

*Drop in Vol*

*Wesley*  
*Nov 13*  
*49*

THE  
WESLEYAN CONFERENCE,  
ITS  
DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES:  
WITH  
A VINDICATION  
OF  
ITS RECENT ACTS OF DISCIPLINE.

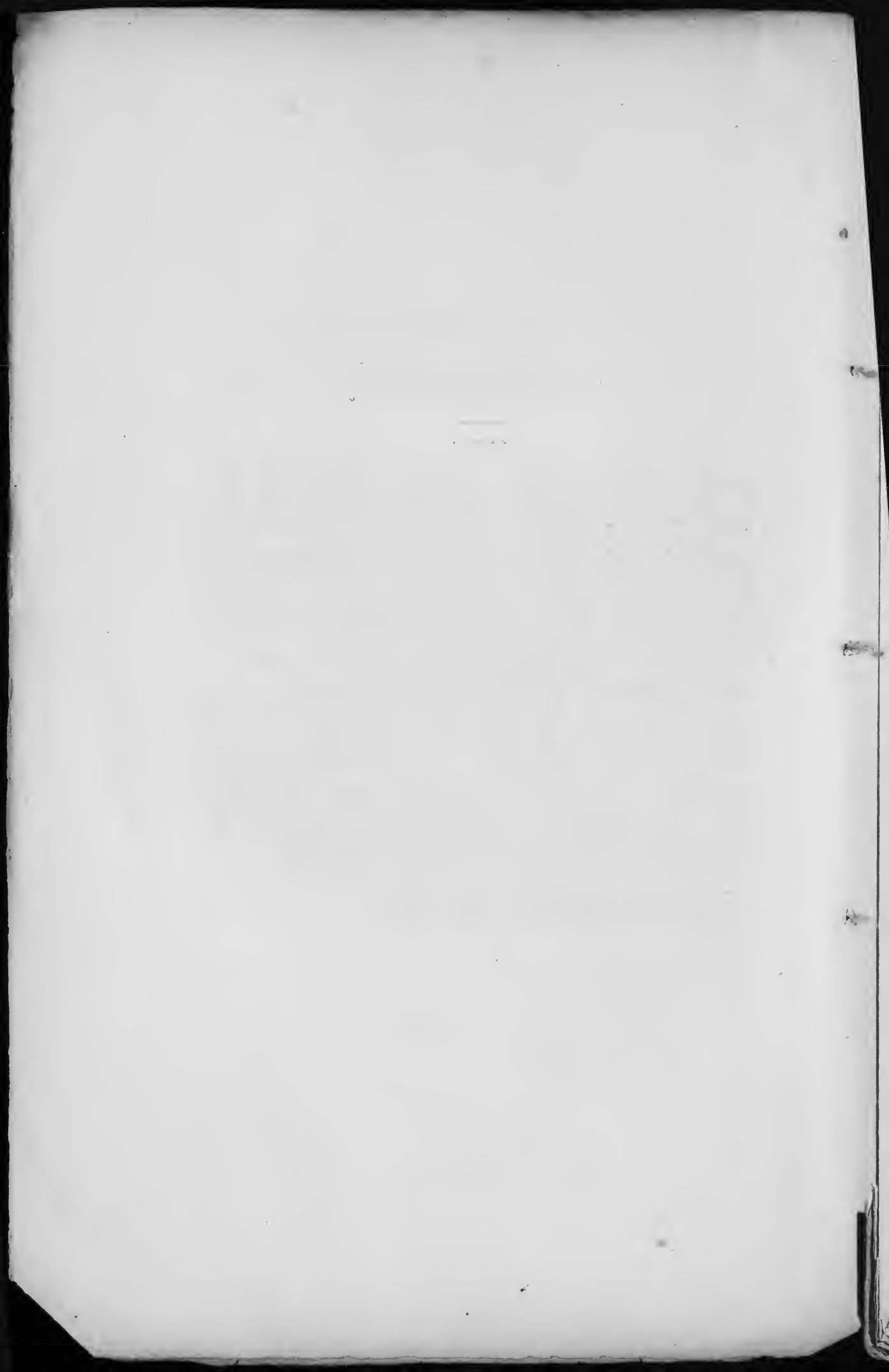
BY THOMAS JACKSON,  
PRESIDENT OF THE CONFERENCE, MDCCCXLIX.

PURGE out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us: therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.—1 Cor. v. 7, 8.

LONDON:  
PUBLISHED BY JOHN MASON, 14, CITY-ROAD;  
SOLD AT 66, PATERNOSTER-ROW.

MDCCCXLIX.

108



THE  
WESLEYAN CONFERENCE,

&c.

---

“LET not then your good be evil spoken of.” This apostolic precept is of general application, and is therefore binding upon the professors of Christianity throughout all time. When misapprehensions prevail respecting their conduct, or respecting their principles of action, so as to be made matter of serious blame, it is the duty of the parties accused to give such explanations as may be requisite in order to a just understanding of the case, so that evil surmising and evil speaking may, as much as possible, be prevented. The Wesleyan Conference, during its late sittings in Manchester, performed certain acts of discipline upon some of its members; and that as matter of painful, but of imperative, duty. Concerning these acts a large amount of clamour has been raised. The men upon whom they were passed have visited various towns, where they have convened mixed assemblies, before which they have stated their alleged wrongs; the public press, to some extent, has not only echoed their complaints, but espoused their cause; several persons belonging to the Wesleyan societies have declared themselves to be grievously offended; and Christians of other denominations have expressed a desire to understand the true nature of the affair, that they may be able to ascertain whether or not an ecclesiastical censure has been righteously administered, or the commands of Christ have been violated by a body of men who are pledged to act in accordance with them.

It is for the purpose of conveying what the writer con-

ceives to be a correct view of the subject, that the following statement has been drawn up, and is now submitted to the consideration of all who feel an interest in the matter.

### THE WESLEYAN CONFERENCE.

THE Wesleyan-Methodist Conference, as it at present exists, is constituted by Mr. Wesley's "Deed of Declaration," which bears the date of Feb. 28th, 1784, and which he enrolled in the High Court of Chancery, in which Court it has been repeatedly recognised, as binding upon the entire Connexion. It consists of one hundred Ministers, and of an indefinite number of others who are voluntarily associated with them; and was intended by its venerable Founder to carry out and perpetuate those plans which he had previously formed for the spiritual benefit of mankind, and upon which the divine blessing had manifestly rested. He invested this body with various rights; but those rights involve some of the most solemn and momentous trusts that were ever committed to human beings. To the Conference is confided the task of admitting men to the evangelical ministry in the Wesleyan section of the Christian church, after the people have, in their Quarterly-Meetings, expressed a persuasion that the parties are duly qualified for that sacred calling; of guarding the orthodoxy, the spirituality, and the purity of that ministry; and of securing the efficient discharge of its sacred duties; of appointing Ministers to the occupancy of the Wesleyan pulpits throughout the United Kingdom, and to the pastoral charge of the societies. The Conference is intended so to fulfil these sacred trusts, as to be a means of raising up a people who shall be examples of Christian holiness in all the relations of life: for the Wesleyan ministry was never designed to accomplish either secular or party objects. "I am sick of opinions," says Mr. Wesley, "I am weary to bear them.\* My soul loathes this

\* By "opinions," it is manifest from the general tenor of Mr. Wesley's writings, he meant, not the truths of Christianity, as some of his adversaries have insinuated, particularly the late Archbishop Magee. These are

frothy food. Give me solid and substantial religion; give me an humble, gentle lover of God and man; a man full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy; a man laying himself out in the work of faith, the patience of hope, the labour of love. Let my soul be with these Christians, wheresoever they are, and whatsoever opinion they are of. 'Whosoever' thus 'doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.'"\*

The manner in which Mr. Wesley intended the Conference to fulfil its momentous trust, is to be learned from his own example; for a Conference with his Preachers was held by him every year through the greater part of his public life; and the method which he adopted in conducting these assemblies he unquestionably designed to be followed by the men whom he appointed to take his place when his spirit had returned to God. Now it was an essential part of his plan to subject his Preachers to a personal examination, not only when they were accepted as fellow-labourers, but at every Annual Conference to the end of their lives. The same plan has been strictly followed to the present day; so that every man who for the last hundred years has entered into this ministry, has entered it with this understanding; and this annual examination has included, not merely inquiries respecting the character and conduct of the Preachers, addressed to other parties; but, in all cases where it was deemed necessary, questions affecting their own views and deportment have been addressed to the Preachers themselves, which they have been expected and required to answer. This fact is proved beyond all controversy by the Minutes of the successive Conferences,

not "opinions," but eternal verities, which men are bound to receive upon the testimony of God himself. He meant a cold and formal assent to the Gospel, while the heart remains unchanged, and the life unreformed; and especially matters of doubtful disputation, concerning which persons of equal piety may innocently differ; and yet which some persons have made the subjects of angry controversy, as if the whole of religion consisted in an adherence to them in some of their modifications.

\* Wesley's Works, vol. viii., p. 244. Octavo edit.

which have been published, and are therefore accessible to all classes of readers. At the very first Conference, which was held in the year 1744, this kind of examination was distinctly recognised, and that as matter of course, as the following question and answer show :—

“ Q. Do we sufficiently watch over our Helpers? \*

“ A. We might consider those that are with us as our pupils, *into whose behaviour and studies we should therefore make a particular inquiry every day.* Should we not frequently ask each, 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? Do you spend the day in the manner which we advise? Do you read the books we advise, and no other? Do you fast as often as your health will permit? Do you converse seriously, usefully, and closely? Do you pray before, and have you a determinate end in, every conversation? ” †

The following extracts from the Minutes of successive Conferences will show how this recognised principle of personal examination was acted upon :—

#### CONFERENCE OF 1746.

“ Q. How shall we try those who think they are moved by the Holy Ghost, and called of God, to preach?

“ A. Inquire, 1. *Do they know God, as a pardoning God? Have they the love of God abiding in them? Do they desire and seek nothing but God?* and are they holy in all manner of conversation?

“ 2. Have they gifts (as well as grace) for the work? Have they (in some tolerable degree) a clear, sound understanding? Have they a right judgment in the things of

\* During Mr. Wesley's life-time the Preachers who had the care of Circuits were called “ Assistants; ” their colleagues were denominated “ Helpers; ” both of them at first acted under the joint direction of John and Charles Wesley. At length Charles declined this kind of service; and John took upon himself the oversight of the Preachers and societies generally.

† Minutes of Conference, vol. i., p. 16.

God? Have they a just conception of salvation by faith? and has God given them any degree of utterance? Do they speak justly, readily, clearly?

“3. Have they fruit? Are any truly convinced of sin, and converted to God, by their preaching?

“As long as these three marks concur in any, we believe he is called of God to preach. These we receive as a sufficient proof that he is moved thereto by the Holy Ghost.

“Q. But how shall we know whether they concur or not in any particular person?

“A. 1. If he is near us, *we will talk with him* on the three preceding heads, and then hear him preach.

“2. We will *desire him to write down* or relate the reasons why he thinks he is called of God thereto.

“3. We will examine those who seem to have been convinced of sin, or converted to God, by his preaching.

“4. If he is at a distance, we will *desire the Assistant to do this*; and to inquire what is the judgment of the society in that place concerning him.

“Q. What method may we use in receiving a new Helper?

“A. A proper time for doing this is at a Conference, after solemn fasting and prayer.”\*

#### CONFERENCE OF 1766.

At this Conference eleven Preachers were admitted into full connexion, all of whom were subjected to the following examination:—

“*William Ellis, have you faith in Christ? Are you going on to perfection? Do you expect to be perfected in love in this life? Are you groaning after it? Are you resolved to devote yourself wholly to God and his work?*

“*Do you know the Methodist doctrine? Have you read the Sermons? the Notes on the New Testament?*

“*Do you know the Methodist plan? Have you read the Plain Account? the Appeals?*

\* Minutes of Conference, vol. i., pp. 29, 30.

“ Do you know the Rules of the Society? of the Bands?  
*Do you keep them?* ”

“ Do you take no snuff? tobacco? drams? ”

“ Do you constantly attend the church and sacrament? ”

“ *Have you read the Minutes? Are you willing to conform to them?* ”

“ *Have you considered the twelve rules of a Helper? especially the first, tenth, and twelfth?* ”

“ *Will you keep them for conscience' sake?* ”

“ *Are you determined to employ all your time in the work of God?* ”

“ Will you *preach every morning and evening*, endeavouring not to speak too loud, or too long? not lolling with your elbows? Have you read the Rules of Action and Utterance? ”

“ *Will you meet the society, the bands, the select society, the Leaders of bands and classes in every place?* ”

“ *Will you diligently and earnestly instruct the children, and visit from house to house?* ”

“ *Will you recommend fasting, both by precept and example?* ”

“ The same questions were proposed to the rest severally before they were admitted.” \*

#### CONFERENCE OF 1770.

“ Q. Two years ago it was agreed that Itinerant Preachers ought not to follow trades. How can we secure the observance of this? ”

“ A. It is agreed, by all the brethren now met in Conference this 9th day of August, 1770, that no Preacher who will not relinquish his trade of buying and selling, or making and vending pills, drops, balsams, or medicines of any kind, shall be considered as a Travelling Preacher any longer. And that *it shall be demanded of all those Preachers who have traded in cloth, hardware, pills, drops, balsams, or medicines of any kind, at the next Conference, whether they have entirely left it off or not?* ” †

\* Minutes, vol. i., pp. 52, 53.

† Ibid., pp. 89, 90.



## CONFERENCE OF 1776.

“Q. Are there any objections to any of our Preachers?

