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# The Methodist Protestant Manual.



THE  
METHODIST PROTESTANT  
MANUAL,

A CONCISE TREATISE UPON THE  
PRINCIPLES OF GOVERNMENT OF THE M. P. CHURCH,

IN CONTRAST WITH THE

Polity of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

WITH A SYNOPSIS OF  
METHODIST PROTESTANT CHURCH HISTORY.

“Whenever the members of a church resign the right of suffrage, and of discussing freely and fearlessly the conduct of their rulers, whether it be done by direct concession, or indirectly by attaching themselves to and continuing within the pale of a church where such a system of polity obtains, they renounce to a fearful extent one of the first principles of the Protestant religion, and bring dishonor upon its name.”—REV. H. B. BASCOM, D. D.

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BY A MEMBER OF THE VIRGINIA CONFERENCE.

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## P R E F A C E .

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WE are sometimes asked the question, “What is the difference between the Methodist Protestant and Methodist Episcopal Churches?” or, “In what respect do the two Methodist Churches differ?” &c. Our object, therefore, in presenting this little book before the public, is to afford a facility to such as may desire it, to become acquainted with the principles and polity of the Methodist Protestant Church, in contradistinction from the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Justice to the Methodist Protestant Church demands that such an exposition of the distinguishing features of her polity should be set forth, in order that those who may desire an acquaintance with her true character and position, may be readily led to embrace a correct understanding of the same.

Again, it is sometimes asserted, either through ignorance or for some other cause less excusable, “that there is but very little difference between the two churches,”—that “the difference which exists between them is a thing of nothing,” &c.

\*



The pages of this little volume, we trust, will fairly present to the reader the magnitude of the "*little difference*," and demonstrate to the candid and judicious mind, that the questions which separate the Methodist Protestant and Methodist Episcopal Churches, in a denominational point of view, so far from being "a thing of nothing," actually constitute the principles which have ever been dear to the hearts of American republicans.

The great questions of the age relate to government. The government of the State concerns the citizens of the State. The government of the church equally concerns the membership of the church. If unjust regulations or administration of the affairs of the State affect the rights of its citizens, even so may the administration of the governmental affairs of the church, upon unscriptural principles, affect the rights of her membership. Hence we infer that the question of church government is a subject that should receive the candid attention and examination of every member of the body of Christ.

To the membership of the Methodist Protestant Church this little book may serve as a manual, or book of reference; explanatory of the principles of our denomination, and as a compendium of events and transactions connected with the his-



tory of the church. And with the prayerful hope that this production of my feeble pen will present the position and polity of the church of my choice, fairly and favorably, to the attention of the reader, and at the same time defend her from unjust imputations, it is submitted to the impartial examination of every friend of religious liberty.

THE AUTHOR.



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# THE METHODIST PROTESTANT MANUAL.

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## CHAPTER I.

Reasons for being a Methodist—Reasons for not being an Episcopal Methodist—Reasons for being a Methodist Protestant.

### REASONS WHY I AM A METHODIST.

1. I AM a Methodist, because I do most sincerely believe the doctrines received by the Methodists, as taught by John and Charles Wesley, those bright and shining lights in the church of God.

2. I am a Methodist, because I believe these doctrines correspond with the pure word of God, and therefore commend themselves to my confidence and faith.

3. I am a Methodist, because Methodism teaches the two grand gospel axioms.—1. Faith in our Lord Jesus Christ as our only and all sufficient Saviour.—2. Loving obedience to him in all his commandments.

4. I am a Methodist, because Methodism recognizes the Holy Scriptures as an infallible rule of faith and practice.



5. I am a Methodist, because the doctrines of Methodism teach me the great Bible principle of "Holiness unto the Lord."

6. I am a Methodist, because I believe that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord."

7. I am a Methodist, because I believe the definition a distinguished divine once gave of Methodism to be a truism—"Methodism is Christianity in earnest."

#### REASONS WHY I AM NOT AN EPISCOPAL METHODIST.

1. I am not an Episcopal Methodist, because the polity of the church is anti-republican.

2. I am not an Episcopal Methodist, because the laity and local ministry of the church have no voice nor representation in the department in which rules are made by which they are to be governed.

3. I am not an Episcopal Methodist, because the laity of the church have no right as such, according to discipline, to nominate, vote for, appoint, or elect the officers of the church.

4. I am not an Episcopal Methodist, because the whole of the government of the church, the legislative, judicial, and executive departments are in the hands of the itinerant ministry alone, and all history goes to prove that the ministry are liable to abuse power.

5. I am not an Episcopal Methodist, because in principle I am a republican in state, and if consistent, I must be also, as a matter of course, a republican in church.



6. I am not an Episcopal Methodist, because the polity of the government in its proscription of the laity, from any voice or weight in the governmental affairs of the church, is not sustained by the spirit, or genius, or precepts of the New Testament.

7. I am not an Episcopal Methodist, because the government of the church is aristocratic—in the hands of a privileged class; while the government of the state is republican—controlled by the people.

#### REASONS WHY I AM A METHODIST PROTESTANT.

1. I am a Methodist Protestant, because the government of the church is founded upon republican principles, or the “mutual rights” of the ministry and laity.

2. I am a Methodist Protestant, because the laity of the church have a delegated representation in the rule-making department, in which rules and regulations are made for their government.

3. I am a Methodist Protestant, because the laity of the church have, by its constitution, the right guaranteed to them to vote for, and elect their own church officers, in accordance with the genius and principles of the New Testament.

4. I am a Methodist Protestant, because the church has a most admirable constitution, which carefully defines and guards the rights and privileges of the ministry and laity, so that the prerogatives of the one may not be inroached upon by the other.



5. I am a Methodist Protestant, because in principle I am an American republican in state, and as my republican principles are consistent, I am also a republican in church.

6. I am a Methodist Protestant, because the republican polity of the church, established upon Bible principles, so happily corresponds with the civil polity of the State.

7. I am a Methodist Protestant, because I am a republican, both in church and State.



## CHAPTER II.

The ecclesiastical rights of ministry and laity defined—  
Composition of the Convention which formed the Constitution and Discipline of the M. P. Church—The elementary principles and arguments thereon.

THE government of the Methodist Protestant Church recognizes the “MUTUAL RIGHTS” of the ministry and laity.

Upon the inalienable Bible rights of these two grades in her communion her government is founded. A government having for its object the best interests of an ecclesiastical organization, could rest so well upon no other foundation.

The ministry, as a component part of the church, are possessed of certain rights and privileges pertaining to the office. The nature of the duties and obligations of the office demonstrates this proposition apart from all other arguments.

To deny that the laity are likewise possessed of ecclesiastical rights, as they constitute the great numerical strength of the church, would be an act of injustice to reason, a contradiction to the book of revelation, and to the records of sacred history.

Hence in the nature of things, the ministry as a class in arranging a system of government for the church, might better understand what rules and regulations would best secure their rights and privileges as a component part of the church; but, *from the nature of things*, could not so well understand and devise such rules and regulations



as would be best adapted, to secure the rights and privileges of the laity. The same argument is equally applicable to the laity with respect to themselves and the ministry. For if a body of ministers, independent of the laity, were to convene for the purpose of making church regulations, or adopting a system of ecclesiastical government for both ministry and laity, as men are not infallible, it is possible that self might be *first* provided for, and the rights of others not be so carefully considered. The same argument may be applied to the laity with respect to themselves and the ministry.

Therefore, a delegated convention or body, composed of both the ministry and laity, acting in the name and by the authority of their constituents, can best devise such a system of polity as will secure and guard the rights and privileges of all, and thereby secure the harmony and welfare of the whole.

Of such was the composition of the convention which adopted the Constitution and Discipline of the Methodist Protestant Church; therefore, the beauty and harmony of the “Mutual Rights” of the ministry and laity, as developed and laid down in her most excellent book of discipline.

#### HER ELEMENTARY PRINCIPLES.

On these her Constitution and Discipline are founded. They are :—

1. “A Christian Church is a society of believers in Jesus Christ, and is of divine institution.”



*Argument.*—Such being the composition of a christian church, the Bible must of course become to that church a rule of faith and practice. They are, therefore, bound by this rule of faith to practice the doctrines and observe the ordinances of the Gospel. To cease to do so would be to cease to be christian. The church, then, being composed of individuals united together for the purpose of worshiping God, and the furtherance of the Gospel, has the inherent right of selecting or appointing its own officers. Upon this principle the primitive churches acted and apostles practiced.—Acts vi, 3; 1 Cor. xvi, 3.

The immutable principles of Bible republicanism claim the exercise of this prerogative for the church. For the ministry to claim and exercise this prerogative, independent of the church, would amount to an exhibition of ecclesiastical despotism.

2. “Christ is the only Head of the Church, and the word of God the only rule of faith and conduct.”

*Argument.*—This acknowledgment that “Christ is the only Head of the Church,” is a contradiction to the Popish claim, long insisted upon, even among some Protestants, that the ministry are entitled to rule the church, *jure divino*, by divine right, independent of the laity. Such a proposition bears the mark of absurdity upon its face; and so long as the Bible is regarded as the only rule of faith and practice, the vanity of such pretensions is easily made apparent by the precepts laid down upon its pages. The Pope and the Bible can never agree. The former contends



for his own supremacy. The latter says, "ALL YE ARE BRETHREN." When the ministry undertake to legislate for the church as a body, independent of the laity or their suffrages, they lose sight of the beautiful principles of the "Mutual Rights" inculcated in the New Testament.

Dr. Bascom once penned this Scriptural sentiment: "The assumption that absolute power in the affairs of church government is a sacred deposit in the hands of the ministry, libels the genius and charities of the New Testament."

3. "No person who loves the Lord Jesus Christ, and obeys the Gospel of our Saviour, ought to be deprived of church membership."

*Argument.*—If ye love me, says Jesus, keep my commandments; therefore, the Christian is to be judged by the moral code taught in the Gospel. Whilst his moral deportment is in unison with this code, his right to church membership cannot be annulled upon the principles of Christianity. The time has been, in the history of our own heaven-favored land, when men, blameless in a moral point of view, were deprived of church membership, upon no other charge than a difference of opinion honestly expressed about the governmental polity of the church to which they belonged. To disfranchise a christian man of the privileges of the church for no other cause than this, in the face of the Bible, betrays an absence of the charity of the Bible, and is an exhibition of ecclesiastical tyranny, unworthy of the age in which we live.

4. "Every man has an inalienable right to



private judgment in matters of religion, and an equal right to express his opinion in any way which will not violate the laws of God, or the rights of his fellow men."

*Argument.*—This is the language of religious liberty, the language of Protestantism, and the doctrine of the Bible. Spiritual despotism arrays itself against it. But our minds with which we reason, the judgment which we are compelled in candor to form upon the testimony addressed to our understanding, and that conscience by which we feel, all, all call for the free exercise of these rights by us as moral agents. Nay, even our faith, our hope, and our love, as Christians, claim the exercise of such rights.

Deny the Christian these rights, and we shall enslave both the mind and conscience, and strip him of that which develops the dignity of the constitution identified with him in his creation. Spiritual tyranny is therefore at war with every principle of pure and undefiled religion.

5. "Church trials should be conducted on Gospel principles only, and no minister or member should be excommunicated except for immorality, the propagation of unchristian doctrines, or neglect of duties enjoined by the word of God."

*Argument.*—Justice, Bibleism and Religion are all well represented in this article. A church trial, conducted on gospel principles, forbids the least partiality to be manifested towards one party more than another, and demands the full and untrammelled exercise of all the rights and privileges known and defined by rule or law in the



case, by all the parties, and the clearest exercise of ample justice toward all concerned. A trial conducted upon any other principles, is derogatory to the justice of the christian religion, and is incompatible with the true interests of the church of Christ.

6. "The pastoral or ministerial office and duties are of divine appointment, and all elders in the church of God are equal, but ministers are forbidden to be lords over God's heritage, or to have dominion over the faith of the saints."

*Argument.*—The office and duties of the minister are of a solemn and responsible character. He professes to believe that he is moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon himself this sacred office. His solemn duties are to win souls to Christ, and to be an example to the flock over which the Holy Ghost has made him overseer. But to lord it over God's heritage is incompatible with the spirit of Christ, and inconsistent with the purity and justice that belong to the ministerial office.

The great beauty and excellency that pertain to the sacred calling, consist in that example of faith, love, zeal, and holiness of life which the minister is called to exhibit in his life and labors before his charge. He who is called to feed the flock of Christ, and to be an example to it, was never called to tyrannize over it. All Christians are brethren in Christ; therefore, a call to the office and work of the ministry affords no reason or argument why an individual so called should presume to exercise a lordly government over the church without its consent fairly expressed.



7. “The church has a right to form and enforce such rules and regulations only as are in accordance with the Holy Scriptures, and may be necessary, or have a tendency to carry into effect the great system of practical Christianity.”

*Argument.*—The New Testament Scriptures furnish us with the principles, rather than the form of government for the church. The province of the church, then, is to mould these principles into such form as will best secure the rights and privileges of all pertaining to her communion, and carry into effect the great principles and doctrines of Christianity. But in order to mould such a form of government, the church should act in a legislative capacity. Her proper ecclesiastical law-makers are those whom she may appoint by her suffrages to act for her. The ministry and the laity constitute the church. Her legislature may, therefore, with the greatest propriety, be constituted of these two classes, and thereby fitly represent the true interests and views of both; thereby confidence and harmony will be secured and maintained, and a vigorous efficiency imparted to her action.

8. “Whatever power may be necessary to the formation of rules and regulations, is inherent in the ministers and members of the church; but so much of that power may be delegated from time to time, upon a plan of representation, as they may judge necessary and proper.”

*Argument.*—The just, the equitable and scriptural doctrine of *ecclesiastical republicanism*, is fairly laid down in the preceding article. The



right of authority to legislate is defined as belonging to the WHOLE CHURCH; consequently, if one portion of the church arrogate to itself the right to legislate, and make rules for the government of the other, it is a practical exhibition of tyranny of a dangerous tendency. As the church is composed of the ministry and laity, and its governmental regulations are designed to guard the religious rights, and promote the spiritual interests of all within its pale, it should receive its form and structure from the delegated authority of "*the whole church*," that it may not only guard the religious rights of the whole, but be sustained by the confidence and esteem of the entire communion.

