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THE WHY AND WHEREFORE

OF THE

METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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EVERY organization of individuals should be able to justify its own existence. Justification depends upon the spirit, aim, and characteristics of the body, which, in the case of professing Christians, should be in harmony with the mind and will of God, and with the best interests of the human race.

The Episcopal Address prefixed to the Discipline says: "We believe that God's design in raising up the Methodist Episcopal Church in America was to reform the continent and spread scriptural holiness over these lands," and, we may add, over all lands. Its missions girdle the globe. Europe, Asia, Af-
rica, and Oceanica, as well as America, bear witness to its beneficent activity. Its work will not be finished until Christ is enthroned in all hearts and over all lives; nay, indeed, not until time itself shall be no more, and all the holy are glorified with their divine Head.

This design is coincident with the object of the Almighty in the gift of his only begotten Son for the world’s salvation, “that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John iii, 16); with the purpose of Christ in dying for the ungodly that all who repent and believe may be presented “holy, unblamable, and unreprovable in his sight” (Col. i, 22); “a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Tit. ii, 14); with the work of the Holy Spirit, convincing “the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment” (John xvi, 8); justifying, sanctifying, and blessing obedient believers; with the gift of the sacred Scriptures No. 242.
through inspired men "moved by the Holy Ghost"—which Scriptures are "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Tim. iii, 16, 17); with the institution of the gospel ministry: "He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph. iv, 11-13); and with the aim of all true ministers: "whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus." Col. i, 28.

The design of the Methodist Episcopal
Church is a proof of its divine origin. As a distinct branch of the Church of Christ in the world it has not yet numbered two centuries of years. Methodism began with two devout young men who were students in the University of Oxford, England. These were the brothers John and Charles Wesley, the former of whom became the expositor and theologian, and the latter the poet, of Methodism, or of "Christianity in earnest." In 1729, while reading the Bible as the sole and sufficient guide of religious faith and practice, they clearly saw that they could not be saved without holiness. They "followed after it," seeking through prayer and good works for purity of heart and righteousness of life. They incited others to do the same. Young men of studious habit and moral earnestness consorted with them. In 1737, obtaining more light, they saw that men are justified, in the order of divine grace, before they are sanctified. Still
they sought holiness as the great object of life. Nor was their search in vain. Consciously justified before God, cleansed from all unrighteousness, and filled with burning enthusiasm for the good of humanity, "God then thrust them out to raise up a holy people."

The great design of the Methodist Episcopal Church shows it to be in the true apostolical succession. Founders and successors to founders have all been called by Christ to spread scriptural holiness throughout the world. Their authority is from him. Their gifts, graces, and usefulness are all from him; and differ only in measure from those of the chosen twelve. Philip Embury, who established Methodism in New York in 1766; Captain Thomas Webb, of the British army, who co-operated with him, and Robert Strawbridge, who introduced Methodism into Maryland about the same time, were local preach-
ers; Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmoor, sent from England in 1769, together with Francis Asbury and Richard Wright, who came in 1771, were traveling preachers, but all alike were divinely commissioned for their appointed work. And so have been the many thousands of preachers raised up to carry on that work since the Wesleys entered into their rest. Ordination is the Church’s formal recognition of their call to entire ministerial devotion. Bishops and presbyters are of the same order (Acts xx, 17, 28), but differ in respect of office. Deacons correspond in function to local preachers. No unvarying specific organization of the Church was ever effected by Christ or his apostles. The living Spirit in the living Church adapts its organization to its environment and to the needs of humanity.

The design of the Methodist Episcopal Church necessarily differentiates its polity
from that of the Protestant Episcopal Church. Its forms of worship are simple, but not liturgical, and are suited to the wants of the people. Conversion is necessary to membership in it. The aim to spread "scriptural holiness" is unchangeable. Methods of accomplishment differ. Liberty in non-essentials is the glory of vital Christianity. Growth in knowledge, love, and usefulness is the law of holy living. In striving to reach its objective point the Church creates different classes of officers, such as class-leaders and stewards. Exhorters and local preachers proclaim the living word, and when called of God to exclusive ministerial functions receive the intelligent indorsement of the Church before admission to the ranks of the traveling ministry. Holding themselves subject to assignment to fields where labor is not likely to yield the best fruits, they do not make salary a subject of legal stipulation.
The design of the Methodist Episcopal Church implies necessary difference of creed from that of its Calvinistic sisters. Laboring to make people holy, it firmly believes that all to whom the Gospel is preached may be holy if they will; that God wills all to be saved; that Christ died for all, and that the Holy Spirit is given to all without respect of persons. Believing in Christ with the heart unto righteousness is the one condition of salvation, and that a condition within the power of every sane human being. It does not believe in the Presbyterian creed that the eternal destiny of each individual has been fixed by arbitrary and irrevocable divine decree, without foresight of faith or good works; nor does it believe with the Reformed Church that God has selected a certain and definite number of persons for salvation out of the mass of falling humanity, leaving all the rest to perish without possibility of deliverance.
The fullness and freeness of the Father's love provides salvation for all. Whether that salvation be experienced or not depends wholly upon the free will of those to whom it is offered.

The design of the Methodist Episcopal Church differentiates its sacramental observances from those of the Baptists. Modes of administering baptism and the Lord's Supper are of minor importance. Of those generally in use one is practically as valid as another. But faith working obedience by love necessarily involves observance of the sacraments ordained by Christ. Baptism is the sign and seal of the covenant of grace, and the Lord's Supper is the loyal and purposeful renewal of that covenant. It is the symbol of Christ's greatest gift to man, the emphatic expression of true faith, and the witness to a common fellowship in Christ. Fitness to receive the sacrament of baptism is consequent on a state
of grace; of the Lord's Supper, on a true faith in Christ. The privileges of the Lord's table are open to all his genuine disciples.

The design of the Methodist Episcopal Church also places it in contrast with the custom of the Quakers—Friends—who do not admit that the sacraments were instituted by Christ, and who dispense with the services of a trained ministry wholly consecrated to preaching the Gospel and to pastoral service. The Friends hold the true sacraments to be spiritual blessings, while Methodists believe them to be the outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace; and that, as ordinances established by the Lord Jesus Christ, the observance of them is obligatory upon his disciples.

"Faith that worketh by love," or holiness, is the principal thing. Rites and ceremonies, however appropriate, have no saving efficacy. Salvation is through Christ. But that salva-
tion is to be proclaimed by true successors of apostles, evangelists, pastors and teachers, whose ministrations have distinguished the Christian Church from the day of Pentecost until now.

Thus the Methodist Episcopal Church is a peculiar organization, adapted to the achievement of its great design, subordinating all details to the accomplishment of its end, and never resting until a divine prophecy shall be fulfilled by the spread of scriptural holiness throughout the world.