“A. Yes. It is objected that some are utterly unqualified for the work; and that others do it negligently, as if they imagined they had nothing to do but to preach once or twice a day.

“In order to silence this objection for ever, which has been repeated ten times over, *the Preachers were examined at large, especially those concerning whom there was the least doubt.* The result was, that *one was excluded for insufficiency; two, for misbehaviour:* and we were thoroughly satisfied that all the rest had both grace and gifts for the work wherein they are engaged. I hope, therefore, we shall hear of this objection no more.”\*

## CONFERENCE OF 1777.

“Q. Are there any objections to any of our Preachers?

“A. Yes. It is objected that most of them are not called of God to preach. This deserves our serious consideration. In the Large Minutes we ask, ‘How shall we try those who think they are called by the Holy Ghost to preach?’

“Q. Is this method of trial sufficient? can we find a better? Weigh this matter impartially.

“A. We cannot find any better method; any more scriptural, or more rational.

“Q. But suppose they were called once, have not many of them forfeited their calling?

“A. *Examine them one by one;* and whoever has any objection or doubt concerning any one, let him now speak without any disguise or reserve, or for ever hold his peace.”†

## CONFERENCE OF 1791.

Mr. Wesley died on the 2d of March this year; and the Conference, when assembled in the month of July follow-

\* Minutes, vol. i., p. 122.

† Ibid., pp. 128, 129.

ing, made the subjoined entry in their Journal:—"It may be expected that the Conference make some observations on the death of Mr. Wesley; but they find themselves utterly inadequate to express their ideas and feelings on this awful and affecting event. Their souls do truly mourn for their great loss; and they trust they shall give the most substantial proofs of their veneration for the memory of their esteemed Father and Friend, by endeavouring, with great humility and diffidence, *to follow and imitate him in doctrine, discipline, and life.*" \*

It is added, in the Minutes of the same Conference, "Is it necessary to enter into any engagements in respect to our future plan of economy?"

"A. *We engage to follow strictly the plan which Mr. Wesley left us at his death.*" †

#### CONFERENCE OF 1802.

"Q. Can any improvement be made in our present mode of receiving Preachers on trial?"

"A. At present the Candidate is supposed to have passed the Quarterly-Meeting, from which he is recommended to the District-Meeting. In addition to this, let him, if possible, *attend the District-Meeting, and be examined before all the brethren present, respecting his experience, his knowledge of divine things, his reading, his views of the doctrines of the Gospel, and his regard for Methodism in general.* The Preacher who examines him shall be chosen by the ballot of the District-Committee. After the examination, the Candidate shall withdraw, and the Committee shall deliberate on the propriety or impropriety of his admission on trial; and determine whether he shall be recommended to the ensuing Conference or not. If it be not convenient for the Candidate to attend the District-Meeting, three of the Committee shall be chosen by ballot, and appointed to act in this instance for the District." †

\* Minutes, vol. i., p. 234.

† Ibid., p. 246.

‡ Ibid., vol. ii., p. 142.

## CONFERENCE OF 1804.

“Q. What directions shall be given in respect to those Preachers to be received on trial, who have not been examined by the District-Committee?

“A. They shall be *examined respectively by the three nearest Superintendents.*” \*

## CONFERENCE OF 1805.

“Q. Are not some of the younger Preachers in danger of departing from our leading doctrines?

“A. We fear they are; and resolve that, in future, before any Preacher be admitted into full connexion, *he shall be required to give a full and explicit declaration of his faith, as to those doctrines, in the presence of the Conference.*” †

## CONFERENCE OF 1807.

“Q. Can any improvement be made in our present mode of admission into full connexion?

“A. After the present year, *no Preacher, unless employed in the Foreign Missions, shall be entered on our Minutes, as admitted into full connexion with us, without being present at the Conference, and personally examined there.* Every Preacher who has travelled four years shall be at liberty to attend the Conference for this purpose; and if he omit to avail himself of such liberty, he shall be considered as still remaining on trial.” ‡

## CONFERENCE OF 1812.

“Q. Is any regulation necessary respecting the annual examination of Preachers in our District-Meetings?

“A. Let it be clearly understood that every Chairman is required to ask the following questions, *distinctly and successively, concerning every brother; viz.,*

“1. Is there any objection to his *moral and religious* character?

\* Minutes, vol. ii., p. 241.

† Ibid., p. 290.

‡ Ibid., p. 402.

"2. Does he *believe* and *preach* our *doctrines* ?

"3. Has he duly observed and enforced our *discipline* ?

"4. Has he competent *abilities* for our itinerant work ?

—A *separate* answer to *each* of these questions is expected to appear in the District-Minutes."\*

CONFERENCE OF 1815.

"Q. Can any additional methods be devised in order to promote the mental improvement of our Preachers ?

"A. The Chairmen of Districts shall, at each District-Meeting, *examine every Preacher on trial* respecting the *course of theological reading* which he may have pursued in the course of the preceding year. For this purpose, every such Preacher is *required to deliver to the Chairman of his District a list of the books which he has read* since the preceding District-Meeting. These lists shall be laid before the Meeting, that the senior brethren may have an opportunity of giving to the junior Preachers such advices and directions respecting their studies as may appear to be necessary.

"2. Before any Preacher, having travelled four years, is recommended by his District-Meeting, for admission into full connexion, *he shall undergo a careful examination*, by the Chairman of that Meeting, respecting his *acquaintance with Mr. Wesley's Works* in general, and especially with his Sermons, and his Notes on the New Testament, in addition to the other examinations required by our existing rules: and *no Preacher shall be so recommended*, unless the result of his examination be *satisfactory to the Meeting.*"†

CONFERENCE OF 1821.

"The Conference directs that in future *all the Preachers* who are recommended by their respective District-Meetings to be admitted into full connexion, shall be required to attend the Conference of *that year*, to undergo the usual

\* Minutes, vol. iii., p. 295.

† Ibid., vol. iv., pp. 122, 123.

*examinations*; and, if approved, to be publicly set apart, without delay, to the Christian ministry.”\*

## CONFERENCE OF 1827.

“Q. Can any additional securities be provided in reference to the character, qualifications, and scriptural orthodoxy of persons proposed as candidates for our ministry?

“A. The Chairmen of Districts are again required, not only to *examine very minutely*, in their District-Meetings, *all persons* proposed to travel as *Preachers among us*, but also to report distinctly in their District-Minutes, for the consideration of the Conference, the opinion of the District-Meeting, after such examination, respecting their *health, piety, moral character, ministerial abilities, knowledge and belief of our doctrines*, attachment to our *discipline*, and *freedom from debt*, as well as from all *secular incumbrances*. In the same District-Minutes, the Preacher who recommends any candidate shall state his age, and sign a recommendatory character of him, which may forthwith be copied, if the Conference receive such candidate upon trial, into the book provided for that purpose.”

“The Conference resolve, that it is the *acknowledged right*, and, under existing circumstances, the *indispensable duty*, of every Chairman of a District, to *ask all candidates* for admission upon trial amongst us, if *they believe the doctrine of the Eternal Sonship* of our Lord Jesus Christ as it is stated by Mr. Wesley, especially in his Notes upon the first chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews, to be agreeable to the Holy Scriptures; and that also it is the *acknowledged right*, and, under existing circumstances, the *indispensable duty*, of the President of the Conference for the time being, to *examine particularly* upon that doctrine *every Preacher proposed to be admitted into full connexion*, and to require an *explicit and unreserved declaration* of his *assent to it*, as a truth revealed in the inspired oracles.”†

\* Minutes, vol. v., pp. 253, 254.

† Ibid., vol. vi., pp. 279, 280.

## CONFERENCE OF 1835.

“It is indispensably necessary to the purity of our ministry, and to the spiritual welfare of our societies, to retain, and on all proper occasions to use, the *right of fully inquiring into the conduct of its own members*, and judicially dealing with them, which *the Conference, in its annual assemblies*, and (during the periods intervening between its yearly meetings) by means of its *District-Committees*, has *hitherto exercised*.”

“Q. Is it expedient, on account of recent occurrences, to re-assert, by *declaratory Resolutions*, any of our rules or usages, which individuals have attempted to contradict or pervert?

“A. We think it is expedient; and therefore the Conference *unanimously declares* as follows; viz.,

“1. That *not only the Conference, but all its District-Committees*, whether ordinary or special, possess the undoubted right of instituting, in their official and collective character, any *inquiry or investigation*, which they may deem expedient, into the *moral, Christian, or ministerial conduct of the Preachers* under their care, even although no formal or regular accusation may have been previously announced on the part of any individual; and that they have also the authority of coming to such decisions thereupon, as to them may seem most conformable to the laws of the New Testament; and to the rules and usages of our Connexion. In the District-Meetings, especially, the Chairman has the official right of originating such inquiries, if he think necessary; because our rule declares that ‘the Chairman of each District, in conjunction with his brethren of the Committee, shall be *responsible* to the Conference for the execution of the laws, as far as his District is concerned.’

“2. That *all Preachers* who desire to remain in ministerial communion with us are considered as retaining that communion *on the distinct condition*, that they hold themselves individually *pledged to submit*, in a peaceable and

Christian spirit, to the *usual disciplinary investigations*, not only of the Conference, but of all its District-Committees, whether ordinary or special, when summoned according to our rules and usages ; and that any Preacher who refuses to submit to the friendly examination of the Chairman and of other brethren, or to take his trial, regularly and formally, before the Preachers either of an ordinary or of a special District-Committee, when duly required so to do, shall be considered as, *ipso facto*, incurring the penalty of suspension until the ensuing Conference ; because *no possible security can be found even against the worst forms of moral or ministerial delinquency*, if persons charged with any misconduct, and summoned to trial, be allowed to evade with impunity our established *modes of investigation.*" \*

These extracts from the printed Minutes of the Methodist Conferences, extending through a period of more than ninety years, suggest the following observations :—

1. That the Wesleyan ministry has been uniformly guarded with singular vigilance and care. All the men who have been admitted into this ministry have from the beginning been subjected to the most searching scrutiny in respect of their personal piety, their knowledge of evangelical truth, their soundness in the faith, their ability to teach, and the purity of their morals. The reason for all this care is obvious. Mr. Wesley regarded the Christian ministry not as a mere profession, but as a divine vocation. He believed, in accordance with the Church to which he belonged, that every true Minister of the Gospel is called of God, and moved by the Holy Ghost, to take upon himself the sacred office which he sustains ; and that upon the right discharge of its duties, the actual salvation of men is made to depend. He did not believe that men are made Christians by being born in a Christian country, and by an external conformity to the ordinances of the Gospel ; but that, as all men are born in sin, and are by nature

\* Minutes, vol. vii., pp. 544, 549, 550.

children of wrath, so they can only be saved from sin, its guilt and curse, its misery, pollution, and reigning power, by a personal faith in Christ as their Redeemer, and their Advocate with God. Such a faith he believed to be the gift of God, preceded and accompanied by unfeigned repentance, followed by peace of conscience, by purity of heart, and by a holy life. As faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God, so Mr. Wesley felt that all this amount of spiritual good is instrumentally produced by an evangelical ministry; but then he saw that, generally speaking, no man can successfully exercise such a ministry unless he himself be a witness of the power of Christianity. For, how can he who is himself unsaved adequately explain the nature and method of salvation to others? and how can an unsanctified man successfully exercise the pastoral charge over a spiritual people, or sympathize with them in all the trials, sorrows, and joys of the divine life? Methodism, as administered by Mr. Wesley, and by the Conference which he constituted, acknowledges no man as a true Minister and Pastor, unless he be personally reconciled to God, and so renewed in the spirit of his mind as to be able explicitly to testify, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

2. The searching examinations to which the Wesleyan Ministers have from the beginning been subjected, have been personal. Candidates for this ministry, and men who were recognised as being in a state of complete union with the Conference, have all been expected to answer questions which were officially proposed to them. Not only have inquiries respecting their general spirit and behaviour been made of their colleagues and other persons, but the men themselves have been required to answer questions especially affecting their religious state, their belief, their regard for the Methodist economy, and their purpose to promote the objects of the Connexion in the



advancement of true religion. These are questions which none but the parties themselves could answer; and answers to them have been both demanded and given, and that as matter of course.

3. These examinations have been annual. Not only have the Methodist Preachers been personally examined when they were admitted upon trial, and when they were received into full ministerial connexion with their brethren; but it has also been their established practice once a year to institute an inquiry into the personal and ministerial character of every one of them, whether he be a Missionary or labour at home. "*Are there any objections to any of our Preachers?*" is a question which is proposed in every regular District-Meeting, and in every Conference; and the answer which is given in the printed Minutes is, "*They were examined one by one.*" This practice, and the terms in which it is recorded, were both originated by Mr. Wesley. When the question, "Does he believe and teach our doctrines?" is proposed in the yearly District-Meeting, every individual is expected to answer for himself; and the call is generally responded to with the utmost promptitude and cheerfulness; for what have honest men to conceal? "For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God." (John iii. 20, 21.) In respect of this yearly examination of character, the Wesleyan economy differs from that of almost every other community. In the Church of England, and in the Church of Scotland,\* for

\* The form of examination which is practised in the Church of England may be seen by a reference to the Book of Common Prayer. The following are the questions to which the Church of Scotland requires an answer from each of her Ministers on his appointment to the sacred office:— "After the sermon, the Minister who hath preached shall, in the face of the congregation, demand of him who is now to be ordained, concerning his faith in Christ Jesus, and his persuasion of the truth of the Reformed religion, according to the Scripture; his sincere intentions and ends in

instance, Ministers undergo a close examination at the time of their ordination ; but in after-life, unless complaint be preferred against them, it does not appear that inquiries are ordinarily made into their spiritual state, or into the manner in which they discharge their public and official duties. Whereas Mr. Wesley thought that a man might be called of God to preach the Gospel, and afterwards forfeit that call by unfaithfulness ; or that he might depart from the truth, lose the spirit of his calling, and so need reproof and godly admonition. The true spirit of the sacred office can only be preserved by incessant vigilance and prayer ; so that whatever may be the natural and acquired abilities of a Minister, if he sink into a state of mental indolence, become self-indulgent, worldly in his disposition, vain and trifling in his conversation, ceasing to "watch for souls as they that must give account," he becomes rather a burden than a blessing to the people ; and unless he can be roused to a due feeling of his responsibilities, the sooner he is superseded in his office the better. Even men that were disabled by the infirmities of age for the efficient discharge of ministerial duties, Mr. Wesley declined to appoint to the full labours of a Circuit.\*

desiring to enter into this calling ; his diligence in praying, reading, meditation, preaching, ministering the sacraments, discipline, and doing all ministerial duties towards his charge ; his zeal and faithfulness in maintaining the truth of the Gospel, and unity of the church, against error and schism ; his care that himself and his family may be unblameable and examples to the flock ; his willingness and humility, in meekness of spirit, to submit unto the admonitions of his brethren, and discipline of the church ; and his resolution to continue in his duty against all trouble and persecution.