9. "It is the duty of all ministers and members of the church to maintain godliness and oppose all moral evil."

*Argument.*—The doctrine here laid down is a truism, because it is Bibleism. So long as the christian ministry and membership are the light of the world and the salt of the earth, the church and the world have a right to expect at their hands, this great christian duty, by which the members of the spiritual kingdom of Christ afford evidence that they are not of this world. Christianity, thus practically illustrated, exercises her salutary influence upon the world, sinners are converted to Christ, and peace and prosperity become attendant glories of the church.

10. "It is obligatory on ministers of the gospel to be faithful in the discharge of their pastoral and ministerial duties; and it is also obliga-



tory on the members, to esteem ministers highly for their work's sake, and to render them a righteous compensation for their labors."

*Argument.*—Fidelity on the part of the ministry, to the solemn trust committed to them, secures the esteem, in the present age of the church, of all who love the ways of godliness. But a time-serving ministry have ever been the bane of the church of God. The only pastor needed by the flock of Christ is a *faithful* one, such as would be a living example to it of love, zeal, and devotion to the cause of Christianity.

The obligation on the part of the membership to esteem such a ministry for their work's sake is entirely compatible with the relationship that exists between them, as they are required to follow the ministry as they follow Christ. The obligation likewise on the part of the membership, "to render a righteous compensation to them for their labors," is a doctrine laid down by the apostle Paul, 1 Cor. ix, 13, 14. Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.

A righteous compensation, then, as understood in the article above, is that "compensation" mutually understood between pastor and people, in accordance with such rules as the church may have adopted in reference to this subject. The interest and welfare of the church require her to support her ministry who devote their time and talents faithfully to her service. To enable them to do this *efficiently*, we argue the church should afford them a competent support. If the pastor



minister unto them in spiritual things, it is their duty to minister unto him in carnal things. The great apostle of the Gentiles tells us, "If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his." When this spirit dwells in the hearts of both pastor and people, but little difficulty will be encountered on this point. The aim on both sides will be, *to know what is duty and to do it.*

11. "The church ought to secure to all her official bodies the necessary authority for the purposes of good government, but she has no right to create any distinct or independent [sovereignities."

*Argument.*—Her true interests require this authority thus secured. A written and well defined CONSTITUTION has ever proved the best safeguard for liberty, either civil or religious. Hence the welfare of the church requires it, as well as the state. Without this, unfair innovation may intrude itself, and unjust administration follow in its train.

A good government consists in three things: A good constitution, good laws, and a faithful and impartial administration. If the church or state fail to obtain ALL these, she also fails to obtain ALL the blessings pertaining to good government. Then, but not till then, the sentiment of Pope becomes a truism:

"Let wits and kings about their plans contest,  
That government best administered is the best."

A distinct and independent sovereignty in the church, has ever proved itself to be incompatible



with its purity and harmony. A certain intelligent writer of the present century has recorded the sentiment,—“Episcopacy is a beautiful fabric reared upon the ruins of piety.”



## CHAPTER III.

Constitution of reformers at Baltimore, in 1830—Character and qualifications of the reformers—The Constitution formed by them—Remarks upon the principles contained in that most admirable Constitution—Objections urged to the claim set up by divine right to rule—Advantages of lay delegation in the Annual Conferences—Reply of the General Conference of the M. E. Church, in 1824, to the petitioners for lay rights—Difference in the government policy of the M. Protestant, and M. E. Church shown by comparison—The relation of the ministry to the church, and of the church to the ministry.

ON the 12th of November, 1828, a convention of delegates met in the city of Baltimore, to consider the condition of those Methodist reformers who had been expelled from the church on account of favoring a reform in its ecclesiastical polity, and of those who had felt themselves bound, by a sense of duty, to withdraw from its communion on account of such unjust and high-handed measures. The convention adopted the seventeen articles for the government of the "Associated Methodist Churches," and made arrangements for another convention, to meet in Baltimore, in November, 1830.

This convention of delegates from the associated Methodist churches, met in Baltimore, on the 2d of November, 1830, and adopted the articles of elementary principles laid down in the preceding chapter, upon which they proceeded to devise and frame our most admirable Constitution and Discipline.



The constitution being the law of laws, defines and guards the mutual rights of the ministry and laity, and stands as a landmark to govern church legislation; consequently the Discipline is founded upon the Constitution. The whole stands as a monument of the wisdom and piety of the men who framed it. The true principles of ecclesiastical republicanism shine brightly in all its features.

The mutual rights of the ministry and laity constitute its vital breath. The convention was composed of men who had been brought up in the school of Episcopal Methodism, where no constitution guarded and defined the rights of the membership. A school in which the laity and local ministry were taught that they had no right to representation, or voice in the rule-making department of the church. A school in which they had witnessed the abuse of power in the hands of the itinerant ministry, and had beheld their local ministers and lay brethren cast out of the church, without even the semblance of a charge of immorality being brought against them;—and all this too for entertaining the opinion that they, as members of the church of Christ, were possessed of ecclesiastical rights;—and that by those rights they ought to be entitled to representation in the legislative department of the church. They had seen with their own eyes this practical illustration of ecclesiastical despotism; some of them had even felt its cold oppressive hand, and by sad experience, were prepared to understand what was best adapted to their wants and interests in entering into a new ecclesiastical organization.



As our forefathers, who had suffered from the oppression of British rule, when they had thrown off all allegiance to the mother country, were prepared to frame and set up a civil government for themselves, which, for its justice and equity, has become the admiration of the world, being hated only by tyrants and despots; even so with the Methodist reformers, in 1830.

The convention was composed of no privileged class, but was constituted of the *ministerial* and *lay delegates* elected by their brethren of the associated Methodist churches; hence, the rights of all were carefully guarded.

The Constitution, Article I, says: "This association shall be denominated, THE METHODIST PROTESTANT CHURCH, comprising the associated Methodist Churches."

*Argument.*—It was first moved in the convention that the name should be "The Republican Methodist Church," but the title contained in the article above being offered as a substitute, it was adopted. But still the name which the church bears is significant of the principles of her ecclesiastical polity. Those who had been expelled on account of their principles of reform, and those who had withdrawn on account of such an unfeeling exhibition of practical tyranny in the church of their choice, had united themselves together in societies, denominated the "Associated Methodist Churches," and in perfecting their ecclesiastical organization, they determined that their denominational cognomen should stand, and read, as a living protest (not against the doctrines,



but) against the *anti-republican* character of the polity of the Methodist E. Church, from which they had been so unjustly exiled. Hence the name, METHODIST PROTESTANT.

Article ii relates to terms of membership in the church. But one, and only one condition is required, viz: “*A desire to flee from the wrath to come, and be saved by grace through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, with an avowed determination to walk in all the commandments of God blameless.*”

But those who may continue therein, must give evidence of their desire and determination, by conforming to such rules of moral discipline as the word of God requires.

*Argument.*—The condition of membership, as laid down in this article, is entirely compatible with the great and leading doctrines of christianity. It requires what the Bible requires, and nothing more: and certainly brings before us the great and good book as the only rule of faith and practice. He who has the desire awakened in him to flee the wrath to come, will not be slow to adopt the *whole system* of the moral government of the gospel, from a sense of humble obedience to Christ.

But the question is sometimes asked, would it not be a better mode to receive applicants for church-membership upon a relation of their experience, by which the church might judge of their faith, whether it be evangelical or not?

We reply:

1. If the church were possessed of an *infalli-*



*ble rule* to apply to the individual case, as a test of sincerity and soundness, it might; and,

2. If the church were herself clothed with *infallibility* of judgment by which to determine, it might; but,

3. In the absence of this *infallibility of judgment*, and that *infallible rule*, no advantage would be gained, not already possessed.

Churches which receive applicants into their communion upon the relation of an experience, are as much perplexed, and as often deceived in the lives and walk of such members, as those churches which receive their applicants upon the simple desire to flee the wrath to come, and be saved by grace through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

#### COMPOSITION OF THE ANNUAL CONFERENCES.

The composition, powers, and authority of an annual conference are defined by the seventh article of the Constitution.

In regard to the composition of an annual conference, it lays down the following:

“1. There shall be held annually within the limits of each district, a conference, to be denominated the Annual Conference, composed of all the ordained itinerant ministers belonging to the district; that is, all ministers properly under the stationing authority of the conference; and of one delegate from each circuit and station for each of its itinerant ministers; provided, however, that each circuit and station shall have at least one delegate.”



*Argument* — From the article above quoted, it is evident that the framers of the Constitution intended that the annual conferences should be composed, as nearly as possible, of an equal number of ministers and laymen; that the true interests of the church required it, and justice and reason demanded it.

But against this principle the lovers of itinerant ministerial supremacy have urged the argument:—

1. That the ministry have a divine right to rule and govern the church, and consequently to regulate and control its internal affairs.

2. That the laity are too little acquainted with ecclesiastical affairs, to deliberate in council with the ministry to an advantage to the church.

To the first argument, viz: that the ministry have a divine right to rule and govern the church, I reply:

1. Such a proposition is not, and cannot be sustained by the word of God.

2. There is nothing to be found in the nature of the call to the office of the ministry, nor in the preaching of the word, nor in the administration of the ordinances, to support such an assumption.

3. Therefore, the proposition that the ministry have a divine right to rule and govern the church, is a fallacy, and has no foundation in truth.

#### THE ADVANTAGES OF LAY DELEGATION IN THE ANNUAL CONFERENCES.

The question may be asked, what advantage



will be gained, or what benefit will be derived by the introduction of lay representation into the annual conferences?

I reply, much every way.

1. The burden of finance or church expenses devolves upon the laity. Therefore, inasmuch as it would be unjust for a people to be taxed without representation, the conferences and the church would both be benefited by the introduction of lay delegation into the conferences.

2. The annual conferences supply the circuits and stations with pastors for the year; this could not be done so effectually without the aid and counsel of lay delegation:—as by this means the wishes, wants and condition of such fields of labor are best made known; hence better judgment may be exercised in affording ministerial supply to such points.

3. By the introduction of the laity into the annual conferences, a greater degree of confidence will be promoted and more harmony secured, as well as more efficiency of action imparted to the whole.

4. Furthermore, a republican form is more just and equitable in its principles than any other form or system of government; and as mutual rights look to the rights of both the ministry and laity, the Methodist Protestant Church has made ample provision for the interests of all, and the admission of lay representation into her annual and general conferences is a guarantee of her devotion to the great and leading principles of Bible republicanism.



## COMPOSITION AND POWERS OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE.

Articles eighth and ninth define the composition and powers of the General Conference. This body meets once in every four years, and may be properly denominated the legislature of the church, as it is the rule-making department which adopts, amends, or frames rules for the government of the church.

The first clause of second section, eighth art., says: "The number of representatives to which each district may be entitled shall be elected at the time and place of holding the annual conference of the district, next preceding the sitting of the General Conference, by the joint ballot of an electoral college, composed of the itinerant ministers and delegates belonging to the annual conference, and of one minister who is not under the stationing authority of the conference, provided there be such, from each circuit and station within the limits of the district. The minister thus added from each circuit and station shall be elected at the time and place of holding the quarterly conference, by the minister in his circuit or station, not under the stationing power of the annual conference."

The above section of the Constitution fairly demonstrates that the Methodist Protestant Church repudiates the doctrine that the ministry have a divine right to rule and govern the church. Hence Article xii, Section 2, of the Constitution, provides that "Every minister and preacher, and



every white lay male member, in full communion and fellowship, having attained to the age of twenty-five years, and having been in full membership two years, shall be eligible as a representative in the General Conference." Therefore, in the law or rule-making department of the church, republicanism is infused and ingrafted in all its beauty, and the representative principle stands out in bold relief before us.

When the reformers petitioned the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, in 1824, praying that body so to modify the government of the church as to admit lay delegation into the rule-making department, and claiming this as "a right" and "privilege," on the part of the local ministry and laity to be thus represented in the department of the church in which rules were made for their government, they were answered in a circular sent out by the General Conference, in the following words: "PARDON US IF WE KNOW NO SUCH RIGHTS, IF WE DO NOT COMPREHEND SUCH PRIVILEGES." And in the same famous document, the General Conference styled the itinerant ministry "*the divinely authorized expounders of moral doctrines and discipline.*" How high and pompous, how haughty and arrogant, are such pretensions and such claims!

Behold, then, the world-wide difference in the ecclesiastical polity and principles of the Methodist Protestant and Methodist Episcopal Churches!

In the rule-making department of the M. E. Church, none but an itinerant minister is permitted to take a seat as a member, and the local min-



istry and laity are informed that their “*rights*” and “*privileges*” to representation there are not known.

In the Methodist Protestant Church “every minister and preacher, (either itinerant or local,) and every white lay male member, in full communion and fellowship, having attained to the age of twenty-five years, and having been in full membership two years,” is eligible to a seat in the General Conference, and this “*right*” and “*privilege*” secured by the Constitution.

*Which of the two systems, we now inquire, is republican, right and just?*

*Again, if republicanism be right in state, can it be wrong in church? And if anti-republicanism or aristocracy be wrong in state, can it be right in church?* We leave the reader to furnish the answers.

With respect to the “*rights*” and “*privileges*” of the ministry and laity, in relation to the government of the church, we hold the following sentiment of Dr. H. B. Baseom to be as unerringly true as truth itself: “Ministers and private Christians, according to the New Testament, are entitled to equal rights and privileges,—an identity of interests implies an equality of rights. A monopoly of power, therefore, by the ministry, is an usurpation of the rights of the people. No power on the part of the ministry can deprive the people legitimately of their elective and representative rights.”



## THE POWERS OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE.

Article ix, Section 1, of the Constitution, reads thus: "1. The General Conference shall have power to make rules and regulations for the itinerant, missionary, literary, and every other department of the church, recognized by this Constitution."

*Argument.*—From this section of the Constitution, it is apparent that the General Conference is clothed with power and authority to make rules and regulations for all the great interests of the church. Now, inasmuch as the laity constitute the great body of the church, and contribute almost the whole amount raised for the purpose of meeting the expenses of the church establishment, it is certainly important that they should be identified with the ministry in making legislative regulations and rules for the general welfare, and we might regard it as worse than a solecism, for the ministry to assume to themselves the right to legislate and make rules for the government of the whole church independent of the laity.

