it has been insinuated that we adhere to the continuance of our present polity from motives of personal interest. For protection against such unkindness and injustice we rest on the good sense and candor of the community. It cannot but be well known that our present economy bears with a peculiar severity upon the personal and domestic comforts of the itinerant ministry. And even an enemy could scarcely fail to admit that, were we really ambitious of worldly interest, and of personal ease, and domestic comfort, we might have the discernment to perceive that the surest way to effect these objects would be to effect the changes proposed, and thus to prepare the way for the enjoyment of similar advantages, in these respects, to those now enjoyed by the settled ministry of other churches. And, indeed, were such a change effected, and should we even still continue itinerant, considering that, from the necessity of things, our wealthy and liberal friends would most generally be selected as delegates, we do not doubt that the change proposed might probably tend to increase our temporal comforts. We think this the more probable, because, if such a direct representation of the laity were admitted, their constituents might ultimately become obliged, by some positive provisions, fully to make up and pay whatever allowances might be made to the ministry; which allowances, in this event, might also more

properly acquire the nature of a civil obligation. At present our economy knows no such thing. The great Head of the church himself has imposed on us the duty of preaching the gospel, of administering its ordinances, and of maintaining its moral discipline among those over whom the Holy Ghost, in these respects, has made us overseers. Of these also, namely, of gospel doctrines, ordinances, and moral discipline, we do believe that the divinely instituted ministry are the divinely author

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