"In all which having declared himself, professed his willingness, and promised his endeavours, by the help of God ; the Minister likewise shall demand of the people concerning their willingness to receive and acknowledge him as the Minister of Christ."

\* "In the Large Minutes, Q. 25, it is asked, What is the office of an Helper ? It is answered, 'To preach morning and evening.' Therefore none who does not can perform this office.

4. These strict examinations are indispensably necessary in order that the Conference may be able to fulfil its trusts with conscientiousness and fidelity. We have seen that upon the Conference devolves the task of appointing Ministers to the different chapels of the Connexion, and to the pastoral oversight of the societies. Who can estimate the amount of responsibility which this task involves! How can this trust be fulfilled, so that its great object may be realized in the conversion and salvation of men, that the approval of the Lord Jesus may be secured, and that the parties who execute it may have a conscience void of offence? The answer is, By a strict adherence to first principles; by selecting spiritual men, duly qualified; men of faith and holy zeal, who will give themselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word; men who love the souls of their fellow-creatures, perishing in ignorance and sin, with a passion like that which brought the Son of God from heaven to die for our guilty race. But in order that the Conference may faithfully fulfil this most solemn trust, it must satisfy itself, by strict examinations, and every other available means, that the Ministers whom it yearly sends forth and sanctions are not only outwardly blameless, but that they also "live in the Spirit, and walk in the Spirit."

5. The Methodist societies and congregations generally are interested in this part of our economy, and are bound to maintain it. The Conference exists not for its own benefit merely, but for the benefit of the Connexion, with whose best and dearest interests it is intrusted; and hence Mr. Wesley denominated it, "The Conference of the people called Methodists." It is bound to regard the people's spiritual benefit, to the utmost limit of its power, by providing for them a holy, enlightened, and efficient

*"But he cannot."* Perhaps so. Then he cannot undertake this office.

*"I did this for many years. But I cannot do it any longer."* Then you can no longer undertake this office. But you may be a Supernumerary, as John Furz and Richard Seed are." (Minutes of Conference, vol. i., p. 160.)

ministry. To most of the congregations and societies, the Preachers, when they are first sent, are entire strangers ; but they are found to preach the same doctrines, breathe the same spirit, pursue the same objects, and adopt the same plans of operation, that their predecessors did ; so that the ministerial succession is perceived and felt to be unbroken. Wesleyan Ministers all walk by the same rule, and mind the same thing. They are therefore received into the houses of our people with a cordial welcome ; and the congregations confess that, although their Pastors change and itinerate, the Gospel trumpet, as it is heard from their pulpits, never gives an uncertain sound. The same truth is preached ; the same divine influence is invoked and obtained ; the same results follow, in the conversion of sinners, and the establishment of believers. But these objects could never be obtained, were it not for the kind fidelity with which the Methodist Preachers watch over each other, and the care which is taken by the Conference, that the men whom it appoints understand the Gospel of God, and are imbued with its spirit.

6. The Wesleyan Ministers stand in a near and peculiar relation to one another ; and this is an additional reason for those faithful examinations to which they voluntarily submit. In the national Churches of England and Scotland, the Ministers express their assent to the same creed, use the same forms of public worship, and acknowledge the same ecclesiastical order and government ; but as each Minister has his own distinct and separate charge, and seldom occupies any pulpit but his own, there is not among them the very close and intimate union which subsists among the Ministers of the Wesleyan body ; who succeed each other in the different Circuits, sustain the pastoral relation to the same people, and hold precisely the same views of divine truth : for the Wesleyan Ministers have never tolerated among themselves that diversity of theological opinion which prevails in the two national Churches just mentioned. Unless, therefore, the Minis-

ters belonging to the Wesleyan community have an entire confidence in one another, accompanied by a tender and cordial affection, their very union is to them a constant source of irritation, and they can never co-operate with satisfaction and comfort for the advancement of their common object, the spread of Christian holiness throughout the world. With the necessity of this mutual confidence and affection among his Preachers, Mr. Wesley was early impressed; and hence many touching and instructive references are made to the subject in the Conference Minutes. The following are examples:—

## CONFERENCE OF 1744.

“Q. What can be done in order to a closer union of our Helpers with each other?”

“A. 1. Let them be deeply convinced of the want there is of it.

“2. Let them pray for an earnest desire of union.

“3. Let them speak freely to each other.

“4. When they meet, let them never part without prayer.

“5. Let them beware how they despise each other's gifts.

“6. Let them never speak slightingly of each other in any kind.

“7. Let them defend one another's character, in everything, to the utmost of their power. And,

“8. Let them labour in honour each to prefer the other before himself.”\*

## CONFERENCE OF 1769.

“It has long been my desire that all those Ministers of our Church who believe and preach salvation by faith, might cordially agree between themselves, and not hinder but help one another. After occasionally pressing this in private conversation, wherever I had opportunity, I wrote

\* Minutes, vol. i., p. 19.

down my thoughts upon the head, and sent them to each in a letter. Out of fifty or sixty to whom I wrote, only three vouchsafed me an answer. So I give this up. I can do no more. They are a rope of sand, and such they will continue.

“But it is otherwise with the Travelling Preachers in our Connexion. You are at present one body. You act in concert with each other, and by united counsels. And now is the time to consider what can be done, in order to continue this union. Indeed, as long as I live there will be no great difficulty. I am, under God, a centre of union to all our Travelling as well as Local Preachers.

“They all know me and my communication. They all love me for my work’s sake: and therefore, were it only out of regard to me, they will continue connected with each other. But by what means may this connexion be preserved when God removes me from you?

“I take it for granted, it cannot be preserved, by any means, between those who have not a single eye. Those who aim at anything but the glory of God, and the salvation of men,—who desire or seek any earthly thing, whether honour, profit, or ease,—will not, cannot, continue in the Connexion; it will not answer their design.”\*

#### CONFERENCE OF 1774.

“Q. Can anything be done now in order to lay a foundation for the future union of the Preachers? Would it not be well, for any that are willing, to sign some articles of agreement, before God calls me hence?

“A. We will do it. Accordingly the following paper was written and signed:—

“We, whose names are underwritten, being thoroughly convinced of the necessity of a close union between those whom God is pleased to use as instruments in this glorious work, in order to preserve this union between ourselves, are resolved, God being our helper,

\* Minutes, vol. i., pp. 87, 88.

I. *To devote ourselves entirely to God; denying ourselves, taking up our cross daily, steadily aiming at one thing, to save our own souls, and them that hear us.*

II. *To preach the old Methodist doctrines, and no other, contained in the Minutes of the Conferences.*

III. *To observe and enforce the whole Methodist discipline, laid down in the said Minutes.\**

## CONFERENCE OF 1775.

“Q. What Preachers signed the agreement to adhere to each other, and to the old Methodist doctrine and discipline?”

This question is answered by the signatures of nearly the entire body of the Preachers who were then in connexion with Mr. Wesley.†

## CONFERENCE OF 1806.

“Q. How may the union of the brethren, who labour together in the same Circuit, be more effectually promoted?”

“A. 1. The Conference insists that no Helper shall countenance or encourage any person who opposes the Superintendent in the proper discharge of his official duties according to our rules.

“2. We advise the brethren to meet together once a week, or as often as it is practicable, in order to converse freely with each other, respecting the affairs of their Circuits.” ‡

## CONFERENCE OF 1827.

“The Preachers of different Circuits, when resident in the same town, are advised to meet at least once in every month, for the purposes of mutual conference and prayer; in order to promote brotherly love, and to afford frequent and regular opportunities for friendly consultation on subjects of common concern in their respective Circuits.” §

It has been felt, from the beginning, that Ministers who sustain a relation to each other, so intimate, peculiar, and

\* Minutes, vol. i., p. 110.

† Ibid., pp. 121, 122.

‡ Ibid., vol. ii., p. 348.

§ Ibid., vol. vi., p. 281.

delicate, must act towards each other with perfect openness and candour, otherwise their very union will rather be a bane than an advantage. Among them collisions of opinion would inevitably chafe their spirits, and mar the sacred work in which they are engaged.

---

### ITS RECENT EXPULSIONS.

WITHIN the last three or four years the peace of the Wesleyan Connexion has been seriously interrupted by the publication of a series of mischievous and libellous pamphlets, which have been extensively circulated, by post and otherwise, for the professed purpose of correcting various alleged abuses, both in the Conference and several of its institutions. These pamphlets are all strictly anonymous, containing no author's name, and the name of no printer, but professing to be the joint production of a Corresponding Committee, the members of which were said to be resident in some of the principal towns of England and North Britain. They contain direct and repeated attacks upon some of the most gifted, useful, laborious, and esteemed Ministers of the body, representing them as indolent, proud, selfish, ambitious, and morally dishonest; especially the men whom the Conference has intrusted with the management of its important and widely extended Missions. The writers represent the members of the Conference generally, as mean and spiritless, not daring to think and act for themselves, but consenting to be blindly led by a few ambitious individuals, who are intent upon managing everything for the gratification of their own selfishness, caprice, and vanity. These nameless authors profess to relate private and confidential conversations, to disclose the secrets of domestic life; and they even assail with strong but unrighteous censure the memory of the pious dead.

These things are dwelt upon by the writers, not in a tone of sorrow and regret, that evils of such magnitude should exist among religious people, so as to dishonour Christ, to



neutralize the effect of his truth and ordinances, and to retard his work of mercy in the world. They are rather dwelt upon in a tone of scorn, and of bitter malignity, bearing, indeed, a character of personal hatred and vindictiveness; and in various instances the writers manifest a fearful disregard of truth. For a time it was hoped that the spirit of these writers would defeat their object, especially among religious people, whose sanctified nature instinctively abhors that which is evil; so that these vehicles of slander and defamation would sink into deserved neglect and forgetfulness. But, alas, appeals to the bad passions of our fallen nature are seldom harmless. Reflections upon the personal and public character of several of our Ministers were, by these anonymous scribes, pressed upon the attention of the Methodist mind with such pertinacity, and even hardihood of repetition, that at length a feeling of distrust was somewhat extensively produced in the body; and even men of pure minds, who were unwilling to believe evil of any one, and especially of the honoured Ministers of Christ who were recklessly assailed, began to fear that there might be some truth in the allegations. Evil surmising and evil speaking were extensively promoted, and religion was wounded in the house of her friends.

Here then was a sin of fearful magnitude and aggravation, committed in the bosom of a Christian community; the sin of slander, reviling, and defamation; the sin of propagating and placing upon public record flagrant untruths, which the writers knew, or might have known, to be such; the sin of attempting to render the public services of gifted, pious, and even aged, Ministers of Christ useless, both to the church and the world; the sin of promoting evil-speaking, jealousy, and wrath among religious people, and that to the widest possible extent; the sin of attempting to shake the public confidence in the management of one of the largest and most successful Missionary Societies in the world, and of thus depriving self-denying Missionaries of their support, and of withholding the word

of salvation from the perishing Heathen. This sin was not hastily committed, under the impulse of temporary and excited feeling; but was deliberately planned, and then pertinaciously perpetrated through a series of years, and that with unabated malignity; the writers never betraying the least signs of relenting towards the men whom they so bitterly maligned. Speaking of Mr. Wesley, the late Robert Hall has said, "I would not incur the guilt of that virulent abuse which Toplady cast upon him, for points merely speculative, and of very little importance, for ten thousand worlds."\* Yet the abuse which Toplady lavished upon Mr. Wesley never surpassed, in rancour and malice, the abuse which the "Fly-Sheet" writers have poured upon several living Ministers of the Wesleyan body.

These proceedings, when compared with the law of Christ, appear in all their atrocity. "Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, and considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye." "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the Law and the Prophets." (Matt. vii. 3—5, 12.) "Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another." "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." (Rom. xii. 9, 10, 18.) "Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another." "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving

\* Hall's Works, vol. v., p. 426.

one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." (Eph. iv. 25, 31, 32.) "But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice.....Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds." "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel (complaint) against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness." (Col. iii. 8, 9, 12—14.)