The pulpit, the press, and the colleges of learning, are powerful engines, when wielded by the church, to effect her purposes. When all these are controlled and regulated by the ministry alone, to the exclusion of the laity, *it cannot with fairness be said that they belong to the church*; for the reason that *the ministry are not the church*, but a small portion of it, and the laity, who constitute the great mass, have nothing at all to do with the government of these powerful agencies



Under such circumstances, the pulpit, the press, and institutions of learning would belong to, and would be controlled by the ministry, and not by the church:—because the ministry are not the church, but the servants of the church,—and the servants of the church have no right, either expressed or implied, to lord it over God's heritage.

*The church does not belong to the ministry, but the ministry belong to the church, for the ministry is the gift of God to the church.*

With these views before us, who can fail to admire the beauty and excellency of the Constitution of the Methodist Protestant Church, which provides that the highest legislative department, the General Conference, shall be composed of “*an equal number of ministers and laymen?*” The whole church being represented in that body which has cognizance of the pulpit, the press, and the institutions of learning, those great effective levers, they may, with great propriety, be regarded as belonging strictly to the church, because they are controlled by the church.

I conclude this chapter with a sentiment of Dr. H. B. Bascom: “In the momentous affairs of government nothing should be made the exclusive property of a few, which by right belongs to all, and may be safely and advantageously used by the rightful proprietors.”



## CHAPTER IV.

Right of Suffrage in the M. P. Church—The laity cannot surrender their rights to the ministry with safety—Extract from the Speech of Rev. W. A. Smith, of Virginia, in the General Conference, at St. Louis, in 1850—Eligibility to office—Rights and privileges enjoyed in the M. P. Church not enjoyed in the M. E. Church—Church government, as called by some “a thing of nothing,” considered—Doctrines held by the General Conferences of 1824–8 upon lay rights—Hon. Reverdy Johnson’s opinion of the government of the Methodist Episcopal Church—Judge Nelson’s, delivered in the United States District Court.

RIGHTS OF SUFFRAGE AND ELIGIBILITY TO OFFICE IN  
THE METHODIST PROTESTANT CHURCH.

In defining the extent of the right of suffrage, the twelfth article of the Constitution, section first, says: “Every minister and preacher, and every white lay male member, in full communion and fellowship, having attained the age of twenty-one years, shall be entitled to vote in all cases.”

*Argument.*—Voting is the result of republicanism,—and where there is no republicanism there is no voting. A republican government is a government of the people, and not a government of the one-man power. Hence, the propriety and utility of the article above. The “cases” as coming within the comprehension of the above clause may be summed up thus:

1. When an individual may be brought to trial before the whole society by his own choice;
2. In the election of class leaders;



3. In the election of trustees to hold the church property ;

4. In the reception of persons into membership.

5. In the election of lay delegates to the annual conference ;

6. In the appointment of committees of trial of accused members.

The General Conference of 1850 expressed its opinion by its vote, that females and minors possess the right to vote in the election of class leaders, in the appointment of committees of trial of accused members, and in cases where trials are brought before the whole church.

Each individual church has its own interests with which the membership feel themselves identified ; and by their suffrages or votes they have the right to express their opinion or choice, as to the measures or men they prefer, in order to carry out the measures or meet the interests of the church.

These are some of the privileges afforded us by church republicanism, which is but another name for religious liberty.

But the question may be asked, may not the laity with propriety and safety surrender their right of suffrage into the hands of the ministry, and suffer the governmental concerns and interests of the church to come entirely under their control ? To which I reply :

1. If the ministry were all capable of using power without abusing it,—and were all capable of acting without feeling the warping influences of partiality, or of yielding to the blinding effects of



prejudice,—such a surrender into the hands of the ministry might be made with safety.

2. But, inasmuch as ministers are men of like passions with others, and the whole history of the christian church goes to prove that justice and judgment have never been as well administered when the laity yielded the government into their hands, as when they retained their full share,—

3. Therefore, it is *always unsafe* for the laity to surrender their rights and privileges into the hands of the ministry, because, “the march of power is ever onward, and its tremendous tendency is to accumulation.”\*

A wise, benevolent and judicious man might administer a despotic government to the advantage of the governed. But what would his opposite do? The government of Imperial Rome was despotic. The wise and benevolent Augustus administered its laws with great justice and moderation. The same government produced a Nero, whose tyrannical administration was the most dreadfully oppressive the world has ever felt. “Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty,” is a political maxim, and we can furnish no reason why it should not become an ecclesiastical one, as “civil and religious liberty are intimately connected; they usually live and die together.”†

\* Dr. Fisk.

† Bascom.



*Extract from the Speech of Rev. W. A. Smith, of Virginia, in the General Conference of the M. E. Church, South, at St. Louis, 1850 :*

“The ministers of the Methodist Episcopal Church are fully competent to abuse their power ; are as liable to it, perhaps, as any other body of good men. \* \* \* Time was when we cherished the hope that no great abuse of authority by the General Conference was likely. That day has gone by. Time has put his seal upon that idle conceit of what some dare to call idle brains, and proved that ministers are as liable to abuse their authority as any other class of men. The lawless act of the majority in 1844 proved it. Near 500,000 ministers and laymen were oppressed and trodden down by an overshadowing majority. In disregard of all right, and reckless of all consequences, they carried out their own measures.”

Dr. Smith once held a different doctrine from the preceding, but like many others he grew wiser in the school of experience.

#### THE CONSTITUTION OF THE METH. PROT. CHURCH,

1. Does neither teach nor require the ministry to think and act for the laity in its governmental affairs ;

2. It neither teaches nor requires the laity to concede the governmental affairs into the hands of the ministry.

3. Therefore the laity are directly concerned,



both in its government and its interests, and christian responsibility requires them to become conversant with every feature of its polity.

#### ELIGIBILITY TO OFFICE.

1. Any minister who shall have exercised faithfully the office of elder for two years, shall be eligible to the office of president of the annual conference.

2. "Every minister and preacher, and every white lay male member, in full communion and fellowship, having attained to the age of twenty-five years, and having been in full membership two years, shall be eligible as a representative in the General Conference."

3. All the offices in the church are to be filled by annual elections.

WHAT HAVE METHODIST PROTESTANTS GAINED BY THEIR ORGANIZATION THAT THEY DID NOT ENJOY IN THE METH. EPIS. CHURCH?

Ans. 1. A Constitution by which, and in which, the mutual rights of the ministry and laity are well defined and guaranteed.

This they did not enjoy in the Methodist Episcopal Church.

2. Eligibility on the part of the local ministry to seats in the General Conference.

This they did not enjoy in the Methodist Episcopal Church.

3. Lay delegation in both the annual and general conferences.

This they did not enjoy in the Methodist Epis-



copal Church ; for no layman has ever been permitted to take a seat in either of those two bodies.

4. The exercise of the right of suffrage on the part of the laity.

This they did not enjoy in the Methodist Episcopal Church ; as the membership have no right there to elect even the trustees, who are to hold the church property which they have paid for with their own money.

5. The right to elect their own class leaders.

This they did not enjoy in the Methodist Episcopal Church.

6. The right to elect the trustees to hold their own church property.

This they did not enjoy in the Methodist Episcopal Church.

7. The right on the part of the laity to exercise a legal and constitutional influence in the government and regulations of the pulpit, the press, and literary institutions of the church.

This right no lay member of the Methodist Episcopal Church has ever yet enjoyed.

8. The advantages and blessings of a republican church government, based upon those principles laid down in the New Testament, and which are in perfect consonance with the principles upon which our civil government is founded.

This they did not enjoy in the Methodist Episcopal Church. Hence it is apparent that the Methodist Protestants enjoy and possess much in their ecclesiastical organization which is neither possessed nor enjoyed in the Methodist Episcopal Church. For :



1. None of those privileges enumerated above were possessed or enjoyed in the Methodist Episcopal Church, because her ecclesiastical polity is not republican.

2. These privileges are all possessed and enjoyed in the Methodist Protestant Church, because her polity of government is purely republican.

3. Therefore, the rights and privileges of Christians are much better secured by and enjoyed in a republican form of government than in one that is anti-republican or aristocratic.

The sentiment has been advanced by Dr. Bascom, late Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, that "the rock on which the church has been split for ages is, that the sovereign power to regulate ecclesiastical matters, (not decided by the Scriptures, and which of right belong to a christian community as such,) has by a most mischievous and unnatural policy, misnamed expediency, been transferred to the hands of a *few* ministers, who have been in part the patricians of the ministry and the aristocracy of the church."

Dr. Bascom had been brought up in a church in which the "sovereign power" had been thus used, and of course, must be regarded as a competent judge of the principle involved in the question. In that church he lived to see a most striking illustration of the truth of the preceding sentiment, by the disruption of the Methodist Episcopal Church, by the General Conference of ministers in 1844.



No layman held a seat in that body, or had voted for any one of its members as his delegate; yet that body claimed and exercised the right to divide the church, independent of the laity, consequently, the church was rent asunder, North and South, by the ministry claiming the right so to do;—and the laity,—the great mass of the church, were not even asked if it might be so, for the ministry acted upon the principle that the laity were possessed of no ecclesiastical rights in the premises.

*History can furnish no parallel to such a transaction in ecclesiastical affairs.* For:

1. The laity in the Methodist Episcopal Church have nothing at all to do with its governmental affairs.

2. The itinerant ministry alone hold the governmental affairs in their own hands, independent of the laity, and, as a matter of course, divided the church without their consent.

3. Consequently, “the sovereign power to regulate all ecclesiastical matters,” having been “conceded to the ministry, by a policy misnamed expediency,” became the rock, on which the Methodist Episcopal Church “split.”

WE HAVE BEEN TOLD, “THE QUESTION OF CHURCH GOVERNMENT IS A THING OF NOTHING.

A position exceedingly strange for a Christian to assume! Look at the church of Rome, and mark the operation and effects of its government. How tyrannical, how oppressive, and how degrading in



its character! The whole control of the governmental affairs is in the hands of the clergy, or ministry to the exclusion of the laity from all participation whatever.

Spiritual tyranny, there unchecked, reigns supreme. What are the effects produced? Superstition, bigotry, religious ignorance, fanaticism, and a slavish servility to the will of the priesthood. Formality and ceremony are taken for religion. The church is looked to for salvation instead of Christ. "The commandments of men," and traditions of the church are regarded, rather than the word of God.

We now ask the question in all candor, *if a church government can produce from its structure such effects, or lead to such results, is not the question of church government a matter of vast importance?*

In the age of primitive Christianity the laity participated in the governmental affairs of the church, and the simplicity and purity of Christianity was then maintained. But in process of time the ministry set up a claim to rule by divine right; the people were stripped of ecclesiastical rights; priesthood was established, popery was born, acquired strength and produced all its melancholy and blighting effects. Dr. Bascom's sentiment, that "civil and religious liberty are intimately connected; they usually live and die together; and he who is the friend of the one, cannot consistently be the enemy of the other," is certainly a self-evident proposition. To which I would add: if republicanism be right in state, it cannot be



wrong in church, and if despotism be wrong in state, it cannot be right in church, and if wrong in church, it ought to be cast out.

The ecclesiastical rights of christian people have been, naturally and scripturally, the same in every age of the church, though often withheld by those who have usurped authority in the church of God, which has often been but a stepping stone to the claim of dominion over the faith of men in religious matters, although "dominion over conscience is the most absurd of all human pretensions"

The question of church government then is a subject of grand and vital importance. Such was its character in the great and glorious reformation of the sixteenth century, when Luther exposed the unrighteous pretensions of the clergy of the Romish Church. *Such is its character now.* One of the triumphs of the Reformation, was the restoration of the usurped rights, which had been in process of time wrested from the laity by the clergy, who professed to rule by divine right.

A survey of the face of Christianity will demonstrate to us the preceding proposition. Hence, we find the right of suffrage, and participation in the governmental affairs in the church, conceded to, and exercised by the laity, in almost every denomination in the United States of America. These rights and privileges are conceded to them by the Episcopalians, Presbyterians, (Old School,) Congregationalists, Presbyterians, (New School,) Lutherans, Baptists, of all orders, Quakers, Cumberland Presbyterians, Wesleyan Methodists, Ger-



man Reformed Presbyterians, Methodist Protestants, &c.

If we turn to the category of those religious denominations who exclude the laity from the right of suffrage, and of representation in the rule making department of the church, we will find it to read as follows: Roman Catholics, Episcopal Methodists, North and South.

These are the only denominations of professing Christians who concede to the ministry the powers and authority of government, to the exclusion of the laity. These three churches hold one common tenet on this subject, viz: *the divine right of the ministry to rule.*

The General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church answered the petitions of the laity in 1824, who asked for a recognition of their right to representation, in the following words: "Pardon us if we know no such right, if we do not comprehend such principles."

The General Conference of 1828 answered similar petitions of the laity in the following language: "Of Gospel doctrines, ordinances, and moral discipline, we do believe that the divinely instituted ministry are the divinely authorized expounders; and that the duty of maintaining them in their purity, and of not permitting our ministrations, in these respects, to be authoritatively controlled by others, does rest upon us with the force of a moral obligation, in the due discharge of which our consciences are involved."

The declarations of the General Conferences of 1824 and 1828 ought to have settled this ques-



tion for ever, as to the fact of the entire exclusion of the laity from all participation in the governmental affairs of the church, but some of the over-zealous advocates of itinerant supremacy, with much sophistry, have insisted that the government of the M. E. Church is quite republican. Says Dr. Bond, in his letters to Hon. Reverdy Johnson: "They (the laity) elect the stewards, who receive what they contribute for the ministers; and the trustees who hold the houses of worship, cemeteries, and other church property; and none of these officers are ever traveling preachers. So omnipotent is their power, that *they create the itinerant ministers*, and they can destroy the itinerancy, by simply refusing to elect, and send up recruits to the annual conference."

This language might pass with the uninformed for a statement of facts, and be readily received by the credulous, but at the same time it is an unpardonable infringement upon the rights of truth, and the best contradiction that can be offered to it, is the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church. When the great Methodist Church suit came before the United States Circuit Court, the Hon. Reverdy Johnson, counsel for the Church, South, in speaking of the General Conference, said: It is in fact an *aristocracy of preachers*. The laity have no voice, and they have submitted to it for many years, acting on the maxim:

'For forms of government let fools contest,  
That which is best administered is best.'

