

## THE AMERICANIZING OF METHODISM

by Frank Baker

It is simple to accept the fact that American Methodism was a British import. Not so simple, either to discover or perhaps to accept, is the extent to which the early British exporters of that ecclesiastical commodity so conditioned their market that after the passing of a generation American Methodism, though looking like a home-produced institution, remained basically British. American Methodism, in fact, was really Americanized British Methodism.

This process of Americanization was in broad outline completed within the half century between the rise of the early societies and the death of Asbury, i.e. 1766 (or a little earlier) to 1816. (Although John Wesley himself had founded society meetings of a kind in Georgia thirty years earlier, whose full influence is yet to be determined, they are eliminated from consideration in this paper.)<sup>1</sup> The following century and a half comprised developments both natural and unnatural, proliferating complexities, sprawling diversification, and multiplying documentation enough to strangle anyone seriously caught in the paper work. A careful delineation of the manner and extent of the Americanizing of Methodism, even during the first formative half century, would necessitate several hefty volumes based upon years of research on both sides of the Atlantic, and this is a task yet to be accomplished, or even seriously tackled.

One minor example of the problems facing the researcher in this field may be cited, which we will entitle "The Case of the Missing Class-Ticket". The class-ticket was an English method devised in 1741 for endorsing Methodists in good standing. This afforded Wesley a handy and dramatic method of enforcing discipline. A new ticket, complete with a fresh serial letter and a different scriptural text, was written out for each approved member every three months, and if you did not receive one you would not normally be admitted to the private meetings of the society nor to the popular love-feasts.<sup>2</sup> The class-ticket was familiar also in

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Baker, John Wesley and the Church of England (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970), pp. 51-2.

<sup>2</sup> Rupert Davies and Gordon Rupp (eds.), A History of the Methodist Church in Great Britain, Vol. I (London: Epworth Press, 1965), pp. 221, 223-25; Frank Baker, Methodism and the Love-feast (London: Epworth Press, 1957), pp. 34-40.

early American Methodism, but in 1784, with Methodism's transformation into a church (at least in name) there came a growing tendency not to enforce strict standards of membership. As a result the class-ticket lost much of its significance, though it lingered for many years as a means of screening love-feasts from disruptive elements, whence in time it came to be known as a "love-feast ticket".<sup>3</sup> When love-feasts also fell into disrepair, this disappeared with them. For well over a century, therefore, the class-ticket has been almost forgotten in America, as a rare museum piece, and remembered even then under a name which obscures its origin. In Britain, on the other hand, it continued to be of such importance throughout the nineteenth century that many loyal Methodists would save every ticket they received, and at their death either bequeath them to their heirs or have them placed in their coffin--as a kind of passport to heaven!<sup>4</sup>

Thus some features of British Methodism, like the class-ticket, were first adopted, then adapted, and later completely discarded by American Methodism. Others, like the love-feast, were adopted and remained in their original form, but eventually faded to little more than a wistful memory, though from time to time attempts were made to resuscitate them. Yet the basic principles behind them (as with the class-ticket's witness to spiritual identity and spiritual discipline, and the love-feast's provision of opportunities for spiritual sharing) remained. It is obviously impossible in a brief paper to follow out such individual features even in this limited detail, or to do more than name a few as representative of the rest. Nor can I claim to have attempted all the necessary research, and in fact am furnished with more questions than answers. I do not pretend, therefore, to offer a definitive analysis of the Americanizing of Methodism within the first half century preceding Asbury's death. In a few broad strokes I attempt to sketch what I trust will prove to be a recognizable likeness of the truth

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<sup>3</sup> J. B. Wakeley, Lost Chapters recovered from the Early History of American Methodism (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1858), pp. 412-25.

<sup>4</sup> Wesley Historical Society, Proceedings, I, p. 135.

rather than a caricature. Even such a summary, however, may be of value in enabling us to see the contours of the wood instead of a shapeless inventory of the innumerable trees.