The violation of these holy precepts, on the part of the "Fly-Sheet" writers, was the more inexcusable, because, as Methodists, and, above all, as Methodist Preachers, they were not only at liberty to seek the removal of any abuses in the Connexion that might come under their observation, but were bound and even pledged to seek their removal, in a constitutional and honourable manner. They knew that the regular courts of the body were open to them continually. A distinct challenge was also given to them twice every year, in the District-Meetings and in the Conference, to prefer any accusation against the Missionary Secretaries, and the Rev. Treasurer: the meeting of the Missionary Committee of review, which is held every year on the day which precedes the opening of the Conference, was accessible to them; and there they might have sought an explanation of anything in the management of the Missions, which they might deem unsatisfactory; and there they might have even urged their complaints. But in all these places the accusers were as silent as death; they never showed their faces to the men whom they accused; they never preferred any complaint before the tribunals that were competent to deal with them: thus leading every disinterested observer to the conclusion, that these writers sought the removal of no grievances, but rather the gratification of some private resentment or jealousy, and the introduction of general confusion.

The duty of the Conference to attempt the extinction of

this evil, few persons, it is presumed, will deny. It was an injury to some of the most useful men that the Wesleyan Connexion ever knew; and these men naturally looked for protection and redress to the Conference, whose faithful servants they were. The matter was an occasion of triumph to infidel scoffers, of deep and bitter sorrow to multitudes of devout people in our own societies, and an occasion of scandal to other denominations of Christians, who saw men publicly professing and teaching spiritual religion, thus "biting and devouring one another." In the year 1847, the Conference published a strong and decisive testimony against this organized system of calumny; but was not able at that time to lay its hand upon the guilty parties, who, it has since been ascertained, had pledged themselves to an inviolable secrecy.

Evils of this kind, however, are seldom permanently concealed; and the time at length arrived when the Conference was able to deal with at least some of the authors of this mischief. The great body of the Wesleyan Ministers purged themselves from all blame, by affixing their names to an explicit "Declaration," in which they not only asserted their innocence of all participation in the authorship and publication of these pamphlets, but stigmatized them as "wicked" and "slandrous." Some other Ministers at the Conference purged themselves by an oral testimony to the same effect. The men who had not purged themselves were now reduced to a very small number; and among them was the individual, whom almost every one suspected to be the prime mover of the whole concern.

Cases of delinquency the Conference generally deals with by means of specific charges, which are preferred by responsible men, given to the accused in writing, and judged of after the accused has been heard in his own defence; but in the present case this course was impossible, because of the concealment in which the offenders had shrouded themselves. The mischief was indeed apparent; and so was the fact, that it had been concerted and perpetrated

by Methodist Preachers ; but they had wrought in the dark ; and although circumstantial evidence was strong and various, direct proof of their identity was not available. Two courses only were therefore open to the Conference : either that of passing the matter over, acknowledging the suspected men as brother Ministers, appointing them to our pulpits, and to the pastoral charge of our societies ; or that of subjecting them to a personal examination as to their guilt or innocence in this matter. The continued recognition of them as brother Ministers, vehemently and generally suspected as they were of a fearful amount of moral guilt, appeared to be utterly incompatible with the solemn trust which the Conference sustained ; for it necessarily involved unfaithfulness to Christ, and to the spiritual interests of his people. Can the purity of the evangelical ministry be lawfully sacrificed to a mere technicality? The Conference has from the beginning possessed the unquestioned right of examining not only Candidates for admission into connexion with it, but its own members, on all points affecting their Christian and ministerial character, or the peace and prosperity of the body ; and it resolved to exercise this right in the case of these suspected men. Through the whole of their ministerial life every one of them had been annually questioned on the subject of his orthodoxy, and his continued attachment to the Wesleyan economy ; and it was felt to be perfectly fair, in this fearful emergency, to question them as to whether or not they were concerned in this grievous system of immorality, by which the whole Connexion was dishonoured. Feeling that the law of Christ had been violated by one of the most vile and malignant conspiracies that ever disgraced a religious community ; feeling at the same time that it was now in a situation to deal with the evil, and that if it neglected the opportunity, it would be a partaker of the sin ; the Conference first called the suspected ring-leader of the mischief, and, through the medium of its own officers, asked him whether or not he was concerned in the authorship, or in the publication, of the "Fly-Sheets."

He replied, that, to this question he would give no answer. If charges were preferred against him, he would meet them, and defend himself; but to no such question as that which was now proposed, would he return any reply, even upon pain of expulsion. Other men, who were suspected of being in the confederacy, and some of whom were known to have been extensively concerned in the mischiefs of agitation, were questioned in the same manner, and avowed the same determination. Attempts were made to bring them to a different mind. A Committee, comprehending some of the most aged Ministers of the body, with others who had filled offices involving great trust and responsibility, was appointed, to meet with the men who thus placed themselves in an attitude of hostility towards their brethren, to hear their reasons, and, if needful, to remonstrate with them; but to no purpose. He who first made the declaration of refusal to answer, declined, even when sent for, to meet either the Conference or the Committee with reference to any argument on the subject. Of the others, two who met the Committee not only persisted in their refusal to answer the question proposed, but even to give any pledge of abstinence from future agitation. The Conference therefore deemed it to be matter of solemn duty, both to God and his church, by three successive votes, to sever these men from ministerial connexion with itself.

The examination to which these men were subjected, *amounted simply to this*, as all the parties well understood:—Our union as Ministers of Christ, as you are well aware, is voluntary; it is founded upon mutual confidence and affection, and upon considerations which are purely religious. We have one faith, and one Lord. We have professed our belief of the same truth, and our adherence to the same system of church order; we exercise our ministry for the one purpose of advancing the glory of Christ, in the conversion and salvation of men; and we have pledged ourselves to countenance among each other no sin, but endeavour to promote each other's purity and usefulness in every possible way. It is our grief to find that a great

sin has been committed among us. The "Fly-Sheets" have neither been written nor circulated by chance. "An enemy hath done this." The enemy is among ourselves. The Preachers in general have solemnly avowed their innocence. The men who are capable of writing and publishing such wanton falsehood and defamation as these pamphlets contain, and who will persist in such practices, are unfit for the ministry which we have received. They are not such men as our venerated Founder would have sent forth and sanctioned; they are not such men as he intended the Conference to send forth and sanction. Direct proof that you are the guilty parties has not been placed before us; we are willing to believe that you are innocent; but general suspicion falls upon you. If you are innocent, declare your innocence; and we will credit your testimony, as we have done every year during the entire period of your union with us; we will still give you the right hand of fellowship, and treat you with our wonted confidence and affection as fellow-labourers in the vineyard of the Lord. If you are not innocent, but have entered into temptation, acknowledge that you have done wrong; give us your promise that you will from this time desist from these practices; and, as we ourselves hope for the mercy of God, we will not withhold mercy from you. But if you will neither clear yourselves with respect to the past, nor give us a guarantee for the future, our duty to God, to his cause, and to his people, together with our own recorded vows and engagements, render it impossible that our ministerial union should any longer continue. You leave us no alternative in the case. Our union must now cease and determine.

I would ask all sober, candid, and religious men, Is this course of action a just subject of blame? Has the Methodist Conference any reason to be ashamed before either angels or men, of having thus acted in this sad emergency?

To thoughtless persons, listening to popular oratory amidst the excitement of a public meeting, it seems a marvellous exhibition of moral courage, that three men

should have dared to set the whole Methodist Conference at defiance; and they think the men worthy of being compared with the great German Reformer, when he stood before the Diet of Worms. They forget that Luther stood there for the announcement and defence of the truth; and these three men for the concealment of sin.

In reference to the acts of discipline, which have now been expounded, two observations may be appropriately made. 1. They were performed with singular unanimity, and with a deep feeling of their necessity. Of the expelled men, one had been forty-three years in connexion with the Conference, partly as a regular Minister, and partly as a Supernumerary; another of them had been thirty years; and the third, seventeen. All of them, therefore, may be fairly presumed to have had an extensive circle of acquaintance, and several personal friends, among the Ministers who constituted the Conference; and yet, with regard to the act of expulsion, scarcely the slightest difference of judgment prevailed, in this the largest assembly of Wesleyan Ministers that was ever held. Indeed, the expulsion of the man who was regarded as the principal writer of the "Fly-Sheets" was proposed to the Conference by a senior Minister, who had been coaxed and lauded in those publications. It may be fairly assumed that such unanimity could not be produced upon light grounds; so that several hundreds of Ministers, with the father of the Conference at their head,—himself having been sixty-two years in this ministry, to which he was personally appointed by its Founder,—should all unite in an act which is at all times painful and unwelcome. Yet here we find Richard Reece, with all the gradations of age and of ministerial rank, down to the men who had been only a few days before ordained to the sacred office, including acquaintances and personal friends, uniting in the act of expulsion as matter of urgent and of solemn duty. In an assembly of brother Ministers, amounting to considerably more than five hundred, in favour of one of the expelled men three



hands were held up, two of them being the hands of accomplices; in favour of another, one hand was held up; and in favour of the third, no hand at all. The act of expulsion, therefore, was not the act of a bare majority, but of the entire Conference, the exceptions being so inconsiderable as to be scarcely worth naming.

2. The act of expulsion was not hastily performed, but took place after much anxious deliberation and delay, and after every effort had been tried to save the men whose case was under consideration. Except these cases of discipline, there was no business of the Conference that required much time; so that its sittings were likely to be less protracted than usual. And indeed its speedy conclusion was on many accounts felt to be exceedingly desirable. The attendance was unusually large: the long detention of so many men from their homes and their work was matter of serious inconvenience; especially when the prevalence of disease and mortality in many of the Circuits was considered. The sitting of so many men, also, from day to day, for several hours together, in a heated atmosphere, created considerable uneasiness, and even alarm; especially as one of the Ministers retired from his place in the Conference, and died in a few hours of malignant cholera; and not a few others became seriously ill. Yet the Conference prolonged its sittings till the last day, and almost till the last hour, that it could legally continue them, deferring other matters of an urgent nature, for the purpose of hearing these men, and of bringing them to a better mind, so as, if possible, to secure their continuance in the ministry to which they had been appointed. For their accommodation and benefit the regular and necessary business of the Conference was from time to time delayed, till all further delay was impossible, without endangering the very existence of the Connexion. In consequence of the large portion of time which was devoted to this case, the Stations of all the Preachers could not be considered with due care; and no small amount of domestic inconvenience and suffering is

the result. In this matter, therefore, all semblance of haste, of precipitancy, and of rashness, was carefully avoided; ample space for reflection was given to the offending parties; but when it was found that there was absolutely no hope for the permanent peace of the Connection, but by the severance of these men, the entire body of the Conference arose to the act of separation, with a calm and solemn fixedness of determination, which nothing could produce but a deep and conscientious feeling of duty to God and to his cause.

---

### OBJECTIONS ANSWERED.

FEW acts which the Methodist Conference ever performed have been the occasion of so much misapprehension and clamour, as the recent expulsions which we have just described. With reference to them, the walls in some of our large towns have been covered with placards; public meetings announced; platforms erected; speeches delivered; resolutions proposed, seconded, and adopted, with every indication of strong excitement; and many good people have been frightened with the thought that Methodist Preachers are going to overturn all liberty, civil and religious, and either to introduce the Papal Inquisition, or something worse. Let us examine a few of the most popular topics of declamation that have been advanced in the shape of argument, and see whether or not they admit of a satisfactory answer.

1. It is said that the Conference by its recent acts of expulsion has violated its own recognised rules.

When any Preacher is accused, those rules provide that the charge which is preferred against him shall be given to him in writing, with the name of the accuser; and after hearing the evidence and the defence, the court to which the matter is referred for adjudication, shall pronounce a sentence of acquittal or of condemnation as the case may be. This course was not followed by the late Conference; and hence it is contended that the men who have been

expelled, have just ground of complaint. Their expulsion was unconstitutional, and therefore unrighteous.

The answer is, that the design of law is to impose a restraint upon evil. "The law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient." In the advancement of time, evil assumes an endless variety of new forms, against which human legislation has never yet been able effectually to provide. Hence it is that all regular governments have a provision for extraordinary emergencies. There are times when some of the most important parts of the British constitution are held in abeyance, and personal liberty is therefore infringed upon; but the people submit to these inconveniences without a murmur, because the safety of the state requires it; and that safety they justly regard as the supreme law, which must be secured at all hazards, and by every kind of sacrifice. So it is in Methodism, which requires an annual examination of all its Ministers. That examination, as we have seen, is partly personal. "Does he believe and teach our doctrines?" is a question which no man can satisfactorily answer for another. Every man is therefore expected to answer it for himself. The same is true with respect to the approval and enforcement of our discipline, concerning which inquiry is also made every year. These inquiries are not made as matters of idle form, but with a reference to ulterior proceedings; and hence the answers which are given to them in District-Meetings are always reported to the Conference, as the supreme authority under God. If it be found, when these inquiries are made, that any man has seriously departed from the truth, or suffered the discipline of the body to be trampled upon in his Circuit, he is admonished, or laid aside, according to the circumstances of the case. The men who have just been expelled were admitted into connexion with the Conference after a personal examination; they received, at the time of their admission, a copy of the form of discipline, with an inscription, signed by the President and Secretary of the Conference, "*So long* as you freely consent to, and ear-

nestly endeavour to walk by, these rules, we shall rejoice to acknowledge you as a fellow-labourer;" \* clearly implying, that, if they should at any time cease to "consent" to them, and to "walk" by them, the Conference would cease to "acknowledge" them "as fellow-labourers." This was not only the implied condition of their union with the Conference, but the stipulated and recorded condition. Up to the time of the last Conference these men acted according to their original pledge; but then, being questioned on a subject which affected their honour and morality, they set the Conference at defiance, and thus peremptorily refused any longer to observe the discipline, a professed subjection to which was one ground of their admission into connexion with that body.