But they gradually found the government of their church was not always 'best administered,' and



there seems to be a disposition to insist upon a participation of the laity in the conferences of the church, which would, he thought, be greatly to its advantage."

Judge Nelson, who delivered the opinion of the court in this unhappy litigation between the two divisions of the M. E. Church, held the following language: "*The lay members of the church have no part or connection with its governmental organization, and never had. The traveling preachers comprise the embodiment of its power, ecclesiastical and temporal.*" This is a high judicial opinion, sustained by the evidence of truth.

The ministry of the Methodist Episcopal Church set up their claim to the government of the church in 1784, when it was organized by the two Britons, Coke and Asbury, and a few traveling preachers whom they called together for that purpose at Baltimore without consulting, or bringing the subject before the laity in any form whatsoever, or even giving notice to all the traveling preachers. What an outrage was this upon the natural and scriptural rights of a christian people!

Then was the seal of proscription placed upon the rights of the laity, and it has never been removed.

Then itinerant, ministerial supremacy took possession of the seat of governing power, and has never yielded its place on the seat.

Civil government was a subject of vast importance with our forefathers, when the subject of "*taxation without representation,*" was pre-



sented before them in a practical point of view. The very small tax upon tea could have been paid by them without little inconvenience, but the principle upon which it was required they spurned in their hearts, and resolved to strike for freedom and taxation only upon the principles of equity and rights.

Even so, ecclesiastical government being identified with man's spiritual interests and enjoyments, becomes a question of no common magnitude. The proof of this proposition is readily furnished by the fact that when the reformers in the Methodist Episcopal Church established a periodical in 1824, in order to discuss the question of the government of that church, and had formed union societies for the purpose of ascertaining the numerical strength of the friends of reform, and to combine in one united memorial to the General Conference, all of which they had a natural and moral right to do; they were unfeelingly, and wantonly, expelled from the communion of the church, by the men in power, for the so-called offence of being the patrons and readers of the "Mutual Rights," and members of the Union Societies. No charge of immorality being alleged against them. "*Legislation, without representation,*" produces all this.

1. The government of the Methodist Episcopal Church *does not* secure the "mutual rights of ministry and laity," nor concede to the laity one of the great excellencies of the Protestant reformation,—the right of delegated representation in the governmental affairs of the church.



2. The government of the Methodist Protestant Church *does secure* the “mutual rights to the ministry and laity,” and *concedes* to the *laity* one of the great excellencies of the Protestant reformation,—the right of suffrage and representation in the rule-making department of the church.

3. Therefore, the question of government is a matter of vital importance to the church, as the polity of the one, is shown to be so far superior to that of the other.



## CHAPTER V.

Governmental Polity of the M. E. Church—Dr. Bascom's opinion of aristocracy—Polity of the Methodist Episcopal and Methodist Protestant Churches compared—Argument—Origin of the two systems of Church polity—I. Methodist Episcopal Church—II. Methodist Protestant Church—Organization of the M. E. Church at Baltimore, in 1784—Organization of the M. P. Church at Baltimore, in 1830—Argument—Dr. Bascom's sentiments.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE METHODIST EPIS. AND METHODIST PROT. CHURCHES?

WITH respect to the doctrines, means of grace, and mode of worship, there is no difference. But as concerns discipline, or the governmental affairs of the church, there is a vast difference.

In the Methodist Episcopal Church the governmental affairs are entirely in the hands of the itinerant ministry, to the exclusion of the local ministry and laity. Thus we find the same class of men holding in their hands the three great powers of the government—legislative, judicial, and executive; and exercising the same as if held *jure divino*, by divine right.

Of the character of such a polity we will quote a sentiment from Dr. H. B. Bascom, late bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South. “A government uniting the legislative, judicial, and executive powers in the hands of the same men, is an absurdity in theory, and in practice tyranny. The executive power in every government should



be subordinate to the legislative, and the judicial independent of both. Whenever, therefore, it happens that these three departments of government are in the hands of the same body of men, and these men not the representatives of the people, first making the laws, then executing them, and finally the sole judges of their acts, there is no liberty, the people are virtually enslaved, and liable to be ruined at any time. In a government, civil or ecclesiastical, where the same men are legislators, administrators, and judges, in relation to all the laws, and every possible application of them, the people, whether well or ill treated, are in fact slaves; for the only remedy against such a despotism is revolt." *See Bascom's Declaration of Rights.*

In the Methodist Protestant Church, the polity is such that the sovereign power is distributed between the ministry and the laity. These two classes are both represented in the rule-making department, consequently, no privileged class is recognized as ruling by "divine right." Hence the legislative, judicial, and executive powers of government are kept separate and apart; the republican principle being infused into the whole system.

In the Methodist Episcopal Church, the entire government is in the hands of the itinerant ministry alone, as a privileged class; hence the polity is a ministerial aristocracy.

In the Methodist Protestant Church, the government derives its authority from the ministry and the laity, upon the representative principle,



therefore, its polity rests upon the republican foundation.

In the Methodist Episcopal Church, no layman is permitted to take a seat in her General and Annual Conferences, because the laity are allowed neither part nor lot in governmental affairs, and the right of suffrage is withheld from them.

In the Methodist Protestant Church, the laity are entitled to an equal number of delegates in the General and Annual Conferences with the ministry, because the right of suffrage is exercised by them, and its government stands upon the republican basis.

In the Methodist Episcopal Church, the laity are not permitted, by discipline, to elect any officer whatever, in the church, (not even a trustee to hold the church property, paid for with their own money,\*) because the government is anti-republican, and the exercise of the right of suffrage denied to the membership.

In the Methodist Protestant Church, all the officers of the church or society are elected by the suffrages of the membership, because this natural and indefeasible right is guaranteed to them by its most admirable constitution, which is based upon the "mutual rights of the ministry and laity."

*Argument.*—1. The laity of the Methodist Episcopal Church being denied the right to representation in the General and Annual Conferences, and not being permitted to elect their own

\* See Discipline of Methodist Episcopal Church, South, edition 1854, page 217, paragraph 2 of section 4.



church officers, and the sole authority being vested in the hands of the itinerant ministry, the government is an aristocracy.

2. The laity of the Methodist Protestant Church, having equal weight with the ministry in both the General and Annual Conferences, and the constitutional rights to elect all their officers, the government is exercised by the ministry and the laity upon the representative principle, and is therefore republican.

3. Therefore, the difference between the Methodist Episcopal and Methodist Protestant Churches, is precisely the same that exists between ARISTOCRACY and REPUBLICANISM.

The two churches harmonize in doctrines, but disagree in the governmental principles. The polity of the Methodist Episcopal Church received its mould from men who were brought up in the British school. The Methodist Protestant Church, on the other hand, received the mould of its polity, from men who were schooled in the principles of republicanism, and had been brought up on the consecrated soil of liberty, which had been baptized by the blood of American patriots.

The two systems differ just as much as their respective paternities differ. One of these systems is entirely American, born on its natal soil. The other is exotic, and of foreign, or British extraction. The former carefully guards the rights and privileges of all classes of the membership, and affords the most ample checks against the abuse of power, as well as safeguards against mal-administration.



The latter strengthens and elevates the hands of an aristocratic and privileged class in the church. Hence the point of difference between these two systems of church polity is most strikingly developed by comparing the one with the other and inquiring into their origin. Moreover, if we choose to extend our inquiries into the New Testament Scriptures, we discover at once that the apostles conceded to the laity in the primitive church an authority and influence in the governmental affairs, which is denied to the laity of the M. E. Church by its one-man-power system.

The polity of the Methodist Episcopal Church is based upon the supposition that the laity have no ecclesiastical rights in the premises ; hence the right of suffrage and representation in the governmental departments of the church is withheld from them. (*See report of Gen. Conf. of 1828.*)

The polity of the Methodist Protestant Church is based upon the scriptural proposition that THE LAITY ARE POSSESSED OF ECCLESIASTICAL RIGHTS AS MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH OF CHRIST; hence, the right of SUFFRAGE, and REPRESENTATION in the legislative department, is fully conceded to them.

We leave the reader to form his own conclusions, as regards the justice and scriptural propriety of these two systems of church polity.

#### INQUIRY INTO THE ORIGIN OF THE TWO SYSTEMS OF CHURCH POLITY.

I. *Of the M. E. Church.* The introduction of Methodism into America dates as far back as 1766. Two years afterwards the first Methodist



Church was built in this country. The first two preachers that came over from England under the direction of Mr. Wesley, arrived in 1769. In 1771 they were followed by Francis Asbury and Richard Wright. During the revolutionary war, which broke out in 1775 and lasted until the beginning of 1783, the fortunes of Methodism seemed to be fluctuating. Many societies had been collected by the preachers in Maryland, Virginia, Delaware, New York and other places. But the military operations of the contending powers had scattered or dispersed these societies in some places; at other points the Tory propensities of many of the preachers, (particularly those who had come over from England,) had rendered them so obnoxious to the inhabitants that they had to fly from the country, or secrete themselves for safety. Mr. Asbury, who figured so prominently afterwards among the Methodists, concealed himself for a season in the State of Delaware. Peace was restored in 1783, and the Methodist preachers could once more resume their labors among the societies. These societies of Methodists up to this period were not called churches, as they possessed no form of government as a church, except the "General Rules of John and Charles Wesley;" and were without an ordained ministry to administer the ordinances of the church.

Early in November, 1784, Dr. Coke landed in New York, from Europe. He was a minister of the established church of England, and had identified himself with the operations of Mr. Wesley. History informs us that, "As soon as Dr. Coke



landed in America, he laid his plan to meet Mr. Asbury as soon as possible, and traveling from New-York to Philadelphia, and then down into the Delaware State, he met with Mr. Asbury at Barrett's chapel, on the 4th of the same month. They then consulted together about the plan Mr. Wesley had adopted and recommended to us. After the business was maturely weighed and sufficient time was taken to consult some more of the preachers who were present on that day, it was judged admissible to call together all the traveling preachers in a general conference, to be held at Baltimore, at Christmas.

“Mr. Freeborn Garretson undertook to travel to the South, in order to give notice to all the traveling preachers of this intended meeting. But being fond of preaching by the way, and thinking he could do the business by writing, he did not give timely notice to the preachers who were in the extremities of the work, and of course several of them were not at the conference.

“December 27th, 1784. The thirteenth conference began at Baltimore, which was considered to be a General Conference, in which *Thomas Coke* and *Francis Asbury* presided.

“At this Conference we formed ourselves into a regular church, by the name of the Methodist Episcopal Church, making at the same time the episcopal office elective, and the elected superintendent amenable to the body of ministers and preachers.” *Lee's History of the Methodists.*

Concerning the transactions of this famous Bal-



timore Conference, I now quote from the published Journal of Mr. Asbury.

“Friday; 24th (December,) rode to Baltimore, where we met a *few* preachers; it was agreed to form ourselves into an episcopal church, with superintendents, elders, and deacons. When the Conference was seated, Dr. Coke and myself were unanimously elected to the superintendency of the church. We were in great haste, and did much business in a little time.”

From this testimony of Mr. Lee and Mr. Asbury, it is apparent that at the Baltimore Conference of 1784, at which the Methodist Episcopal Church was organized, there were but “*a few preachers*” present; although the work for which the two Britons had called them together was the organization of an independent ecclesiastical establishment. No layman was permitted to participate in this work, which was done by Dr. Coke, Mr. Asbury, and “*a few preachers.*” It is therefore evident that these two Englishmen and the “*few preachers*” whom they consulted had no intention or desire, whatever, to permit the laity to have any weight, or take any part or lot in the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Let the reader bear in mind that the government which was formed for the M. E. Church at its organization, *was a government instituted and adopted by the ministry, exclusively, without the consent of the laity being in any way sought. Yet this same government was intended in its application to embrace and bear upon the laity as well as*



*the ministry.* Therefore, the government of the Methodist Episcopal Church belongs to, and is controlled by the itinerant ministry alone. It properly belongs to them, and not to the church proper;—for they made it,—they only can mend it;—they alone can administer it, and the church is required to remain passive under it.

Who that possesses the heart of an American Christian in his bosom can point out to us one single feature of American republicanism in this whole transaction? It cannot be done. Mutual rights were trampled in the dust. And the polity that was adopted then, is the polity the church practices now.

The famous Conference of 1784 acted upon the principle that the laity were possessed of no ecclesiastical rights in the premises. But it has been argued that “the Conference followed the advice of Mr. Wesley.” This I deny. In a circular letter sent over from England in 1784, and addressed to “*Dr. Coke, Mr. Asbury and our brethren in North America,*” Mr. Wesley sets forth the following language: “As our American brethren are now totally disentangled, both from the state and from the English hierarchy, we dare not entangle them again either with the one or the other. They are now at full liberty, simply to follow the Scriptures and the primitive church. And we judge it best that they should stand fast in that liberty wherewith God has so strangely made them free.”

Now if Dr. Coke, Mr. Asbury, and the “few preachers” who composed the Baltimore Con-



ference of 1784, had followed this advice of Mr. Wesley, the laity would not only have been invited to participate in the proceedings in the organization, but their "*ecclesiastical rights*" would have been carefully recognized, and fully guaranteed by the governmental polity of the Methodist Episcopal Church; for if they had followed "*the Scriptures*," the laity would have certainly come in, as entitled by right to a voice in the affairs of the church. And if they had followed "*the primitive church*," the laity would have come in, as one of the prime elements in the government of the church; for the learned ecclesiastical historian, Mosheim, in speaking of the polity of the primitive church, says:

"It was, therefore, the assembly of the people which chose their own rulers and teachers, or received them by a free and authoritative consent, when recommended by others. The same people rejected or confirmed, by their suffrage, the laws that were proposed by their rulers to the assembly; excommunicated profligate, and unworthy members of the church; restored the penitents to their forfeited privileges; passed judgment upon the different subjects of controversy and dissension that arose in their community; examined and decided the disputes which happened between the elders and deacons; and, in a word, exercised all that authority which belongs to such as are invested with the sovereign power."

