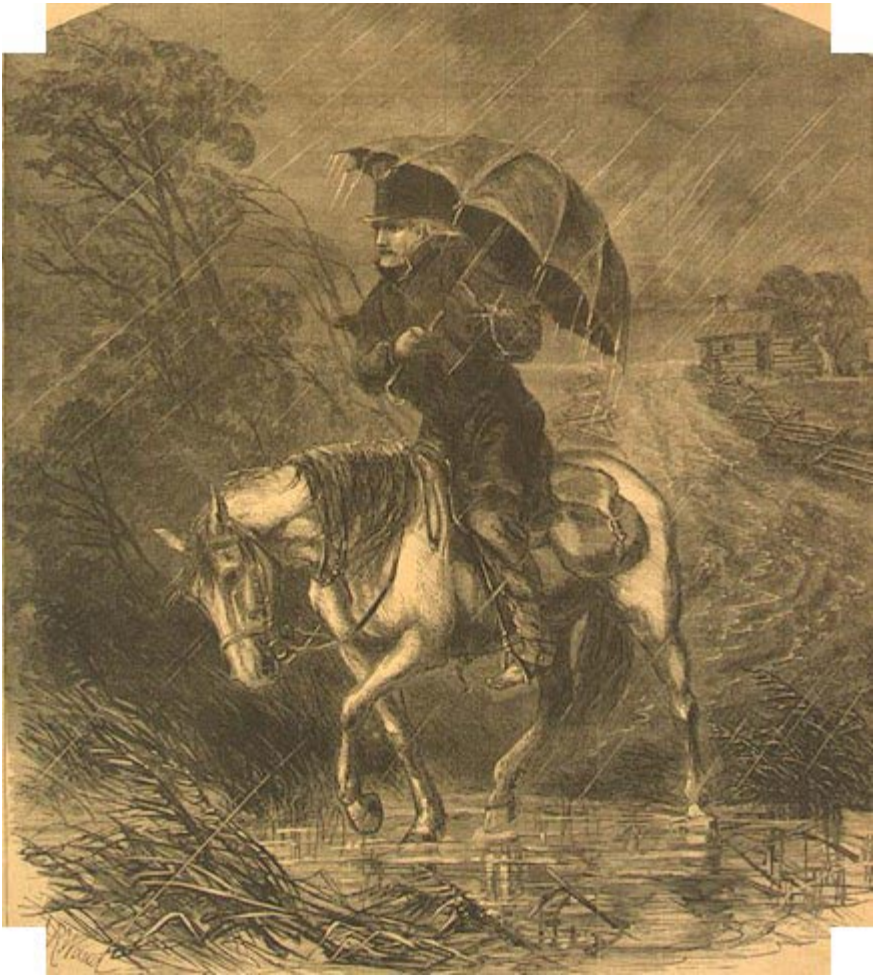


How the Methodists Saved America



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Mike Atnip

The cover picture is an artist's version of a Methodist circuit preacher, faithfully taking the message to his next appointment.

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Introduction

I have never been a Methodist. I never intend to be either. So to those who may be thinking, “Oh no, another ‘my church is the perfect one’ book”, take a seat and read on...

While this book is not Methodist propaganda, it is biased. As John D. Martin has noted in the introduction to the book *The Secret of the Strength*, all books are. You will see my particular views and understandings of the Christian experience in every page and paragraph if you read between the lines. I offer no apologies; I only ask that for the moment you bear with any particular differences in “issues” and consider the whole. Today’s Christianity is in desperate need of a return to the principles of a people like the first Methodists were.

This book was born out of a rare situation. I never had thoughts of writing it until recent events left me without much reading material, except some old Christian writings of which a good percentage was of early Methodist and “Holiness” origin. Even though my childhood for the most part was among the conservative “Holiness” type of churches, I never knew the full story of its beginnings, with only the names of Wesley and Asbury sticking in my mind. For the last 10 years, I had rarely read anything much of Methodist/Holiness writings, but now by circumstances which I did not plan, I have a large amount of material available (of which I have not read it all), of which this book was born. The history of this courageous and faithful people should not really be lost.

Rather than pepper the page with bibliographical footnotes, and thus distract the reader’s attention from the main message, I have chosen to include a Bibliography and only annotate those points that add to the story. All of the biographical and historical information has been, of

course, gleaned from old books, most of which are in the public domain—so I quote them and recite by memory from them (by now forgetting where I read some of those little points that I include), and sometimes use their phraseology (So don't credit me for some of these beautifully written words. I acknowledge they are copied), freely intermixing the information from various sources. Should anyone think this to be improper, and that every tidbit of information be separately and duly noted, I beg your pardon. I claim no originality in anything historical, neither do I wish to receive any merit as an outstanding authority of Methodist history—it was all harvested from other books, as mentioned earlier, most of which are in public domain and no longer in print.

The title to this book makes a daring supposition. To take the great nation of the United States of America, and then propose that some religious group saved them will definitely need a bit of explaining.

Sure, it will likely be admitted, the Methodists were one of the most influential of the various religious movements in the early days of America. But does the religion of one group of people affect a nation as a whole? Especially when that group was far from being a majority?

No, the Methodists were not like the Mormons in Utah, or the Muslims in Saudi Arabia. Their numbers never climbed anywhere close to being a majority. But I still propose that they saved America from the utter moral and ethical bankruptcy that has shackled other Central and South American countries!

Now for a few points to note about the book:

First, I want to clarify that other groups—Quakers, Presbyterians, Baptist, etc., were involved in the making and salvation of our nation (The Puritans laying a foundation). Keep this in mind, as I will not repeat it much, but I never intend to say the Methodists did it all. But from particulars

about to be revealed, I am still convinced that without the Methodists, the USA (and the whole world) would never have had such a stable society as has been witnessed for over 200 years now.

Next, this book does not contain many Bible verses and references. Since I presume that most of the readers will be familiar with the Bible, they can judge for themselves whether any certain statement is based on Biblical principles or not.

Next, this book has errors, I am sure. I have not understood some of the intentions of the quotes in this book, or have misquoted someone, or have put a wrong name or date. Since particulars are not the focus, I have not worried myself in precision. Please do not use this book for a reference in such matters.

Finally, this book focuses on what the early Methodists did accomplish, not what they didn't. They had their errors and problems. For now, I pass these over for the most part. Had they been better in a few areas, who knows what might have happened in greater ways!

Now, to prove my theory, I will lay before the reader three things—

1. A description of the early Methodists. Since time has changed the Methodist Church so drastically, it is absolutely necessary to set the record straight as to what kind of a people the first generations of Methodist were.

2. The manner in which the Methodists “saved” America.

3. A description of Methodist methods.

And lastly, I lay a challenge before us in the present time.

May you be blessed by this book, as thoroughly as I have been blessed in writing it!

—Mike Atnip
April, 2003

Chapter 1

Primitive Methodism

Bible-bigots.

This was one of the names given to the first group of Methodists. They did not give themselves this name which originated from an early Greek society of physicians who ate a regulated, methodical diet. For some hundred years before the Wesleys, the name had been applied to other non-conformist groups in England as well. But neither were John and Charles Wesley and their associates ashamed of what they called that “harmless name”. Bible-bigots, Bible Maggots, Sacramentarians, The Godly Club, and The Holy Club fell away, and the name Methodist stuck and became common; even though John Wesley tended to say “the people called Methodists” when referring to those who fellowshipped with him.

The “Holy Club” meeting at Oxford University



As well as their strict eating habits, that early group of men that gathered at Oxford University had other habits—like fasting regularly, attending church every Sunday faithfully, visiting the sick and those in prison, exhorting one another... And if a man is going to get into a habit of doing something, I propose that these types of habits are 1000 times better than swearing, lying, stealing, and such like. Yet they were ridiculed and persecuted—right in the midst of the University that was supposed to be training men for the ministry of the Word of God.

The story of John and Charles Wesley is so well known and documented that I will not even include much of it here. Their piety, their conversion from trusting in their good works for salvation to the merits of Christ, the anointing upon their preaching, their hymns which are still sung today; all this and more can be found in almost any Christian bookstore in America.

However, there are a few points that need to be made here. No 150-page biography can include all the details of a man's life. And so most of the biographies that you might find today in the typical Christian bookstore leaves out some details that are necessary to really understanding what the first Methodists stood for and practiced. Let's look at what was expected of a person who wanted to join a Methodist Society. The following is a part of what John and Charles Wesley put together as a guide for the societies:

4. There is only one condition previously required of those who desire admission into these societies, a desire to flee from the wrath to come, i.e., a desire to be saved from their sins. But wherever this is really fixed in the soul, it will be shown by its fruits. It is therefore expected of all who continue therein, that they should

continue to evidence their desire of salvation,

First— By doing no harm, by avoiding evil of every kind; especially that which is most generally practiced: such as

The taking the name of God in vain;

The profaning the day of the Lord, either by doing ordinary work thereon, or by buying or selling.

Drunkenness, buying or selling spirituous liquors; or drinking them, unless in cases of necessity.

Fighting, quarreling, brawling, brother going to law with brother, returning evil for evil, or railing for railing, the using many words in buying or selling.

The buying or selling of goods that have not paid the duty.

The giving or taking things on usury, i.e., unlawful interest:

Uncharitable or unprofitable conversation; particularly speaking evil of magistrates or of ministers;

Doing to others as we would not they should do unto us:

Doing what we know is not for the glory of God:

As, The putting on of gold or costly apparel:

The taking such diversions as cannot be used in the name of the Lord Jesus:

The singing those songs, or reading those books, which do not tend to the knowledge or love of God:

Softness and needless self-indulgence:

Laying up treasure upon earth:

Borrowing without a probability of paying; or taking up goods without a probability of paying for them.

5. It is expected of all who continue in these societies, that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation:

Secondly, By doing good, by being in every kind, merciful after their power, as they have opportunity, doing good of every possible sort, and as far as is possible, to all men:

To their bodies, of the ability which God giveth, by giving food to the hungry, by clothing the naked, by visiting or helping them that are sick, or in prison.

To their souls, by instructing, reproving, or exhorting all we have any intercourse with; trampling under foot that enthusiastic doctrine, that “we are not to do good, unless our hearts be free to it.”

By doing good, especially to them that are of the household of faith, or groaning so to be; employing them preferably to others, buying one of another, helping each other in business; and so much the more, because the world will love its own and them only.

By all possible diligence and frugality, that the gospel be not blamed.

By running with patience the race that is set before them, denying themselves, and taking up their cross daily; submitting to bear the reproach of Christ, to be as the filth and off-scouring of the world: and looking that men should say all manner of evil of them falsely for the Lord’s sake.

6. It is expected of all who continue in these societies, that they should continue to evidence their desire of salvation:

Thirdly, By attending upon all the ordinances of God: such are

The public worship of God:

The ministry of the word, either read or expounded:

The supper of the Lord;

Family and private prayer;

Searching the scriptures, and Fasting, or abstinence.

7. These are the general rules of our societies, all which we are taught of God to observe, even in his written word, which is the only rule, and the sufficient rule both of our faith and practice. And all these we know his Spirit writes on every truly awakened heart. If there be any among us who observe them not, who habitually break any of them, let it be made known unto them who watch over that soul, as they that must give an account. We will admonish him of the error of his ways: we will bear with him for a season. But then, if he repent not, he hath no more place among us. We have delivered our own souls.

[signed]

JOHN WESLEY.

CHARLES WESLEY.

Wouldn't that make a nice plaque to stick beside the bulletin board of your church! But wait a minute! This was no plaque. These were the rules of the Society, and

6

John kept his word: those not showing “evidences” of a serious desire to follow Jesus were put out by the scores. Originally, membership in the Society was not limited to those converted, but was opened to those who were seriously seeking it. In later years, membership in the various “offshoots” of Methodism (Salvation Army, Church of God, Holiness Churches, etc.) was a different thing. This required a new-birth experience.

These rules (and similar ones) and the teachings of the first Methodists in England were the mold which formed the first American Methodists. When John was “born again” on Fetter Lane, and felt that he did “trust in Christ, and Christ alone” for his salvation, did he drop all of his methodical approaches to a holy life?

As far as I can tell, his faith in Christ did not diminish his former “habits” of prayer, visitations to the sick, and preaching. On the contrary, it added new life to these good works. To his dying day he insisted upon seeing good works as a fruit of repentance and then of redemption. And this same type of thinking was the mentality of the first Methodists who came to the shores of the New World. Such thinking is almost a heresy in today’s modern “evangelical” churches.

With this (the fact that the first Methodists believed that faith produces works) in mind, I want to now point out a few other details about the first generations of Methodists. This is not a complete listing of their practices and theology. Just a few points that have been lost over the years.

Fasten your seat belt; you might be surprised...

REPENTANCE FROM CARNALITY

Barbara Heck is a name almost gone into oblivion. With the exception of a very small number of Methodist or

“Holiness” church devotees, no one knows who she is. It is time she was remembered once again. Some called her “the mother of American Methodism”.

Although Methodism was born in England, the first ones to come to America were of German extract, from the Palatinate region between France and Germany. These first removed from their homeland to escape persecution, settling in Ireland where Wesley and his preachers gained some to Methodism. From this group of Germans, a few came to America in the 1760’s, settling in New York City. Among that number were some of the Methodists, the names of the cousins Philip Embury and Barbara Heck being the ones that are more prominent in the history of US Methodism.

Philip had been a Methodist preacher in Ireland before immigrating to America, but it seems he somewhere lost his zeal and left off preaching. The whole group seemed to be losing itself into the life of the times until the following incident, which I quote from Nathan Bangs’ book, *“History of the Methodist Episcopal Church”*:

Among their number was Mr. Philip Embury, a local preacher. Though they had been attached to Wesleyan Methodism at home, it appears that, on their arrival here, they came very near making “shipwreck of faith and a good conscience.” They were strangers in a strange land; and not finding any pious acquaintances with whom they could associate, they gradually lost their relish for divine things, and sunk away into the spirit of the world. In this state of lukewarmness and worldly-mindedness they were found the next year on the arrival of another family from Ireland, among whom was a pious “mother in Israel,” to whose zeal in the cause of God they were all indebted for the revival



*Barbara Heck
Called the
Mother of
American
Methodism*

of the spirit of piety among them.

Soon after her arrival, she ascertained that those who had preceded her had so far departed from their “first love” as to be mingling in the frivolities and sinful amusements of life. The knowledge of this painful fact aroused her indignation, and with a zeal which deserves commemoration, she suddenly entered the room where they were assembled, seized the pack of cards with which they were playing, and threw them into the fire. Having thus unceremoniously destroyed their “playthings,” she addressed herself to them in language of expostulation; and turning to Mr. Embury, she said, “You must preach to us, or we shall all go to hell together, and God will require our blood at your hands!”

From another historian I add the following:

She spoke under the afflatus of the Holy Spirit with such solemnity and power that his [Embury] excuses were all beaten down, and he consented again to preach, and to begin at once. Giving him no time to react or recede from his promise, she opened her own house, went out and brought in four persons, she making the fifth.

Welcome to Methodism in the early days of America! This incident so well shows the colors of the original spirit of Methodism, that I need not say much more. As seen above, upon receiving his rebuke, Embury began to preach once again, and the first Methodist Society in America was shortly organized, the year being 1766. We will hear more of Barbara shortly. But for now I say God bless her, and may many more like her arise!

In today's thought, a card game is an "innocent pleasure", and furthermore, "why not start a bingo game to draw in the people!" "Hey, that's a good idea. Maybe we can get the young people interested in ministry that way." Well, the early Methodists thought otherwise. John Wesley said:

"The desire of the flesh" is generally understood in far too narrow a meaning. It does not, as is commonly supposed, refer to one of the senses only; but takes in all the pleasures of sense, the gratification of any of the outward senses. It has reference to the *taste* in particular. How many thousands do we find at this day, in whom the ruling principle is, the desire to enlarge the pleasure of tasting! Perhaps they do not gratify this desire in a gross manner, so as to incur the imputation of intemperance; much less so as to violate health or impair their understanding by gluttony or drunkenness: But they live in a genteel, regular sensuality; in an elegant epicurism¹, which does not hurt the body, but only destroys the soul; keeping it at a distance from all true religion.

¹ Epicurus, three centuries before Christ, philosophized that the goal of a man was to seek a life of pleasure, regulated by morality, temperance, etc.

Experience shows that the imagination is gratified chiefly by means of the eye: Therefore, “The desire of the eyes,” in its natural sense, is the desiring and seeking happiness in gratifying the imagination. Now, the imagination is gratified either by grandeur, by beauty, or by novelty: Chiefly by the last; for neither grand nor beautiful objects please any longer than they are new.

Seeking happiness in *learning*, of whatever kind, falls under “the desire of the eyes;” whether it be in history, languages, poetry, or any branch of natural or experimental philosophy: Yea, we must include the several kinds of learning, such as Geometry, Algebra, and Metaphysics. For if our supreme delight be in any of these, we are herein gratifying “the desire of the eyes.”²

“The pride of life” (whatever else that very uncommon [Greek] expression, *h alazoneiz tou biou*, may mean) seems to imply chiefly, the *desire of honor*; of the esteem, admiration, and applause of men; as nothing more directly tends both to beget and cherish pride than the honor that cometh of men. And as riches attract much admiration, and occasion much applause, they proportionally minister food for pride, and so may also be referred to this head.

Desire of ease is another of these foolish and hurtful desires; desire of avoiding every cross, every degree of trouble, danger, difficulty; a desire of slumbering out life, and going to heaven (as the vulgar say) upon

² I agree that such desires “come from within, defiling a man”, but how he connects this with the desire of the eyes, I don’t understand. I would put it under the following heading...

a feather-bed. Every one may observe how riches first beget, and then confirm and increase, this desire, making men more and more soft and delicate; more unwilling, and indeed more unable, to “take up their cross daily;” to “endure hardship as good soldiers of Jesus Christ,” and to “take the kingdom of heaven by violence.”

For Adam Clarke, the well-known commentator, dancing was “a perverting influence—an unmixed moral evil.” “Let them plead for it who will, but I know it to be evil, and that only.”

For Hester Ann Rogers, one of English Methodism’s early examples of female piety, it is recorded that in her repentance she “rose early, took her ‘finery,’ high-dressed caps, and such like, and ripped them all up, so that she could wear them no more; then cut her hair short, that it might not be in her power to have it dressed, and in the most solemn manner vowed never to dance again.”

The cutting of her hair³ was, of course, an unscriptural practice (a personal reaction against the former lifestyle—probably the only Methodist that did so), but her motive was pure. For a woman enslaved by fashion and lust, she did what she could to break the ties to her past. Yes, for the first Methodists, card-playing, dancing, fashionable clothes and hairstyles, and a host of other worldly and carnal activities and things needed serious attention—commonly called heartfelt repentance. Today such an attitude about “non-essentials” would immediately be classed as something akin to heresy.