It is confessed that in this instance the recognised practice of personal examination was applied to a new subject, the authorship and publication of certain pamphlets; and that no example is upon record in which men were expelled for refusing to answer questions precisely similar to those which are now under consideration. This is indeed matter of thankfulness to God. The Conference has existed for a hundred and five years, and was never before humbled and disgraced by the astounding discovery among its members of such a conspiracy as that which has lately been brought to light. Never before was it known that a company of Methodist Preachers bound themselves together, if not by an oath, yet by something resembling it, to propagate falsehood and slander by means of a clandestine press, for the purpose of destroying the reputation of their brethren, while they were accustomed to meet those brethren with smiles, and profess towards them a perfect cordiality. If the proceeding of the Conference was novel, so was the crime with which it was called to deal. That Mr. Wesley, with all his tact and forethought, and with all his knowledge of the baseness to which fallen human nature can stoop, should not have contemplated

\* Minutes, vol. i., p. 30.

such a conspiracy, and that it should not have been contemplated by the Conference in any of its legislative acts, may be readily conceived ; and we may fairly hope that many centuries will pass away before another conspiracy, equally dark and hateful, will be formed. In dealing with this vile case, however, it is clear that the Conference has acted upon no new principle, and has therefore violated none of its own regulations.

Nor must it be forgotten, that Methodist Preachers, met together in their annual Conference, are not an assembly of Lawyers, who are retained for the purpose of assisting delinquents in extricating themselves from the meshes of law, by the discovery of technical difficulties and objections ; but a body of plain, honest men, whose duty and aim it is to visit sin, by whomsoever it may be committed, with appropriate penalties, and in the fear of God to preserve in untainted holiness and efficiency the ministry with which they are intrusted. Such was John Wesley's course of proceeding ; and the men who bear his honoured name can honestly say, " We are all one man's sons ; we are true men." If it be right that they should every year examine one another as to their soundness in the faith, and their continued attachment to the economy of the body, to which they are solemnly pledged, these " true men " cannot perceive that it is either conventionally or morally wrong, in a season of peculiar emergency, to ask one another whether or not they are addicted to the practice of secret immorality, like that of " Fly-Sheet " lying and defamation.

2. It is further objected, that the expulsions have taken place under a law which is but of recent origin, being unknown in Methodism till the year 1835 ; a law, therefore, which Mr. Wesley never sanctioned, and which none of his Preachers were required to observe for nearly one hundred years.

This law, as it is called, is given p. 16, of this pamphlet, and need not be here repeated. The reader, however, is requested to turn to it, that he may at once perceive the

character of the objection which has been urged, again and again, in speeches at public meetings, and even embodied in Resolutions, which are said to have been carried by acclamation. The answer is, that the objection is utterly unfounded, and shows with what haste even some good people have permitted themselves to judge of a subject which they never took the pains to understand. They have even pledged themselves to persevere in a course of agitation, till the rule, as they are pleased to denominate it, shall be expunged from the statute-book of the Connexion, lest other expulsions should be effected under its sanction. Whereas the fact is, as every one may see, no man was ever expelled under that rule, and never can be. It is, in fact, an explanatory declaration respecting the duties and rights of District-Meetings. But District-Meetings, as such, have no power of expulsion, and never had. That some Local Preachers, Class-Leaders, Circuit and Society Stewards, should have adopted Resolutions, and circulated them by means of the press to the widest possible extent, embodying so palpable a mis-statement, is deeply to be lamented, and must be to themselves, when they shall reflect upon the matter, an occasion of unfeigned regret.

Officers in the Wesleyan body, who have suffered themselves to be thus misled, we conceive are all bound, as Christian men, to send forth counter-statements through the three kingdoms, with their own signatures affixed, recalling their former Resolutions, and asking pardon of the Ministers whom they were bound highly to esteem for their work's sake, but whom they have openly misrepresented and traduced. The late expulsions took place under no law of 1835, but under the common law of Methodism; the law upon which Mr. Wesley acted through the entire course of his public life, and upon which the Conference has invariably acted since his death; the law of examining all the Ministers connected with it every year, and of discarding all such as, in its conscientious judgment, are unfit any longer to be employed under

its direction. Upon these terms Mr. Wesley received all the Preachers that laboured in connexion with him; upon these terms every Preacher, without exception, is received by the Conference; and upon these terms the expelled men themselves were all received, and were continued, up to the very time of their expulsion.

3. It is alleged, that the manner in which the expulsions were effected was un-English, because the men were required to answer questions which might fix upon themselves the charge of moral blame. Whereas no Englishman is bound to criminate himself.

This is a very popular objection; but it will not bear the test of a strict scrutiny. In our courts of justice, indeed, persons who are under criminal charges are not required to say anything that might be of disservice to them in their defence; and cautions to this effect are often humanely given to them both by Magistrates and Judges. But then it is equally true that persons who are arraigned at our criminal tribunals are not the only people that have to do with English law and English usage. Even in our criminal courts, witnesses are often not only compelled to appear, but to submit to a searching examination as to the past transactions of their lives, and to disclose facts which inflict a permanent injury upon their reputation; for without such examinations the ends of public justice could not be secured. In the Court of Chancery parties are treated in a somewhat similar manner, being compelled to give distinct and explicit answers to questions, which for ever damage their own character. Who has not read in the public papers the torturing examinations to which insolvent debtors are compelled to submit in the Court of Bankruptcy? In the County Courts, in the department of the Customs and of the Excise, and in the enforcement of the Income Tax, the system of personal examination is pursued, to the great annoyance of parties whose intentions are not perfectly upright.

The same course is pursued in domestic life, and among professional and commercial men. When any mischief

occurs in a family, is it not the universal practice to question the children and servants as to their participation in it? Who deems such inquiries "un-English?" or will be satisfied with less than an explicit answer? What company of naval or military officers, or society of literary or of scientific men, would remain silent, when it had been ascertained that one or more of themselves had published a libel upon the rest? Suppose a company of men to enter into a partnership, for the purpose of conducting to their mutual advantage any particular business; and after they have for some time prosecuted their plans with success, they find that one of themselves is, by some secret process, counterworking the rest, so as to secure his own gain, and their ruin; would not the injured men feel themselves entitled to ask every member of their fraternity, whether or not he was the guilty man? Would the plea of "English liberty" avail to screen any one of them from the inquiry, and from the obligation to return an explicit answer? And would not measures be immediately taken to dissolve all partnership with the man who should pertinaciously say, "I will meet any charges that you have to prefer; but I will answer no questions?"

With respect to the questioning of Englishmen on matters which affect their own reputation, we would invite attention to that very solemn form of adjuration with which the marriage-service of the Church of England begins. Thus the proposed bridegroom and his spouse are addressed from the altar: "I require and charge you both, as ye will answer at the dreadful day of judgment, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, that if either of you know any impediment why ye may not be lawfully joined together in matrimony, ye do now confess it. For be ye well assured, that so many as are coupled together otherwise than God's word doth allow are not joined together by God; neither is their matrimony lawful."

The following principles are involved in this solemn appeal:—(1.) That there may be something in existence which would render a proposed marriage sinful in the sight



of God. (2.) That one or both of the parties may have a knowledge of this fact. (3.) That they have, nevertheless, come to the house of God for the express purpose of doing that which they know He has forbidden. (4.) That a third party may and ought, in a matter of such importance, to interpose, by solemn inquiry, for the purpose of ascertaining whether or not there is any guilty concealment in the case. (5.) That the parties are bound to confess this secret, so that the sin may not be actually committed. It cannot be said, that this example of questioning, with the design of bringing to light possible criminality, is "un-English;" for it received the sanction of the English Legislature ages ago; and millions of English people, of both sexes, and of every grade in society, have for several generations submitted to it without a murmur.

When these facts are duly considered, perhaps it will be thought that to ask questions respecting personal conduct is not quite so alien from English practice as some people have hastily supposed; and certainly examples of it occur in holy Scripture, and that under the direct sanction of Almighty God, whose own recognised servants were employed in making the inquiries. "And *Joshua said* unto Achan, My son, give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto him; and *tell me now what thou hast done; hide it not from me.* And Achan *answered Joshua*, and said, Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel, and *thus and thus have I done.*" (Joshua vii. 19, 20.) The question which *St. Peter* addressed to Sapphira had a similar bearing. She and her husband had agreed together to practise deceit, "And Peter answered unto her, *Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much?*" This question was followed by the repetition of a lie, which was punished with instant death. (Acts v. 8—10.)

4. It has been urged, as an objection against the Conference, that before it proceeded to deal with the supposed writers of the "Fly-Sheets," it ought to have instituted

an inquiry into the truth of the charges which these pamphlets contain.

This language is held by several parties, who profess to be the friends of Methodism, and of fair-dealing ; but with singular injustice and inconsideration. Here are certain accusers ; but they are nameless and intangible, and they adduce no proof of their allegations ; the parties accused avow their innocence, and challenge investigation ; the Conference does not believe the charges, but is ready to hear evidence, if any man, or body of men, will come forward and produce it. Let, then, the men who in printed Resolutions insinuate their belief of the "Fly-Sheet" slanders, and therefore call for investigation,—that it may be ascertained whether some of the most esteemed and useful Ministers that the Wesleyan body ever knew are not in reality worthless knaves,—themselves come forward as accusers and witnesses, if they have anything to say, and any right to be heard ; or, as Mr. Wesley said in a similar case, let them hereafter for ever hold their peace. This is the only course that is open to them as honourable men.

5. It is objected that the proceedings of the late Conference were "tyrannical," "cruel," and "an infringement upon the rights of Englishmen."

Let us examine these charges in detail. The Conference is accused of "tyranny" in proposing certain questions to some of its members, and requiring of them a promise as to their future conduct. "What right," it has been said, "had the Conference either to propose the questions, or to demand the promise?" The answer is, The Conference had the right, because the parties had conceded it of their own free will ; and if they wished to withdraw the concession, their duty was quietly to retire. The Conference has no right over any of its members, but what is thus conceded. It is intrusted with the appointment of men to the occupancy of the Wesleyan pulpits ; but they must be men of certain peculiarities of character, holding certain tenets, and pledged to a certain course of moral conduct and of church order. Persons who prefer

this ministry offer themselves as Candidates for it; they voluntarily submit to the required examinations, and, if approved, engage to comply with all the regulations and usages of the body with which they are united. As their entrance into this ministry is voluntary, so is their continuance in it. No man is compelled to remain in it an hour longer than he feels it to be a privilege and a duty. To talk of "tyranny" is palpably absurd where all is perfectly optional.

As to "torture" under the questionings of the Conference, and "torture" compared with that of the Romish Inquisition, if there was any, it could only arise from an uneasy conscience. It can be no "torture" to an innocent man to have an opportunity of declaring his innocence before brethren who are willing to receive his testimony; or even to avow the uprightness of his intentions with respect to the future. In such a case all "torture" implies conscious guilt.

That the discipline under which a Methodist Preacher is placed is "an interference with the rights of Englishmen," is very true, but very irrelevant; for so are the regulations of all voluntary associations into which Englishmen think it desirable to enter. An Englishman has a right to keep his money in his pocket; but when he enters into a benefit society, he is bound to certain payments, by which that right is to some extent superseded. An Englishman, as such, is not bound to any particular form of religion. He may be a Deist, or even an Atheist; but when he joins a Methodist society, he must meet in class, read his Bible, sanctify the Sabbath, attend public worship, and adorn the doctrine of his God and Saviour. So when a man enters the Wesleyan ministry, he comes under an obligation to observe all the rules by which that ministry is controlled and directed. But having done this of his own choice, he is still a free man; for even the discipline to which he submits is beneficial; and if it be not so regarded, he can shake it off whenever he pleases.

To complain of being shackled by the rules of a voluntary association is the perfection of folly. Why were the shackles put on, why are they worn, if they are not looked upon as a means of securing some important benefit?

6. It is alleged that the expelled Ministers would have dishonoured themselves, if they had submitted to answer the questions which the Conference proposed to them; and that the questions therefore ought not to have been proposed. One of the men who refused to answer, urged this plea repeatedly: "I cannot answer," said he; "for were I to do so, I should feel myself dishonoured."

To show the unsatisfactory nature of this excuse, we would observe that the feeling of personal honour is a very equivocal rule of duty among Christian people. The confession of sin to God is always required; and the confession of it to men is often matter of imperative obligation. But when a man knows himself to be innocent of a suspected crime, he cannot be dishonoured by declaring the truth. Upwards of eleven hundred Wesleyan Ministers have declared their innocence of the "Fly-Sheet" sin, and are held in undiminished respect by every pure-minded man.

But it may be asked, How have wise and good men generally acted in similar cases, when evil has been imputed to them, or they have been under suspicion? Hear John Wesley, speaking of himself, when he was clamorously assailed by the Dublin press, at the close of his upright and eventful life! "This is my answer to them that trouble me, and will not let my grey hairs go down to the grave in peace. I am not a man of duplicity: I am not an old hypocrite, a double-tongued knave. More than forty years I have frequented Ireland. I have wished to do some good there. I now tell a plain tale, that the good which is in me may not be evil spoken of. I have no temporal end to serve. I seek not the honour that cometh of men. It is not for pleasure that, at this time of life, I travel three or four thousand miles a year. It is not for gain.

‘ No foot of land do I possess,  
 No cottage in this wilderness ;  
 A poor way-faring man,  
 I lodge awhile in tents below,  
 Or gladly wander to and fro,  
 Till I my Canaan gain.’\* \*

When Charles Wesley was basely slandered by an apostate Methodist, of the name of Williams, in the year 1744, he published a hymn, from which the following stanzas are selected :—

“ O my Galilean King,  
 Can I glory in *this* shame ?  
 Can I *this* dishonour bring  
 As a suffering for thy Name ?  
 Lord, Thou know’st, and Thou alone,  
 All our hearts to Thee are known.