Such is the testimony of Mosheim touching the rights and privileges exercised by the laity in the primitive church. Other ecclesiastical writers of



high repute coincide with him ; hence it becomes apparent that, if Dr. Coke, Mr. Asbury, and the “few preachers” who acted with them, had intended to follow the advice of Mr. Wesley in organizing the church after the primitive church as a model, the ecclesiastical rights of the laity would have been regarded, and they would have been recognized as those “invested with sovereign power.”

But the church was organized, the government established, and the laity excluded from the exercise of sovereign power.

*Question.* Who did this deed?

*Answer.* Dr. Coke, Mr. Asbury and “a few preachers.”

*Ques.* But had not the societies, or the people composing them, elected or appointed them their delegates and clothed them with authority in the premises to do so?

*Ans.* No: the people had taken no such action, for they were not consulted at all: the two Englishmen and “a few preachers” acted entirely independently of them.

*Ques.* But did not Mr. Wesley advise that, in instituting the government of the church, the laity should be excluded from “the sovereign power?”

*Ans.* No: Mr. Wesley says in his advisory letter: ~~“They~~ “They are now at full liberty, simply to follow the Scriptures and the primitive church.” ~~“~~

*Ques.* Was Mr. Wesley’s advice followed in this thing?

*Ans.* Certainly not.



Of this very strange ecclesiastical proceeding, Jesse Lee says: "At this Conference we formed ourselves into a regular church, by the name of the Methodist Episcopal Church."

Mr. Asbury says in his journal, "Friday, 24th (December,) rode to Baltimore, met a few preachers; it was agreed to form ourselves into an episcopal church, with superintendents, elders and deacons."

These two witnesses use the phrase "*ourselves*," in speaking of the organization. But who were "*ourselves*?" Ans. Dr. Coke, Mr. Asbury and "a few preachers."

Had they no delegated authority at all from others? None at all. The Conference acted as a self-constituted legislature, "*without constituents*." They say, "we formed ourselves into a regular church." The term "*ourselves*" did not, cannot, and does not comprehend the laity under the circumstances in which these witnesses use it. Therefore these two Britons, and "a few preachers," being without legitimate authority to act for any others, formed themselves into a "regular church;" they seized upon the "sovereign power" with their own hands, and made ample provision for retaining that power; and the itinerant ministry still retain it. They, the same "*ourselves*," by the principles of the government which they established, assumed absolute authority over the government, inasmuch as they made it, and also over the pulpits, the press, and institutions of learning of the church: that authority and control the itinerant ministry hold by virtue of *their sovereign power*.



By no legal means can the word "church" be so construed or diverted from its proper use as to signify the ministry without the laity. The term church would much more correctly signify the great body of the membership—the laity. If this position then be correct, we are free to declare that to-day the Methodist Episcopal Church does not own either a government, or a pulpit, or a press, or a college; for they all belong to, and are controlled by the authority of the itinerant ministry, and the itinerant ministry cannot with any propriety be called the *church*. And strange to relate, this anti-republican system of church polity, so diverse from all others in Protestant christendom, found a foothold in republican America, in less than nine years after our civil government was declared free and independent, and established upon the republican platform. But these two Britons, Coke and Asbury, were artful and ingenious in strengthening and retaining in their own hands absolute power and authority. But who were the authors of this system or polity? Let Dr. Coke himself answer the question. Hear him. "*I am not sure but I went further in the separation of our church in America than Mr. Wesley, from whom I received my commission, did intend.*"\* Here is a tacit admission on the part of Dr. Coke, first, that the counsel of Mr. Wesley had not been strictly his criterion, and secondly, that he had exercised a controlling power, or management in the organization of the Methodist Epis-

\* See Dr. Coke's letter to Bishop White, dated April 14th, 1791.



copal Church. Then, taking all the testimony and the circumstances into consideration, we can arrive at but one reasonable conclusion in the premises, and that is, *that the polity of the Methodist Episcopal Church was moulded not by Americans, but by Britons: hence its aristocratic or anti-republican character.*

## II. ORIGIN OF THE POLITY OF THE METHODIST PROTESTANT CHURCH.

A system of government which is so constituted as we have found, from the preceding pages, the government of the Methodist Episcopal Church to be,—the three departments, legislative, executive, and judicial, placed in the hands of the same class of men, and those men constituting a privileged class, the judges of their own actions in the administration,—could not fail, in its application to the governed, to excite in their minds the inquiry, is this system or polity by which we are governed, and at the same time excluded from all participation in the governmental affairs, compatible with the republican principles of the civil government under which we live? Do we possess civil rights as citizens, and yet possess no ecclesiastical rights as members of the church to which we belong? Is this government of the church consistent with the principles laid down in Scripture, or the practice of the primitive church? Such an inquiry could not, and did not fail to lead multitudes who were not influenced by undue or overweening prejudices, to learn and understand that such a system of ecclesiastical



polity was in direct opposition of character to the polity of the civil government; and that, if an American freeman, as a citizen, has civil rights, as a Christian he has also ecclesiastical rights; that such a system of church polity was neither consistent with the principles of ecclesiastical polity laid down in the New Testament, nor with the practice of the primitive church.

Such opinions and impressions produced action. Memorials, numerously signed by both the ministry and laity, were sent up to the General Conference which met at Baltimore in 1824, praying that body so to alter the system of government as to admit into the rule-making department representation from the laity and local ministry. The petitioners urged that this was "a right and a privilege," which should belong to them as members of the church, but which its polity had heretofore failed to provide for, or even acknowledge. The memorialists were answered by a General Conference circular signed by the bishops, and which contained this remarkable language: "*Pardon us if we know no such rights, if we comprehend no such privileges.*" This language, emanating from the highest council of the church, would seem sufficient to blast completely, the hopes of the petitioners. But not so.

The General Conference having adjourned, a meeting was held in the city of Baltimore, on the 21st of May, 1824, by a number of the itinerant and local ministers and laymen of the church, for the purpose of adopting such measures as would be best calculated to secure the object of the



memorialists. At this meeting it was resolved to publish in the city of Baltimore, a monthly periodical, entitled, "The Mutual Rights of the ministers and members of the Methodist Episcopal Church;" and also to raise societies in all parts of the United States, in order to correspond with each other on such subjects, as they might believe were calculated to improve the polity of the church; to ascertain the number of persons friendly to such improvement, &c.

The periodical was instituted, and the principles of the government of the church freely discussed in its columns. The societies were organized and called "Union Societies," and corresponded with each other on the objects had in view in their organization. All this seemed to be right and just; for if christian people feel an interest in the church with which they are identified, they will certainly approve or disapprove, according to their judgment, of its regulations and polity; and at the same time, they certainly possess the right of freemen to discuss the principles of the polity by which they are governed, and likewise an equal right to labor in a manner consistent with Christianity, to amend what they may deem wrong in that polity.

But now came the tug of war. This movement on the part of the friends of reform gave offence to "the powers that be," viz: the itinerant party, or those who maintained the doctrine that the "sovereign power" in the government of the church belongs to the itinerant ministry alone, and that the laity have no ecclesiastical rights.



A violent persecution soon followed. The members of the "Union Societies" in several places, and the committee who published the "Mutual Rights" at Baltimore, were brought to trial by the itinerant party, upon the frivolous charge of "inveighing against discipline," and numbers of both ministers and laymen were *expelled* from the Methodist E. Church; not for any violation of the moral precepts of the gospel, but for the exercise of an inalienable right which they possessed as American Christians;—*the right to discuss freely the principles of the polity of the church to which they belonged*;—never dreaming of the existence, much less the application of a "gag-law" in the church of their choice. Mistaken men! The great iron wheel of itinerant ministerial power turned upon them, and they were ecclesiastically crushed.

These high-handed, arbitrary, and unjust measures caused many others to secede from the M. E. Church. The charge of "inveighing against discipline," which led to these expulsions and secessions, deserves some notice. "To inveigh" signifies to speak against. If a member of church does not, and cannot approve of a rule of discipline according to his judgment and conscience, he certainly violates no moral obligation or christian duty in expressing his views as to its impropriety, or laboring fairly for its amendment; and any rule in a Protestant church which would prohibit him from acting thus, must assimilate in spirit to the rules of Romanism that require the membership to yield silent submission to all the requirements of the church.



What were these ministers and laymen expelled the communion of the church for? Ans. For discussing freely the polity of their church, and laboring fairly and honorably to effect a reformation therein. All this was done in the boasted land of freedom. Then, tell me no more that "the question of church government is a thing of nothing." *Here it has proved itself to be a tremendous and dreadful something.* Only look at its shameful application, and mark its startling effects; and then its mighty power for good, *or for evil*, may be estimated by the intelligent and impartial.

The expelled and the withdrawn formed themselves into religious societies denominated the "Associated Methodist Churches." These events took place principally in 1827-8.

In November, 1827, a General Convention of reformers met in Baltimore. In this convention preliminary arrangements were made by which another General Convention met in the same city, on the 12th day of November, 1828. This convention adopted seventeen "Articles of Association," as a provisional government for the churches until a General Convention should meet and adopt a constitution and discipline.

One of the "Articles of Association" reads thus: "There shall be a General Convention to be held in the city of Baltimore, on the first Tuesday in November, 1830, to be composed of an equal number of ministers and lay representatives chosen by the Annual Conferences respectively."

This article contained the doctrine held by the



friends of reform from the beginning of the discussion, viz: "the mutual rights of the ministry and laity." Upon this principle the respective Annual Conferences of Associated Methodist Churches elected their delegates to the General Convention of 1830, which was to provide a permanent and constitutional government upon an equitable basis. The Convention met. But how different was its composition from that of the Convention which met in the same city, in 1784, to organize the M. E. Church? Instead of a Dr. Coke, Mr. Asbury and "a few preachers," "*without constituents*," the members of the Convention as delegated representatives elected to this body by the votes of both the ministry and laity, took their seats upon the delegated authority of their constituents. They went into session as the uncompromising advocates of the mutual rights of the ministry and laity. Upon these principles they acted; and upon these principles they established the most admirable Constitution and Discipline of the Methodist Protestant Church, and gave to her polity its republican mould; hence its American character.

*Argument.*—1. "As like begets like," the Conference which met at Baltimore in 1784, to organize the Methodist Episcopal Church, acting without constituents, and being self-constituted, framed the government upon their own principles, vesting the "sovereign power" exclusively in the hands of the itinerant ministry as a privileged class, and thereby constituted the government an "aristocracy."



2. "As like begets like," the Convention which met at Baltimore in 1830, to organize the Methodist-Protestant Church, being elected upon the basis of an equal number of ministerial and lay-delegates, framed a government upon their own principles, vesting the "sovereign power" in the whole church, upon the republican principle.

3. Therefore, the government of the former is aristocratic, and the government of the latter republican.

We will here record a sentiment of a distinguished divine of the Meth. Episcopal Church, touching the principles under consideration.

"Legislators without constituents, or peers and fellows, deputing them as their representatives and actors—thus constituting themselves a legislature beyond the control of the people, is an exhibition of tyranny in one of its most dangerous forms."—*Dr. H. B. Bascom.*

Whoso readeth, let him understand. May we not hope that

"Truth crushed to earth will rise again ?

The eternal years of God are hers ;

Whilst error, wounded, writhes in pain,

And dies among its worshipers."



## CHAPTER VI.

Polity of the Methodist Protestant Church contrasted with that of the Methodist Episcopal Church—The system of the former republican, the system of the latter aristocratic—Scriptural evidence in support of the rights of the laity to participate in governmental regulations of the Church—Arguments built thereon.

## THE CONTRAST BETWEEN THE TWO SYSTEMS.

In the Methodist Protestant Church the “sovereign,” or governing “power,” is vested in the ministry and the laity—the great body of the church.

In the Methodist Episcopal Church, the “sovereign power” is vested in the itinerant ministry alone.

In the Methodist Protestant Church, “every white lay male member, over the age of twenty-one years, is entitled to vote in all cases whatever.”

In the Methodist Episcopal Church, the laity are entitled, as such, *to vote in no case whatever.*

In the Methodist Protestant Church, the membership intending to build or purchase church property, have the right, according to discipline, to elect their own trustees to hold the property in trust for their use.

In the Methodist Episcopal Church, the membership intending to build, or purchase church property, have no right, according to discipline, to elect, appoint, or nominate trustees to hold their church property in trust for their use.



In the Methodist Protestant Church, each class or society elects its own class-leader, subject to the change that annual elections may produce.

In the Methodist Episcopal Church, the class-leader is appointed by the preacher in charge, independent of the church, and retains his office at the will and pleasure only of the appointing power.

In the Methodist Protestant Church, each circuit and station holds the right to elect a lay-delegate to the Annual Conference for each itinerant minister belonging to such circuit or station, in order that such delegate may represent its interests there.

In the Methodist Episcopal Church, *no circuit or station has any right to elect a lay-delegate to the Annual Conference to represent its wishes and interests there.*

In the Methodist Protestant Church, the Annual Conferences are composed of all the itinerant ministers belonging to the district, and one lay-delegate for each minister, elected from the circuits and stations.

In the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Annual Conferences are composed of the bishops and traveling preachers alone.

In the Methodist Protestant Church, the basis of representation, upon which the Annual Conference elects delegates to the General Conference, is upon the ratio of the membership in full standing in the district.

In the Methodist Episcopal Church, the basis of representation, upon which the Annual Conference elects delegates to the General Confer-



ence, is upon the ratio of the number of traveling preachers belonging to the district.

In the Methodist Protestant Church, the General Conference is composed of an equal number of ministerial and lay-delegates.

In the Methodist Episcopal Church, the General Conference is composed of itinerant ministers alone, elected by the itinerant ministry from the ranks of the itinerant ministry.

In the Methodist Protestant Church, the "sovereign power" being vested in the church—the pulpits, the press, and the institutions of learning, of course belong to, and are controlled by, the church.

In the Methodist Episcopal Church, the "sovereign power" being vested *in the itinerant ministry alone*, of course the pulpits, the press and institutions of learning, are governed and controlled by the itinerant ministers, independent of the laity.

In the Methodist Protestant Church, the governmental polity is based upon the doctrine that *the laity are possessed of ecclesiastical rights*.