³ It is to be remembered that all early Methodist women (in fact, practically all Christian women of those days) wore a head covering in public, so her cut hair was not seen.

Let us consider now Thomas Olivers, and how he dealt with repentance:

His old debts troubled his conscience. Some money being due him from his kindred, he went back to his old home to receive it; and having gotten it in hand, he paid off every creditor, paying interest as well as principal in all cases. "You ought to thank God," he said to them, "for if he had not converted me I never should have thought of paying you." He went from Fordham to Shrewsbury, to Whitehurst, to Wrexham, to Chester, to Liverpool, to Manchester, to Birmingham, to Bristol, paying his debts and preaching the gospel. In all he paid about seventy persons—among them one at Whitehurst to whom he owed a sixpence.

Wesley sent him to preach to the miners in Cornwall; but having sold his horse, saddle, and bridle to pay his debts, he set out on foot, with his saddlebags, containing his books and linen, across his shoulder. A layman gave him a colt—a wiry, tough little animal, suited to his rider. "I have kept him," said he twenty-five years afterward, "to this day; and on him I have traveled comfortably not less than a hundred thousand miles."

NON-RESISTANCE

What do dead cats, bricks, eggs, and insults have in common? These, and a variety of other objects, were all hurled at the Wesleys and the Methodists of the early days. Several pages could be filled with such stories; leaving town with clothes torn, blood running, mud flying at them, and perhaps the very building they preached in literally torn

down by angry crowds. But the focus of this is not what the people did to the Methodists, but what the Methodists' response was to such inhumane treatment. Like their Master of 18 centuries before, they bore it all patiently.

What is amazing is that not one Methodist preacher was ever killed or martyred in the process, even though one reported to have a rifle fired at him, the bullet passing just by his head. They accepted their lot as being considered the "off-scouring of the earth" as normal and fearlessly re-entered towns to preach where they had only recently received such treatment. In all the reading I did, not one retaliated, with the exception of once; some of the property owners filed a complaint with the authorities when their houses were ruined and their goods carried off by the raging mobs.

What would you do if you were forced into a military uniform, a musket put in your hands, and told to march? John Nelson, the first man to offer his aid to Wesley as a lay preacher, having been put in just this situation, said he would wear them as a cross, but would not fight.

Although not as strongly proclaimed as should have been, the refusal to kill others was fairly common among the first generations of Methodists. The name Barbara Heck comes up again at this point. She and her husband refused to take arms in the War of Rebellion (called the Revolutionary War in American History books), and exiled themselves—at great monetary loss—across Lake Champaign to Canada in small boats. Once in Canada the war still reached them, and a British officer accosted Paul, her husband, to be of service for the King.

"I have taken service under the best of kings," said

Paul, devoutly, “and I desire no better. And as for King George, God bless him, I am willing to suffer in body and estate for his cause; but fight I cannot. I would ever hear the voice of the Master whom I serve, saying: ‘Put up thy sword in its sheath.’”

“You’re an impracticable fellow, Heck. How ever would the world wag if everybody was of your way of thinking?”

“I doubt not the widows and orphans of His Majesty’s slain soldiers think it would wag on better than it does without so much fighting. And if we believe the Bible, we must believe the day is coming when the nations shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks, and learn war no more.”

To be fair to the story, it is to be added that their traveling companion, who later married the widow of Philip Embury (he died shortly before they left for Canada) did fight, and that Paul Heck did engage at some time during his stay in Canada in the business of making wooden gun carriages and other pieces for the military.

From here we pass on to Freeborn Garrettson, one of the most eminent of the early preachers in America. In his life story he writes:

I was determined to have nothing to do with the War. It was contrary to my mind, and grievous to my conscience, to have any hand in shedding human blood. This brought me into some trouble. I was taken before the rulers at the general meeting. But the Lord was with me, and gave me words, which my opposers could not resist. I was so happy, even when surrounded

by my enemies, that with tears flowing from my eyes, I told them of their danger, and entreated them to turn to the Lord. They laid a fine upon me, but were not permitted to take a farthing of my property. On being dismissed I withdrew, and found great freedom to pray for them; I returned home with a glad heart.

About this time the state oath⁴ began to be administered, and was universally complied with, both by preachers and people where I was; but I could by no means be subject to my rulers in this respect, as it touched my conscience toward God: so I was informed I must either leave the state, take the oath, or go to jail.

I told those who came to tender the oath to me, that I professed myself a friend to my country: that I would do nothing willingly or knowingly to the prejudice of it that if they required it, I would give them good security of my friendly behavior during my stay in the state. ‘But why,’ said they, ‘will you not take the oath?’ ‘I think,’ said I, ‘the oath is too binding on my conscience; moreover, I never swore an oath in my life: and ministers of the Gospel have enough to do in their sphere. I want, in all things, to keep a conscience void of offense, to walk in the safest way, and to do all the good I can in bringing sinners to God.’ It might be asked, Why did you not comply with the law? From reading, my own reflection, and the teachings of the good Spirit, I was drawn quite away from a belief in the lawfulness of shedding human blood under the Gospel

⁴ A state oath was an oath to be loyal to that state. Most, if not all, of the states required this oath during the Revolutionary War to insure that those living in its realm were not loyal to the British King. These oaths often were worded to require the tender to take up arms in defense of the state, should the state ask this of them.

dispensation, or at most it must be in an extreme case, touching which, at that time, my mind was in doubt. Again, I thought the test oath was worded in such a way, as to bind me to take arms whenever called on, and I felt no disposition to use carnal weapons.”

Garrettson states in his story that since most of those who joined the Methodist societies were averse to war and bearing arms, the suspicion of the American colonists was strengthened to believe that they were “Tories”, with a plot to move the American people to the side of the King. And so, it was a common experience for the preachers to be “honored” with tar and feathers. Caleb Pedicord was cruelly whipped, and carried his scars to the grave. Joseph Hartley was imprisoned, and during his confinement preached through the gratings of his window to crowds of people. In many places our preachers were insulted, beaten, and maimed.

“I weighed the matter over and over again; but my mind was settled as a Christian, and as a preacher I could not fight.” This was the conclusion of Jesse Lee, another of the very first preachers. He also was a prominent figure in Methodism, and like Garrettson, was almost nominated Bishop at one point. It must be remembered that the colonists were at this time engaged in the Revolutionary War for freedom. The struggle had been going on for four years, and they were almost broken in spirit, exhausted in munitions, and the ranks greatly depleted. They were making the last rally for victory; men were sought for, almost without regard to age or vocation. Mr. Lee was no exception; he was drafted. From various sources, the story is told:

It was a trying episode to him when he was drafted into the army in 1780. As a Christian and preacher

of the gospel he felt that he could not fight, and so he calmly declined to handle a gun or go to parade, saying he could not kill a man with a clear conscience. The captain of the company took him to one side and argued the case with him, but to no purpose. The officer gave many reasons why all should bear arms at that time. But Brother Lee was still obstinate, feeling that the reasons were not sufficient, so he was then turned back to the guard. The next morning the camp was aroused by the praying of the prisoner. He must have prayed rather loudly, because he awoke a hotelkeeper in the neighborhood who came afterwards and told him that his praying had affected him seriously. Even though put under guard, he departed himself with such Christian zeal, dignity, and good sense that the soldiers' hearts were won to him, and a rich field of usefulness opened to him in the camp. It was Saturday night when he was put under confinement, a Baptist preacher sharing his captivity.

“After dark,” he says, “I told the guard we must pray before we slept.” After the Baptist brother had led the devotions, Lee told the people if they would come out early in the morning he would pray with them. The soldiers brought him straw to sleep on, and offered him their blankets and greatcoats for covering. He slept well, and says he felt “remarkably happy in God.” The prayer-meeting was held next morning. “As soon as it was light,” he says, “I was up and began to sing; some hundreds of people assembled and joined with me, and we made the plantation ring with the songs of Zion. We then knelt down and prayed; and while I was praying my soul was happy in God; I wept much and prayed loud, and many of the poor soldiers also

wept.” Later in the day, he preached with great effect. He was, by the kindness of the colonel, exempted from other duty and put to driving a baggage-wagon, which he could do without any scruples of conscience. The army had penetrated into South Carolina with a view of forming a junction with General Gates, but the disastrous defeat of that officer near Camden spread dismay over the camp, and a retreat was ordered. On this retreat, he found the roads thronged with men, women, and children flying before the enemy. The colonel rode to the side of the non-combatant soldier, and pointing to the defenseless crowd, some of whom were wounded, said: “Well, Lee, don’t you think you could fight now?” “I told him,” he says, “I could fight with switches⁵, but I could not kill a man.”

It appears that some Methodists did fight—on both sides. But, it is also to be noted that in those days a person could join a Methodist Society on a sincere desire to be saved, not having actually attained redemption. Joining the Society and being a member of the church were two different things.⁶ Also it is to be remembered that the official teachings of Methodism were somewhat lacking in this area of non-resistance. The position that the above-mentioned men⁷ took was above and beyond the norm. Such is the effects of a true heaven-sent revival—men and women focus on Jesus and his teachings, not stopping at where the “official” doctrines of the church have stopped.

⁵ Perhaps referring to Jesus cleansing the temple.

⁶ This distinction later faded away.

⁷ Francis Asbury also refused to participate in the War, going into hiding for many months, as he was suspected, unjustly, of being a Tory.

From the above examples, we see the non-resistance of many of the leading Methodists of those days. Of those that did enter the War, Jesse Lee later wrote:

Some of them lost their lives, and some made shipwreck of the faith, and but few of them returned home with as much religion as they formerly possessed.

SIMPLICITY—A SINGLE EYE TO HIM⁸

“He was a plain man, even careless as to his personal appearance, and at first sight might be taken for an old plow-jogger.”

“His personal appearance was not imposing. His dress was always plain, and evidently of home manufacture, and he was a little careless how it was put on. He rode an old horse, over which was usually thrown the old-fashioned saddlebags well filled with books and articles of clothing. And as he rode along strangers would have taken him for a root doctor rather than a Methodist preacher of modern date. But those who knew him would recognize in that homely-attired man in the distance, jogging along slowly and steadily on ‘Old Roan,’ the respected and loved pastor of Windsor circuit.”⁹

Such were the descriptions of two American Methodists

⁸ This definition was given by an early Methodist.

⁹ The early Methodists did not teach a purposeful sloppiness. These descriptions were written years afterward, comparing the first men with “a preacher of modern date”. When “dressing up” begins to be in mode, simplicity is often seen as “sloppy”.

preachers, George Evans and ‘Elder’ Dewey, in the early days. It is a common modern notion that plain clothes have only ever belonged to the Amish. Not so. The first Methodists were known by their simplicity in life, affecting their clothes, houses, chapels, and, well, everything about them. This simplicity sprang from a desire to be holy unto God and to not feed the “desire of the eye.” Let’s look at one of the original rules for the Society, clear back from the days of Wesley:

6. To wear no needless ornaments, such as rings, earrings, necklaces, lace, ruffles.

John meant business with this, and would expel those in the Societies that did not prove their sincerity in following Jesus by obeying this New Testament principle. Frances Asbury and his fellow American preachers followed in the same track. In 1784, at one of the General Conferences, this is included in the minutes of the discussion:

Question. How shall we prevent superfluity in dress among our people?

Answer. Let the preachers carefully avoid every thing of this kind in themselves; and let them speak frequently and faithfully against it in all our societies.

Just a few months later they convened again, officially separating themselves from the Anglican Church’s authority, since that denomination had deserted America during the War of the Rebellion (Revolutionary War). Wesley sent Thomas Coke over, giving him and Asbury oversight of

the “abandoned sheep”. The preachers were gathered and decisions made on how things were to be organized from that point on. This conference was during the Christmas season, and has been named ever since “The Christmas Conference”. Of the 74 questions in the minutes, the subject of dress appears again:

Question- Should we insist on the rules concerning dress?

Answer- By all means. This is no time to give any encouragement to superfluity of apparel; therefore give no tickets¹⁰ to any till they have left off superfluous ornaments. In order to this,

1. Let every deacon read the thoughts upon dress, at least once a year, in every large society.
2. In visiting the classes be very mild, but very strict.
3. Allow of no exempt case, not even of a married woman: better one suffer than many.
4. Give no tickets to any that wear high heads, enormous bonnets, ruffles, or rings.

At one point, some of the ministry took to wearing the clerical gowns used by the Anglican Church¹¹, and one early Methodist wrote- “but it was opposed by many of the preachers, as well as private members, who looked upon it as needless and superfluous. Having made a stand against it, after a few years it was given up, and has never been

¹⁰ Permission to take part in class meetings.

¹¹ Wesley had originally wanted Asbury to do so, but it appears he did not comply.

introduced among us since.”

James B. Finley wrote the following account, which occurred in Asbury’s later days:

At the close of the meeting I started, with the bishop [Asbury], for Springfield, [Ohio] where we arrived Tuesday afternoon. We stopped with a Methodist family. As we passed through the parlors, we saw the daughter and some other young ladies dressed very gaily. The daughter was playing on the piano, and as we moved through the room, we doubtless elicited from those fashionable young ladies some remarks about the rusticity of our appearance; and the wonder was doubtless excited, where on earth could these old country codgers have come from?

The bishop took his seat, and presently in came the father and mother of the young lady. They spoke to the bishop, and then followed the grandfather and grandmother. When the old lady took the bishop by the hand, he held it, and looking her in the face, while the tear dropped from his eye, he said, “I was looking to see if I could trace in the lineaments of your face, the likeness of your sainted mother. She belonged to the first generation of Methodists. She lived a holy life and died a most happy and triumphant death.”

“You,” said the bishop, “and your husband belong to the second generation of Methodists. Your son and his wife are the third, and that young girl, your granddaughter, represents the fourth. She has learned to dress and play on the piano, and is versed in all the arts of fashionable life, and I presume, at this rate of progress, the fifth generation of Methodists will be

sent to dancing school.”

This was a solemn reproof, and it had a powerful effect upon the grandparents. The first Methodists were a peculiar people in their personal appearance and manners, and *could be distinguished from the world at a single glance*.¹² Their self-denial led them to the abandonment of all the lusts of the flesh. They were simple-hearted, single-eyed, humble, and devoted followers of the Savior. They loved God devotedly and one another with pure hearts fervently; and though scoffed at by the world, hated and persecuted by the devil, they witnessed a good profession of godliness and faith.

The Presbyterian Charles Finney¹³, in a sermon promoting plain dress, wrote in the mid-1800s about the Methodists of earlier days:

Who does not know that the Methodists, when they were noted for their plain dress, and for renouncing the fashions and show of the world, used to have power with God in prayer—and that they had the universal respect of the world as sincere Christians. And who does not know that since they have laid aside this peculiarity, and conformed to the world in dress and other things, and seemed to be trying to lift themselves up as a denomination, and gain influence with the world, they are losing the power of prayer? Would

¹² Italics mine—to show what an early-day Methodist himself said of them.

¹³ In his later years, Finney became a Congregationalist. What he was when this was written I do not know.

to God they had never thrown down this wall. It was one of the leading excellencies of Wesley's system, to have his followers distinguished from others by a plain dress.

From this we pass on to Peter Cartwright, who lived in the second, third, and fourth generations of Methodists:

We had a little Book Concern, then in its infancy, struggling hard for existence. We had no Missionary Society; no Sunday School Society; no Church papers; no Bible or Tract Society; no colleges, seminaries, academies, or universities; all the efforts to get up colleges under the patronage of the Methodist Episcopal Church in these United States and territories, were signal failures. We had no pewed churches, no choirs, no organs; in a word, we had no instrumental music in our churches anywhere. The Methodists in that early day dressed plain; attended their meetings faithfully, especially preaching, prayer and class meetings; they wore no jewelry, no ruffles; they would frequently walk three or four miles to class meetings, and home again, on Sundays; they would go thirty or forty miles to their quarterly meetings, and think it a glorious privilege to meet their presiding elder, and the rest of the preachers. They could, nearly every soul of them, sing our hymns and spiritual songs.

They religiously kept the Sabbath day: many of them abstained from dram-drinking, not because the temperance reformation was ever heard of in that day, but because it was interdicted in the General Rules of our Discipline. The Methodists of that day

stood up and faced their preacher when they sung; they kneeled down in the public congregation as well as elsewhere, when the preacher said, “Let us pray.” There was no standing among the members in time of prayer; especially the abominable practice of sitting down during that exercise was unknown among early Methodists. Parents did not allow their children to go to balls or plays; they did not send them to dancing-schools; they generally fasted once a week, and almost universally on the Friday before each quarterly meeting. If the Methodists had dressed in the same “superfluity of naughtiness” then as they do now, there were very few even out of the Church that would have any confidence in their religion. But O, how have things changed for the worse in this educational age of the world! I do declare—there was little or no necessity for preachers to say any thing against fashionable and superfluous dressing in those primitive times of early Methodism; the very wicked themselves knew it was wrong, and spoke out against it in the members of the Church. The moment we saw members begin to trim in dress after the fashionable world, we all knew they would not hold out.

He continues his testimony¹⁴, noting several cases of people getting converted and immediately doing away with their adornments. No, the Amish are not the only ones who dressed plain!

This simplicity carried over in other areas. For example, one of the conferences warned against “Fugue” tunes.¹⁵

¹⁴ Taken from his autobiography.

¹⁵ Where the different voices sing different words at the same time—common in the later-written choruses of many hymns now used.

Why? It was simply a superfluity that added nothing to the spiritual benefit of the people, and was hard for the older ones to learn how to sing that way.

Another note was the simple chapels that were built—no bell, steeple, etc... Below is an extract from Asbury's journal:

(Augusta, Georgia). I wrote to Daniel Hitt on things sacred. I am grieved to have to do with boys...I shall take care of these youngsters. And behold here is a bell over the gallery, and cracked, too. May it break! It is the first I ever saw in a [Meeting] house of ours in America; I hope it will be the last.



Early Methodist chapel

June 13, 1813—We rose at four o'clock, to gain twelve miles for Somerset quarter meeting. I lectured on the Lord's Prayer... I am told there is a revival of the work of God here, and at Warren, and at Bristol. I have difficulties to encounter, but I must be silent. My mind is in God. In New England we sing, we build houses, we eat, and stand at prayer. Here preachers locate, and people support them, and have traveling preachers also. Were I to labor forty-two years more, I suppose I should not succeed in getting things right.

Preachers have been sent away from Newport by an apostate; so we go.

O rare steeple-houses, bells! (organs by and by?)¹⁶
 These things are against me, *and contrary to the simplicity of Christ*¹⁷. We have made a stand in the New England Conference against steeples and pews; and shall possibly give up the houses...we will be flattered no longer.