“ Naked, and without disguise,  
 In Thy sight my spirit stands ;  
 Have I not from outward vice  
 Wash’d in innocence my hands,  
 From the great transgression free ?  
 LORD, I dare appeal to THEE !

“ Inwardly, like other men,  
 Wholly born in sin I am ;  
 Only Thou didst still restrain  
 For the honour of thy Name ;  
 Kept by Thine almighty grace,  
 THEE I render all the praise ! ” †

But we have higher authority to plead than even that of the Wesleys. The inspired Apostles of our Lord did not hesitate to avow their own moral integrity when it was called in question, and when their ministry was therefore in danger of being despised. Thus the Apostle of the Gentiles speaks of himself, and of his brethren : “ Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not ; but have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor hand-

\* Wesley’s Works, vol. xiii., pp. 237, 238. Octavo edit.

† Charles Wesley’s Journal, vol. i., pp. 390, 391.

ling the word of God deceitfully ; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." (2 Cor. iv. 1, 2.) "Receive us ; we have wronged no man, we have corrupted no man, we have defrauded no man." (2 Cor. vii. 2.)

That which was done by the Wesleys, and by the Apostles of our Lord, could be no dishonour to a Methodist Preacher, standing before his brethren in the Conference, supposing him to have a good conscience, and therefore to be under no restraint from an inward sense of guilt.

7. It is further maintained, that in regard of the expulsions which are the subject of our present inquiry, the Conference must be in the wrong, because it is opposed and censured by the public press.

To this we answer, that in many quarters the public press is neutral, having declared no judgment on either side ; and that, in several cases, the public press has taken the part of the Conference ; especially that section of the press which is characterized by high moral bearing, by consistency of principle, and by the advocacy of sound Protestantism. But let us glance at that portion of the press which is hostile to the Conference, and we shall perhaps find that its opposition can be accounted for, and that it is less formidable than some people have imagined.

First, there is the "Weekly Dispatch," which is decidedly opposed to the Conference in this whole affair. But then this paper is a recognised organ of infidelity and licentiousness in their grossest forms, and is the favourite vehicle of intelligence with Sabbath-breakers, drunkards, and all classes of irreligious people : so that its hostility is incomparably more honourable than its friendship, in all cases where religion and Christian morals are concerned.

Next there is a large class of secular papers, both metropolitan and provincial, which affect a character of liberalism. They are mostly occupied with politics and general intelligence, so as seldom to introduce religion, except when any quarrel among its professors happens to occur, and a hint can be advantageously given that people should

carefully abstain from being "righteous overmuch." The conductors of such journals, of course, think that the expelled men have been harshly treated; for why should the Conference question its members either in respect of their tenets or practices? Other people can believe and act as they please, and why may not Methodist Preachers? To question men respecting points of doctrine and of moral practice, in the estimation of these gentlemen, is as intolerable as the Inquisition, and the proceedings of Laud in the Star Chamber. "The carnal mind is enmity against God;" and religious people only deceive themselves if they suppose that in this "liberal age," that "enmity" has undergone any abatement in unsanctified men. It is as deep and intense as it was when the Wesleys were buffeted by the mobs of Staffordshire; and if Methodist Preachers will still appear as the unflinching advocates of spiritual religion, and of the faith and holiness which the Gospel enjoins, bearing a faithful testimony against sin in all its forms, they may escape the violence of mobs, but they will receive no mercy from the men who deem religious truth of little moment, and would place Popery on a level with Protestantism, and Hindooism with Christianity. And such, to a great extent, is the character of the liberalism with which much of our periodical literature is imbued, but with which true Methodism has no sympathy.

The organs of Popery and Tractarianism are, of course, opposed to the Conference, because its Ministers, having only received Presbyterian ordination, are not in the assumed "apostolical succession;" so that for them to perform ministerial acts is a most unpardonable presumption. The writers of these prints would persuade the Methodists that the exercise of private judgment is connected with so much turmoil, they would do well to wave it, and allow "holy mother church" to think for them, and just tell them what to believe and do; but as we have no confidence in her wisdom, we decline the advice.

We must not forget the Dissenting press, which is bit-

terly hostile to the Conference, as it always has been ; and for this plain reason,—the Conference is the centre of union to all the Wesleyan societies, and many Dissenters would like to see all those societies transformed into Independent churches, after their own example. There is also another ground of hostility. Within the last few years some of the Dissenters have put forth strenuous efforts to effect a separation between the Church and the State, and have not succeeded. They wished the Conference to join them in this enterprise, and were refused ; its members feeling that, whatever the opinions of individuals among themselves might be, as this was no object of their union, so it would neither be respectful to their Founder, nor consistent with their own often-repeated professions. On these grounds, and others that might be named, the Dissenting journalists, without any intentional provocation from the Wesleyans, pour forth against the five or six hundred Ministers, who composed the late Conference, the most intolerant and disgraceful vituperations.

Far be it from us to include the entire body of English Dissenters in this censure. Not a few of them breathe the spirit of Christian toleration, while they profess its principles. Some of these, it is probable, without any feeling of hostility to their Wesleyan brethren, not perceiving the exact nature of the relation in which Methodist Ministers stand to each other, may think that the Conference has acted with undue severity in its recent expulsions. Let us, then, suppose the case of an Independent or of a Baptist Minister, who has a co-Pastor. They occupy the same pulpit, they teach the same doctrine, they administer together the memorials of redeeming mercy, they sustain the same pastoral relation ; and are thus united by the most sacred ties that can by possibility bind man to man ; at the same time that they have by solemn vows bound themselves to the strict observance of an unchangeable fidelity. After labouring together in harmony and with success for many years, the senior Minister is surprised by the appearance and circulation of a pamphlet,



reflecting in the severest terms upon his public and personal character, and also upon the character of his family. It represents him as indolent, ambitious, selfish, extravagant in his habits, intemperate, and morally dishonest. The pamphlet bears no name of either printer or author. It is followed by a second, a third, and a fourth; and the system of annoyance is carried on for three or four years with unmitigated malignity, till the friends of the persecuted man are staggered, his usefulness as a Minister is impaired, and his family distressed. He mentions the case to the members of his church, and to various persons belonging to his congregation, and expresses an anxious desire to discover the author of the mischief. They declare, as with one voice, that, beyond all doubt, his co-Pastor is the man; for the pamphlets breathe his bitter and sarcastic spirit; they embody things which he has often been heard to utter in conversation; they accord with his well-known habit of anonymous writing, and they correspond with his usual style. We ask, Would not this injured Minister be bound to mention these suspicions to his co-Pastor, and ask him whether they were true or not? Would not justice both to himself and his colleague require this? justice to himself, as deeply injured; and justice to the other, who might be innocent, and should therefore have an opportunity of clearing himself. Suppose that the suspected man, instead of giving a frank and candid answer, and of expressing sympathy with his suffering brother, should assume an air of importance, talk of his rights as an Englishman, and, in a tone of insult, should say, "If you have any evidence against me, produce it: but I will answer none of your questions. I defy you." Would not the injured man be justified in believing the worst, and in saying, "I am not at present provided with direct evidence of your guilt; but since you deny me all assurance that you are innocent of this act of enormous immorality, our co-pastorship must now end: I can never publicly acknowledge as a brother Minister a man who is universally suspected of such wickedness, and

who will not even deny it ; because such conduct would, on my part, be a tacit confession that I am guilty of the things which are laid to my charge ?” Supply the names, and all the particulars of this supposed case are applicable to the Conference and to the men whom it has expelled.

In the category of hostile journals we must also place a weekly print, whose title and contents form a perfect contrast to each other. It is one of a series of publications, by which it has been attempted, under the name of WESLEY, to pull down what it was the business of John Wesley's life to build up. Its efforts are incessantly directed to the setting of young Ministers in the Wesleyan body against aged Ministers, the Local Preachers against the Itinerant Preachers, the societies against their Pastors, the Connexion against the Conference, and evangelical Christians in general against the Wesleyan Missionary Society. The title which this print bears is as palpable a fraud as would be a periodical defence of Popery under the name of Luther ; of sedition under the name of Wellington ; or of infidelity under the name of St. Paul. Religious people who imbibe the spirit of this print will inevitably in the same proportion lose their piety. They will cease to be charitable, prayerful, and happy ; and will become jealous, malignant, and disputatious ; and parents who place it within the reach of their children will soon see their unsuspecting offspring loathe the very name of Christian godliness. One of the greatest injuries that can by possibility be inflicted upon a youthful mind, is the exhibition of incessant reviling in connexion with a profession of spiritual religion.

---

### CONCLUSION.

NECESSARY and justifiable as it is contended the recent expulsions by the Conference were, it cannot be denied, that they have given deep offence to many persons who not only belong to the Wesleyan societies, but who also sustain important offices in them. This is no more than

might have been expected, considering the attempts which have long been made, by a selfish and unscrupulous press, to bring the Ministers of our body generally under suspicion and contempt: so that, if these expulsions had not occurred, occasion would unquestionably have been taken from something else, to give expression to hostile feelings for which many minds have been prepared, by a long course of unblushing misrepresentation. Even the late Conference has been publicly described as disorderly, riotous, capricious, and intolerant, regardless of all propriety, and of the rules by which deliberative assemblies are usually governed. It has been so described in the print to which reference has been just made; and these sinful mis-statements have been left to produce their effects. I have been accustomed to attend the Annual Conferences for more than forty years; and I solemnly aver, that on no former occasion of the assembling of that body did I witness more striking indications of devout feeling, a greater regard for order, or a stronger desire to extend mercy to the utmost limit that was at all consistent with the maintenance of its own purity. But the Conference could not suffer its time to be wasted by irrelevant and vituperative speeches, which, after all, were manifestly intended less for its members than for the public; nor could it allow itself and its officers to be treated with insult and contumely.

It is also to be observed that nearly all the men who have put forth Resolutions against the late Conference, have said that the expulsions took place under the rule of 1835, than which there could not be a greater error. Under that rule (or declaratory resolution rather, for it is nothing more) no man ever was expelled, or ever can be, for a reason which has been already stated, and which every one must perceive. The men are said to have been expelled for contumacy. This is true, but it is not the whole truth. The Conference is not wont to visit cases of ordinary contumacy with so severe a penalty as expulsion. The man who was regarded as the principal offender

was expelled for contumaciously refusing either to acknowledge his guilt, or to purge himself from a course of flagrant immorality,—the publication of a series of atrocious libels upon personal character; such libels as no honourable society of professional men would tolerate in any of its members; such libels as have rendered many a British subject amenable to the laws of his country, and have subjected to heavy fines, and even to imprisonment in a common jail. Was it right that such a man should receive the public sanction of the Methodist Conference, as a Minister of Christ? For this exercise of discipline some office-bearers in various Circuits have unceremoniously published censures upon the entire and collective pastorate of the body to which they belong; and even threaten to withhold their support from the several funds by which the cause of Christianity is maintained and extended.

Cases of this nature, however much they are to be lamented, are, unhappily, no novelties, as the records of the church too plainly show. Even the Apostles were not exempted from trials of this kind. "The disciple whom Jesus loved" had occasion to mention at least one person of influence and distinction in the church, who "prated against him with malicious words." St. Paul also speaks of his "perils among false brethren," as well as from Heathens and Jews. In consequence of his extraordinary diligence in his ministry, continued for two years in one particular region, it is said, "All they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks." (Acts xix. 10.) That his success among them was great, is manifest from the following chapter, which contains his parting address, and a warning that "from among themselves would men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." These men were successful in their divisive schemes, so that when the Apostle was "about to be offered up," and "the time of his departure was at hand," he had occasion to say to his son Timothy, "This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned

away from me." (2 Tim. i. 15.) A sad proof this of instability even among religious people. If the "many tears," the public preaching, the pastoral visitation, the devotedness, the self-denial, of St. Paul were thus requited, if he were left to pine in a dungeon, and to die by the hand of the public executioner, without the slightest sympathy from immense bodies of people whom he had instrumentally turned to Christianity, from the guilt and misery of Heathenism,—let not Wesleyan Ministers either murmur or be surprised, if their spiritual children, in the hour of temptation, should listen to the mis-statements of an ungodly press, and traduce the men whom they are bound by every tie to esteem and love. It was not in vain that this inspired servant of Christ said, "Be patient toward all men." Yet the people who were "turned away" from St. Paul were all undeniably in the wrong.

With the official men among the Methodists, who have published Resolutions against the Conference, it may be hoped, however, that the dispute will soon terminate; for most of them declare an inalienable attachment to Methodism as it was administered by Mr. Wesley. Now we have shown that in the very first Conference Mr. Wesley laid down the principle of personal examination as applicable to all the Preachers that should labour in connexion with him; upon that principle he acted with respect to every one of them to the end of his life; he devolved upon the Conference the task of carrying out his plans after his death; and in the "Deed of Declaration," by which he invested the Conference with its powers, and defined its duties, he distinctly intimated that the annual examination of its members was to be no matter of mere form, but a means of preserving the body, in every respect, pure and uncorrupt: for he thus stated his purpose: "The Conference shall and may expel and put out from being a member thereof, or from being in connexion therewith, or from being upon trial, any person, member of the Conference, or admitted into connexion, or upon trial, for any cause which to the Conference may seem fit or neces-

sary; and every member of the Conference so expelled and put out, shall cease to be a member thereof, to all intents and purposes, as though he were naturally dead."\* In the fulfilment of its trust, the late Conference, in the examination of its members, found three who were deemed unfit to be any longer intrusted with this ministry, and therefore dismissed them, agreeably to Mr. Wesley's own practice and arrangements. This mode of dealing with men who are regarded as unfaithful is therefore no novelty, and no innovation; but is as old as Wesleyan Methodism itself. It cannot be then, that men who revere the memory of Mr. Wesley, and in reality approve of his plans, will long persist in raising a clamour against the Conference on account of its late expulsions. The extracts which we have given from the Minutes of Conference, published by Mr. Wesley himself, clearly prove that he required from his Preachers answers, which were quite as stringent and searching as any that were proposed by the late Conference to the men whom it was reluctantly compelled to disown.