In the Methodist Episcopal Church, the governmental polity is based upon the doctrine that *the laity have no ecclesiastical rights*.

This contrast exhibits a wide difference between the Methodist Protestant and Methodist Episcopal Churches. Monarchy, aristocracy and democracy are three forms of government known among men. Democracy, which is republicanism, is that system of government for which Washington fought, and our fathers bled, and in which we as



Americans glory as being the best on earth. Such is the system of government adopted by the Methodist Protestant Church.

Aristocracy is that form of government which is in the hands of the few, who are a privileged class. Such is the form of government of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

*Axiom.*—The welfare, peace and prosperity of the State, with the rights and privileges of its citizens, depend upon the form and character of its government, and the manner in which it is administered.

*Corollary.*—The welfare, peace and prosperity of the church, with the rights and privileges of its membership, depend upon the form and character of its government, and the manner in which it is administered.

THE METHODIST PROTESTANT CHURCH HAS DRAWN  
ITS PRINCIPLES OF POLITY FROM THE NEW  
TESTAMENT.

That man in connection with the church of Christ is possessed of ecclesiastical rights, is a proposition which I hold to be fairly and strongly sustained by the New Testament. Hence he has his ecclesiastical, as well as civil rights. The same principle is applicable to church as well as to State. If it is just in the latter, it is not unjust in the former. If the relationship which he sustains to the State, justifies his right to the exercise of the elective franchise, surely there can be nothing found in the nature of right, or of religion, or in the precepts of the gospel, to annul



the justice or propriety of this principle as applicable to the relationship which the membership sustain to the church of God.

We therefore assume the position that enough is laid down, and set forth in the writings of the apostles, to prove most conclusively, that *the laity did participate in the councils that regulated the affairs of the primitive church*. To sustain this position, we refer in the first place to the election of the successor to Judas. Acts, ch. i, v. 15, it is written: "And in those days Peter stood up *in the midst of the disciples*, and said, (the number of the names together were about one hundred and twenty,") &c. Peter in his address on this occasion did not address apostles alone; the sacred penman tells us he stood up in the midst of the disciples, and in verse twenty-second he says, "Beginning from the baptism of John, unto the same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection." In the following part of the chapter we are informed that they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias; and that after they had prayed they gave forth their lots. In this grave and deeply interesting transaction to the primitive church, we find that the eleven apostles were not acting alone or independent of the disciples, (the laity,) but the number of the names together were about one hundred and twenty; and in this election the laity most unquestionably participated with the apostles.

The next passage to which we refer in order to



support our position, is to be found Acts, ch. vi, vs. 2 and 3, and relates to the selection of the seven deacons. It reads as follows: "Then the twelve called the multitude of disciples unto them, and said, it is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business." In this instance the address is made to "the multitude of disciples." The business to be transacted was of great importance to Christianity, and to the church. It was, therefore, according to the judgment of the apostles, necessary and proper for "the multitude of disciples," (the laity of the church,) to have a hand in this matter; and as it pertained to the affairs of the church, it was laid before them.

In the fifth and sixth verses we read thus: "And the saying pleased the *whole multitude*; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Simon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas, a proselyte of Antioch, whom they set before the apostles; and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them." This historical narrative, as stated by the sacred writer, clearly establishes the fact that in the first christian church ever established, and which was located at Jerusalem, the laity participated in the affairs of its government, and acted an important and prominent part therein, precisely as if "possessed of sovereign power," and that, too, by the counsel and approbation of the apostles.



It was necessary to elect officers for the church. The apostles would not arrogate to themselves the right to do this, independent of their christian brethren comprising the membership—for this right belonged to the whole multitude. The apostles thus conceded it. Upon this principle the multitude acted; and the whole transaction goes to demonstrate the proposition, that the laity in the primitive church were not only possessed of sovereign power in the church, but did exercise it in its governmental regulations.

We shall refer, in the next place, to the 15th chapter of the Acts of the Apostles. It affords an account of the first church council ever held. The history of that council is given in the following words: “Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the *whole church*, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch, with Paul and Barnabas—namely, Judas, surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren; and they wrote letters by them after this manner: The apostles, and elders, and brethren, send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch, and Syria, and Cilicia.” See verses 22 and 23.

From the record of this chapter it becomes evident that the laity participated in the deliberations of this important church council. The terms used by the inspired writer clearly establish the fact. The words, “Apostles and elders, with the whole church,” are very expressive. Beyond the possibility of a doubt, the phrase embraces the laity. And the address of the let-



ter sent by the messengers chosen by that council, must show most conclusively to the satisfaction of every unprejudiced mind, that three distinct classes of persons, all belonging to the christian church, constituted the writers of that epistle;—that apostles, elders and *brethren* were all united to give character and authority to the document. But, above all, the question before this council, in which the whole church participated, as one of paramount importance; a question in which the purity of the doctrine of Christianity was seriously involved. And in no period of the history of the church could the ministry have put forward a stronger plea for acting independent of the laity, or the church, than they could have done at that time; for the question was one of doctrine, and there was Paul who had seen Jesus, and there were James, and Peter, and John, and the whole conclave of the apostles, with the elders. But even apostles *could not*, and *would not*, dare to decide and act upon this question, referred to them and the elders, without the co-operation of the *whole church*. Why so? Because, no doubt, they believed and felt that, under such circumstances, they were not the only “*divinely authorized expounders of moral doctrines and discipline.*” Hence it became them, under the circumstances, to render unto the church the things that belonged to the church.

Let the reader view this transaction of the church council at Jerusalem in every aspect in which it is susceptible, and the stubborn fact will



be forced upon his mind, that the laity of the church formed a part of that council; that they possessed an indefeasible right to participate in the same, and that right is endorsed by apostles, all co-operating together.

We admit that the New Testament does not furnish a definite form of church government; but we argue that it does furnish and lay down the principles that should enter into the government of the church, and in the adaptation of forms to those principles, the precedents furnished us by apostles, and the precepts of revelation should become our guide.

From the evidence which we have furnished upon these pages, both from Scripture and ecclesiastical history, we hope that we have shown most conclusively to the satisfaction of the honest inquirer after truth, that in the primitive church the laity did participate in its governmental and doctrinal regulations, and the evidence fully establishes the proposition that they were regarded as being possessed of sovereign power in the premises.

*Argument.*—1. The principles of church polity furnished us in the New Testament unquestionably recognize the laity as being “possessed of sovereign power” with the ministry.

2. The history of the primitive church represents the laity as exercising “sovereign power” with the ministry, in the governmental affairs of the church.

3. The governmental polity of the Methodist Protestant Church recognizes the laity as being



possessed of sovereign power in the premises, therefore her polity is founded upon "*the Scriptures and the practice of the primitive church.*" according to the advice of Mr. Wesley to the American Methodists.

*Axiom.*—The principles of church polity laid down in the New Testament, and which recognize the sovereign power as belonging to the ministry and laity, are the principles of justice and equity and should be applied to the church of Christ in every age.

*Corollary.*—The principles of church polity, which do not vest the "sovereign power" in the ministry and laity, or the whole church, are *not*, and *cannot*, be derived from the New Testament, consequently are void of scriptural justice and equity, and should never be applied to the church of Christ in any age.



## CHAPTER VII.

The laity of the Methodist Episcopal Church have nothing to do with the governmental affairs—Opinions of Hon. Reverdy Johnson and Judge Nelson in support of the position—Dr. Bond's position to the contrary examined and exposed—The importance of church members investigating for themselves the principles of church polity, and acting from an intelligent understanding of propriety—The effects of indifference upon such subjects.

IS THE GOVERNMENT OF THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL  
CHURCH REPRESENTATIVE?

If such be its character, we must admit that the reformers of 1824 were greatly mistaken in its principles and application; and perhaps no men in its communion had studied its relations and were better acquainted with all its features, than were some of those who were denominated "prominent leaders" in the movement in favor of a reform in the government of the Methodist Episcopal Church; but they knew nothing of any thing like representation, so far as the great body of the church was concerned. We know of no officer, we know of no delegate that the laity are authorized to elect by any rule of discipline; what then becomes of the proposition set forth by some that the government of the Methodist Episcopal Church is representative? Hon. Reverdy Johnson, ex-attorney general of the United States, when advocating the claims of the M. E.



Church, South, before the United States Circuit Court, upon the famous Methodist Church property question, said, when speaking of the governmental polity of the church, "*It is in fact an aristocracy of preachers. The laity have no voice, and they have submitted to it for many years.*"

Judge Nelson, who delivered the opinion of the court in the case, said: "THE LAY MEMBERS OF THE CHURCH HAVE NO PART OR CONNECTION WITH ITS GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION, AND NEVER HAD."

The opinions of these two distinguished jurists are based upon the best historical and tangible evidence produced before the court, and of course must for ever stand, until truth itself shall fall. But Dr. Bond, of the New York Christian Advocate, in a series of letters addressed to Hon. Reverdy Johnson, holds the following extraordinary language upon the subject:

"The General Conference is composed of a body of ministers of the gospel, elected by our Annual Conferences of ministers once every four years, and these Annual Conferences themselves are composed of ministers, all of whom have been elected and licensed as preachers by the laity of the church. . . . Neither local nor traveling ministers can become such without election by the laity. Holding, then, their relation to the church, with all their privileges and powers, by the suffrages of the people—the laity—they cannot, in virtue of their individual relation, privileges or powers, constitute an aristocracy. . . . They (the laity) elect the stewards, who receive what they contribute for the support of the min-



isters; and the trustees who hold the houses of worship, cemeteries, and other church property; and none of these officers are ever traveling preachers. So omnipotent is their power, that they create the itinerant ministers, and they can destroy the itinerancy by simply refusing to elect and send up recruits to the Annual Conference."

This argument of Dr. Bond has two distinguishing features, absurd sophistry and absolute misstatement. We shall now examine it. He says: "*all of whom (the ministers) have been elected and licensed by the laity of the church.*" To which we reply, the laity of the Methodist Episcopal Church, as such, have never elected or licensed any man as a preacher. We now turn to the Discipline of the church to sustain our position. The rule made and provided in the case requires the applicant for preacher's license to obtain a "recommendation of the society of which he is a member, or of a leader's meeting," upon which recommendation the Quarterly Conference may license him to preach. Now mark the features in the case. The applicant may come well recommended, but a recommendation is by no means an election, and the Quarterly Conference may reject him. And if he be licensed, he was certainly never recommended by his society, as a law-maker, or one competent to sit in the legislative department of the church. Or if preacher's license be granted him by the Quarterly Conference, that act vests him with no other authority than to preach and expound the word of God. Or suppose the Quarterly Conference should re-



commend a licensed preacher according to rule to the Annual Conference, as a suitable person to be received into the traveling connection on trial, or to take deacon's or elder's orders. A recommendation is by no means an election. The Annual Conference possesses the power, and often like the Quarterly Conference exercises it, by rejecting the applicant independent of his recommendation. How then can Dr. Bond's declaration be true that all the ministers of the Methodist Episcopal Church "have been elected and licensed as preachers by the laity of the church?"

But we are told that the Quarterly Conference license the preachers, and then they are recommended by the same body to the Annual Conference to be received *upon trial* into the itinerancy, without which recommendation they could not become even probationary members of the Annual Conference. To which we reply: A recommendation is no election, and the Annual Conference often rejects the applicant when duly recommended. But of whom are the Quarterly Conferences constituted? "Of all the traveling and local preachers, exhorters, stewards, class-leaders, and (superintendents of Sabbath schools."\*) Of these component parts of the Quarterly Conference, every class-leader is appointed and removed by the preacher in charge at his own will and pleasure. Even so of the superintendents of Sabbath schools, and no man can be appointed a steward, unless he be first nominated

\* Discipline of M. E. Church, South, page 43, edition 1854.



by the preacher in charge, and then the Quarterly Conference may confirm or reject such nomination. Nor can any Quarterly Conference sit to transact business unless presided over by the preacher in charge or the presiding elder. Hence it is apparent that the Quarterly Conference is virtually the creature of the one-man-power; therefore, its actions are but the expression of his will, and the chairman of said body can defeat any measure he may desire in a moment, by vacating the chair and thereby dissolving the session. And we learn from Dr. Bond that in the Quarterly Conferences the laity elect and license the preachers, and create the itinerant ministers; that here also they elect the stewards. Wonderful, indeed! He also informs us that the laity elect the trustees who hold the houses of worship. But if the reader will turn to the book of Discipline,\* he will there find that no new board of trustees can be formed except by the appointing power of the preacher in charge or the presiding elder, and no vacancy can be filled in a board, but by the nomination of the preacher in charge, being confirmed by the remaining members of the board. And this is the "representative government" of the Methodist Episcopal Church, in which Dr. Bond tells us "*so omnipotent is their power (the laity) that they create the itinerant ministers, and they can destroy the itinerancy.*"

Who, we would ask, created the itinerant ministers that organized the government of the M. E. Church in 1784, without asking the consent

\* M. E. Church, South.



of the laity whom they proposed to govern? Not the laity. Who, we again ask, created the ministers that disrupted the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1844, severing her bonds of union, and causing her to fall into two discordant divisions no more to be united, and involved in suits at law, the one with the other? Were they the creatures of the laity or the representatives of the laity, acting upon their delegated authority? We pause for a reply.

Surely, Dr. Bond must have forgotten that, when the reformers in the Methodist Episcopal Church petitioned the General Conference in 1824, for representation in the governmental affairs of the church, and claimed it as "a right" and asked it as "a privilege," that body from its high authoritative position, replied to the petitioners in these very explicit words: "*pardon us if we know no such rights, if we comprehend no such privileges.*" Surely he has not made a discovery of that of which both the reformers and the General Conference were ignorant, viz: that the laity of the Methodist Episcopal Church are possessed of an "omnipotent power" in the governmental affairs of the church.

We have been told that "*the membership should not concern themselves about the government of the church.*"

Such doctrine is unworthy of the Protestant religion, and of the age and country in which we live. For every enlightened and intelligent christian mind must regard every thing, yea, every principle connected and identified with the posi-



tion and condition of the church of which he is a member, as worthy of its candid attention and investigation. And for a man to be identified with any one of the denominations of the Christian Church, and at the same time to remain both ignorant of, and indifferent as to the principles, rules and governmental regulations of his church, will argue but little in favor of either his intelligence as a man, or of his attentive regard for the best interests of the church as a Christian. That regard for, and attachment to the church, which spring from enlightened intelligence and a complete acquaintance with her principles, produce the best influence on the part of the membership, and lead to the best christian results. For that part of the membership whose love for the church springs from a hearty approval of such principles by an enlightened intelligence, always constitutes the most steadfast, the most influential, and the most useful class to be found within her pale.