### The Methodist Immigrants

There is not the slightest doubt that the manner and measure in which British Methodism was accepted for Americanization depended in large part upon its fitness for the American scene and the American people, but also to a very large degree upon the personalities of the actual British immigrants. Methodism in America as in England began with small groups of men and women meeting for Christian fellowship supplementary to public worship in the churches of their choice, societies which gradually became so central in their lives that they almost displaced the organized churches. This happened in rural Maryland, in Philadelphia, in New York, apparently in Leesburg, Virginia, and probably in other areas yet to be documented. These small societies found their focus in ordinary homespun folk whose sincere devotion furnished the most effective endorsement of the new faith--men like Robert Strawbridge and Philip Embury, women like Elizabeth Strawbridge and Barbara Heck. Their zeal was reinforced and spread by the exuberant evangelism of that eccentric soldier-preacher, Captain Thomas Webb. The problems of organizing these growing societies in a strange environment, however, prompted them to ask for Wesley's help. The men he chose to strengthen their hands, eight itinerant preachers coming out in matched pairs between 1769 and 1774, were both warmhearted and clearheaded, not so young as to be scatterbrained, not so old as to have lost the spark of adventure. Only one was a comparative failure. After the successful revolution Wesley sent two more, much older men, set apart by his ordaining hands to transform the American societies into something much nearer a new church. Each of these ten men in one way or another helped to impress Wesley's methods upon American Methodism, though the key period was the first decade, and the key figure the one who remained behind when his loyalist brethren left for England--Francis Asbury. In successfully transplanting British Methodism into American soil these men, and especially this man, exerted an influence out of all proportion to their numbers.



Asbury was deeply sensitive of the spiritual values of Wesley's Methodism, deeply convinced of the efficiency of the methods which Wesley had experimentally worked out to maintain those values in the British Isles. He therefore strove to keep American Methodism patterned as closely as possible upon British Methodism, in spite of frequent opposition from native American radicals, who would grant John Wesley only a slightly higher place in hell than that to which they assigned King George III and most of his ministers of state. Not that all native Americans were radicals, of course,<sup>5</sup> nor that Asbury lacked strong sympathies with the native American viewpoint. He knew perfectly well that to insist upon an American replica of British Methodism would be not only politically inexpedient but spiritually stultifying. Yet what was the point of throwing all that experience, like so many casks of tea, into Boston Harbour? Let Methodism be adapted to American needs; let old methods be modified if necessary, new methods devised, and themselves in turn modified, as Providence slowly opened out before American Methodism. This conservative caution did in fact prevent radical changes, although the cumulative effect of minor modifications over several generations was to give the superficial appearance of a completely new, homemade denomination.

#### The Methodist Societies

The organization and life of the early Methodist societies in America was almost a duplicate of that in Britain, except that the profession of loyalty to the Church of England, gradually dying in England in spite of Wesley's advocacy, was almost non-existent in America. British immigrants immediately felt at home in the Sunday preaching service, with its hearty singing, and welcomed the familiar emphasis upon personal Christian experience voiced in many public gatherings. They found the same insistence upon regular spiritual sharing at the weekly class-meeting,

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. the reaction of Thomas Haskins at the Christmas Conference, "Oh, how tottering I see Methodism now!" (quoted by William Warren Sweet, Men of Zeal (New York: Abingdon, 1935, p. 173.)



with class-leaders both male and female leading their fellowship, and registering the members' attendance in class-papers, and testifying to their loyalty when the itinerant preachers came to renew their class-tickets.<sup>6</sup> The more intimate searching of the band-meetings, confined to those of the same sex and marital status, although strongly advocated by Asbury and Coke, never took lasting hold except in larger city societies.<sup>7</sup>

The American Methodists found themselves being disciplined by the same standards of membership evolved by Wesley for the parent body, the General Rules, with a prohibition against slave-holding added in American editions only. These British rules, indeed, became even more integral in American Methodism, being specially singled out by the General Conference of 1808 as one of the features of the Church which must never be altered.

Like their British counterparts, the greater number of American societies met an itinerant preacher only occasionally, as at spaced intervals he travelled with his colleagues round a large circuit. Often the members vied with each other in offering the hospitality of bed and board during the itinerants' visits. For the rest of the time they were served by twice as many local preachers, who earned their livelihood by some craft or trade, and devoted their leisure to conducting services anywhere within a radius of twenty or thirty miles or more of their own homes.<sup>8</sup> The itinerant preachers were not merely pastors and administrators of a circuit comprising many societies, however. Primarily they were evangelists. Similarly the local preachers were untrained missionaries rather than fillers of pulpit gaps. Such was the enthusiasm that

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Freeborn Garrettson, The Experience and Travels of Mr. Freeborn Garrettson (Philadelphia: Hall, 1791), pp. 37-9; William Duke, manuscript journal (Diocesan Library, Peabody Institute, Baltimore, abstract by Edwin Schell), Sept. 4, Dec. 21, 1775; Jan. 6, 13, Feb. 3, 1776, etc.; Samuel A. Seaman, Annals of New York Methodism (New York: Hunt and Eaton, 1892), pp. 464-66.