But it was never difficult to create prejudice against authority. Even Moses, who acted solely as the vicegerent of God, and whose divine commission was demonstrated by miracles which caused "amazed heaven and earth to shake," was openly resisted, and accused of "taking too much upon himself." A vain and worthless son of David succeeded in alienating the people from their allegiance, and in sending the aged Monarch into exile. It has, therefore, been justly and beautifully observed, by a wise and holy man of a former age: "He that goeth about to persuade a multitude that they are not so well governed as they ought to be, shall never want attentive and favourable hearers, because they know the manifold defects whereunto every kind of regiment is subject; but the secret lets and difficulties, which in public proceedings are innumerable and inevitable, they have not ordinarily the judgment to consider. And because such as openly

\* Wesley's Works, vol. iv., pp. 508, 509.

reprove supposed disorders of state are taken for principal friends to the common benefit of all, and for men that carry singular freedom of mind: under this fair and plausible colour, whatsoever they utter passeth for good and current. That which wanteth in the weight of their speech is supplied by the aptness of men's minds to accept and believe it. Whereas, on the other side, if we maintain things that are established, we have not only to strive with a number of heavy prejudices deeply rooted in the hearts of men, who think that herein we serve the time, and speak in favour of the present state, because thereby we either hold or seek preferment; but also to bear such exceptions as minds so averted beforehand usually take against that which they are loth should be poured into them."\*

Some persons seem to think that the system of Conference questioning, although instituted by Mr. Wesley, and intended by him to be practised as long as that body might remain, should now be abandoned, as being contrary to "the spirit of the age," and therefore distasteful to the public mind. To people who entertain these views we would take leave to say, that "the spirit of the age," in whatever light it may be viewed, is a variable and evanescent thing; so that the spirit of one age is not the spirit of another: whereas the principles of evangelical truth and morals, like their divine Author, are immutable. Christians are not to be carried about by the fluctuating opinions of the world; but having ascertained the mind of God, by a prayerful study of His word, are to "walk by the same rule, and to mind the same thing;" remembering the apostolic admonition, "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God." It is in perfect consistency with "the spirit of the age" for large masses of people to assemble, consisting of young and old, male and female, infidels, libertines, Chartists, scoffers, and professors of religion, and at the mention of the names of even aged Ministers, whom God has long

\* Hooker's Ecclesiastical Polity, book i., sec. i.

blessed and owned in their work, to hiss and groan and stamp like Legion, just come from the tombs ; but there is "another Spirit," which says, "We beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you ; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake." (1 Thess. v. 12, 13.) "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves : for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief : for that is unprofitable for you." (Heb. xiii. 17.) If our blessed Lord and his Apostles, if Mr. Wesley, and other eminent instruments of usefulness, had taken "the spirit of the age" for their guide, what would have been the state of the world at this day ?

It has also been said that as the system of questioning, as it is practised by the Conference, is liable to abuse, it would be well, on this account, to abandon it, and thus prevent all future occasion of offence and excitement, such as now prevail. Men have thus expressed themselves in public meetings ; but it is difficult to believe that they are serious. If we ought to renounce everything that may be abused, what are we to retain ? We must neither eat nor drink ; for both have been abused to the purpose of intemperance. We must not profess religion ; for this has been used as a covering of base designs. Class-Leaders are to see the members of their classes once a week, to inquire how their souls prosper. Is this also to be given up, because it may be abused by impertinence ? But then this practice, so far as the Conference is concerned, never has been abused. It has been in use for more than a century ; and no instance of its abuse has been recorded ; nor was any complaint against it ever heard of till the late Conference, when it was applied to parties who shrunk from the test. They, of course, complain of it ; but others regard this instance of its application as a public benefit, and would not, on any account, reverse what has been done, especially considering the spirit of the men on whom these acts of discipline have been passed.



It is further to be observed that the system in question has not only been harmless, but eminently useful; having been one principal means of preserving the doctrinal purity of the Wesleyan ministry; so that it has never, at any period, assumed an heretical character. When any departure from catholic truth has appeared, it has instantly been resisted and suppressed. It was the honest boast of Mr. Wesley, more than a century ago, that the societies who were under his care were all sound in the faith. "Where is there a body of people in the realm," said he, "who, number for number, so closely adhere to what our Church delivers as pure doctrine? Where are those who have approved and do approve themselves more orthodox, more sound in their opinions? Is there a Socinian or an Arian among them all? Nay, were you to recite the whole catalogue of heresies enumerated by Bishop Pearson, it might be asked, Who can lay any one of these to their charge?"\* At this day there are connected with the British Conference one thousand seven hundred and seventy Ministers and Preachers on trial; and in respect of doctrinal sentiment, Mr. Wesley's appeal is strictly applicable to the whole of them. Is it a light matter that such a body of men, whose labours are incessant, widely extended, and carried on in perpetuity, should have been preserved from the pestilential errors, which have utterly ruined many churches that were once large and flourishing; and that their teaching should have uniformly been of a healthy character? Let the unthinking men who would remove one of the strongest guards of orthodoxy in the Wesleyan body, contemplate the withering effects of doctrinal error upon the Presbyterian churches of England, upon the Protestant churches of Poland, of Germany, of Switzerland, and of France, and learn wisdom by the facts of history. Men who duly consider the importance of truth, and the terrible effects of corrupt doctrine, at different periods of the church, will pause

\* Wesley's Works, vol. viii., p. 205.

seriously and long before they hastily abandon a practice from which the most substantial benefits have arisen for more than a century. Many parts of Christendom at this day, through the want of an efficient discipline among Ministers, are a barren waste ; while the Wesleyan section of the church, with its Conference and its strict disciplinary arrangements, is as the garden of the Lord, equally verdant and fruitful.

Besides, if the Conference were to be so infatuated as to discontinue the practice of examining the Wesleyan Ministers, it would at the same time abandon its great trust, the trust for the execution of which it was itself created ; and in this case it would be bound in honour to dissolve itself. A Conference sending forth from year to year unexamined Ministers, who should be at liberty to preach what they pleased, and to live as they pleased, so as not to outrage public decency, and to provoke an impeachment, would not be the Conference that John Wesley constituted. But the evil would soon work its own cure ; for pious people would refuse to receive such men, and to submit to their pastoral rule ; so that the appointments of a faithless Conference would be null and void.

And as Wesleyan Methodism, founded on the connexional principle, has worked well in respect of the maintenance of Christian doctrine and morals ; so it has worked no less beneficially as to the spread of divine truth, and the advancement of spiritual religion. We have no quarrel with Christians of the Independent denomination, some of whom at present, through the medium of their recognised organs, load us with abuse ; nor should we ever publicly animadvert either upon them or their system, if they would allow us peacefully to follow our own plans of evangelical labour. But they force us to a comparison of their ecclesiastical system and our own. Christianity is intended by its Author to be the one religion of mankind : for He has commanded that his Gospel should be preached to every creature ; and therefore to the retired villager, as well as to the inhabitant of the crowded city.

But what has Independency ever done for the scattered peasantry of either this or any other nation? It has ranked under its banners many Ministers equally eminent for scholarship and piety; it has erected large chapels, and collected large congregations, in populous districts and towns; and their influence in their several localities has been and is now a public blessing, in which every good man is bound to rejoice. Independency took its rise in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, more than a century before the Wesleys were born; but where are its trophies among the thinly-scattered population of our agricultural villages? In less than half the time during which the principles of Independency have been in operation, Wesleyan Methodism, with its connexional form, and its Conference, has erected thousands of chapels in these villages, and raised up in connexion with them thousands of societies and congregations, with their Sunday-schools, their Missionary associations, and all the apparatus of a living Christianity. Ten thousand Methodist peasants at this day, in the midst of poverty and privation, present as fine examples of spiritual religion, both in life and death, as the church of God has ever seen, even in her best and palmiest days.

Whence arises this difference? Are such men as James and Leifchild less zealous for the honour of Christ and the salvation of men than Methodist Preachers are? Far from it. The difference is doubtless to be found in the systems. In the extension of the work of God, Independency is comparatively powerless, because it is single-handed. The strength of Wesleyan Methodism lies mainly in its connexional unity. Its Ministers are stationed, generally two or three of them together, in large towns, where they are principally supported by numerous societies, and are therefore able, upon a regular and systematic plan, to extend their labours into the surrounding villages and hamlets, without imposing any oppressive burden upon the humble peasants, to whom they minister the word of life; and if, after all, these country Circuits are unable fully to support their own ministry, the deficiency

is usually supplied out of a general fund, to which all the societies and congregations contribute.

Shall then this beautiful system of evangelical operation, of which the Conference is the centre and bond of union, and upon which the blessing of God has so marvellously rested for more than a century, be broken up, and abandoned? So in effect say the Dissenting journalists, whose cry is, "Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof!" Extinguish the Conference, with all its discipline and regulations; set the people free, and let them choose their own Ministers, and act for themselves:" and it is matter of surprise and regret, that some of our own professed friends are so faithless or ill-informed as to abet these hostile journalists in their clamour; forgetting that if the Conference be extinguished, the itinerant ministry which Mr. Wesley instituted would necessarily cease. But even in this case, the societies would not be allowed to choose their own Ministers, upon the Independent plan. The appointment of them, according to the "Deed of Declaration," would be vested in the Trustees, and the people would have no power to help themselves.\* But supposing all the societies were allowed to choose their own Ministers, there are thousands of them

\* "Whenever the said Conference shall be reduced under the number of forty members, and continue so reduced for three yearly assemblies thereof successively, or whenever the members thereof shall decline or neglect to meet together annually for the purposes aforesaid, during the space of three years, that then, and in either of the said events, the Conference of the people called Methodists shall be extinguished, and all the aforesaid powers, privileges, and advantages shall cease, and the said chapels and premises, and all other chapels and premises, which now are or hereafter may be, settled, given, or conveyed, upon the trusts aforesaid, shall VEST IN THE TRUSTEES for the time being of the said chapels and premises respectively, and THEIR SUCCESSORS FOR EVER; upon trust that they, and the survivors of them, and the Trustees for the time being, do, shall, and may appoint such person and persons to preach and expound God's holy word therein, and to have the use and enjoyment thereof, for such time, and such manner, as to THEM shall seem proper." (Wesley's Works, vol. iv., pp. 510, 511.)

who could not support them when they were chosen; and hence endless bickerings and confusion would inevitably ensue. What could fifteen, or twenty, or even thirty farmers' labourers, with their wives and children, do in the support of an Independent Minister? But they are happy and prosperous as a Methodist society, connected with other societies, and aided in their Circuit by the funds of the body.

The question therefore naturally arises, "Will the Conference, in consequence of this pressure both within and from without, either violate its trust, or abandon it?" It is bound, by God's blessing, to provide for the Wesleyan pulpits a ministry which is at once evangelical, spiritual, and morally pure. It has hitherto fulfilled its trust, and stands pledged to the continued fulfilment of it. *In the faith of this pledge millions of money have been expended in the erection of Methodist chapels, and of Ministers' dwelling-houses; and upwards of three hundred and seventy thousand people, in the United Kingdom alone, have enrolled themselves as members of the Wesleyan societies, in the faith that they should have an itinerant ministry possessing these characteristics.* Shall all these interests be sacrificed? Shall the Conference either dissolve itself, or cease with conscientious care to examine the Ministers whom it sends forth with its sanction? Shall it force upon a confiding people men of doubtful orthodoxy, or of doubtful morals? Will the Conference so succumb to the clamour of worldly, infidel, or even Dissenting journalists, as to betray a trust so sacred and momentous, and involving the interests of generations yet unborn? The united heart of the Conference, and of its pious and intelligent societies throughout the world, responds, as with a voice of thunder, NEVER, NO NEVER, NO NEVER! A THOUSAND TIMES, NEVER!

Thank God, the Methodist Conference yet stands, after the changes and the lapse of a hundred years, as one of the most important institutions of the country, a witness to the truth, a conservator of vital Christianity, of social

order, and of religious freedom ; a breakwater against the intolerance of Popery and of its twin-sister Tractarianism, on the one hand, and against the equally violent intolerance of ultra-Dissent, on the other. The Conference was never stronger than it is at this day. It is strong in the religious and sanctified unity of its own members : it is strong in the consciousness of its own integrity, of which it has given demonstrative proof by expelling the men who know its affairs, and charge it with unfaithfulness and abuses ; thus challenging and compelling its accusers to tell all that they know. The Conference is strong in the confidence, affection, and loyalty of the societies generally, of which they have given and still give substantial proof. Above all, the Conference is strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might ; for, while in the fulfilment of its trust it is acknowledged to have fallen into inadvertencies, and has shown such infirmities as are incident even to the wisest and best of men, it has never, at any period of its existence, tolerated "either error in doctrine, or viciousness of life."