But on the other hand there are to be found within the communion of the different branches of the Christian Church, numbers who take but little interest in any thing that relates to the governmental affairs thereof. Some will secretly disapprove of the principles of the ecclesiastical polity of a church, and yet, from motives prudential, and not religious, subscribe to, and identify themselves with it, seeking for convenience in policy. Such are generally wanting in individuality of sentiment, or that definite action that is the result of independency of thought, firmness of purpose, and decision in religious principles; and the position



which such occupy in any church, is rather one of neutrality and quiescence, than of usefulness and activity. Again, there are others who may care but little about the regulations of the church of their choice, (if they really have a choice,) and at the same time disbelieve some of its doctrinal tenets of religion, and yet from motives alone prudential, and a policy not religious, subscribe to those regulations and to those tenets, seemingly satisfied with the conveniency which such a position secures. Such membership constitute a poor acquisition to any church, for one church will suit them as well as another, under the same circumstances; and, unfortunately for the cause of Christianity, they contribute but little in a religious point of view to establish its influence, or to strengthen its hands, for such care but little for its doctrines and less for its governmental affairs.

Candor in investigation, an independent exercise of judgment, purity of principle, and firmness of purpose, are highly becoming on the part of all who become members of any branch of the church of Christ.



## CHAPTER VIII.

Composition of the Methodist Protestant Church in its organization—History of the cause and extent of the spirit of dissatisfaction in the Methodist Episcopal Church—Rev. Jesse Lee's version of it—Withdrawal of Rev. William McKendree (afterwards Bishop) and Rev. James O'Kelley from the Methodist Episcopal Church—Charter for District Conference granted to the local ministers in 1820—The "Wesleyan Repository" published in 1821—Answer of the General Conference of 1824 to the memorials of the Reformers—The "Mutual Rights" published and Union Societies formed in 1824—Persecutions and expulsions of Reformers—First "Associated Methodist Church" formed in Baltimore in 1828.

THE Methodist Protestant Church was originally composed of persons exiled from the Methodist Episcopal Church by the hand of arbitrary power, exercised by the itinerant ministry. Some of them had been expelled because they honestly believed the sovereign power should be vested in the whole Church, and were sufficiently American in their feelings to express their opinions. Many others had withdrawn upon witnessing such an exhibition of tyrannical measures as were meted out to their christian brethren, against whom no charges of immorality had been brought. These two classes composed the Methodist Protestant Church at its organization;—men who had been proscribed in church for opinion's sake, and not for want of christian character or religious integrity.



In order to reach the root of the matter, we appeal to history. Jesse Lee informs us that not long after the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church there were some who complained that the laity were excluded from its counsels, and that the itinerant ministry had become the supreme governing power. He says: "The same spirit prevailed in many places, both among the local preachers and private members. Some of them contended that the local preachers ought to have a seat and vote in all our Conferences, and others said there ought to be a delegation of lay members." (See Lee's History of the Methodists, page 213.)

This discussion in the Methodist Episcopal Church was carried on in 1794. Two years before James O'Kelley and Rev. Wm. McKendree, (afterwards Bishop,) with many others, had withdrawn from the Methodist Episcopal Church on account of some of the arbitrary principles of its government.

In 1820 the General Conference granted to the local preachers a charter, by virtue of which they were permitted to meet together annually in District Conference; the presiding elder of the district being chairman of the body. The authority of the Conference extended to granting license to preach, recommending persons to the Annual Conference for the itinerancy, orders, &c. About this time the ecclesiastical rights of the local ministry and laity became a subject of discussion, to a considerable extent, within the pale of the church.



In 1821 Mr. William S. Stockton began the publication of a semi-monthly periodical at Trenton, New Jersey, entitled "The Wesleyan Repository and Religious Intelligencer." Its columns were open to the discussion of the principles of church government, and writers of distinguished ability entered into the discussion, and as truth never loses any thing by honest investigation, the friends of "Mutual Rights" soon began to increase in number.

The General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church met in Baltimore on the first of May, 1824. Petitions and memorials from different parts of the United States were presented to that body, all praying for a change in the polity of the government, in such a manner as to admit of representation from the local ministry and laity in the General Conference, where rules were made for their government. This was asked as "a privilege" and claimed as "a right."

These memorials were answered by a circular, issued by the General Conference, containing a shameful denial of the "rights and privileges" asked for. Hear its high-toned language:

"But if by 'rights and privileges' it is intended to signify something foreign from the institutions of the church as we received them from our fathers, pardon us if we know no such rights, if we do not comprehend such privileges."

On the 21st of May, 1824, a few days after the rise of the General Conference, a meeting was held in the city of Baltimore by the advocates of a reform in the government of the Meth-



odist Episcopal Church, for the purpose of adopting such measures as in their judgment were best calculated to effect the desired reformation. At this meeting it was resolved,—

“*First*, To institute a periodical publication, entitled the Mutual Rights of the Ministers and Members of the Methodist Episcopal Church, to be conducted by a committee of ministers and laymen.

“*Secondly*, To raise societies in all parts of the United States, whose duty it shall be to disseminate the principles of a well-balanced church government, and to correspond with each other,” &c.

The periodical was established. The societies were raised and organized, and were generally known by the name of the “Union Societies.” Writers of high distinction as ministers of the M. E. Church, contributed to the columns of the Mutual Rights. The productions of their pens were mighty to disseminate the truth and destroy the assumptions of the advocates of itinerant, ministerial aristocracy. In the list of those writers we would record the names of Snethen, Shinn, Jennings, McCaine, French, Brown, Hill, Bascom, Smith, Davis, and others. “Several of the anti-reformers availed themselves of the freedom of the columns of the Mutual Rights, and wrote essays in vindication of the Methodist government, as being of divine origin, and the only legitimate church government on earth, and represented the reformers as ‘back-sliders,’ ‘under the influence of base motives,’ ‘enemies of Meth-



odism,' 'opposers of God,' 'instigated by the devil,' &c. Indeed, this kind of abusive matter and mere declamation from anti-reformers, accumulated to such a degree that the editorial committee of the second volume were under the necessity of restricting those writers to argument alone."\*

It would seem that this latter class of writers fancied they had a right to call the reformers by names that would not only disparage, but at the same time impute motives to them wholly unchristian in their character, and could even dare to denounce them for publishing their arguments in the Mutual Rights, in favor of a change of polity in the government of the church of their choice; and not only so, but as we shall soon see, could expel them from the communion of that church for presuming to exercise such a right. All this was done in republican America!! BUT IT WAS NOT DONE UPON THE PRINCIPLES OF AMERICAN REPUBLICANISM.

Early in 1825, it became evident that the violent and relentless persecution which had been gotten up and carried on by the itinerant ministry and their abettors against the friends of "mutual rights," was destined to ripen into expulsion from the church. For early in that year, the Rev. James Gwynn publicly read out of church from the pulpit, in Tennessee, the names of fourteen official members, some of them local preachers, without any form of trial.

\* Williams's History M. P. Church.



In August of this year the Rev. W. W. Hill, of N. C., was brought to trial for advocating a reformation in the government of the church.

In 1826 the persecutions were continued in N. Carolina, by the expulsion of eight laymen from the church, on one circuit.

In the month of April, 1827, the Baltimore Annual Conference, being in session, left one of its ministers, Rev. D. B. Dorsey, without an appointment, for having read and recommended the Mutual Rights to a friend.

In the latter part of this year, twelve local ministers, and twenty-two laymen were expelled from the Methodist Episcopal Church in Baltimore, upon the charge of patronizing the Mutual Rights and belonging to the Union Society. This was effected by the arbitrary and tyrannical measures of Rev. James M. Hanson. The preachers carried up their cases to the District Conference, which sat on the 26th December, 1827, which was their proper court of trial. Here they expected justice, as a majority of the Conference were reformers. But on the morning of the second day, after having held a caucus the preceding evening, the presiding elder, with a *minority* of the Conference and the votes of *nine colored men, who were not entitled to vote*, DISSOLVED the District Conference, and ordered the preachers to appear at the Quarterly Conference and stand their trials. Indignant at this shameful act of injustice, the preachers determined not to appear at this Quarterly Conference, but to appeal to the approaching Annual Conference, against the ar-



bitrary and *illegal* proceedings of the presiding elder. In the mean time the Quarterly Conference expelled them all.

A memorial was sent up by all who were expelled in Baltimore, to the Baltimore Annual Conference, which met in Carlisle, Penn., in April, 1828. But that Conference not only confirmed the acts of Hanson & Co., in the expulsion of the memorialists, but likewise expelled the Rev. D. B. Dorsey and Rev. W. C. Pool, upon charges of a similar nature. A species of stereotyped charge was brought against reformers every where, East, West, North and South. It was made to suit all. “*For sowing dissension in our societies by inveighing against discipline.*” This embraced the head and front of their offence. If a member differed in opinion from the itinerant party, he was supposed to have *no right* to discuss the principles of the government of the church to which he belonged. To do so, was to be guilty of “*inveighing against discipline,*” and generally led to a demand for the offender’s expulsion by the party in power. Behold what vast importance the question of church government assumes just here!

In November, 1827, a general Convention of reformers met in the city of Baltimore, composed of ministerial and lay delegates from the States of Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, Maryland, Virginia, N. Carolina, and the District of Columbia. This body adopted a memorial to the General Conference, praying for a representation to be granted the laity and local ministry in the



General Conference, in which department rules were made for their government, and prepared an address to the Methodist public; both of which were published for general information.

December 23d, 1827, the expelled laymen in Baltimore united themselves together as a society, "in the name of the Great Head of the church, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, receiving the Holy Scriptures as our guide; and for prudential purposes adopting as an instrument of union, the 'general rules' of Messrs. John and Charles Wesley." January 26th, 1828, nine of the expelled ministers and preachers united with them. Forty-seven ladies belonging to the M. E. Church, addressed a letter to Mr. Hanson, the preacher in charge, declaring their connection with the church dissolved, and united with the others a few days afterwards. This constituted the first organization of an "Associated Methodist Church."

In 1828 thirteen local ministers were expelled from the church in N. Carolina. Eight of them were subjected to all the formality of a mock-trial; the preacher in charge acting in the triple character of *prosecutor*, *witness*, and *judge* in the cases; and *his will*, supplying the *place of law* or *rule* in the premises. Two more were disposed of, by dropping their names from the records, that is by the use of "*the scratch law*." Three others were simply read out of church from the pulpit, by the preacher in charge, with no other formality whatever.

In Lynchburg, Va., this year, nine members of the M. E. Church were expelled, two of them



being licensed preachers, for favoring the movement of the reformers ; and about fifty withdrew, after witnessing such a tyrannical outrage perpetrated upon their brethren for opinion's sake.

Persecutions raged about this time against the friends of reform at Cincinnati. Four ministers were expelled, and ten laymen censured,—which led to the withdrawal of about two hundred and forty from the communion of the church.

The reader of the history of those times cannot fail to notice with the deepest degree of astonishment, the *injustice* on the one hand, and the *partiality* on the other, that mark the conduct of the men in power in the M. E. Church. For reading and circulating the “Mutual Rights,” numbers both of the ministry and laity were expelled ;—because, as it was charged, “*it contains among other things much that inveighs against the discipline of the M. E. Church aforesaid in whole or in part, and is in direct opposition thereto, and that is abusive or speaks evil of a part, if not most, of the ministers of that church.*” But for writing the articles which were published in the “Mutual Rights,” and which the opponents of reform contended did constitute its objectionable character, was by no means deemed so objectionable an offence, as to read and circulate the periodical ; as perhaps but one minister was ever summoned to trial for an essay of his pen in said periodical ; and it was well known that the great majority of the essays in that paper were the productions of prominent ministers of the M. E. Church.

Rev. H. B. Bascom was the author of the most



vindictive article that ever appeared in the *Mutual Rights*: it was a paper signed "*Vindex*." (See Paris's History of the M. P. Church, page 136.) No charge whatever was brought against him, but receiving soon afterwards the appointment of President to Augusta College, Kentucky, it acted like a charm, and proved a quietus to his pen, so far as reform was concerned,—and this same "*Vindex*" finally accepted the Episcopacy!

The answer of the General Conference of 1828, to the memorial of the convention of reformers, was of such a character, and couched in such language, as to forbid them to hope for a moment that any justice would be received from that quarter. Its answer was as dogmatical and dictatorial as the reply of 1824. The convention of reformers which met in Baltimore, in 1827, had appointed a committee for the purpose of calling another convention, to meet at such time and place as they might designate, if they should be of opinion that the general interests of the reformers should require it. The General Conference having proposed no honorable or just terms upon which those who had been so unjustly expelled for opinion's sake, could return into the bosom of the church, the committee deemed it proper to call a convention of the reformers to meet in Baltimore on the 12th of November, 1828.



## CHAPTER IX.

The Convention of 1828—Articles of Association—The work of Organization under the articles—General Convention of 1830—Adoption of the Constitution and Discipline—The first General Conference—Second General Conference—Third General Conference—Fourth General Conference—Fifth General Conference—Sixth General Conference—Divorce of the Methodist Protestant and Book Concern from all connection with the General Conference—General View of the Methodist Protestant Church—Her increase contrasted with the early progress of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and shown to be any thing but a failure.

THE Convention met in Baltimore, November 12th, 1828. It was composed of delegates from the States of Vermont, New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, Virginia, North Carolina, Ohio, Tennessee, Alabama, New Jersey and the District of Columbia. Rev. N. Snethen was elected President, and W. S. Stockton, Secretary.

The Convention proceeded to consider the condition of those Reformers who had been expelled from the Church for opinion's sake, and those who had withdrawn on account of the persecutions waged against the friends of Reform, and adopted "Articles of Association" for the government of all such as might agree thereto, under the title of "*Associated Methodist Churches.*"

Seventeen "Articles" were adopted, which provided for laying off the work into Annual Conferences, circuits, stations, &c., the trial of immoral members, the temporal interests of the Societies and the general welfare of the whole.