In his “History of the Old Baltimore Conference”, James Edward Armstrong commented on the characteristics of Barratt’s Chapel, the site where the M. E. Church was born:

It was meet that the new church should be born, as was her Divine Head eighteen centuries before, in humblest place. A rude structure with no adornment, and with simplest furniture, some of the benches with backs supplied only a few days previous by kind friends, served the purpose of organization, and provision for the most aggressive and successful body of Christians on this continent.

As can be seen from the quotes by Asbury, during his final days he saw the world creeping in—pleasing the eyes, ears, and carnal heart in general. What would he have done had he known that within fifty years of his death, several thousand Methodist chapels would be sprinkled across the US, and some bragging that the one in New Orleans “had the point of its steeple 176 feet above the street!”?

¹⁶ Asbury’s parenthesis.

¹⁷ Italics mine, to emphasize the root of his thoughts.

ANTI-SLAVERY AND PROHIBITION

“This is the prime curse of the United States, and will be, I fear much, the ruin of all that is excellent in morals and government in them. Lord, interpose thine arm!”

So one Methodist described alcoholic beverages. This may not seem so strange to us in our day, when most conservative churches strongly disapprove of, if not totally prohibiting, the partaking of any strong drink. However, in those days it was common for all to drink beer or wine, just not to excess. And, this is actually Biblical. Adam Clarke speaks of having “a light supper and all I wanted of a small beer.”

Where Methodism stands out is her stand for total abstinence. This was not the mood of the times. In American Methodism, the standard was to use alcohol only for medicinal purposes, with a special outcry against “dram-drinking”. Since the drams were small amounts, it was a common practice—but one drink led to two, and two to three, and... The wise leaders of Methodism said “Don’t even start!”

And then there was slavery...

What do you do with people who sail to a foreign country, round up its inhabitants, load them on a filthy ship, and haul them to their homeland to be sold for slaves? Now, what do you do with those in the homeland who do not sail over the sea to collect them—they merely buy them, and what’s more, they treat them decently, as compared to other slave-sellers? And, furthermore, the laws of the land forbid the release of these slaves? The Bible never forbids slavery: Paul never told the slave-owners to free all their bondmen. He simply exhorted them to treat them respectably. Welcome to the plight of early Methodism and the slavery issue!

Here is how one early conference dealt with it:

Every member in our society who has slaves, in those states where the laws will admit of freeing them, shall, after notice given him by the preacher, within twelve months, (except in Virginia, and there within two years) legally execute and record an instrument, whereby he sets free every slave in his possession, those who are from forty to forty-five, immediately, or at farthest at the age of forty-five. Those who are between the ages of twenty-five and forty, immediately, or within the course of five years.

Those who are between the ages of twenty and twenty-five, immediately, or at farthest at the age of thirty. Those who are under the age of twenty, as soon as they are twenty-five at farthest.¹⁸

And every infant, immediately on its birth.

Every person concerned, who will not comply with these rules, shall have liberty quietly to withdraw from our society within the twelve months following, the notice being given him as aforesaid. Otherwise, the assistant shall exclude him in the society.

No person holding slaves shall in future be admitted into society, or to the Lord's supper, till he previously comply with these rules concerning slavery.

Those who buy or sell slaves, or give them away, unless on purpose to free them, shall be expelled immediately.

¹⁸ I assume these rules were given to allow the owner to receive a bit of recompense for his expenditure, the younger men costing more.

Within a short time [two years or so] these rules were dropped, as they were seen as unenforceable for some reason. But it was a start. Slavery continued to bother the Methodists, until, in 1844, it split the church into The Methodist Episcopal Church, and The Methodist Episcopal Church, South. But, even though she failed to entirely rid it from her ranks, Methodism surely was one of the moving forces to eventually destroy it in this country. Many of the preachers, especially from the North, got themselves into some pretty serious trouble by their strong anti-slavery sermons and activities.¹⁹

And so we conclude this sub-section by noting that Methodism took some unpopular stands. She was not afraid to go against the tide of public opinion. In these days that we live in, it seems many churches are moved by society, but here we have seen Methodism moving it!

¹⁹ I am quite confident that the Methodist slaveholders in the South were reasonable with their slaves, even though I have no quotes for this. I have found where they taught them the Bible and etc.

Chapter 2

How they saved America

“To reform the continent, and to spread scriptural holiness over these lands.”

This was the answer to the fourth question in the minutes of the famous Christmas Conference, in which American Methodism began to distinguish itself as a separate body from the Anglican Church. The question? “What may we reasonably believe to be God’s design in raising up the Methodist preachers?”

To reform the Continent? What were they, dreamers? Or, men of faith?

In most of today’s churches, to mention the idea of a church—a non-resistant, non-conformed, and non-political one at that—actually reforming a nation would maybe be enough to cause rumors of monomania. Just who did these Methodists “dreamers” think they were, anyways? To “reasonably believe” they could change the course of a nation in a detectable way? Come on!

In this section, I would like to show to you how they did just that!

Over two hundred years after Barbara Heck threw the pack of playing cards in the fire, admonishing those first Methodists to repentance, a group of fifth graders in a rural Indiana public school had a request for their teacher.

“May we take time each day to read the Bible?”

This was granted, and so for several weeks after that we were given permission to read the little red New Testaments

that The Gideons had distributed to each member of the class. I was in that class, in 1977, but I was not the one who asked the teacher. It was probably one of the many Methodist children.

In my class of about twenty-five children in Jackson Township, Blackford County, Indiana, I estimate that maybe a third were from Methodist families. Of course, by this time Methodism had slipped so far it was hardly a comparison to the glorious days of yesteryear. But it was still potent enough to cause some fifth-graders to ask their teacher (who was not an especially religious one) for permission to read the Bible in the public school.

In first grade, we had an older “Holiness”²⁰ lady as a teacher. Her hair piled in a bun on her head, and her daily dresses were not new to me, but I suppose for many of the students it was different. The memories are dim now, but it seems we had a daily prayer before we went to lunch. Second grade had smoker for a teacher, but passing to third grade was a nice Methodist lady, even though she wore pants and had short hair. We prayed before we went to lunch in third grade (a least part of the time). And in the fifth grade we read the New Testament—yes, in the public schools of the 1970’s.

If you were to travel through the Midwest, you will notice that practically every little village has a chapel—most of them Methodist. And even roaming the country roads, you will see these old white buildings, some of them abandoned, interspersed among the cornfields; insomuch that in the days before the automobile, one would rarely had to travel over an hour or two in his horse and buggy to find a Methodist Church.

²⁰ Remember, the “Holiness” movement is an offshoot of Methodism.

Yes, the Methodists **did** reform the continent. Granted, not as much as could have been, and, yes, in conjunction with other denominations. But without the Methodists, America would have never been the same (unless God had raised up another similar movement).

How did they do it?

IN THE FIRST WAVE OF SETTLERS

Methodism was given a tremendous opportunity. And they jumped at the chance. America was young (from a European standpoint). Immigrants were pouring into her by the thousands. The wilderness was giving way to the axes and sweat of hardy and adventurous individuals. Hardly had a new town been platted when someone would say “gettin’ too crowded for me in these parts, I’m headed further west...”

And hardly had such a pioneer gotten settled in his new clearing before a Methodist preacher would show up. This is illustrated by the incident reported by one of the itinerants in Mississippi. Following a pair of wagon tracks through the woods, he found they ended where a man was making camp in a little clearing. They began to talk, and upon finding out that his visitor was a Methodist preacher, the man exclaimed (not exact quote), “I left Virginia to get away from those Methodists, and went to Georgia. There they got my wife and daughter in the church. Now I have come here to escape them, and before I get my wagon unloaded, here they come!” (Praise God!!)

This was their reputation, and perhaps some might have even been proud of it. But having an old-time Methodist preacher coming around to these new settlements had dividends. Instead of turning into a totally regenerate community of drink and lust (how fast that happens!), a few,

and sometimes many, started praying. This would set the “tone” of the new community in a distinctly different, and better, direction.

An example of this is Dayton, Ohio, currently a city of some 850 thousands of people. One of the itinerant preachers mentions the first time Dayton had a Methodist preacher pass through. In his diary or journal, he notes something to the effect of traveling up the Miami River, and finding a little settlement called Dayton, with a dozen or so log cabins clustered around.

In such a place, the preachers would find a receptive family, or, if there was none, a school, courthouse, or even an empty field. Then he would go through the community announcing a meeting for that evening a “so-and-so’s place”. Loneliness, curiosity, or even a contentious spirit²¹ would make for a crowd most times. The preacher preached, and on closing would announce that on a certain date he would return again, to all who cared to hear more. And as regular as clockwork, with amazingly few exceptions, they would return: again and again, as long as welcome. From this, a few would repent (or leave other denominations), a society formed, and later a church started. Then a pastor would locate, if none had risen up from within the converts. And another Methodist church was born.

This pattern repeated itself hundreds—or probably more correctly thousands—of times, as long as Methodism had the divine fire in her bones. But when she began to lose her purity, her power and zeal disappeared as well. One can trace this loss of power and zeal by looking at the density of the Methodist churches in the US. Starting on the east coast, they are scattered amongst other churches (Methodism got

²¹ A pioneer man had to keep up on politics and religion so he could join the arguments, didn’t he?

a late start here, much of the seaboard was settled by 1760) at a comparable rate with other groups. Moving west over the Allegheny Mountains, suddenly Methodists have a very distinct increase. These states, Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky, western Pennsylvania etc., were being settled in the “glory days”, the height of Methodism’s purity and power (late 1700’ to early 1800’s). Crossing the Mississippi, the thinning out is noticeable. By the mid 19th century, Methodism was in her wane, and by the time the Western states, like Arizona, Montana, and Colorado were being settled, the old-time Methodist circuit-riding preacher had disappeared for the most part.

Now, the thing to keep in mind is that, especially in the earliest days, the gospel preached by these preachers was like that mentioned in Chapter 1 above. This wasn’t your “raise your hand” or “sign your name” stuff. This was life-changing decision stuff. And by changing the spiritual tone of the developing communities—first by changing individuals, next families, and finally communities—Methodism changed America.

POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT

The first Methodists were not much interested in meddling in politics. In his later years, Bishop Asbury wrote to his younger collegiate Mckendree:

We neither have, nor wish to have, anything to do with the government of the States, nor, as I conceive, do the States fear us. Our kingdom is not of this world. For near half a century we have never grasped at power.

What happened in the later years, as about to be explained,

was a consequence, unplanned for and originally shied away from. It is a lesser blessing than what would have happened had the Methodist Church continued in its former course. But history is history, and this is what happened.

When the original purity began to slip, and the emphasis began to change, Methodists began to get more involved in the political scene. Now, this “slipping” just mentioned was not an immediate slipping into the degenerate vices of heathendom. Holiness was lost (by degrees), but morality stayed firm for many more years. This is the path of all apostasy. “Little things”, like adornment in dress, tea parties, music, art, and etc. are picked up. They are morally innocent, but spiritually they take the edge off of the love to God (holiness). And so the first half of the 19th century found the Methodist church with nicer sounding music, nicer chapels, lacy head-coverings, more money, more social prestige, fancier homes, and less Holy Ghost power. But she still had solid moral values. No lying, stealing, fighting (although the non-resistance of the first generation was considerably lost), divorce, or drunkenness was yet permitted. And Methodist of this caliber began to be in office.

While this is not the call of the church, it is to be noted that a good moral Methodist (who still has a degree of holiness, although not the purest) is a whole lot better of a politician than a drunken sot! When laws are being made, and new states are being forged, a lukewarm “Bible-bigot” has to be better than a cutthroat bandit!

Methodism’s involvement in the political affairs of this nation happened in two ways.

First, by friendships and indirect association of people in high positions.

For some examples of this, we can note that the nephew of Rowland Hill, an early noted Methodist preacher in

England, came to be commander-in-chief of the British armies. Think about that. Uncle Rowland. How much did he affect his nephew, now commander of one of the most powerful armies in the world? I don't know, but there is a lot of potential. Or take the sister of Patrick Henry; she and her husband were converted under the preaching of Thomas Ware in 1788.

While in hiding during the Revolutionary War, a prominent man came to visit the Judge that was protecting Frances Asbury. Upon hearing that some Methodists were in the house, this man almost left immediately, so prejudiced was his mind against such a people. But being convinced by the hostess that they were harmless people, he stayed, and actually visited with Asbury a bit. Upon leaving, he courteously invited Asbury to visit him, should he ever come to his part of the country. It was courtesy, and he really did not want him, nor expect him. He left and went home. One day he casually remarked to his wife that he had invited a Methodist preacher to visit their home. She was a bit horrified, but her fears were calmed by her husband's reassurance that he probably would never come.

But, one day, sure enough, the plainly dressed preacher did show up to take the man up on his word. And thus, Francis Asbury and Richard Bassett, Esq., well known as a distinguished character, not only in the state, but in the United States, became close friends. At different times he filled high and honorable stations. He was a lawyer of note, a legislator, judge, and a governor of Delaware. He was also a member of the convention which framed the Constitution of the United States, a senator in the first Congress, and a judge of the United States Court for the circuit comprising the Districts of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Delaware. Their friendship and confidential intercourse was intimate

and uninterrupted till death, the one surviving the other but a few months.

Asbury's journal contains the following:

FEBRUARY 10, 1811—(Raleigh, North Carolina). Conference began Thursday. I preached in the state-house to two thousand souls, I presume. We have had, and mean to have, while Conference is in session preaching three times a day; meeting sometimes holds till midnight. I believe there was much good done in Raleigh; and we, the preachers, are much indebted to the people for their kindness to us.

[The Conference was held in the Senate Chamber at the State House. Preaching services were held in the House of Representatives. Among those converted during the Conference were William Hill, the Secretary of State, and several members of his family.]²²

While going through his journal, I noticed he preached in the state-houses of Kentucky, North Carolina, and South Carolina, if not others. This was not a political stunt, but rather, I believe, a chance to “do good wherever I can” practice that Asbury was known for.

I don't remember much about Andrew Jackson from my school years. Only three points. He was a president. He had been a back-woods soldier. And at his inauguration, his backwoods friends had a big drunk, so much so that they were swinging from the chandeliers of the White House. What the history books did not mention is that during his wars with the Indians, a young Methodist fought bravely by his side (obviously not of the earlier non-resistant class).

²² Brackets by an editor of his journal, I assume.

This young soldier and Jackson were very close friends, and remained so for all their lives.

The wife of Freeborn Garrettson was from the richest family²³ in the state of New York. Her joining the Methodist Society was an outrage, but eventually the mother allowed her daughter to marry one of the preachers.²⁴

John Adams, one of our first presidents, once went to hear the British Captain Webb preach. He then wrote:

In the evening I went to the Methodist meeting, and heard Mr. Webb, the old soldier, who first came to America under General Braddock. He is one of the most fluent, eloquent men I ever heard.

And so we see how, without striving for political power, the first Methodists did affect the nation's leaders by their friendships and associations. Your friends help make you. How do you suppose Freeborn Garrettson and Francis Asbury, preachers of holiness, righteousness, and peace (remember, both refused to bear arms in the War), affected our nation's founding fathers? Did they pull for righteousness, or did they ask for some shady, under the table deals? We know the answers.

Secondly, they affected our country by direct involvement in political affairs.

²³ This family had many political ties, being very heavily involved in Revolutionary War politics, and George Washington had even once asked Catherine Livingstone, later Catherine Garrettson, to dance with him. She refused, even though this was before joining the Methodists.

²⁴ An interesting side-note. Even though both Freeborn and his dearly beloved were in their thirties when desiring marriage, they waited the approval of her mother—for five years!

In her first days, Methodism shied away from seeking power, as noted in the remark by Asbury above. But as time went by, and convictions began to slip, more and more Methodists entered, unabashedly, the political sphere. Jesse Lee, who refused to bear arms in the War of the Rebellion, later served as Chaplain to Congress for a couple of years. He was challenged by his fellow preachers for meddling in political power, but his accepting the position seems to have been from a readiness to “do good” when and where an opportunity presented itself. Imagine an old-time non-resistant, holiness-preaching Methodist leading the prayers, preaching sermons, and giving counsel to the leaders of a nation! Lee and his peers were not known to mince words to please men.

Other examples: one of the first Governors of Indiana was a Methodist. Peter Cartwright, a man of an “eccentric” character²⁵, served in the legislature in Illinois. Thomas Stockton was chaplain to the House of Representatives in 1833 (when he was but 25 years old), and again re-elected to this charge in 1835. Later in 1861, he again resumed this post. By consulting a chart of these dates, we find Andrew Jackson and Abraham Lincoln as Presidents.

Lesser public offices were also filled. Judges, College presidents, School Boards, etc: it is hard to say how many, but probably hundreds, if not thousands, by the time the 20th century rolled around.

Now, take any developing nation, mix amongst her leaders God-fearing men (not necessarily Christians in the fullest and highest sense, but still guided by Biblically based morals and ethics) and you will surely turn that nation in a better direction. I am in no way calling for Christians of today to turn to politics. We have a higher calling. I only

²⁵ A fitting description; read his autobiography to see why!

note that this was an after-effect of the labors of the previous work of God in our nation. An after-effect that changed the US, and the whole world, in a positive way.

As a comparison, look to the South American nations. Discovered and settled about the same time as North America, morally and ethically they have never prospered to the degree that the US and Canada have. Corruption and internal factions have kept them from ever becoming stable countries. The average time-span of a continuous government has been but a few years in many of these countries. These governments, even to this day, can hardly accomplish any internal improvements. Roads cannot get finished, nor businesses established. A handshake deal is unheard of, as was common in the earlier days of US business. Everybody cheats everybody else, and lying is so common, no one believes anyone. Methodism helped save America from this moral whirlpool.²⁶

How did slavery come to be abolished? How did an entire nation make a Prohibition law? How did it come to be that a woman could be arrested for public indecency if she appeared in public with her ankles showing? How did the USA come to be a leader in human rights? By chance?

EVANGELICAL STABILITY

As well as helping to shape the ethical foundations of our country, Methodism helped save her from being overtaken by another monster: perverted and degenerate Christianity.

Joseph Smith, founder of Mormonism, married the niece of a Methodist preacher. The following story is taken from Peck's "Early Methodism".

²⁶ I think it right to insert here that the revivals in the mid-19th century surely helped what the Methodists had started. Under Finney alone, it is estimated 100,000 people were converted.

After the story of the golden Bible and the miracle-working spectacles had come out, Joe undertook to make a convert of “Uncle Nat” [Lewis]. The old gentleman heard his tale with due gravity, and then proceeded:

“Joseph, can anybody else translate strange languages by the help of them spectacles?”

“O yes!” was the answer.

“Well now,” said Mr. Lewis, “I’ve got Clarke’s Commentary²⁷, and it contains a great many strange languages; now, if you will let me try the spectacles, and if by looking through them I can translate these strange tongues into English, then I’ll be one of your disciples.”

This was a poser, and the only way Joe had to escape from “Uncle Nat’s” net was to get away and run.