Let history then record the fact, that when a large portion of the British press combined to assail the Wesleyan Conference, and some of the Methodists themselves joined in the clamour, the mighty charge which they preferred against that venerable body was, that, in accordance with its own recognised principles and usages from the beginning, and to which it was solemnly pledged to adhere, it expelled one of its members, because he would not, when under general suspicion, purge himself of the meanness and the sin of propagating falsehood and slander by means of a clandestine press ; and two others, his accomplices, because they would not promise to abstain from a similar system of annoyance and agitation.

## APPENDIX.

---

### MR. WESLEY'S POWER.

“THERE is nothing new under the sun.” Eighty-three years ago, the very objections which are now so vehemently urged against the Conference were urged against Mr. Wesley, and in the very same terms, as the following extract from the Minutes of Conference, of the year 1766, clearly show. He was accused of “tyranny,” of “shackling free-born Englishmen,” and of introducing “Popery.”

Q. But what power is this, which you exercise over all the Methodists in Great Britain and Ireland?

A. Count Z. loved to keep all things closely. I love to do all things openly. I will, therefore, tell you all I know of the matter, taking it from the very beginning.

1. In November, 1738, two or three persons, who desired to flee from the wrath to come, and then seven or eight more, came to me in London, and desired me to advise and pray with them. I said, “If you will meet on Thursday night, I will help you as well as I can.” More and more then desired to meet with them, till they were increased to many hundreds. The case was afterwards the same at Bristol, Kingswood, Newcastle, and many other parts of England, Scotland, and Ireland. It may be observed, the desire was on *their* part, not *mine*. My desire was, to live and die in retirement. But I did not see that I could refuse them my help, and be guiltless before God.

Here commenced my power; namely, a power to appoint, when, and where, and how, they should meet; and to remove those whose life showed that they had no desire to “flee from the wrath to come.” And this power remained the same, whether the people meeting together were twelve, twelve hundred, or twelve thousand.

2. In a few days, some of them said, “Sir, we will not sit under you for nothing. We will subscribe quarterly.” I said, “I will have nothing, for I want nothing. My fellowship supplies me with all, and more than I want.” One replied, “Nay, but you want £115 to pay for the lease of the Foundery. And likewise a large sum of money will be wanting to put it into repair.” On this consideration, I suffered them to subscribe. And

when the society met, I asked, "Who will take the trouble of receiving this money, and paying it where it is needful?" One said, "I will do it, and keep the account for you." So here was the first Steward. Afterwards I desired one or two more to help me as Stewards, and, in process of time, a greater number.

Let it be remarked, it was I myself, not the people, who chose these Stewards, and appointed to each the distinct work, wherein he was to help me, as long as I desired; and herein I began to exercise another sort of power, namely, that of appointing and removing Stewards.

3. After a time, a young man came, T. Maxfield, and said he desired to help me, as a son in the Gospel. Soon after came a second, Thomas Richards, and a third, Thomas Westal. These severally desired to serve me as sons, and to labour when and where I should direct. Observe, these likewise desired me, not I them. But I durst not refuse their assistance. And here commenced my power, to appoint each of these, when, where, and how to labour; that is, while he chose to continue with me: for each had a power to go away when he pleased; as I had also to go away from them, or any of them, if I saw sufficient cause. The case continued the same when the number of Preachers increased. I had just the same power still, to appoint when, and where, and how, each should help me; and to tell any, if I saw cause, "I do not desire your help any longer." On these terms, and no other, we joined at first; on these we continue joined. But they do me no favour in being directed by me. It is true, my reward is with the Lord. But at present I have nothing from it but trouble and care; and often a burden I scarce know how to bear.

4. In 1744 I wrote to several Clergymen, and to all who then served me as sons in the Gospel, desiring them to meet me in London, to give me their advice concerning the best method of carrying on the work of God. They did not desire this meeting, but I did; knowing that "in a multitude of counsellors there is safety." And when their number increased, so that it was neither needful nor convenient to invite them all, for several years I wrote to those with whom I desired to confer, and these only met at the place appointed; till at length I gave a general permission, that all who desired it might come.

Observe: I myself sent for these of my own free choice; and I sent for them to advise, not govern, me. Neither did I at any of those times divest myself of any part of that power above described, which the providence of God had cast upon me, without any design or choice of mine.

What is that power? It is a power of admitting into, and excluding from, the societies under my care; of choosing and removing Stewards; of receiving or not receiving Helpers; of appointing them when, where, and how, to help me; and of desiring any of them to meet me, when I see good. And as it was merely in obedience to the providence of God, and for the good of the people, that I at first accepted this power, which I



never sought, nay, a hundred times laboured to throw off; so it is on the same considerations, not for profit, honour, or pleasure, that I use it at this day.

5. But several gentlemen are much offended at my having so much power. My answer to them is this :

I did not seek any part of this power. It came upon me unawares. But when it was come, not daring to bury that talent, I used it to the best of my judgment.

Yet I never was fond of it. I always did, and do now, bear it as my burden; the burden which God lays upon me, and therefore I dare not yet lay it down.

But if you can tell me any one, or any five men, to whom I may transfer this burden, who can and will do just what I do now, I will heartily thank both them and you.

6. But some of our Helpers say, "This is *shackling free-born Englishmen*," and demand a free Conference; that is, a meeting of all the Preachers, wherein all things shall be determined by most votes.

I answer, It is possible, after my death, something of this kind may take place; but not while I live. To *me* the Preachers have engaged themselves to submit, to "serve me as sons in the Gospel." But they are not thus engaged to any man, or number of men, besides. To me the people in general will submit. But they will not yet submit to any other.

It is nonsense, then, to call my using this power "*shackling free-born Englishmen*." None needs to submit to it, unless he will; so there is no shackling in the case. Every Preacher and every member may leave me when he pleases. But while he chooses to stay, it is on the same terms that he joined me at first.

"But this is *arbitrary power*; this is no less than *making yourself a Pope*."

If by arbitrary power you mean a power which I exercise singly, without any colleagues therein, this is certainly true; but I see no hurt in it. *Arbitrary*, in this sense, is a very harmless word. If you mean unjust, unreasonable, or tyrannical, then it is not true.

As to the other branch of the charge, it carries no face of truth. The Pope affirms, that every Christian must do all he bids, and believe all he says, under pain of damnation. I never affirmed anything that bears any, the most distant, resemblance to this. All I affirm is, "The Preachers who choose to labour with me, choose to serve me as sons in the Gospel;" and "the people who choose to be under my care, choose to be so, on the same terms they were at first."

Therefore, all talk of this kind is highly injurious to me, who bear this burden merely for *your* sakes. And it is exceedingly mischievous to the people, tending to confound their understandings, and to fill their hearts with evil surmisings and unkind tempers towards me; to whom they

really owe more, for taking all this load upon me, for exercising this very power, for shackling myself in this manner, than for all my preaching put together. Because preaching twice or thrice a day is no burden to me at all; but the care of all the Preachers and all the people is a burden indeed !\*

At a later period Mr. Wesley had occasion to complain that persons who were under the deepest obligations to him, "lifted up the heel against him," because he declined to adapt his system of church order to their views. His society in Bristol shared largely in his pastoral attention; yet, in the year 1779, several persons in the society there cherished towards him a feeling of deep prejudice, and even of hostility. The ringleader of the faction said, "I think it my duty to pray that God would take Mr. John Wesley away; that he may do no more harm in the church. It would be a great mercy, if he was dead." In the midst of the agitation Mr. Charles Wesley met the society; and after reasoning and expostulating with the disaffected members, he said, "I will leave you to your own reflections, and call upon *you who love him*, to join me in prayer for his life, in the following hymn:—

Jesus, thy hated servant own,  
And send thy glorious Spirit down,  
In answer to our prayers;  
While others curse, and wish him dead,  
Do Thou Thy choicest blessings shed,  
And crown his hoary hairs.

Not for his death, but life, we pray,  
In mercy lengthen out his day,  
Our venerable guide;  
*Long may he live* thy flock to keep,  
Protect from wolves the lambs and sheep,  
And in his bosom hide.

*Long may he live* to serve thy cause,  
To spread the victory of thy cross,  
To minister thy grace;  
And late to' increase thy church in heaven,  
With all the children thou hast given,  
Appear before thy face.

\* Minutes, vol. i., pp. 58—61.

Thou God that answerest by fire,  
 With fervent faith and strong desire,  
 Whom we present to Thee,  
 Fill with pure love his ravish'd breast,  
 And let the Spirit of glory rest  
 On all thy church—and me !

Me, me thy meanest messenger,  
 Admit his happiness to share,  
 And, intimately one  
 Through life, through death, together guide,  
 To sing with all the sanctified,  
 Around thy azure throne."

In a letter to his brother, describing this scene, Mr. Charles Wesley adds, "You may more easily imagine, than I describe, the effect. God bowed the hearts of all the people, as the heart of one man, towards Himself, I trust, and towards his servant. They received a large measure of love for you, as their tears witnessed. I have heard of but one exception."

These facts, which I copy from the hand-writing of Mr. Charles Wesley, show that the former days were not better than these. We have not heard that the present opponents of the Conference pray for the speedy death of its members in general, or even of its officers ; yet, in the Methodist society of Bristol, prayers to this effect were recommended with respect to the venerable man who founded that society, and who watched over it with more than paternal care for half a century. Let us hope that tears, such as those which Mr. Charles Wesley describes, may be shed by some of the parties who are now taught to cherish a spirit of opposition towards their spiritual guides and Pastors.

---

#### MR. WESLEY'S DEED OF DECLARATION.

WHEN Mr. Wesley had drawn up his "Deed of Declaration," constituting one hundred of his Preachers the "Conference of the people called Methodists," a violent outcry was raised against him. Several of the Preachers were greatly offended, because their names were not inserted in this important document ; and other persons were alarmed lest the trust which was thus created should be abused. In the midst of this excitement he inserted

the following paper in his monthly Magazine, under the title of "Thoughts upon some late Occurrences." It is important, as showing that the object which he had in view when he constituted the Conference was the unity and continuation of his societies, by securing for them in perpetuity the itinerant ministry, to which they were accustomed, and which they highly valued.

1. In June, 1744, I desired my brother and a few other Clergymen to meet me in London, to consider how we should proceed to save our own souls and those that heard us. After some time, I invited the Lay Preachers that were in the house to meet with us. We conferred together for several days, and were much comforted and strengthened thereby.

2. The next year I not only invited most of the Travelling Preachers, but several others, to confer with me in Bristol. And from that time for some years, though I invited only a part of the Travelling Preachers, yet I permitted any that desired it, to be present, not apprehending any ill consequences therefrom.

3. But two ill consequences soon appeared: one, that the expense was too great to be borne; the other, that many of our people were scattered while they were left without a shepherd. I therefore determined, (1.) That for the time to come, none should be present but those whom I invited; and, (2.) That I would only invite a select number out of every Circuit.

4. This I did for many years, and all that time the term "Conference" meant not so much the conversation we had together, as the persons that conferred; namely, those whom I invited to confer with me from time to time. So that all this time it depended on me alone, not only what persons should constitute the Conference,—but whether there should be any Conference at all, this lay wholly in my own breast; neither the Preachers nor the people having any part or lot in the matter.

5. Some years after, it was agreed, that, after the decease of my brother and me, the Preachers should be stationed by the Conference. But ere long a question arose, What does that term mean? Who are the Conference? It appeared difficult to define the term. And the year before last all our brethren who were met at Bristol desired me to fix the determinate meaning of the word.

6. Hitherto, it had meant (not the whole body of Travelling Preachers, it never bore that meaning at all; but) those persons whom I invited yearly to confer with me. But to this there was a palpable objection,—Such a Conference would have no being after my death. And what other definition of it to give, I knew not; at least I knew none that would stand good in law. I consulted a skilful and honest Attorney; and he consulted an eminent Counsellor, who answered, "There is no way of doing this but

by naming a determinate number of persons. The deed which names these must be enrolled in Chancery: then it will stand good in law."

7. My first thought was to name a very few, suppose ten or twelve persons. Count Zinzendorf named only six who were to preside over the community after his decease. But on second thoughts, I believed there would be more safety in a greater number of counsellors, and therefore named a hundred, as many as I judged could meet without too great an expense, and without leaving any Circuit naked of Preachers while the Conference met.

8. In naming these Preachers, as I had no adviser, so I had no respect of persons; but I simply set down those that, according to the best of my judgment, were most proper. But I am not infallible. I might mistake and think better of some of them than they deserved. However, I did my best; and if I did wrong, it was not the error of my will, but of my judgment.

9. This was the rise, and this is the nature, of that famous Deed of Declaration, that vile wicked Deed, concerning which you have heard such an outcry! And now, can any one tell me how to mend it, or how it could have been made better? "O yes. You might have inserted two hundred, as well as one hundred, Preachers." No; for then the expense of meeting would have been double, and all the Circuits would have been without Preachers. "But you might have named other Preachers instead of these." True, if I had thought as well of them as they did of themselves. But I did not: therefore I could do no otherwise than I did, without sinning against God and my own conscience.

10. "But what need was there for any Deed at all?" There was the utmost need of it: without some authentic Deed fixing the meaning of the term, the moment I died the Conference had been nothing. Therefore any of the proprietors of the land on which our preaching-houses were built might have seized them for their own use; and there would have been none to hinder them; for the Conference would have been nobody, a mere empty name.

11. You see, then, in all the pains I have taken about this absolutely necessary Deed, I have been labouring, *not for myself*, (I have no interest therein,) *but for the whole body of Methodists*; in order to fix them upon such a foundation as is likely to stand as long as the sun and moon endure. That is, if they continue to walk by faith, and to show forth their faith by their works; otherwise, I pray God to root out the memorial of them from the earth.

THE END.