<sup>7</sup> David Sherman, History of the Revisions of the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 3rd ed. (New York: Hunt and Eaton, 1890), pp. 139-40, 448-50; Seaman, op.cit., p. 482.

<sup>8</sup> Emory S. Bucke (ed.), History of American Methodism, 3 vols., (Nashville: Abingdon, 1964), I, pp. 321-22, 471-73.

many preachers burned themselves out before they attained middle years.<sup>9</sup>

Every society, every member, was more or less caught up into this same atmosphere of evangelism. The society was not regarded as an end in itself, a comfortable club where the religiously inclined might sit back and enjoy a decorous hour of worship. It must form a centre of evangelism or it died, or was written off by the itinerant preachers. The love-feast, the watch-night service, the prayer meeting, even the society meeting and the Lord's Supper, were looked upon as occasions for heartfelt testimonies about the personal experience of religion, for conversions. Typical is an entry in William Colbert's journal for 1790: "In the love-feast this morning we had a wonderful shouting both among the black and white."<sup>10</sup> The natural climax of religious activities was the revival.<sup>11</sup> In this, too, they reflected Wesley's Methodism, and more especially the livelier, less self-conscious Methodism of the British countryside.

The week-by-week running of the local society, as in Britain, was in the hands of two groups of people, the stewards, who took care of such mundane things as building, maintenance, finance and hospitality, and the class-leaders, who gave spiritual direction in the absence of the preacher. In smaller societies--and these formed the majority--one man or one family filled every office. Most of the identifiably British features of the societies' activities, even the class-meetings, seem to have disappeared with the disappearance of the British-born preachers, those who had seen them operating at their magnificent best in England.

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<sup>9</sup> Jesse Lee, A Short History of the Methodists (Baltimore: Magill and Clime, 1810), pp. 335-40.

<sup>10</sup> William Colbert, manuscript journal, Sunday, Feb. 28, 1790 (Garrett Theological Seminary, Evanston, Ill.).

<sup>11</sup> Benjamin Abbott, Experience and Gospel Labours, ed. John Ffirth (New York: Waugh and Mason, 1833), pp. 55-7, 66, 129, 162-63, 249; W. W. Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, Vol. IV, The Methodists, p. 79; Gordon Pratt Baker (ed.), Those Incredible Methodists (Baltimore: Commission on Archives and History, The Baltimore Conference, 1972), pp. 76-7.

Little but the General Rules eventually remained, and even these came to be regarded as unenforceable, as a quaint survival rather than as a living document.

### Connexionalism and the Itinerancy

One double-sided element in Wesley's Methodism proved ideal for the American frontier situation, and therefore continued as a distinctive feature of the Americanized version of Methodism. Methodism was not a settled church, each congregation and minister independent of others: rather it was a connexion of interdependent Christian communities, linked as well as served by an itinerant ministry. The wide circuits common to British Methodism, around which the preachers travelled on four- or six-week rounds, were even larger in America--the five men on the Virginia circuit in 1775 covered several hundred miles to make one round.<sup>12</sup> Eventually, however, even in the rural areas, they shrank to the two- or three-point charges served by one minister, such as are common today. Nevertheless the itinerancy itself remained, and the itinerancy preserved the connexional principle.

In England the connexional itinerancy had originally been guaranteed by Wesley's direction of the whole body. He did, however, consult his preachers, and in 1784 legally settled this power upon the annual Conference, to take effect after his death. In America also the direction and maintenance of the itinerancy was shared by the episcopacy and the preachers in the Conference, and also (as with Wesley and his itinerants) at the cost of some friction and jockeying for position. This two-fold insistence upon connexionalism and itinerancy, however, safely survived several potential disruptions. The dispute over terminology--"superintendent" or "bishop"--was really a minor transatlantic tiff, not affecting the main issue. Of far more importance was the truly democratic suggestion made in

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<sup>12</sup> Edward Dromgoole, autobiographical letter to Asbury (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, FCC929.2/D78c), p. 2; cf. W. W. Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, Vol. IV, The Methodists, pp. 63, 222n, 226n, 230n, 231n, 246-47n.



1792 by one of the greatest native preachers, Jesse Lee,<sup>13</sup> for a delegated quadrennial General Conference. This strictly American innovation was seen as a functional development dictated by the vast areas covered by American Methodism, and did not affect the central connexional-itinerant system. Similarly the disputes shortly after the death of Asbury as to who should appoint the presiding elders, the ancestors of the present District Superintendents, developed as a struggle over prerogative rather than principle.<sup>14</sup> This struggle, of course, was strictly between preachers, not preachers and people. Early American Methodism was no more democratic than Wesley's, and lay representation on the major church courts was not won for generations.