Well, Joe did eventually run (not, of course because of this one encounter), to Illinois²⁸, where he ran into Peter Cartwright, mentioned above. From Cartwright’s Autobiography, we find about this collision:

After the Mormons were driven from Missouri for their infamous and unlawful deeds, they fled to Illinois, Joe

²⁷ Adam Clarke, Methodist preacher in England, had taught himself about a dozen Classical and Eastern languages, which he used in making his famed commentary. The original work contained portions of these languages in his comments.

²⁸ Making stops in Ohio and Missouri first.

Smith and all, and established themselves at Nauvoo, or the foot of the Lower Rapids, on the east side of the Mississippi. At an early day after they were driven from Missouri and took up their residence in Illinois, it fell to my lot to become acquainted with Joe Smith personally, and with many of their leading men and professed followers. On a certain occasion I fell in with Joe Smith, and was formally and officially introduced to him in Springfield, then our county town. We soon fell into a free conversation on the subject of religion, and Mormonism in particular. I found him to be a very illiterate and impudent desperado in morals, but, at the same time, he had a vast fund of low cunning.

In the first place, he made his onset on me by flattery, and he laid on the soft sodder [sic] thick and fast. He expressed great and almost unbounded pleasure in the high privilege of becoming acquainted with me, one of whom he had heard so many great and good things, and he had no doubt I was one among God's noblest creatures, an honest man. He believed that among all the Churches in the world the Methodist was the nearest right, and that, as far as they went, they were right. But they had stopped short by not claiming the gift of tongues, of prophecy, and of miracles, and then quoted a batch of Scripture to prove his positions correct. Upon the whole, he did pretty well for clumsy Joe. I gave him rope, as the sailors say, and, indeed, I seemed to lay this flattering unction pleurably to my soul.

"Indeed," said Joe, "if the Methodists would only advance a step or two further, they would take the world. We Latter-day Saints are Methodists, as far as they have gone, only we have advanced further,

and if you would come in and go with us, we could sweep not only the Methodist Church, but all others, and you would be looked up to as one of the Lord's greatest prophets. You would be honored by countless thousands, and have of the good things of this world all that heart could wish."

I then began to inquire into some of the tenets of the Latter-day Saints. He explained. I criticized his explanation till, unfortunately, we got into high debate, and he cunningly concluded that his first bait would not take, for he plainly saw I was not to be flattered out of common sense and honesty. The next pass he made at me was to move upon my fears. He said that in all ages of the world the good and right way was evil spoken of and that it was an awful thing to fight against God.

"Now," said he, "if you will go with me to Nauvoo, I will show you many living witnesses that will testify that they were, by the saints, cured of blindness, lameness, deafness, dumbness, and all the diseases that human flesh is heir to; and I will show you," said he, "that we have the gift of tongues, and can speak in unknown languages, and that the saints can drink any deadly poison, and it will not hurt them;" and closed by saying, "the idle stories you hear about us are nothing but sheer persecution."

I then gave him the following history of an encounter I had at a camp meeting in Morgan county, some time before, with some of his Mormons, and assured him I could prove all I said by thousands that were present.

At this point Peter relayed an incident that had happened

at a camp-meeting that Peter was leading. Some Mormons attended, and after one of the meetings began to sing. As people gathered around to listen, one of the Mormon women fainted in her husband's arms. Her husband announced that when she awoke, she would begin to speak in tongues, of which he would translate. At this point, the "eccentric" Peter arrived on the scene and in a brusque manner, accused the man of sin²⁹, and told them to leave the grounds immediately. We now continue with his run-in with Smith:

My friend, Joe Smith, became very restive before I got through with my narrative; and when I closed, his wrath boiled over, and he cursed me in the name of his God, and said, "I will show you, sir, that I will raise up a government in these United States which will overturn the present government, and I will raise up a new religion that will overturn every other form of religion in this country!"

"Yes," said I, "uncle Jo, but my Bible tells me, 'the bloody and deceitful man shall not live out half his days;' and I expect the Lord will send the devil after you some of these days, and take you out of the [word missing in my copy of the story, probably "way", or "world".]

"No, sir," said he; "I shall live and prosper, while you will die in your sins."

"Well, sir," said I, "if you live and prosper, you must quit your stealing and abominable whoredoms³⁰!"

²⁹ While not there to verify the spirit of everything, I do say I have questions about Peter's actions, even though his accusations to the man supposedly had some verification later

³⁰ Probably referring to polygamy.

Thus we parted to meet no more on earth; for in a few years after this, an outraged and deeply-injured people took the law into their own hands and killed him, and drove the Mormons from the state.

The Methodists were not able to keep all their members from being deceived. Cartwright, in his *Autobiography*, mentions at least two who were deceived by the Mormon promises of receiving the gift of tongues and healings, and subsequently joining that group. But the firm Biblical knowledge of the preachers kept them from being swept away wholesale by this false prophet. What would have become of America had Smith's ambition to overtake it with "another government" come to pass?

As well as Mormonism, another form of degenerate Christianity was put in check. This was the hyper-Calvinism of an apostate Puritanism. So strong was the feeling of "inability", that many under her tenacious grasps simply did nothing, but go through a formal church performance. True, many had a basic morality about them, but formality never has the power to stop sin. New England was pretty well overtaken with this fatalistic doctrine. Jesse Lee, the "Apostle of New England Methodism", bravely attacked this part of the world, and eventually some societies were raised up in those states. It was tough ground though, as the people were known to be kind of stubborn and hardheaded in their beliefs. Even though some were brought into new life, the hyper-Calvinism prevailed as the prominent religion of New England, the fruit of which was the faithless Unitarian/Universalism that has prevailed to this day.

In spite of this, it was checked by Methodism, and later Charles Finney was greatly used in this particular area also, in the mid-19th century. One historian notes this

preservation of correct doctrine, stating that Lee, although he did not gain as many members as in other parts of the country, did a work that put in check the fatalism of extreme predestinarian views.

These views were largely confined to New England. But not by accident. Preachers of this doctrine did go out to other parts of the colonies and states. And wherever they went, they clashed heads with the Methodist Arminian views. Strong, and often heated, debates were held. Pamphlets and books were written, many with uncharitable comments (from both sides). But, by and large, the Methodist view prevailed, to the good of the nation. Imagine how this country would be if it had been as spiritually cold, and evangelically erroneous, as the Unitarianism of Massachusetts. Talk about giving a fellow the shivers...!!!

NUMBERS AND STATISTICS

“Numbers aren’t everything.”

But, neither are they nothing. A study of how Methodism saved America would be incomplete without a few statistics. She was the fastest growing, and largest, of the early groups of Christians in our nation. When she declined, a similar group, with roots of Methodism, took over the lead in growth- The Church of God (Anderson, IN). In the first part of the 20th century, this latter group was the fastest growing denomination. But, The Church of God³¹ may have been the closest thing to the original spirit of Methodism, being a

³¹ There were several denominations that took this name. The Anderson, IN group is a “Holiness” church. The Cleveland, TN group is “Pentecostal”. Both of these now have sub-shoots, and I suppose that more than a score of slightly varying groups use this name. The Guthrie, OK group (a version of the Anderson group) was my heritage, more or less.

strong advocate of holiness, mission minded (they covered all the US and the bigger part of the globe within two decades), and non-resistant. So, Methodism really did not die. She was reformed and revived by several different movements in



William and Catherine Booth helped revive the slugging spirit of the Methodist movement by forming “The Salvation Army”.

the latter part of the 19th century. The Salvation Army, the “Holiness” movement, Free Methodists, and many others picked up where she left off, being “revised versions” of the original.

But for now, we will confine our study to Methodism proper.

We have briefly noted the beginnings of Methodism in America above, which occurred in 1766. What happened with this handful of Irish/German immigrants?

In 18 years, Lee reports in his “History” that they now numbered 1160 souls. Eight more years put them at close to 12,000. And then ten years later, we find this report in

Bangs' "History":

Methodism had now existed in this country about thirty-six years, and numbered in its communion, including preachers and people, white and colored, sixty-six thousand, two hundred and forty-six souls. The entire population of the United States at that time was about four millions; if we allow three minors and others, who attended upon public worship among them, to each communicant, the population of the Methodist Episcopal Church would amount to about one hundred and ninety-eight thousand.

According to this estimation, about one-twentieth part of the entire population was brought under Methodist influence in the short space of thirty-six years. This, it should be remembered, had been effected from nothing, that is, we had no church members with whom to begin, except the few solitary emigrants from Ireland, as noted in the second chapter of this work.

So, did Methodism save America? Did you note the computation in the paragraph above that 1/20 of the American population was estimated to be under her influence by the year 1792? One out of every twenty families an old-time Methodist family with morning and evening prayers? With weekly fastings. With modest clothes and a vision of living a holy life. With a moral and ethical foundation. 5% of the population under its sway. I know, there were hypocrites and lukewarm fence-straddlers. There always have been and always will be.

Not to many years after this, someone else noted the following:

I would take the names and numbers of our congregations in Georgia. This I effected with the assistance of Josias Randall, and found them to be one hundred and thirty, which I calculate to consist of one thousand souls each; so that we preach to one hundred and thirty thousand souls in Georgia-to some of these once in a year, others once in a quarter, others in four, some in two, and by the labors of the traveling and local ministry, to some every week... It is quite probable we congregate two hundred thousand in each state, on an average; and if to these we add those who hear us in the two Canadian Provinces, in the Mississippi and Indiana Territories, it will perhaps be found that we preach to four millions of people. What a charge!

But tell me now: What would 21st-century America be like if a full 5% of its population suddenly were made to be old-fashioned Methodists? Would the moral and religious tone of the country be affected? Drive down the highway. Count the houses. In every twentieth place, picture an industrious father. A virtuous mother. Undeified young ladies with skirts to the ankles, and a bonnet on their head. No cursing. No alcohol. Hymns rising while they work. Of these, many are zealously evangelistic, some dedicating their whole life to evangelism. Would such a people affect our nation?

By 1840, almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of a million would join the Methodist ranks. She was dying, yes, in quality, but not yet dead. 750,000 men and women with moral and ethical virtues. Like Bangs, if we compute three minors to this number and you end up with 3 million. 3 million souls influenced by Biblical truth. Yes, Methodism did "reform the continent"!

Before we go further, let's look at some numbers from a bit different view. It is somewhat a repetition, but bear with me.

Suppose you were duly ordained a Bishop over three congregations. They number about 400 souls, and there are about seven preachers helping you. You are a young man, not yet thirty years old. What would you expect to see by the time you died? Would you be satisfied to find your congregations had doubled? Tripled? Perhaps you are a visionary, and have a vision of quadrupled?

Francis Asbury found himself in such a situation³². Some four decades, 16,500 sermons, 270,000 miles of horseback³³, 224 annual conferences, and 4000 ordinations, his flock numbered over 200,000 [with the help of two other Bishops].

“Numbers aren't everything.” But these figures speak volumes. Even the leaders of that day recognized the fallacy of numbers only. I close this chapter with a quote from Jesse Lee:

I wish that we may increase in grace, as fast as we have in numbers.

³² He was not officially ordained a Bishop until several years after his arrival in America, but Wesley had appointed Thomas Coke and him “Assistant Superintendents”, effectually giving them the same oversight as Wesley had in England.

³³ Late in his life, he did use a wagon or carriage at times as he was too infirm to mount a horse.

Methodist Methods

In the first chapter of this book, I presented a brief and incomplete overview of Methodism in her prime years, focusing upon a few areas that have noticeably changed. In this chapter, I want to continue this, but with a look more at what caused the effects in Section 1, which in turn caused the fruits in Section 2. The following is the root, the “heart” of primitive Methodism. May we all give ear!

DEDICATION, CONSECRATION, AND PERFECT LOVE

I confess, I hardly know where to start in this section. I have chosen to look at the dedication of those warriors of the cross, perhaps because I saw it so many times. They were naturally a tough bunch, as those were the days before air-conditioners, interstate highways, telephones, and chain saws. A little quote from Peck’s “Early Methodism” sets the tenor:

[A] quarterly meeting was [held] on Lycoming circuit. It was held in a barn, and the meeting was highly favored of the Lord. In those days there was seldom a quarterly meeting³⁴ held where there were not souls converted. The Methodists would attend from every part of the circuit. Twenty, or thirty, and even fifty miles was not so far off but they would make an effort

³⁴ A meeting held four times a year in which all the members from various circuits attended.

to attend, and look upon it as a great privilege to go to quarterly meeting. They would come on horseback through the woods, and from the settlements and towns in their great old-fashioned wagons, drawn by oxen very often, and crowded full; sometimes they would come down the river in canoes. They came with their hearts alive to God, and every one was ambitious of excelling in getting nearest to, and in doing most for God and truth.

This describes the common members. But such backwoods conditions were the necessary lot of a settler in the early days of our country. The preachers gave themselves to these conditions heartily. Consider Thomas Coke. He crossed the Atlantic Ocean eighteen times, but not in a Boeing 747! At the age of nearly seventy years—the love of souls still burning in his heart—he offered to go as missionary to the East Indies. The [British] Conference hesitated on account of the expense; but he proposed to pay all the charges of the outfit himself—not less than thirty thousand dollars³⁵. The objections were overcome, and he set sail. It was his last voyage, as he died on the way, and was buried in the sea; the rolling waves a worthy headstone of testimony to his life.

HARDSHIP AND SUFFERING

“The weather is so bad today, the only things out are crows and Methodist preachers.”

This pioneer saying reveals the reputation of the circuit-riders. They had made appointments, and they did not want to disappoint a congregation. Souls were at stake. And so

³⁵ Approximately \$786,000.00 in today's value.

through rain, snow, heat, mosquitoes, gnats, mud, unfriendly settlements that offered no place to lodge, scalp-hunting Indians, high mountains, deep valleys, impossible swamps, swollen rivers, and loneliness they pushed ahead. Once when Asbury visited the circuits in what is now Kentucky, he noted in his journal:

“I found the poor preachers indifferently clad, with emaciated bodies, and subject to hard fare; but I hope they are rich in faith.”

Like his spiritual mentor Wesley, Asbury did not ask anything of the preacher that he himself would not do. He himself traveled basically every year on a circuit from the northern states to the Carolinas or Georgia, and west into Kentucky and Ohio. His journal is the record of a man of suffering and dedication. Once when questioned where he was from, he replied something akin to, “Boston, New York, Philadelphia and about any other place you can name.” He literally had no home of his own. Wesley, too, suffered from the long journeys and the persecution that often left his clothes torn or muddied. He wrote of one place where he spent three weeks preaching, the ungrateful people of the place only offering him some boards to sleep on. His comment? “I am glad God made us with two sides to sleep on. My one side is pretty well rubbed sore!” Asbury tells of some of his privations:

AUGUST 19, 1805 -- We reached Bedford (Pa.). At night we had fiddle and flute to enliven our prayers, and assist our meditations³⁶. I had but little rest. On

³⁶ And a bit of wry humor on Asbury’s part, it appears.

Tuesday we rode sixteen miles to breakfast. We stopped at Berlin, and I gave them a sermon. Wednesday brought us over awful roads to Connellsville, forty-two miles. We were nearly wrecked. I am indebted to a kind Providence for my good little wagon, and my excellent and active driver and good preacher too. I am resolved to quit this mountainous, rocky, rugged, stumpy route³⁷. It was a mercy of God we were not—men, horses, and wagon—broken in pieces. I praise God now, but I hardly had time to pray then. I have ridden, by computation, sixteen hundred and eighty miles since I left Baltimore.

What is the toil of beating over rocks, hills, mountains, deserts, five thousand miles a year! Nothing, when we reflect it is done for God, for Christ, for the Holy Spirit, the church of God, the souls of poor sinners, the preachers of the gospel in the seven Conferences, one hundred and thirty thousand members, and one or two millions, who congregate with us in the solemn worship of God. O, it is nothing!

A book could be filled with incidents of this sort. Poor housing on the far reaches of the circuits, poor food (or little in quantity), fleas on the beds; on the list goes. And then there was the emotional strain. Misunderstood, cursed, debated, and gossiped about. Yet they pressed on. But perhaps the worst was the separation from loved ones, of which the following account almost makes one cry, and then praise. Ebenezer White had a hard time surrendering to the call to itinerancy because of his family. Finally he gave in

³⁷ I think he may have traveled it some eight or ten times yet before he died!

to what he felt was his call. Later it was recorded in “Early Methodism” about his family:

According to our information Mrs. White was a feeble and timid woman. We saw her once some time after her husband’s death. We believe it was her choice to remain at her humble but comfortable cottage with her little ones, and endure the long absences of her husband, rather than run the hazard of an almost annual removal³⁸. It was a hard lot, but she endured it with the fortitude of a Christian. She was often asked by her little ones, “Why does papa go away, and leave us so much?”

On one occasion she replied: “Ask him, and perhaps he will tell you.” Accordingly, when he was about to depart, the little things came around him with countenances full of solicitude and sobbed out: “Papa, why do you go away and leave us and poor mamma alone so much?” The man of God paused, and calling them all around him, he proceeded to give them a formal explanation. Said he:

“The people in this world are most of them wicked, and if they die in their wickedness they will go to the bad place. God has called me to preach the Gospel to them and get them converted, so that they may go to heaven. It is a dreadful thing for people to sin against God and be lost. O would you not be sorry to have all the poor sinners cast into the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, and remain there forever?”

³⁸ The preachers were rarely assigned the same circuit two times in a row. I believe this was to rotate the various gifts, among other reasons.

This talk brought about an entire change in the feelings of the little group, one after another saying: "Papa, you may go and preach to the wicked people, and get them converted, and we will stay home with mamma, and will be good, and say our prayers when we go to bed and when we get up. Mamma prays for you very much when you are gone." The apostolic man, always able to command his feelings, was nearly overcome this time; but he rallied and bid the little circle good-by, and went on his way with new zeal.

After several weeks' absence he returned, and when he rode up to the door of his house the first salutation from the little band was: "O papa has come! Papa, have you get any sinners converted this time?" What a reception was this! What a question! This eminent servant of God gave this beautiful incident in love-feast the last year of his life. And after repeating the question with which he was met by his little children, being much affected; he added: "Thank God I could tell them that sinners had been converted.'

So difficult (partly from low pay, which we will touch shortly) was the life of the itinerants that marriage usually meant "locating". But some of the wives were capable and willing to handle the weeks and months of separation, putting their blessing on their departing husbands. Methodism had godly female heroes as well! Although they are not as well-known or acknowledged, without them the story would have been different.