The action of this Convention might be termed the incipient organization of the church, for it provided for the meeting of a Convention in Baltimore, which was to assemble in that city in November, 1830.

Immediately after the rise of the Convention the friends of Mutual Rights embarked in the work of organization. Societies were collected, churches formed, circuits arranged, and Annual Conferences were organized. The seventeen "Articles of Association" were founded upon the doctrine of the Mutual Rights of the ministry and laity, and the prospect of a convention of ministers and lay delegates, to meet in 1830, to adopt a Constitution and Discipline upon the same principles, were satisfactory and encouraging to the friends of church representation. The ranks of the Reformers now swelled rapidly. Numbers of those who were still within the pale of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and holding the doctrine of Mutual Rights, came forward and united with the new association.

But the hand of persecution was not stayed, for "*the tug of war*" had now fairly come. Many who had boldly advocated the doctrine of Mutual Rights and of a republican church polity, cowered before the storm. The time had come for action, and *quietude*, not *manly firmness*, became their policy. But men of decided principles, who acted from principle, boldly braved the storm, and like true men, defined their principles by their actions. Some, who were still within the pale of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and



holding the opinions of the friends of Reform, and who could not afford to exchange their views of polity on the one hand for quietude in the church on the other, as one commodity is exchanged in the market for another, were made sorely to feel the lash of ecclesiastical despotism.

In Lancaster circuit, Virginia Conference, eight or ten names of members, known to be Reformers in sentiment, were read out of church by the preacher in charge without the least semblance of trial. In many other places the arbitrary power of the itinerant ministry was exhibited against the friends of Mutual Rights in such a high-handed and tyrannical manner as to open the eyes of the membership and lead them to examine into their church rights as Christians. This, as a matter of course, led numbers to decide upon principle, and go into the ranks of the reformers.

The supporters of itinerant ministerial aristocracy very probably thought to crush, at the outset, the spirit of reform, by dealing arbitrarily with its advocates, but being disappointed in this, and doomed to see their own chosen measures drive numbers into the ranks of the reformers, proscription was in some places abandoned, and other measures were substituted.

At some points it was currently reported that reform was "*going down*." In other places the societies of the Associated Methodists were represented as being "made up of expelled persons," "immoral members," "backsliders," &c. This too proved a failure, and the stream of reform has



continued to flow onward, and grow deeper and broader the further it runs.

#### GENERAL CONVENTION.

On the 2d day of November, 1830, the General Convention met in the city of Baltimore. This body was composed of eighty-three ministerial and lay delegates, and was organized by the election of Rev. Francis Waters, D. D., president, and Rev. W. C. Lipscomb, secretary.

The committee which had been appointed at the convention of 1828, "to draft a constitution and discipline," made their report. After minutely and carefully investigating the drafts presented, and making some small alterations, the present most admirable Constitution and Discipline, as found in the edition of 1830, were adopted. Twelve Annual Conferences were represented in this Convention, viz: Vermont, Boston, New York and Lower Canada, Genesee, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, N. Carolina, Tennessee, Georgia and Ohio.

In the conclusion of their labors the convention adopted the following resolution:

*Resolved*, that all power not delegated to the respective official bodies of the Methodist Protestant Church by this convention, are retained to said ministers and members." It would be well for those in whose hands the administration of discipline is vested, to bear this resolution in mind.

The Constitution and Discipline, as adopted by the convention, was gladly received, and adopted



with great unanimity by the churches and Annual Conferences every where. The Constitution guaranteed the mutual rights of the ministry and laity, built upon the fair platform of sound republicanism, affording to the ministers and members of the M. P. Church an ample shield and defence for their religious and church privileges against the arbitrary hands of all ecclesiastical tyrants, and from the cruelty of such despotism as they had felt and suffered when within the pale of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

#### THE FIRST GENERAL CONFERENCE.

The first General Conference of the M. P. Church met in Georgetown, D. C., May 6th, 1834. Rev. N. Snethen was elected president, and Rev. W. C. Lipscomb secretary. The operations of the Constitution and Discipline had been closely observed from their adoption up to this period; consequently, the General Conference was prepared to make such alterations as the experience of the past might suggest. By a comparison of the edition of the Discipline of 1834, with that of 1830, it will be observed that some very important changes and improvements were made. One more new Conference, the Pittsburg, had been set off. The prosperity that had attended the labors of the ministry, and the consequent increase in numerical strength, according to the statements of the Mutual Rights and Methodist Protestant, were greatly encouraging. Opposition had generally been thrown in the way of the ministers of the Methodist Prot-



estant Church, by the supporters of the one-man-power system, but the doctrine of mutual rights had been received by many; and embraced by such as had the manly independence to think, to choose, and to act for themselves.

The minutes of the several Annual Conferences now exhibited the membership as numbering 26,587; and the ministers and preachers over 500, about one third of whom were in the itinerancy. This General Conference took some steps in the establishment of a book concern in the city of Baltimore, for the benefit of the church, but the fluctuating condition of the finances of the country militated against its prosperity.

#### THE SECOND GENERAL CONFERENCE.

On the fifteenth of May, 1838, the second General Conference met at Pittsburg, Pennsylvania; it was composed of fifty-three delegates, representing fifteen Annual Conferences. Rev. Asa Shinn was elected president, and Rev. S. W. Pearson, secretary.

This was a called session of the General Conference, made by a constitutional majority of all the Annual Conferences. The Constitution provided that, after the meeting of the General Conference in 1834, that body should meet only once in seven years afterwards, but this arrangement it was believed from observation, would not meet the interests of the church so well; accordingly that body, being invested with proper authority from the Annual Conferences, so altered the Constitution at this session, as to require a session of



the body to meet once in four years. A plan was also adopted for the establishment of a church book concern.

At this General Conference some excitement began to be manifested upon the subject of slavery in connection with the church. But it being a question over which the respective Annual Conferences only have cognizance, the General Conference had no constitutional authority to take any definite action in the premises. The agitation of this subject is not known to have benefited any church, either North or South. Within two years after the rupture of the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Northern division had suffered a decrease in membership of about 15,000.

The increase of the Methodist Protestant Church, for the past four year was not so large as in the preceding; the meagre returns show her numbers at this period to be something over 28,000.

#### THE THIRD GENERAL CONFERENCE.

The third General Conference met in Baltimore on the 3d of May, 1842. Fifty-one delegates were in attendance, representing nineteen Annual Conferences. Rev. Asa Shinn was elected president, and Rev. A. H. Bassett, and J. J. Reed, secretaries. But few alterations were made in the discipline of the church at this session. The name of the church organ was changed to "Methodist Protestant," and Rev. E. Y. Reese elected editor. The subject of slavery was also brought into the session, and a vigorous effort made by



Northern and Northwestern members to create an excitement upon the subject. Nothing definite was effected, and probably, no party was benefited. Numerical strength, twenty-one Annual Conferences, and 53,875 members.

#### THE FOURTH GENERAL CONFERENCE.

The fourth General Conference met in Cincinnati, on the first Tuesday in May, 1846. The work now embraced twenty-five Annual Conferences, from which seventy-one delegates were in attendance. Rev. Francis Waters, D. D., was elected president, and James E. Wilson and A. H. Bassett, secretaries.

At this General Conference the subject of slavery was again brought forward by Northern members; although, they conceded that the General Conference had no constitutional authority over the question, yet were clamorous for that body to express an opinion upon it. A vague and indefinite resolution was passed, which left the subject precisely where it found it, and no party perhaps, were either pleased or benefited thereby.

A favorable report of the financial condition of the Book Concern, which is located at Baltimore, and of the church paper, was made by the Book Committee. Rev. E. Y. Reese was elected editor of the Methodist Protestant. At this session four new Conference districts were set off, making in all twenty-nine. The numerical strength of the church amounted to 63,567 communicants.



## THE FIFTH GENERAL CONFERENCE.

The fifth General Conference met in Baltimore, May 7th, 1850. Fifty-two delegates were in attendance. Rev. Levi R. Reese was elected president, and Rev. A. H. Bassett, and Rev. B. S. Anderson, secretaries. From the report of the book Committee to this General Conference it was apparent that the Book Concern and church paper, the Methodist Protestant, under the supervision and control of Rev. E. Y. Reese, had attained to a state of prosperity not heretofore enjoyed since the church had commenced her operations. The liabilities for outstanding debts which had heretofore weighed heavily upon the Book Concern, had been nearly all liquidated. No excitement upon the question of slavery took place at this session. Two resolutions from Quarterly Conferences were sent up, one from New York, and the other from Pittsburg district, touching the subject. The papers were read, referred, reported and voted upon, with that Christian urbanity and forbearance, which became the dignity of such a body of ministers and laymen; which certainly argues that the church has grown wiser in some of her departments by experience. Of course this subject which has become so completely identified with the politics of the country, was left precisely where it was found. The church now embraced thirty-two Annual Conferences, and numbered 65,694 communicants.

The Methodist Protestant Church had now increased in numbers and influence to such an ex-



tent as to induce the General Conference to take such steps as, in its judgment, would place the church in a more extended and influential sphere of usefulness. To this end a "board of foreign missions" was appointed, which board was located at Pittsburg, Penn. The board upon its organization elected Rev. William Collier chairman, and proceeded at once to act with becoming vigor, in raising funds, in order to fit out and send off missionaries to distant lands. In 1852 the board sent out as missionary to Oregon Territory, Rev. Daniel Bagly, of North Illinois District. He arrived upon his field of labor late in the year, and immediately commenced successful operations. Through his labors in that far off land several churches have been organized, a mission conference formed, which now (1855) numbers ten local and itinerant ministers.

The M. P. Church had, up to the meeting of this General Conference, established no college or institution of learning she could call her own. At this session provisional arrangements were entered into to accept the offer of Madison College, at Uniontown, Penn., which the trustees thereof had tendered to the church, upon terms deemed altogether liberal. The College was accepted; and the first session of the institution was opened in September, 1851, under favorable auspices. Rev. R. H. Ball, of Virginia, was selected to take charge as president of the institution.

Rev. E. Y. Reese was re-elected editor of the Methodist Protestant, and Book Agent.



## THE SIXTH GENERAL CONFERENCE.

The sixth General Conference met at Steubenville, Ohio, May 2d, 1854. Rev. John Burns was elected president, and Rev. W. H. Wills, and Rev. John Scott, secretaries. Sixty-two ministerial and lay delegates were in attendance, and the work now embraced thirty-four Annual Conferences.

At this General Conference the Methodist Protestant and Book Concern, at Baltimore, were divorced from their connection with the General Conference, and arrangements were made for the establishment of a new paper to be called the "Western Methodist Protestant," and also a book concern in the west. The two church papers and Book Concerns are to be amenable to and patronized by the respective Annual Conferences that shall enter into the arrangement, by selecting the establishment they may choose to patronize. By this arrangement \$2,300 were withdrawn from the Book Concern at Baltimore, to aid in laying the foundation of the Western establishment.

The convention of the Western Annual Conferences met at Zanesville, Ohio, in November, 1854, to adopt measures in accordance with the resolutions of the General Conference, for the establishment of the Western Methodist Protestant and Book Concern; and elected Rev. A. H. Bassett editor and book agent, and located their establishment at Springfield, Ohio.

The Methodist Protestant and Book Concern was continued at Baltimore by the convention of



Eastern and Southern Conferences which had elected to sustain this establishment. The Convention met in Baltimore in June, 1855, to carry out the arrangements required by the resolutions of the General Conference, and re-elected Rev. E. Y. Reese editor and book agent.

The Methodist Protestant denomination now embraces thirty-five Annual Conferences, and according to the returns made to the General Conference of 1854, her statistics may be summed up thus :

Stations 78 ; Circuits 405 ; Missions 103 ; Itinerant Ministers and Preachers 916 ; Unstationed Ministers and Preachers 767 ; Members 70,018 ; Houses of worship 982 ; Parsonages 118 ; estimated value of church property \$1,009,275.

#### GENERAL VIEW OF THE METHODIST PROTESTANT CHURCH.

The Articles of Association were adopted in November, 1828. Under these articles twelve Annual Conferences were organized within the space of two years, although the country was rife with the predictions made by the opponents of "mutual rights," that "reform would go down," and that "reform is going down."

In 1830 the Constitution and Discipline were adopted, and the Methodist Protestant Church took her position among the sister churches of the land. In 1834 she numbered but 26,587, and at the General Conference of 1854, her re-



turns showed an aggregate of 70,018 communicants.

She is now in the twenty-fifth year of her existence, and the star of prosperity has continued to shine brightly upon her path-way. The vigorous exertions she is now making for the diffusion of the gospel, and the institutions of learning she is founding and patronizing, afford cheering assurances through the blessing of God, of abundant success and extended usefulness. Her future prospects are bright with hope, and should cause all her sons and daughters to rejoice.

“The Methodist Protestant Church *has not proved a failure*. Methodism rose in England in 1739, and in 1767 the whole number of members amounted to 25,911—a period of 28 years. The Methodist Protestant Church has existed 24 years, and numbers 70,018 members, being an average increase of 2,917 per annum; while the former is little more than 900 members per annum.

“Methodism took its rise in the United States in 1769, and in 1791 they numbered 43,265—a period of 22 years; while in the same length of time the Methodist Protestants increased above that amount 22,000. Failure indeed! Considering the kind and amount of opposition it has had to contend with, its success has been wonderful.” See “A Tribute to our Fathers,” by Rev. R. F. Shinn. We will add the prayer, may she prove a praise and a blessing to the whole earth.



## THE LITERARY INSTITUTIONS OF THE CHURCH.

Madison College, at Uniontown, Penn. Under the advisory direction of the General Conference. Rev. R. H. Ball, its first president.

North Hebron Institute, Vermont. Under the control of the Vermont and New York Annual Conferences.

Central Female College, Culloden, Georgia. Under the control and direction of the Georgia Annual Conference.

Lynchburg College, at Lynchburg, Virginia. Adopted in 1855, and is under the control of the Virginia Annual Conference. Rev. S. K. Cox, president.

By the latest reports these institutions are all represented as being in a prosperous condition.