To dedicate themselves more fully to the work, many of the early preachers remained unmarried all their lives. Asbury is a prime example. He shares his views on married

preachers in these two excerpts from his journal:

FEBRUARY 1, 1809—Opened the Virginia Conference. We had eighty-four preachers present, sixty of them the most pleasing, promising young men. Seventeen preachers were admitted. In all the Conference there are but three married men. The high taste of these Southern folks will not permit their families to be degraded by an alliance with a Methodist traveling preacher, and thus involuntary celibacy is imposed upon us. All the better; anxiety about worldly possessions does not stop our course... Many of these are the most elegant young men I have seen, in features, body, and mind; they are manly yet meek.

I received a letter from Dr. Coke, announcing to me his marriage; and advising me that he did not intend to visit America again as a visitor, but rather as a sojourner, if at all... Marriage is honorable in all, but to me it is a ceremony awful as death. Well may it be so, when I calculate we have lost the traveling labors of two hundred of the best men in America, or the world, by marriage and consequent location.

Jesse Lee also never married, as well as Bishop McKendree. Philip Bruce, a man twice nominated for Bishop, but missing by three votes both times (Lee had missed the bishopric by one vote), stayed single all his life as well. There were probably many others who devoted themselves to the single life whose names are now in oblivion.

From the toil and hardship, many of the preachers became sick and had to locate. But some simply died at a young age. Perusing through the biographies, one finds name after name of those who died in their twenties and thirties. Although Methodism has no actual *Martyr's Mirror*, she does have a hidden one. To die from exposure to the elements for the sake of the Gospel is martyrdom. And Methodism could supply a respectable list of such men. Here are a few, their age at death noted after their name:³⁹

Peter Massie 30

Zenas Caldwell 26

Richard Nolley 30

God will use a man of any age. But how he longs to take young people and show his might. A 16-year-old girl with refined character is a stronger testimony than a 60-year-old grandma. The world cannot say the young lady has been refined by time.

One of Methodism's strength was her consecrated youth. Poring over the annals of her early years, one will note that a majority of the preachers began to preach in their late teens or early twenties. Richard Watson in England began to preach at 15. At 17, Asbury was a class leader and local preacher. By the time many of these dedicated young men had reached the early twenties, they were put on the circuit, usually in conjunction with an older preacher.

But what counsel was another preacher on a lonely circuit? If, for example, two men ran the circuit, each passing through it once a month (some were as long as several hundred miles), that meant that each preaching place got a visit twice a month. And the preachers were on opposite ends of the route! With such demands, there

³⁹ The cause of death not known in some cases.

was little time for visitation amongst preachers. And so, in reality, the young men were put to the test from the start. An unconsecrated heart would never have passed the test (undoubtedly, some did fail). Poor food, long hours, bad weather, low pay... The only reason to stay was a higher purpose!

...AND PERFECT LOVE

I will not attempt to lay out my understanding of sanctification in this book. Some would likely get angry and not read the rest if I should say sanctification is in one work, or two works, or three. I shall suffice to say that the views presented by some “Holiness” churches of today have evolutionized somewhat from Wesley’s writings. The idea that the second work of grace is equal to the [first] baptism of the Holy Ghost did not come about until Phoebe Palmer, who began to teach this some 30 years after Wesley died.⁴⁰ But it is best to let John speak for himself in a little work he wrote:

BRIEF THOUGHTS ON CHRISTIAN PERFECTION.

SOME thoughts occurred to my mind this morning concerning Christian perfection, and the manner and time of receiving it, which I believe may be useful to set down.

⁴⁰ Incidentally, she was also one of the first women to publicly preach to men. Up until her time, no Methodist woman did so, except perhaps on a very rare occasion. The classes and bands that the early female Methodists led were composed of other women, children, or young people (or, a mixture of these).

1. By perfection I mean the humble, gentle, patient love of God, and our neighbor, ruling our tempers, words, and actions. I do not include an impossibility of falling from it, either in part or in whole. Therefore, I retract several expressions in our Hymns, which partly express, partly imply, such an impossibility. And I do not contend for the term *sinless*, though I do not object against it.

2. As to the manner. I believe this perfection is always wrought in the soul by a simple act of faith; consequently, in an instant. But I believe a gradual work, both preceding and following that instant.

3. As to the time. I believe this instant generally is the instant of death, the moment before the soul leaves the body. But I believe it may be ten, twenty, or forty years before. I believe it is usually many years after justification; but that it may be within five years or five months after it, I know no conclusive argument to the contrary.

In his well-known work “A Plain Account of Christian Perfection”, he explains when this sanctification begins (parenthesis his):

Our Second Conference began August 1, 1745. The next morning we spoke of sanctification as follows:
—

Q. When does inward sanctification begin?

A. In the moment a man is justified. (Yet sin remains in him, yea, the seed of all sin, till he is sanctified throughout.) From that time a believer gradually dies

to sin, and grows in grace.

Later, he explained that coming to perfect love “is constantly both preceded and followed by a gradual work [of sanctification].” So did he believe in one work, two works, a gradual work, or three works? I will let you decide!⁴¹

The point I will now focus on is that, in his teaching, he believed that a man could overcome sin from his first day as a Christian, and, in fact would overcome. This was where his opponents of those days threw fits. The main strivings about sanctification being a “second, definite work of grace” did not begin until later.

But will not all Christians sin some time? This he answers by:

I everywhere allow that a child of God can and will commit sin, if he does not keep himself.

In his sermon “The Marks of the New Birth”, he says the following:

An immediate and constant fruit of this faith whereby we are born of God, a fruit which can in no wise be separated from it, no, not for an hour, is power over sin;—power over outward sin of every kind; over every evil word and work; for wheresoever the blood of Christ is thus applied, it “purgeth the conscience from dead works;”—and over inward

⁴¹ I have seen quotes of his in other books (not his own writings) that promote a certain view. If you really want to know, read his writings himself. But, if you want to know what Jesus taught, read the Bible!

sin; for it purifieth the heart from every unholy desire and temper. This fruit of faith St. Paul has largely described, in the sixth chapter of his Epistle to the Romans. “How shall we,” saith he, “who” by faith “are dead to sin, live any longer therein?” “Our old man is crucified with Christ, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.” “Likewise, reckon ye yourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign” even “in your mortal body,” “but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead.” “For sin shall not have dominion over you. God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but being made free,”—the plain meaning is, God be thanked, that though ye were, in time past, the servants of sin, yet now—”being free from sin, ye are become the servants of righteousness.”

What was the result of such teaching, besides being assailed heavily by the Calvinists and antinomians? The results were a people that excelled in living it out. Was there a sin in a person’s life? Seek God until it was destroyed! Were there strivings within? Seek God to conquer them! Without going any further into whether Wesley explained sanctification correctly or not, let it suffice to say that many of his hearers took him seriously in striving to arrive at the point of having nothing but “perfect love” towards God in their hearts. Whether they got there by one step, two steps, or many little steps really isn’t the point- some did arrive at loving God with a perfect heart! Let’s look at an example of the seeking heart of Hester Ann Rogers, as she sought for entire sanctification:

But I cried, “Lord, help me,” and fell instantly on my knees; for a few moments my ideas were all distraction; but the mighty God spoke to the troubled ocean, “Peace, be still!” and there followed a great calm throughout my soul.

My companionship was now opened with my beloved, and various promises presented to my believing view. I thought, shall I now ask small blessings only of my God? Lord, cried I, make this the moment of my full salvation! Baptize me now with the Holy Ghost, and the fire of pure love⁴². Now make me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me. Now enter thy temple, and cast out sin forever. Now, cleanse the thoughts, desires, and propensities of my heart, and let me perfectly love thee. But here Satan raised all his force of temptations to oppose me; suggesting to me, I had not been long enough justified; I had more to suffer first, &c. And my views not being yet clear in the nature of this blessing, gave the enemy an advantage. For I thought when fully saved from sin, I could suffer no more; feel no more pain; make no more mistakes; my judgment and memory would be perfect, and I should feel temptation no more! Therefore this suggestion, that I had to suffer much first, had the more plausibility. But in that moment I received light from above, and cried, “Lord, till my heart is renewed, I cannot suffer as I ought: give me perfect love, and I can then bear all things!”

“But,” said Satan, “if this blessing were given, thou wouldst soon lose it again, in such and such trials

⁴² Whether she refers to an initial experience of this baptism, a repeat, or a deeper I do not know. It is dangerous to assume any one view from this one statement. Careful!

which lie before thee: get past those trials first, and then come for this blessing.” But I cried, “Lord, I cannot stand those trials without it. O purify my heart, that I may be able to stand in the trying hour! If I face my subtle enemies, while I have a traitor within, ever ready to betray me into their hands, how shall I be able to stand?” But if that “strong man armed, be cast out with all his armor,” how much more able shall I be to contend with my outward enemies? Many other temptations were presented: but I cried so much the more, “Lord, save me!” And the Lord gave me that promise, “I will circumcise thy heart, and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart,” &c. I said, “Lord, thou art faithful, and this is thy word; I cast my whole soul upon thy promise: make known thy faithfulness, by performing it on my heart. Circumcise it now, fill it now with thy pure love; sanctify every faculty of my soul; I offer all to thee, I give thee all my powers, I take thee, Almighty Jesus, for my wisdom, my righteousness, my sanctification.” Now “cleanse me from all my filthiness and from all my idols; take away the heart of stone, and give me a heart of flesh.” I come empty to be filled; deny me not. It would be for thy own glory to save me now; for how much better could I serve thee! It is true. I have no plea but thy mercy! The blood of Jesus, thy promise, and my own great need. O save me fully, by an act of free grace! Thou hast said, “He that believeth shall be saved.” I now take thee at thy word: I do by faith cast my self on thy promise. I venture my soul on thy veracity; thou canst not deny! Being purchased by thy blood, thy justice is engaged: being promised without money and without price, thy truth is bound: thus every attribute of my God secures it to me.

Any soul that prays with an honest heart such a prayer will receive a blessings from heaven—grace and power from on high: whether they have the correct understanding of sanctification or not, whether they believe in one work, two works, or three, whether they have been baptized with the Holy Ghost and fire previously or not!⁴³ And, since they did not think that entire sanctification was the end⁴⁴, they constantly watched or pressed ahead for higher ground.

And so, Methodism produced a people that have been enabled to transform societies of people!

THE AX AT THE ROOT OF MATERIALISM

“I have only known two Methodists grow rich without declining in grace.” So wrote John Wesley, founder of Methodism. But, sometime later he added a note to this statement: “No, not one.”

Do we have ears to hear?

Bishop Asbury was known as a man of firm convictions. One of them was to not pay the preachers very much. This, he said, would sort out those who preached for money. And, it surely did so! Why else would a man go through what was previously mentioned about their suffering, if it were not for a higher prize?

While not perfect, Methodism made some pretty amazing chops at this “root of all evil”. We North Americans need give ear! Our Lord has said it is impossible to serve God and Mammon. We live as though trying to prove God did not know what He was talking about! Listen on...

⁴³ We can be baptized, overwhelmed, with the Holy Ghost again and again, as in Acts.

⁴⁴ Although Wesley in his earlier days had taught that one could not lose “perfect love” after obtaining it, he later recanted on this point

As mentioned earlier, Wesley and Asbury never asked the preachers to do more than what they were willing to do themselves. This applies to money as well. John Wesley limited himself to a salary of £30⁴⁵ all his life, even though through royalties from his books he could have been a very rich man. He tells his own story:

Two-and-forty years ago, having a desire to furnish poor people with cheaper, shorter, and plainer books than any I had seen, I wrote many small tracts, generally a penny apiece; and afterwards several larger. Some of these had such a sale as I never thought of; and, by this means, I unawares became rich. But I never desired or endeavored after it. [Underscore mine] And now that it is come upon me unawares, I lay up no treasures upon earth.

John's rules, *Gain all you can, save all you can, give all you can*, are well known. What did he mean? Work overtime (missing prayer meetings), and invest heavily to gain more? Build up savings accounts? I will let him explain his own guidelines [all italics and parenthesis his]:

Perhaps you will ask, "But do not you yourself advise, to gain all we can, and to save all we can? And is it possible to do this, without both *desiring* and *endeavoring to be rich*? nay, suppose our endeavors are successful, without actually, laying up treasures upon earth?" I answer, it is possible. You may gain all you can, without hurting either your soul or body; you may save all you can, by carefully avoiding every

⁴⁵ This would equal approximately US \$4500.00 in today's economy.

needless expense; and yet never lay up treasures on earth, nor either desire or endeavor so to do.

Permit me to speak as freely of myself as I would of any other man. I *gain all I can* (namely, by writing) without hurting, either my soul or body. I *save all I can*, not willingly wasting anything, not a sheet of paper, not a cup of water, I do not lay out anything, not a shilling, unless as a sacrifice to God. Yet by *giving all I can*, I am effectually secured from “laying up treasures upon earth.” Yea, and I am secure from either desiring or endeavoring, it, as long as I give all I can. And that I do this, I call all that know me, both friends and foes, to testify.

But some may say, “Whether you endeavor it or no, you are undeniably *rich*. You have more than the necessaries of life.” I have. But the Apostle does not fix the charge, barely on *possessing* any quantities of goods, but on possessing more than we employ according to the will of the Donor.⁴⁶ I lay up nothing at all. My desire and endeavor, in this respect, is, to “wind my bottom round the year.” I cannot help leaving my books behind me whenever God calls me hence; but, in every other respect, my own hands will be my executors.

Herein, my brethren, let you that are rich, be even as I am. Do you that possess more than food and raiment, ask, “What shall we do? Shall we throw into the sea what God hath given us?” God forbid that you should!

⁴⁶ My underscore. Note well what he is saying. Possessing things that are used in the building of the kingdom is not hoarding up riches unto one’s self. John Wesley owning a horse to travel around so as to preach would not be considered materialism.

It is an excellent talent: It may be employed much, to the glory of God. Your way lies plain, before your face; if you have courage, walk in it.

Having *gained*, in a right sense, *all you can*, and *saved all you can*; in spite of nature, and custom, and worldly prudence, *give all you can*. I do not say, “Be a good Jew giving a tenth of all you possess.” I do not say, “Be a good Pharisee; giving a fifth of all your substance.” I dare not advise you to give half of what you have; no, nor three quarters; but all!

By frugal living, he found he could live on about £30 a year. Everything else was given away. How much did he give?

The actual amount may not make much sense to us two hundred and fifty years later. But let’s look at percentage. If Wesley gained 40 pounds a year, he gave 10 away, and when he earned 100 pounds a year, he still gave 70 away. This increased until he gave 98%, (yes, this is not a misprint, 98%) of his income away!⁴⁷ Listen to what he had to say about riches and covetousness:

[At Bristol] As many of them increase in worldly goods, the great danger I apprehend now is their relapsing into the spirit of the world; and then their religion is but a dream.

⁴⁷ I thoroughly recommend the book “*Covetousness (The Sin Very Few Ever Confess)*”, by Lillian Harvey. It is from this book that this information was taken, and some of the following quotes were gathered, even though Wesley is the original author. Also, were it not for space, I would reprint the whole of Wesley’s sermon “*The Dangers of Riches*”, of which I have pulled several quotes.

I gave our brethren a solemn caution not to ‘love the world, neither the things that are of the world.’ This will be their great danger; as they are industrious and frugal, they must needs increase in goods. This appears already. In London, Bristol and most other trading towns, those who are in business have increased in substance sevenfold, some of them twenty, yea, an hundredfold. What need then have these of the strongest warnings, lest they be entangled therein, and perish!

Riches swiftly increase on many Methodists, so called. What but the mighty power of God can hinder their setting their hearts upon them? And if so, the life of God vanishes away.

But many swiftly increase in goods; and I fear very few sufficiently watch and pray that they may not set their hearts upon them.

But the society here [one in Ireland], as well as at Tyrrell’s Pass, is well nigh shrunk into nothing! Such is the baleful influence of riches! The same effect we find in every place. The more men increase in goods (very few excepted) the more they decrease in grace.

I went on to Macclesfield, and found a people still alive to God, in spite of swiftly increasing riches. If they continue so, it will be the only instance I have

known, in above a half a century. I warned them in the strongest terms I could, and believe some of them had ears to hear.

Whoever has sufficient food to eat, and raiment to put on, with a place where to lay his head, and something over, is rich.

I ask, then, in the name of God, Who of you “desire to be rich?” Which of *you* (ask your own hearts in the sight of God) seriously and deliberately desire (and perhaps applaud yourselves for so doing, as no small instance of your *prudence*) to have more than food to eat, and raiment to put on, and a house, to cover you? Who of you desires to have more than the plain necessities and conveniences of life? Stop! Consider! What are you doing? Evil is before you! Will you rush upon the point of a sword? By the grace of God, turn and live!

By the same authority I ask, Who of you are *endeavoring* to be rich? So procure for yourselves more than the plain necessities and conveniences of life? Lay, each of you, your hand to your heart, and seriously inquire, Am I of that number? Am I laboring, not only for what I want, but for more than I want?” May the Spirit of God say to every one whom it concerns, “Thou art the man!”

Why is not the spiritual health of the people called Methodists recovered? Why is not all that “mind in us which was also in Christ Jesus?” Why have we not

learned of him our very first lesson, to be meek and lowly of heart? to say with him, in all circumstances of life, “Not as I will, but as thou wilt? I come not to do my own will, but the will of him that sent me.”

Why are not we “crucified to the world, and the world crucified to us;”—dead to the “desire of the flesh, the desire of the eye, and the pride of life?” Why do not all of us live “the life that is hid with Christ in God?” O why do not we, that have all possible helps, “walk as Christ also walked?” Hath he not left us an example that we might tread in his steps? But do we regard either his example or precept? To instance only in one point: Who regards those solemn words, “Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth?” Of the three rules which are laid down on this head, in the sermon on “The Mammon of Unrighteousness,” you may find many that observe the First rule, namely, “Gain all you can.” You may find a few that observe the Second, “Save all you can.” But how many have you found that observe the Third rule, “Give all you can?” Have you reason to believe, that five hundred of these are to be found among fifty thousand Methodists? And yet nothing can be more plain, than that all who observe the two first rules without the third, will be twofold more the children of hell than ever they were before.

9. O that God would enable me once more, before I go hence and am no more seen, to lift up my voice like a trumpet to those who gain and save all they can, but do not give all they can! Ye are the men, some of the chief men, who continually grieve the Holy Spirit of God, and in a great measure stop his gracious influence from descending on our assemblies.

I could ask forgiveness for including so much material in this section. But I am not sorry. From this framework, Asbury and his peers established Methodism in America. Not only was this talk, it was walk also. Consider the following examples.

In England, Mary Bosenquet gave all her income above her actual necessities to good causes, saying:

It is very easy to give our neighbor what we can spare, but to pinch ourselves, and even to run the risk of debts and distress for their sakes, makes the work far more hard.

Lady Huntingdon, a wealthy countess who gave the equivalent of millions of dollars to the cause of the gospel.



It is reported of the Countess of Huntingdon that she “gave away more than half a million of dollars⁴⁸ for religious uses. She sold her jewels, gave up her costly equipage, expensive residence, and livened servants, and with the

⁴⁸ Some \$13 million dollars in today’s value.

money thus obtained, she bought theaters, halls, and other buildings, and fitted up places of worship for the poor. She made itinerant excursions into different parts of England and Wales, accompanied by zealous noblewomen and by evangelists, who preached as they went in the churches or in the open air. To systematize the work, she mapped all England into six circuits, and supplied them with preachers at her own expense.”

John Fletcher, well known for his works against antinomianism, declined a parish with light labor and good income, saying it afforded “too much money and too little work.”

These are English examples. On the American side, we find more. Robert Williams came from Ireland to America in 1769. He had been a local preacher, but he felt his heart burn with love for souls across the sea. Wesley, who seems to have discerned the true gold in his composition, gave him authority to preach in America. He sold his horse to pay his debts, and set sail for New York—his “outfit” consisting of “a pair of saddle-bags containing a few pieces of clothing, a loaf of bread, and a bottle of milk.” His traveling companion paid the fare for his passage to this country. Then with his “outfit”, he began to preach; with very successful results!

Of Thomas Ware it is reported: “His fealty to his Master and his love for his work were put to a decisive test while he was in North Carolina. A wealthy couple, aged and childless, proposed to him to give him all their property on condition that he would stay with them and take care of them during the remainder of their short stay on earth. He declined the tempting offer. “I could not do it with a good conscience,” he simply said; and that ended the matter.

About Marmaduke Pearce in western Pennsylvania: “Soon after his conversion he was deeply impressed with

a belief that it was his duty to preach the Gospel, and with this impression came a proposition from citizens of Bellefonte to teach the academy in that village, and for said service they would pay his board and give him five hundred dollars per annum⁴⁹. Here was a trial of his faith and the genuineness of his call to preach Jesus: to become a poor Methodist preacher and wander about from place to place, without receiving perhaps fifty dollars a year, or to become the teacher of an academy, with a good salary, in a pleasant village. He resolved to take his stand on the walls of Zion and declare the unsearchable riches of Christ. His first efforts at exhortation were failures, and he frequently retired from the congregation to the woods ashamed and mortified, praying God to relieve him from the work.”

Giving up a salary of \$500 for about \$50? Imprudence (I mean, look at what a poor preacher he was!)? Stupidity? Could he not have been used at the school as well? But when a man is under the call of God for a work, substitutions just “don’t get it”. So he preached, receiving probably “\$64 and no more” per year⁵⁰, which was the stated salary of the itinerant preachers until 1800, when it was raised to \$80⁵¹. To show how this salary compared to the then current wages, compare it to the offer given to Marmaduke as a teacher in a school [which was probably above average somewhat], and that Asbury mentions the price of two horses in 1804— one for \$80, the other \$90.

Wesley once commented, “Our people die well.” By this he referred to the peace and joy they proclaimed with their dying breaths. When John died, his last words were, “The

⁴⁹ A salary of about \$11,000 in today’s value.

⁵⁰ The wives of married preachers received an equal amount, and the men were given some travel expenses, like horseshoes and ferry tolls.

⁵¹ About \$1200.00 in today’s economy.

best of all, God is with us!” Besides these words, he had not much to offer besides the royalties from his books, which were willed to the societies (minus an annual allowance to his brother’s widow and children). He had said, on two different occasions:

“If I die with more than twenty pounds⁵² in my pocket, you will know I am a backslidden preacher.” And a slightly different occasion:

“If I leave behind me ten pounds...you and all mankind bear witness against me that I lived and died a thief and robber.”

And Asbury? We will let him speak for himself also from his journal:

How hardly shall preachers who are well provided for maintain the spirit of religion!

NOVEMBER 11, 1804—I preached, feebly, upon John 1:50. The superintendent bishop of the Methodist Church in America⁵³ being reduced to two dollars, he was obliged to make his wants known.

The brethren were in want, and could not provide clothes for themselves, so I parted with my watch, my coat, and my shirt.

⁵² \$3000.00 buying power today.

⁵³ Speaking of himself...

What do the rich do for us but spoil us?

I have sold my sulky, and purchased a horse, that I may more easily wind my way through the wilderness to Georgia. The advantages of being on horseback are, that I can better turn aside to visit the poor; I can get along more difficult and intricate roads; I shall save money to give away to the needy; and, lastly, I can be more tender to my poor, faithful beast.

Frances Asbury, who gave his own coat and watch to one of the frontier preachers. It is likely that he did not have two coats at the time.



There are many late converts around here: Frank Hollingsworth and his wife, Henry Willis, and a young lady with fifty thousand dollars⁵⁴—can she get and keep religion? I doubt.

By thus chopping at the roots of covetousness and riches, Methodism was enabled to do her proposed work of “reforming” American society. But let us move on to other areas now.

⁵⁴ \$1,000,000 of current value.

CHRISTIAN ACCOUNTABILITY—THE CLASS MEETING

“What is the communion of the saints?”

And the astonished English clergyman received from his little female catechist the answer, “A Methodist class-meeting, sir.”

She was more right than wrong.

Coke and Asbury, in their “Notes on the Discipline,” had this to say:

Christian fellowship cannot be carried on to any considerable advantage without stated times of assembling. The meetings held for this purpose must have a name to distinguish them. We call ours class-meetings. Here we must notice that it is the thing itself, Christian fellowship, and not the name which we contend for.

The super-intelligent Adam Clarke was quick to join a Methodist Society. He once said:

When [joined] in class, I learned more in a week than I had learned before in a month. I understood the preaching better, and getting acquaintance with my own heart, and hearing the experience of God’s people, I soon got acquainted with God himself.”

Called the “right arm of Methodism”, all historians of Methodism alike acknowledge the class-meeting to have been among the most potent factors contributing to the success of Methodism. In a very important degree,

they were the life of Methodist churches everywhere, and their tone and character were the measure of the church's spirituality and fruitfulness.

According to one historian, in about the year 1729 John Wesley was admonished by someone (now unknown) with a life-changing principle:

Sir, you wish to serve God and go to heaven; remember you cannot serve him alone; you must therefore find companions, or make them; the Bible knows nothing of solitary religion.

Perhaps this was the catalyst for the first "Holy Club" meetings at Oxford, gathered in the same year to study the scriptures in the original tongues as well as other Christian activities. This first group disbanded, and some years later, after "trusting in Christ, and Christ alone", John tells what happened:

In the latter end of the year 1739, eight or ten persons came to me in London, who appeared to be deeply convinced of sin, and earnestly groaning for redemption. They desired I would spend some time with them in prayer, and advise them how to flee from the wrath to come. That we might have more time for this great work, I appointed a day when they might all come together, which from thenceforward they did every Thursday in the evening. To these, and to as many more as desired to join with them (for the number increased daily), I gave those advices from time to time which I judged most needful for them, and we always concluded our meeting with prayer

suiting to their several necessities. This was the rise of the United Society, first in London, and then in other places.

As noted above, the first societies were not churches. They were groups of people who felt the need of Biblical salvation, or having received it wanted further instruction. For this reason, joining a Methodist Society was open to anyone who professed a desire to know God. This has been criticized as opening the doors of the church to the unsaved, and perhaps that was the case in some instances. But, if the discipline of the Society had been maintained as originally planned, all those who soon failed to show a genuineness (by fruits of repentance—a change of life) were promptly expelled.

From the Society, class meeting began. This broke the Society into smaller groups. This came about “accidentally” as well. It was suggested that all members of the society contribute a penny a week towards the “the debts”, and when it was found that some would not be able to donate even this, one man (Captain Coy) offered to take upon himself to give the penny donation in the place of those who could not afford it (up to eleven others). He volunteered to go around every week to collect from these, and should they not be able, he would pitch in for them.

This method took hold (with others doing like Coy), and while traveling the rounds to take the collection, spiritual needs were noticed amongst some. John explains what then happened:

In a while some of these informed me, they found such and such an one did not live as he ought. It struck me

immediately, ‘This is the very thing; the very thing we have wanted [probably in the sense of ‘lack’] so long.’ I called together all the leaders of the classes (so we used to term them and their companies) and desired, that each would make a particular inquiry into the behavior of those whom he saw weekly. They did so. Many disorderly walkers were detected. Some turned from the evil of their ways. Some were put away from us. Many saw it with fear, and rejoiced unto God with reverence.

Soon it was realized that going from house to house for personal accountability was somewhat inefficient, and the “class” was called to meeting- and official “class-meetings” were born. These classes grew from about a dozen people to up to forty or fifty, usually with the men and women separate, and a woman taking responsibility of the female classes.

After a time, the need for even more personal accountability was desired by some. Hence the “band meeting” was born. This has been called the “class within the class”. These were composed of three to five members, strictly all male or female, all married or unmarried, and “who have confidence one in another”. Once every quarter, these bands were all met as one big group, and a “love feast” was held. A very simple meal of bread and water was had, but the “bread and wine” of the fellowship was sweet! In the American version of Methodism, the “band” meetings did not develop as thoroughly, but the “class” was still used, essentially being of the same nature. What was the nature of these? Let’s look at the rules as wrote by Wesley for the “bands” on Dec. 25, 1738:

In order to ‘confess our faults one to another,’ and pray for one another that we may be healed, we intend:

- (1) To meet once a week at the least.
- (2) To come punctually at the hour appointed.
- (3) To begin with singing or prayer.
- (4) To speak each of us in order, freely and plainly, the state of our souls, with the faults we have committed in thought, or word, or deed, and the temptations we have felt since our last meeting.
- 5) To desire some person among us (thence called a leader) to speak his own state first, and then to ask the rest in order, as many and as searching questions as may be, concerning their state, sins and temptations.”

Some of the questions proposed to every one before he is admitted among us, may be to this effect:

1. Have you the forgiveness of your sins?
2. Have you peace with GOD, through our LORD JESUS CHRIST?
3. Have you the witness of GOD’S Spirit with your Spirit, that you are a child of GOD?
4. Is the love of GOD shed abroad in your heart?
5. Has no sin, inward or outward, dominion over you?
6. Do you desire to be told of your faults?
7. Do you desire to be told of all your faults, and that plain and home?
8. Do you desire, that every one of us should tell you, from time to time, whatsoever is in HIS heart

concerning you?

9. Consider! Do you desire we should tell you whatsoever we think, whatsoever we fear, whatsoever we hear, concerning you? Do you desire, that in doing this we should come as close as possible, that we should cut to the quick, and search your heart to the bottom?

11. Is it your desire and design to be on this and all other occasions entirely open, so as to speak every thing that is in your heart, without exception, without disguise, and without reserve?

Any of the preceding questions may be asked as often as occasion offers: the five following at every meeting.

1. What known sins have you committed since our last meeting?
2. What temptations have you met with?
3. How were you delivered?
4. What have you thought, said, or done, of which you doubt whether it be sin or not?
5. Have you nothing you desire to keep secret!

Welcome to a Methodist Band Meeting!

A few years later, six to be exact, some “directions” were sent to these band societies:

You are supposed to have the Faith that overcometh the world. To you therefore it is not grievous,

- I. Carefully to abstain from doing evil; in particular,

1. Neither to buy nor sell any thing at all on the LORD'S day.

2. To taste no spirituous liquor, no dram of any kind, unless prescribed by a physician.

3. To be at a word both in buying and selling.

4. To pawn nothing.

5. Not to mention the fault of any behind his back, and to stop those short that do.

6. To wear no needless ornaments, such as rings, earrings, necklaces, lace, ruffles.

7. To use no needless self indulgence, such as taking snuff or tobacco, unless prescribed by a physician.

II. Zealously to maintain good works; in particular,

1. To give alms of such things as you possess, and that to the uttermost of your power.

2. To reprove all that sin in your sight, and that in love, and meekness of wisdom.

3. To be patterns of diligence and frugality, of self-denial, and taking up the cross daily.

III. Constantly to attend on all the ordinances of GOD; in particular,

1. To be at church, and at the LORD'S table every week, and at every public meeting of the bands.

2. To attend the ministry of the word every morning⁵⁵ unless distance, business, or sickness prevent.

⁵⁵ Underscore mine: Remember, John Wesley preached every day at five in the morning for most of his life!

3. To use private prayer every day, and family prayer, if you are the head of a family.

4. To read the Scriptures, and meditate thereon, at every vacant hour. And,

5. To observe, as days of fasting or abstinence, all Fridays in the year.

So, do you still want Christian accountability?!!!

This was serious business for the first Methodists. Listen to John, as he explains how important he thought it to be:

Whoever misses his class thrice together thereby excludes himself; and the preacher that comes next ought to put out his name. I wish you would consider this. Halt not between two. Meet the brethren or leave them. It is not honest to profess yourself of a society, and not observe the rules of it. Be therefore consistent with yourself. Never miss your class till you miss it for good and all.

Then he explains in another place:

Great as this labor of private instruction is, it is absolutely necessary; for after all our preaching, many of our people are almost as ignorant as though they had never heard the gospel. I speak as plainly as I can, yet I frequently meet with those who have been my hearers for many years, who do not know whether Christ be God or man. And how few are there who know the nature of repentance, faith, and holiness!

Most of them have a sort of confidence that God will save them, while the world has their hearts. I have found by experience that one of these has learned more from an hour's close discourse than from ten years' public preaching.

In America, the feeling was basically the same. Read over these minutes from one of their early conferences.

Question 2. Do we sufficiently watch over each other?

Answer. We do not. Should we not frequently ask each other, Do you walk closely with God? Have you now fellowship with the Father and the Son? At what hour do you rise? Do you punctually observe the morning and evening hour of retirement, viz. five o'clock? Do you spend the day in the manner which the conference advises? Do you converse seriously, usefully, and closely?

To be more particular:

Do you use all the means of grace yourself, and enforce the use of them on all other persons?

1. Do you steadily watch against the world? yourself? your besetting sin?

2. Do you deny yourself every useless pleasure of sense? imagination? honor? Are you temperate in all things? instance in food.

(1.) Do you use only that kind, and that degree which is best both for your body and soul? Do you see the necessity of this?

- (2.) Do you eat no flesh suppers?
- (3.) Do you eat no more at each meal than is necessary?
Are you not heavy or drowsy after dinner?
- (4.) Do you use only that kind and that degree of drink
which is best both for your body and soul?
- (5.) Do you choose and use water for your
common drink? and only take wine medicinally or
sacramentally?
3. Wherein do you take up your cross daily? Do you
cheerfully bear your cross (whatever is grievous to
nature) as a gift of God, and labor to profit thereby?
4. Do you endeavor to set God always before you? to
see his eye continually fixed upon you? Never can
you use these means but a blessing will ensue; and the
more you use them, the more will you grow in grace.

This accountability was not for the band meetings only. At one conference it was advised that accountability should be had “In singing—By often stopping short and asking the people, ‘Now! Do you know what you said last! Did you speak no more than you felt!’”

Adding accountability to dedication and forsaking covetousness, we can begin to understand how the Methodists were enabled to “reform the continent”. But wait, we aren’t through yet!

DISCIPLINE

Perusing the biographies of the early Methodists, written by the following generations of Methodists, one sees words like “stern”, “plain”, “severe”, “firm”; followed by phrases

like, “but when you got to know them better, underneath was a loving, gentle, humble man.”

And so it is, so many times the younger generations feel the fathers were too strong in their discipline. Very few times have the later generations (in whatever revival movement) been able to retain the glory of the former days, but with a slight smile and a knowing wag they say, “They were a good people in those days, even though they were overly strict...” And so, life goes on—admiring the “old days”, but not really desiring to return to them.

What good does accountability do, if when it becomes manifest that one of the number in the “band meeting” has lost his fervor for Christ, and nobody does anything about it? Or, it becomes known that a man has fallen into covetousness, and life goes on as before? Accountability without discipline is like a cart without a horse.

John Wesley was one of those numbers who have been dubbed, “stern”, “strict”, and “severe”. Perhaps he was: I personally cannot say 200 years later. But John certainly was a disciplinarian. This can be seen by his advice in the section above, concerning the class meeting: “Never miss class until you miss it once for all.” And John practiced what he preached, expelling delinquent class-members by the scores in his day.⁵⁶ I will let John explain himself again as to how he felt on the subject:

However, in some parts, both of England and Ireland, scriptural Christianity is well known; especially in London, Bristol, Dublin, and almost all the large and

⁵⁶ In the beginning, a person had to have a “ticket”, personally signed by John or Charles Wesley, to gain entrance into the class meetings. A person was allowed to visit two or three times to see what they were like, but afterwards, it was by express permission only.

populous cities and towns of both kingdoms. In these, every branch of Christianity is openly and largely declared; and thousands upon thousands continually hear and receive “the truth as it is in Jesus.” Why is it then, that even in these parts Christianity has had so little effect? Why are the generality of the people, in all these places, Heathens still? no better than the Heathens of Africa or America, either in their tempers or in their lives? Now, how is this to be accounted for? I conceive, thus: It was a common saying among the Christians in the primitive Church, “The soul and the body make a man; the spirit and discipline make a Christian;” implying, that none could be real Christians, without the help of Christian discipline. But if this be so, is it any wonder that we find so few Christians; for where is Christian discipline? In what part of England (to go no farther) is Christian discipline added to Christian doctrine? Now, whatever doctrine is preached, where there is not discipline, it cannot have its full effect upon the hearers.

To bring the matter closer still. Is not scriptural Christianity preached and generally known among the people commonly called Methodists? Impartial persons allow it is. And have they not Christian discipline too, in all the essential branches of it, regularly and constantly exercised? Let those who think any essential part of it is wanting, point it out, and it shall not be wanting [lacking] long.

Historical evidence of this discipline is evident. A smuggler [bringing goods into the country without paying import tax] in the society? John sends one of his preachers to investigate, and the unrepentant man is expelled. Are

there those that wear adornments on their dress? After being warned, those not complying are put out.⁵⁷ On the frontiers of America, a man shoots a deer on Sunday, butchers it, and shares the meat with his neighbors. He is called to question about “breaking the Sabbath”, but is acquitted when he explains that the neighborhood was low on food, and “God sent it on Sunday.”

Francis Asbury was another man thoroughly convinced that without discipline the church of God quickly degenerates into a spiritual Ichabod. First, let us look into some of the 1784 Christmas Conference’s conclusions:

Many of our members have married with unawakened persons.

Q. What can be done to put a stop to this?

A. Let every preacher publicly enforce the Apostle’s caution, be not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.

2. Let him openly declare, whoever does this will be expelled the society. Let all be exhorted to take no step in so weighty a matter without advising with the most serious of their brethren.”

Q. What shall we do with those members of our society who willfully and repeatedly neglect to meet their class!

A. 1. Let the assistant or helper visit them, whenever it is practicable, and inform them, if they continue to neglect they will be excluded.

⁵⁷ This happened in England and America.

2. If they do not amend, let the assistant exclude them in the society, informing it, that they are laid aside for a breach of our rules of discipline, and not for immoral conduct.

It is to be noticed in the second part above that the offense was not one of ex-communication from Christian fellowship. The Society was seen as a “church within the church”, and those who did not like the way it was run could simply choose not to join. As Wesley noted once, why should anyone join a society if he did not intend to go by its rules? But, let us look now in Asbury’s journal as to his feelings on the matter:

MAY 17, 1772—After preaching in the morning I went to see G. H., who was near to eternity. He had peace in his soul. Some slight me in this place on account of my attention to discipline; and some drop off. But my work is to please God.

OCTOBER 10, 1772—I received a letter from Mr. Wesley, in which he required a strict attention to discipline

MARCH 30, 1773—Our quarterly meeting began. After I had preached we proceeded to business, and in our little conference the following queries were propounded, namely:

1. Are there no disorderly persons in our classes? It was thought not.

2. Does not dram-drinking⁵⁸ too much prevail among our people?
3. Do none contract debts without due care to pay them? We found that this evil is much avoided among our people.
4. Are the band meetings kept up?
5. Is there nothing immoral in any of our preachers?
6. What preachers travel now, and where are they stationed? It was then urged that none must break our rules, under the penalty of being excluded from our connection. Discipline must be enforced!

OCTOBER 13, 1775—Returned to Portsmouth, and found my spirit at liberty in preaching at night. Well may the kingdom of heaven be compared to a net, which is cast into the sea, and gathereth all, both good and bad; we had collected twenty-seven persons in our little society here, when I first came, but I have been obliged to reduce them to fourteen, and this day I put out a woman for excessive drinking. Here we see the necessity and advantage of discipline. Unless the discipline of the church is enforced, what sincere person would ever join a society, among whom they saw ungodliness connived at?

JUNE 24, 1776—Spoke plainly on the nature of our society, and the necessity of discipline, which perhaps was not very pleasing to some who do not choose to join. I told them we could not, would not, and durst

⁵⁸ Whiskey drank in small amounts.

not allow any the privileges of members who would not come under the discipline of the society.

1781—There appear, at times, to be great movings among the people, but there seems to be a slackness of discipline among the preachers and them; this evil must be cured, or the work will be injured.

JUNE 6, 1813—I preached in the morning and afternoon with little freedom. May we not expect increasing days of distress? Methodism in the East is as likely to be anything else as that which it ought to be, unless we have displays of the power of God, and a strict discipline.

Some will perhaps criticize these statements, as they tend to speak of “our” discipline, and not the Bible’s. Perhaps this is justifiable, especially when Methodism began to apostatize. However, in the early days, “our” discipline simply referred to applying Biblical principles to then present-day situations of life. For example, consider the resolution concerning slavery, already mentioned in Chapter 1 of this book; does the church of the 21st century need to come to terms with the slaveholders in Virginia and the Carolinas? Let us now look at the conclusion that the conference of preachers came to in one of the early days:

Question 3. How shall we guard against Sabbath-breaking, evil speaking, unprofitable conversation, lightness, expensiveness or gayety of apparel, and contracting debts without due care to discharge them?

Answer:

1. Let us preach expressly on each of these heads.
2. Read in every society the sermon on evil speaking.
3. Let the leaders closely examine and exhort every person to put away the accursed thing.
4. Let the preacher warn every society that none who is guilty herein can remain with us.
5. Extirpate buying or selling goods that have not paid the duty laid upon them by government out every society. Let none remain with us who will not totally abstain from this evil in every kind and degree.
6. Extirpate bribery, receiving any thing directly or indirectly for voting at any election. Show no respect to persons herein, but expel all that touch the accursed thing.

In the latter days of both Asbury and Wesley, one finds in their journals a dismal note at times, bemoaning that the discipline of earlier days was falling away—the “world” was gaining ground, and both foresaw the demise of “pure Christianity” in their ranks. But with several hundred thousand members in their circles, neither could personally purge the leaven as they would have liked. But for their own lives, they kept the self-discipline that precludes the use of church discipline, and by casting out the leaven in their early days, they enabled Methodism to keep her power longer, and thus transform lives and communities—and our great nation!

PERSONAL WORK

Many are the testimonies of being awakened to the need to fly to Jesus by a Methodist itinerant preacher entering a home and praying, exhorting, and going on his way. The itinerants did not simply preach publicly, but as Asbury noted, “it was his duty to pray in whatever house or tavern⁵⁹ he found himself in.” In the 1784 Christmas Conference, some guidelines were spelled out for the preachers in regards to personal work among families and with children:

“Go into every house in course, and teach every one therein, young and old, if they belong to us, to be Christians inwardly and outwardly. Make every particular plain to their understanding; fix it in their memory; write it on their heart. In order to do this, there must be line upon line, precept upon precept. What patience, what love, what knowledge is requisite for this!

But what shall we do for the rising generation? Who will labor for them? Let him who is zealous for God and the souls of men begin now.

1. Where there are ten children whose parents are in society, meet them at least an hour every week.
2. Talk with them every time you see any of them at home:
3. Pray in earnest for them:
4. Diligently instruct and vehemently exhort all parents at their own houses:

⁵⁹ In those days, a tavern was equal to an inn, and he spent many nights in these places

5. Preach expressly on education. ‘But I have no gift for this.’ Gift or no gift, you are to do it, else you are not called to be a Methodist preacher: Do it as you can, till you can do it as you would.

Pray earnestly for the gift, and use the means for it.

Then, at another conference, we find this among the minutes:

Question 1. How can we farther assist those under our care?

Answer By instructing them at their own houses. What unspeakable need is there of this? The world says, “The Methodists are no better than other people.” This is not true in the general. But,

1. Personal religion, either toward God or man, is too superficial among us. We can but just touch on a few particulars. How little faith is there among us! how little communion with God! how little living in heaven, walking in eternity, deadness to every creature! how much love of the world! Desire of pleasure, of ease, of getting money! how little brotherly love! What continual judging one another! what gossiping, evil speaking, tale-bearing! what want of moral honesty! To instance only one particular: Who does as he would be done by, in buying and selling?

2. Family religion is wanting in many branches. And what avails public preaching alone, though we could preach like angels? We must, yea, every traveling preacher must instruct the people from house to house. Till this is done, and that in good earnest, the

Methodists will be no better.

Our religion is not deep, universal, uniform; but superficial, partial, uneven. It will be so till we spend half as much time in this visiting as we do now in talking uselessly. Can we find a better method of doing this than Mr. Baxter's? If not, let us adopt it without delay. His whole tract, entitled, *Gildas Salvianus*, is well worth a careful perusal. Speaking of this visiting from house to house, he says, (p. 351,)

“We shall find many hindrances, both in ourselves and the people.

1. In ourselves, there is much dullness and laziness, so that there will be much ado to get us to be faithful in the work.
2. We have a base, man-pleasing temper, so that we let men perish, rather than lose their love; we let them go quietly to hell, lest we should offend them.
3. Some of us have also a foolish bashfulness. We know not how to begin, and blush to contradict the devil.
4. But the greatest hindrance is weakness of faith. Our whole motion is weak, because the spring of it is weak.
5. Lastly, we are unskillful in the work. How few know how to deal with men so as to get within them, and suit all our discourse to their several conditions and tempers to choose the fittest subjects, and follow them with a holy mixture of seriousness, terror, love, and meekness!

But undoubtedly this private application is implied,

those solemn words of the apostle, "I charge thee before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and dead at his appearing, preach the word; be instant in season, out of season: reprove, rebuke, exhort, with all long-suffering."

O brethren, if we could but set this work on foot in all our societies, and prosecute it zealously, what glory would redound to God! If the common lukewarmness were banished, and every shop and every house busied, in speaking of the word and works of God, surely God would dwell in our habitations, and make us his delight.

And this is absolutely necessary to the welfare of our people, some of whom neither repent nor believe to this day. Look around and see how many of them are still in apparent danger of damnation. And how can you walk, and talk, and be merry with such people, when you know their case?

Methinks when you look them in the face, you should break forth into tears, as the prophet did when he looked upon Hazeal, and then set on them with the most vehement exhortations. O, for God's sake, and the sake of poor souls, bestir yourselves, and spare no pains that may conduce to their salvation!

What cause have we to bleed before the Lord this day, that we have so long neglected this good work! If we had but engaged in it sooner, how many more might have been brought to Christ! and how much holier and happier might we have made our societies before now! and why might we not have done it sooner? There are many hindrances: and so there always will be; but the greatest hindrance was in ourselves, in our

littleness of faith and love.

But it is objected,

1. This will take up so much time, we shall not have leisure to follow our studies.

We answer,

1. Gaining knowledge is a good thing, but saving souls is a better.

2. By this very thing you will gain the most excellent knowledge, that of God and eternity.

3. You will have time for gaining other knowledge too. Only sleep not more than you need; “and never be idle or triflingly employed.” But,

4. If you can do but one, let your studies alone. We ought to throw by all the libraries in the world rather than be guilty of the loss of one soul.

It is objected,

2. “The people will not submit to it.” If some will not, others will; and the success with them will repay all your labor. O let us herein follow the example of St. Paul.

1. For our general business, Serving the Lord with all humility of mind.

2. Our special work, Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock.

3. Our doctrine, Repentance toward God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

4. The place, I have taught you publicly, and from house to house.

5. The object and manner of teaching, I ceased not to warn every one, night and day, with tears

6. His innocence and self-denial herein, I have coveted no man's silver or gold.

7. His patience, Neither count I my life dear unto myself. And, among all other motives, let these be ever before our eyes.

a. The church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

b. Grievous wolves shall enter in; yea, of yourselves shall men arise, speaking perverse things.

Write this upon your hearts, and it will do you more good than twenty years' study. Then you will have no time to spare: you will have work enough. Then likewise no preacher will stay with us who is as salt that has lost its savor; for to such this employment would be mere drudgery and in order to it, you will have need of all the knowledge you can procure, and grace you can attain.

The sum is, Go into every house in course, and teach every one therein, young and old, to be Christians inwardly and outwardly; make every particular plain to their understandings; fix it in their minds; write it on their hearts. In order to this, there must be line upon line, precept upon precept. What patience, what love, what knowledge is requisite for this? we must needs do this, were it only to avoid idleness. Do we not loiter away many hours in every week? each try himself: no idleness is consistent with growth in grace. Nay, without exactness in redeeming time, you cannot retain the grace you received in justification.

Perhaps this is rather lengthy and wordy, but we need such reminders in 21st century Christianity, probably more-so than a Methodist preacher of the late 1700's!

The itinerants took hold of these admonitions—they visited door to door, praying with each family, asking about their present spiritual condition, and leaving long-lasting impressions upon the children, many who had never heard a prayer before. Imagine the son of a tavern-keeper having Francis Asbury look him in the eye, questioning him of his soul's state, and then laying his hand upon his head and praying down a Holy Ghost blessing upon "this lad"! Many never could ignore God again!

PRAYER AND FASTING

Just because this is towards the last, it is by no means the least. The Methodists were a praying people. Consider their reputation in the story of John Fletcher, as given by Wesley:

When Mr. Hill went up to London to attend the Parliament, he took his family and Mr. Fletcher with him. While they stopped at St. Alban's, he walked out into the town, and did not return till they were set out for London. A horse being left for him, he rode after, and overtook them in the evening. Mr. Hill asking him why he stayed behind, he said, "As I was walking, I met with a poor old woman who talked so sweetly of Jesus Christ, that I knew not how the time passed away."

"I shall wonder," said Mrs. H., "if our tutor does not turn Methodist by and by." "Methodist, Madam," said he, "pray what is that?"

She replied, “Why, the Methodists are a people that do nothing but pray; they are praying all day and all night.”

“Are they?” said he; “then by the help of God, I will find them out, if they be above ground.” He did find them out not long after, and was admitted into the Society.

It has been said of Wesley, that he did not think much of a preacher that did not spend at least 4-5 hours daily in prayer. He himself rose at four o’clock every morning to be able to spend time alone with God. John Nelson, a helper of Wesley, said, “If you spend several hours in prayer daily, you will see great things.” William Bramwell “spent hours in prayer. He almost lived on his knees...He often spent as much as four hours in a single season of prayer...” Another said of him:

He was instant and mighty in prayer, and went from house to house as a messenger of God. His visits were short, and he had the holy tact that improved every moment for religious edification.

Frequently, says one who knew him well, “so powerfully did he wrestle with God that the room seemed filled with the divine glory.” He prayed much in secret, and when he went among the people it was evident to all that he had been with Jesus in the holy of holies, the place of secret prayer, he had gazed upon the Shekinah, the symbol of the excellent glory, and he came forth transfigured by the heavenly illumination.

Wesley, after hearing Thomas Webb preach noted:

The Captain is full of life and fire. The secret of his power was the old secret ever new—he was a man of prayer. “He wrestled,” said an intimate friend, “day and night with God for that degree of grace which he stood in need of, that he might stand firm as the beaten anvil to the stroke, and he was favored with those communications from above which made him bold to declare the whole counsel of God. His evidence of the favor of God was so bright that he never lost a sense of that blessed truth, the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin.” It is the old story—he wrestled and prevailed. The wrestlers only are the conquerors.

The preacher must prevail with God in the closet before he will be able to prevail with men in the pulpit.

Of the power of one prayer, consider the following account of Hope Hull, who was preaching in Georgia at the time of this story:

Once while traveling in the country he was invited to spend the night at a house where a ball was to be held. “He entered, and when, soon after, he was requested to dance, he took the floor and remarked aloud: ‘I shall never engage in any kind of business without first asking the blessing of God upon it; so let us pray.’”

Quick as thought the preacher was on his knees praying in the most earnest manner for the souls of the people, that God would open their eyes to see their danger, and convert them from the error of their ways.

All present were amazed and overwhelmed; many fled in terror from the house, while others, feeling the power of God in their midst, began to plead for mercy and forgiveness.

After the prayer he said, 'On today four weeks I expect to preach at this house,' and quietly retired.

On the appointed day the inhabitants for miles around were assembled, and heard one of the most powerful sermons that ever fell on human ears. From the work begun in a ball-room a most powerful revival of religion extended in every direction, and many were added to the Church."

Of Asbury it is said:

He was specially endowed with the praying gift, if it may be so called. Prayerfulness was his most characteristic quality. He prayed so much in secret that his soul was always tuned for leading public devotions. In prayer he received divine illumination in the study of the sacred oracles; on his knees he sought and found strength to bear the heavy burdens, guidance amid the perplexities and comfort under the sorrows of his life. Prayer was his recreation. From the place of secret prayer he went into the pulpit with his face shining like that of Moses when he came down from the mount where he had talked with God, and the awe-struck multitude felt strangely moved while he spoke to them the word of life.

On his journeys, he would pray in a humble cabin with such sweetness, tenderness, and power that

his visit was remembered as a benediction, and the tradition is handed down to children's children. By the wayside, yielding to a sudden impulse, he kneeled down and prayed for a Negro ferryman, and twenty years afterward, meeting him again, found that his impromptu prayer was blessed to the saving of a soul. This is the key to his wonderful career; through the channel of prayer the supernatural element flowed into the life of this man of God, and flowed out again in blessing to the world. God was with him, and wrought mightily by his hand because he waited daily at his feet in prayer for power from on high.

From the journal of William Mckendrie, we read the following:

Wednesday, Sept. 22, 1790.

Early in the morning, spent an hour on my knees in fervent prayer, reading God's Word, and praising my adorable Saviour. It was a time of heavenly joys to my soul. From ten o'clock A.M. to half-past one o'clock I spent in wrestling, agonizing prayer. But surely God and his holy ones were all around me, heaven burst into my bosom, and glory filled my soul.

If you are finicky about churches making rules for its people, I suppose the following minute from an early conference will not go down well with you:

Question 11. Ought not all our preachers to make conscience of rising at four, and if not, yet at five: (is

it not a shame for a preacher to be in bed till six in the morning?)⁶⁰

Answer. Undoubtedly they ought.

“Undoubtedly”. Getting up at four in the morning to pray. Oh, how far we have fallen!

For their view on family prayers, I will let Peter Cartwright speak:

The duty of family prayer is a very important one to the Christian. God has given the head of the family a very important and responsible position. It is a question very fairly settled, that from the early ages of the Christian religion, family prayer was required and expected of all who professed godliness. If we are to bring up our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and if we and our household are professionally bound to serve the Lord, how can we be innocent before God and our families, and habitually neglect this duty? One of the great wants of the Church at this day is the want of more family religion; and has not God threatened to “pour out his wrath and fury upon the families that call not on his name?” How many happy thousands of children will bless God forever for family prayer, or, in other words, for praying parents, who, morning and evening, called their little ones around them, and bowed down before God, and prayed with and for them! O, parents, think of the happy results of the discharge of this duty! Many of your children will thank you in heaven forever, for praying for them in your families. And

⁶⁰ Parenthesis theirs.

yet I am sorry to hear that many of the members of the Methodist Episcopal Church shamefully neglect this sacred duty of praying in their families, how shall we answer it to God? Is not this one among many other reasons, why so many of our members feel almost entirely unprepared to enter into the work of the Lord in times of revival, when God pours out his Spirit and convicts sinners among us? and perhaps if we prayed more at home, we would be better prepared to hear the Gospel of our salvation when we attend Church.

Let no business, let no company that visits you, turn you away from or cause you to neglect this duty; have your family altar firmly fixed, and your sacrifice always on it, and then look up, and in the very act of asking, expect God to send down the holy fire and consume your sacrifice, be it great or small. I long to see the time come when God shall abundantly revive family religion in the Church; then, and perhaps not till then, shall we see better and more glorious times of the work of God among us.

“It was a custom among the Methodists formerly, to observe all Fridays in the year as days of fasting or abstinence; but this custom is not strictly attended to by our societies at present.” So wrote one of the later Methodists. Actually, some of the first Methodists regularly fasted twice a week—every Wednesday and Friday—following a custom from the early church. Some may complain of customs and traditions, and rightly so if these traditions lack a living faith. But what can be expected from a tradition of fasting once a week (and on other occasions as well), if this be mixed with a living faith? “The reformation of the Continent”!



AND THE PREACHING...

“Preach as if you had seen heaven and its celestial inhabitants, and had hovered over the bottomless pit and beheld the tortures and heard the groans of the damned.”

I suppose this statement characterizes Methodist preaching as well as any. In writing this book, I at first had no thoughts of mentioning their preaching. But it really would not be fair to exclude it. After all, they (the itinerants) were called “preachers”, not “pray-ers”, “teachers”, “house-to house visitors”, or “pastors”, even though they filled all these roles at times.

Their style varied, as can be expected from any number of preachers, whose number exceeds the hundreds (later-literally thousands). John Wesley never preached a message more than thirty minutes in length. Some of those who joined his cause were known to preach for three, and even four, hours at a time. Some were eloquent, and others “butchered up the language” pretty bad. Some were college graduates and could read the classic languages. One, William Carvosso, was a class leader for many years, and finally learned to write at age 65. I will again let Peter Cartwright describe a Methodist preacher of olden days:

Many nights, in early times, the itinerant had to camp out, without fire or food for man or beast. Our pocket

Bible, Hymnbook, and Discipline constituted our library. It is true we could not, many of us, conjugate a verb or parse a sentence, and murdered the King's English almost every lick. But there was a Divine unction attended the word preached, and thousands fell under the mighty power of God, and thus the



The early campmeetings at times had several preachers preaching at various points on the grounds as the crowds were too large for one preacher to effectively reach.



Methodist Episcopal Church was planted firmly in this western wilderness⁶¹, and many glorious signs⁶² have followed, and will follow, to the end of time.

Later, he explains what happened when some other preachers entered that part of the country and began to preach where the Methodists had already established themselves.

About this time there were a great many young missionaries sent out to this [part of the] country to civilize and Christianize the poor heathen of the west. They would come with a tolerable education, and a smattering knowledge of the old Calvinistic system of theology. They were generally tolerably well furnished with old manuscript sermons, that had been preached, or written, perhaps a hundred years before. Some of these sermons they had memorized, but in general they read them to the people. This way of reading sermons was out of fashion altogether in this western world, and of course they produced no good effect among the people. The great mass of our western people wanted a preacher that could mount a stump, a block, or old log, or stand in the bed of a wagon, and without note or manuscript, quote, expound, and apply the word of God to the hearts and consciences of the people. The result of the efforts of these eastern missionaries was not very flattering...

⁶¹ He calls Illinois “western wilderness”, as at that time it was “the west”, not the mid-west.

⁶² He speaks, I am persuaded, not of other miracles, but of changed lives.

Or consider Gideon Ouseley in Ireland. “On market-days and other occasions that drew the people together he would ride into the midst of a crowd, start a hymn or begin an exhortation, and with a voice of remarkable clearness and power would make himself heard above all the noises of carts, cattle, pigs, poultry, and the howlings of the mob.”

What was it about the sermons of these preachers that would “mount a stump” and expound? Hearts were touched. Conviction of sin would set in, so much so that many could not sleep after hearing the message. Crowds would gather when the itinerant returned [those being the days before television entertained people at home, of course]. And, by these men, “the continent was reformed”.

Of all the variations in abilities and styles, one common element was found amongst them by and large: fervency. The listeners were convinced that the speaker was dead serious in his message. For example, it was said of one:

Mr. Major was from Virginia, and was one of the first missionaries that we sent to the state of Georgia. His abilities as a preacher were but small; but in exhortation he was powerful and pathetic; what he lacked in words, he generally made up in tears. Sometimes he wept from the beginning to the end of his discourse. He was often called the “Weeping Prophet.”

And of another:

Mr. White had the reputation of a revivalist of the old stamp. It was said that he always had revivals, but it was not by clap-trap, or eccentricities, or even

protracted meetings, for they were not then known, that he produced revivals; but by the old apostolic Methodist method of preaching the truth in simplicity and earnestness, and everywhere breathing the spirit of holiness. He often did reprove delinquents with great plainness of speech; but the weak and the wounded, the youthful and inexperienced, always found in him a sympathizing friend.

And yet one more:

Mr. [Benjamin] Abbott was, in many respects, a remarkable man; not, indeed, on account of his intellectual or literary attainments, for he was extremely illiterate, and of very limited information. Were we, therefore, to measure his standard of excellence as a preacher by the usual rules by which it is determined, he would sink perhaps below mediocrity; for such was his deficiency in respect to his knowledge even of his vernacular tongue that he could scarcely express himself grammatically on any subject; yet with all these defects, he had drunk so deeply at the fountain of spiritual life, had made himself so thoroughly acquainted with the Holy Scriptures, and had such an accurate knowledge of the human heart, and was, moreover, so deeply impressed by the Holy Spirit that it was his duty to call sinners to repentance, that whenever he spoke in the name of the Lord there was an "unction from the Holy One" attending his word, which made it manifest to all that he was sent from heaven to beseech mankind to be reconciled to God.

Add to fervency of human spirit the “unction of the Holy One”, and it is no wonder that literally thousands walked away from a Methodist message touched—never to be the same again. In fact, one of the qualities needed before being given a circuit seems to have been, “Are any truly convinced of sin, and converted to God by their preaching?”

These messages made for many revivals; especially to be noted are the revivals in southern Virginian and northern North Carolina during 1775-6 (In the midst of a war!) and again in 1787. Literally hundreds of lives were changed, and the entire population of several counties seemed moved to seek God. Of John Easter, greatly used in these revivals, it is said:

Having married a wife, he located⁶³ in 1792: forced to do so to get bread for his family. This step cost the great-hearted preacher a keen pang; but he never lost his zeal. He was faithful and zealous to the end—”first for souls, and second for bread,” as he himself puts it.

Bullies who came to his meetings to make trouble were abashed and slunk off, or remained to pray and be converted. When threatened with personal violence by one who brandished a club in his face, looking him straight in the eye, he calmly said: “I regard the spilling of my blood for the sake of Christ no more than the bite of a fly.” The ruffian, cowed and crestfallen, left him. Scoffers were silenced, opposers were won to Christ, great fear fell upon the ungodly, and the victorious people of God rejoiced with exceeding joy.

⁶³ Meaning he gave up itinerant work and settled in a local area

In later years, the camp-meetings began, and in Kentucky there were amazing results, even though mixed in the real fire was the “strange fire” of extreme emotional oddities. The Methodists as a whole down-played this “wildfire”, but did not entirely disregard the “jerks” or “barks” that overcame some of the hearers—after all, when those (at least some) stricken with such activities⁶⁴ recovered (sometimes after laying unconscious for several hours), their lives were changed from sin to holiness. What could they—or we—say?

From these early meetings in Kentucky, the camp-meetings have continued to this day. They are rapidly passing away, the materialistic mind-set of most North Americans tending to air-conditioned motels and padded pews rather than a brush arbor and a few rough planks for seats.

REPROVING SIN

“He is a man of God,” said a rude and wicked man of Thomas Ware, at whose house he had stayed one night.

“How do you know that?” he was asked.

“Ah!” said the man, “when he reproved me for my sins I felt the devil shake in me.”

The early Methodists did not leave all the responsibility

⁶⁴ Modern psychologists might call it “mass hysteria”. I do not know how to class them all, some maybe being demonic manifestations, others emotional hysteria, or yet possibly a strike from the hand of God. These odd behaviors were not considered, as in modern “charismatic” circles, as manifestations of the Baptism of the Holy Ghost, but rather, since they fell on the unconverted, a form of deep conviction or retribution from a just God.

of “reproving the world of sin” to the Holy Spirit alone. They joined hand in hand in this unpopular work. Not only did they publicly preach with effectiveness, they privately and capably reproved sin—face to face. Adam Clarke was known for this, especially in his younger years. He would reprove sailors for their cursing, and they walked away with shame for their lack of piety.

This personal reproof has to have anointing, or the only thing produced will be anger or resentment on the part of the receiver. But many were brought to conviction by the faithful rebukes of the Methodists. Sometimes, of course, the receiver did not receive the reproof well, as in the following incident with a backbiter:

On one of his visits, Father Evans had been listening to her a while, and his righteous soul became exceedingly vexed, and stepping up to her he exclaimed in a voice of authority:

‘Woman, stop, stop! don’t you know that your tongue is too long? I advise you to cut it off this moment. Why, it is so long that it reaches to every one in the neighborhood, and stings them like an adder.’

This silenced her. She left the room and ever after refused to see him. But we heard no more of the woman’s scandal, and the society had peace the remaining part of the year.

Reading John Wesley’s letters has proved interesting to me. He was known for speaking faithfully what he felt in his heart, as one of his rules for the preachers was, “Tell every one under your care what you think wrong in his conduct and temper, and that plainly as soon as may be: else it will

fester in your heart. Make all haste to cast the fire out of your bosom.”

This was not to be the finger-pointing, red-hot type of “straightening out” that is common to the self-appointed prophet. Rather this was to rise up out of a heart of compassion for a lost soul. And Wesley, as usual, practiced what he preached; his letters are abundant proof of this. It is hard to know the spirit of someone in a mere letter sometimes. But Wesley surely could not have given such a quantity of faithful reproofs in a bad spirit, and retained so many faithful, god-fearing people who looked up to him as a leader. Yes, “faithful are the wounds of a friend”!



*John Wesley in his last days, writing.
He authored volumes of sermons, books, and tracts,
as well as numerous personal letters in which he
poured out his honest thoughts to the recipient.*

Chapter 4

How about us?

“To reform the continent, and spread scriptural holiness over the land.”

Can we do it, in the 21st century?

YES!!!

I suppose some may call me a dreamer, enthusiast, or visionary. I hope they are right. Without a vision⁶⁵ we die. Without faith that God can change a person, a community, or a nation, we will never move in that direction.

How can we do it?

Simple. By the same methods the Methodists used.

Please, now, do not go get your Methodist history book and study their style of church buildings, or their particular plan of church organization. History has shown that God cannot be put in a box.

But wait! I have a confession to make!

You may have heard me make the statement above: “You can’t put God in a box.” I confess my error, and retract that statement as an untruth.

Yes, you can put God in a box. We have just been trying to put Him in the wrong type of box. Let me explain...

If you try to put God in the Methodist box of episcopal church organization, and say, “Now, God worked among the Methodists with that type of church government, and if we organize ourselves that way, we will surely see revival”, set yourself for a big disappointment. God has worked in that box, but you cannot box Him in that one. He has worked

among the independent, congregational church organization just as mightily!

Or, perhaps you study the sanctification doctrine of Wesley, outline it and patent it, thinking “This is it”: get ready for a failure! God worked mightily also amongst the Anabaptists, who differed from Wesley in that point! God isn’t about to allow Himself to be boxed into two works of grace; nor three; nor one!

Let me point you to the box that God will always allow Himself to be boxed in. Open your Bible to 2 Chronicles 7: 14:

“If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.”⁶⁶

Reader, jump in this box. God is already there, waiting for you to get in with Him. When you enter, if you let Him, He will shut the lid and box Himself in there with you for eternity!

I was born 201 years after Barbara Heck gave Methodism a push start in New York City. By my time, The United Methodist Church had died. No longer were they throwing playing cards into the fireplace, but rather the homosexuals were coming out of the closet and into their

⁶⁶ I understand the verse, “Where there is no vision the people perish” to be speaking of prophetic vision, not a future goal. Yet, I believe the saying is still true even if the thought of “future goal” is used for vision. In fact, prophetic vision will probably cause future goals to arise in the hearts of the people!

pulpits. Methodism's offshoots, the "Holiness" churches, were still fiercely proclaiming "second definite work of grace holiness", still having camp-meetings, in which they occasionally got so "blessed" they jumped out the windows of the tabernacles, and they still felt themselves to be the successors of Wesley's reformation; despite the fact that they lost 80%⁶⁷ of their youth to the world and rarely gained a new convert from it. The Salvation Army was no longer banging on the gates of hell, but was ringing bells at Christmas time in front of K-mart®. The "Pentecostals" still peeped and muttered, and occasionally barked and laughed holy laughter; and this despite the fact that a holy lifestyle was often smirked as "legalism".

I do not desire to "judge unrighteous judgment" with these groups; but I do want to be real. Within each, there were, and still are, a few sparks of life and an occasional little burst of flame that springs from the dying embers. God bless each one! But the original spirit of Methodism in these groups is gasping its final breaths.

Please do not try to get me interested in resurrecting John Wesley: Studying his doctrine of sanctification, outlining it, and preaching it. Nor, looking into his organization of Society, Class, Band, Itinerant Preachers, Bishops, District Presiding Elder, and then trying to build a church on that plan. Nor, counting how many hours he prayed and fasted each week and trying to equal that. Nor, looking at old pictures and trying to dress in the same cut of pants that he wore. God does not dwell in that box, even though he can work in it.

⁶⁷ My rough guess, from my experiences among them.

If we are going to reform the continent again, be it North America, South America, Asia, or Africa, we are going to have to get into the box of:

- Holiness unto the Lord.

Very easily, I could lay out several pages here, but will refrain and try to outline. Holiness unto the Lord is equal to loving God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. If you need three works of grace to get to this point, get them now. If you need two steps, take them now. If you got it all in one big lot, then walk in it! No matter how you arrive at perfect love to God, it does not amount to much unless you walk daily in it afterward. And, bless God, we can walk in perfect love. In fact, we are commanded to. And furthermore, “without holiness (loving God with all our heart), no man shall see the Lord!”

Where one problem lies, especially in “second generation” Christianity, is that the second commandment is held higher than the first. And, if a man or woman walks in morality, he is accounted as a fine Christian: despite the fact that he walks more or less pleasing the desires of his body, eye, and ambition: a “Christian” Epicurean⁶⁸.

Sports, hobbies, adornments in clothes, gluttony, the “arts”: if we are going to receive a genuine out-pouring of God Himself into our life, these will all have to go. And whatever space these occupied in our hearts will have to be filled with love to God.

Speaking like this brings persecution (I fully expect it on myself when I release this book); mostly from “conservative” Christians who are not quite done with this

⁶⁸ For those who missed the footnote above, Epicurus was a philosopher that taught the goal of man was to enjoy pleasure in the context of good morals and ethics.

world yet. They will say that this is “legalism”. That these are “innocent pleasures⁶⁹”; “neither here nor there”. I will begin to change my views when I am shown an example from church history (or better yet, a present example!) where a people that used to stand against these things⁷⁰ as carnality, and then begin to accept them, have increased in spiritual power and glory. Every story I have read has the same tune: the next generation laments the loss of power, but seems at a loss as to why.

We will move on, not because this area has been sufficiently covered, but will focus on one particular “uncleanness” (blemish in loving God):

- Putting to death covetousness.

Probably the best I can do under this heading is advise you to reread the section above on this subject, and then your Bible to back it up. Until we begin to actually do more than lip service to this one, all our cries for revival we be just so much hoop-la. It seems to me that Baal worship is a type of materialism. Baal was the god of prosperity (in the sense of making things fertile and reproductive), and he nearly took over the worship of Jehovah in the days of the kings. And he has pretty well succeeded in doing it again in North America.

Oh, when will we see people who actually live out Jesus’ command to “sell what you have and give to the poor”? In my three and a half decades of existence, I cannot remember anyone ever preaching a sermon on that verse! Why?

⁶⁹ Please seek and read Charles Finney’s sermon “Innocent Amusements”. He hits the nail on the head.

⁷⁰ That is, that did so from a spiritual standpoint, and not merely tradition.

Covetousness (keeping for yourself more than what you actually need) is idolatry. It is as gross a sin as fornication or adultery. It is as rampant as both, but rarely confessed and repented of. Until we do so, good-bye to reforming the continent.

- Genuine Christian communion.

If there were one area to copy Wesley in form as well as spirit, the class or band meeting is it (his praying might well be also). There are, as mentioned above, various ways to accomplish Christian fellowship. But a typical Sunday meeting of singing a few songs, public prayer, preaching a sermon, singing another song or two, and dismissing really “doesn’t get it”. Not that this is wrong or unnecessary; it simply is not the Christian communion that we all desperately long for.

Some churches have practiced what is called “prayer and sharing” time. This is something akin to a class meeting. What probably lacks in these, as compared to a Methodist class meeting, is the pointed questioning each week: “How is it really going?”

- And then there is discipline...

The words “church discipline” automatically brings to mind a written church standard in the minds of many. To some, “standards” are absolutely necessity, to others they are “anathema”. But “standards” are not the point. God doesn’t dwell in the “standards” box, and he does not dwell in the “no-standards” box. He is in the box of applying Christian discipline, whether that be in the context of “written standards”, or without them. Some have jumped out of the “standards” box, into the “no-standards” box (and vice-versa) thinking that the first box was the cause of the lack of the Shekinah glory in the church. Many of these have now

made serious shipwreck; the wandering, world-loving sheep full proof of this.

God has moved mightily in both frameworks in days gone by. And, as much as some may not like it to be said, the church has to apply Biblical principles to current day needs—and this in specific ways.

“Oh,” so you say, “I see, you are for specific written church standards.” Actually, I lean towards ‘without’ as a better means of administration, but can accept the other, when rightly used. But, no written church standards with no church discipline means shipwreck—and that right soon! The idea of a church being governed solely by the promptings of the Holy Spirit in each individual’s heart is a dream never come true. God has given, yea commanded, the responsibility of disciplining the wayward to the church (in conjunction with the Spirit, of course). The book of Proverbs with all its child-training gems is for the church as well as the home. “He that spareth the rod” in the church will reap the same reward as he that spareth it in the home.

- Prayer and Fasting

To reform a continent without prayer is, well, a foolish thought. When will we really pray? How many of us fast regularly? How many spend over one hour a day seeking God? There are many excellent books on prayer, and the examples of those who have gone before. Do not let the absence of material under this heading, in this book, lead you to think I consider it minimal. Not for a moment!

Well, will we do it?

By “we”, I include you, God, and me.

God will do His part. This is not to be doubted for a moment.

And I now set myself, by His grace, to do mine.⁷¹

That leaves you.

Will you?

Will you seek holiness? Will you go after the nasty attitudes as soon as they appear in your heart? Will you put to death any and all unforgiveness, until all is perfect love?

Will you forsake your little carnal loves?

Your past-times?

Your pleasure-seeking?

Your adornments?

Will you really? Will you really renounce them once for all, calling them sin? And then place in your heart a consecration to God, a commitment to seek Him every day to be more holy yet, until you are nothing but perfect love for Him?

And will you repent of covetousness? Will you actually consecrate to God all that you do not need for maintenance—simple food and raiment—of yourself and your family. Even if that means, like Wesley, giving 98% of your income away?⁷²

And will you pray? I mean really pray? And fast? And seek God's face daily?

And will you practice self-discipline, so that the church does not need to practice discipline on you? Will you then keep your brother accountable, faithfully applying the anointed rod to him as you would your way-ward child?

⁷¹ I do not want this to be boasting. Any prayers offered on my behalf to complete this will be appreciated.

⁷² I wonder how many people would work so hard if they would follow Christ's teaching and example in this area—living frugally and investing in the Gospel all beyond "food and raiment"?

Will you really do this?

You will, you say?

Ah, methinks I see a cloud arising out of the sea, like a man's hand! Glory!!

Run, brother, run!!! It's going to rain!!!!

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A pair of old leather saddlebags.

Is this the symbol of the reformation of America?

As you read the account of how the Methodists reformed the North American continent, you could very well say yes!

As the days and years slip by, the amazing story of the dedicated Methodist circuit preacher is also slipping into oblivion. This book is an attempt to not let that happen. Rather than forget, we best remember, so that we can learn a few things for the present distress of North American Christianity!