The itinerant principle was rarely challenged after Wesley's first two preachers, Richard Boardman and Joseph Pilmore, were tempted to indulge in settled ministries, alternating between New York and Philadelphia, out of which un-Methodist dream they were speedily aroused by Francis Asbury.<sup>15</sup> The connexional system would dwindle without a wide-ranging ministry; each supported the other. Asbury had inherited both from Wesley, and successfully transmitted both to American Methodism, in spite of their British origin, largely because they were so ideal for the pioneer American scene. Future generations simply refined and developed them to their changing needs.

#### Church, Ministry, and Sacraments

The creation of the Methodist Episcopal Church during the Conference beginning in Baltimore at Christmas, 1784, accomplished several important things. At last the Methodist people in America were identified

<sup>13</sup> Lee, Short History, pp. 158-59; Bucke, op.cit., I, pp. 474-78.

<sup>14</sup> Bucke, op.cit., I, pp. 640-41; see Emora T. Brannan, "The Presiding Elder Question: its critical nature in American Methodism, 1820-1824, and its impact upon ecclesiastical institutions," Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1974, pp. iv-v, etc.

<sup>15</sup> Francis Asbury, The Journal and Letters, ed. Elmer T. Clark, J. Manning Potts, and Jacob S. Payton, 3 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1958), I, p. 10.

to themselves and to others as an independent native church, resolving the ecclesiastical schizophrenia which continued to plague Wesley's followers at home because of his insistence upon a dual loyalty, to the Church of England, and to Methodism only as a society within that Church. The episcopal system of the Church of England was nevertheless imitated, and Asbury became the first bishop or "superintendent," though not by Wesley's fiat so much as by the election of his brethren. His thus stepping into Wesley's apostolic shoes clearly strengthened his influence in preserving the connexional-itinerant system, especially as he insisted that an American Methodist bishop must itinerate even more than his colleagues.<sup>16</sup> His ubiquitous presence also helped to ensure that the ethos, the general atmosphere, of the Methodist Episcopal Church, long continued to be that of an evangelical society rather than that of a full-orbed church self-consciously administering Word and Sacraments to the whole community.

The status of the other preachers was similarly enhanced, or potentially enhanced, to that of ordained ministers, able without any qualms of conscience to administer the sacraments and to fulfil all other functions traditional to an ordained ministry. Like the Church of England, they retained the three-fold structure of the ministry, deliberately provided for them by Wesley in his Sunday Service for the Methodists. In Britain, on the other hand, when the church-society problem was finally resolved after Wesley's death, Methodist differences from the Church of England were accentuated by a single ordination only, as "minister" rather than as deacon or elder. Although elevated in ecclesiastical status, however, the American preachers remained true to Wesley's principles in refusing pomp and ceremony, retaining the layman's garb of their British colleagues, and using every opportunity to keep in close touch with their flocks by extempore speech, in prayer, in preaching, and even in many instances in the administration of the sacraments.<sup>17</sup> There seems little doubt that this was largely because of the

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<sup>16</sup> Robert J. Bull, "John Wesley Bond's Reminiscences of Francis Asbury," Methodist History, IV, No. 1, pp. 12-13, 26-7 (October, 1965).

<sup>17</sup> Bucke, op.cit., I, 313-15.

example of Asbury himself, who with his rural, non-liturgical background rarely used the formal prayers furnished in Wesley's Sunday Service, and was lukewarm even about the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper itself.<sup>18</sup> Asbury was indefatigable in recruiting men to this kind of ministry, and though he insisted upon a certain minimum of decorum and literacy, his real criterion for them was not book-learning but spiritual devotion and enthusiasm.<sup>19</sup>

#### Americanization

The general institutional patterns of British Methodism and its parent church were thus taken over by American Methodism, though with changes, sometimes subtle, sometimes drastic, in the details of their operation. The causes for these changes are not far to seek. A major factor was the larger distances which must be travelled in America, whether by preachers on their circuits or by members attending meetings. For generations past and generations to come America had been and was to remain a constantly extending frontier. British traditions survived most readily in settled communities in the cities, but these were so few as hardly to influence the general patterns of modification. In most areas the assembling of a large religious gathering proved a formidable undertaking, and when it was accomplished there was a strong tendency for several activities to be combined into one great spiritual jamboree lasting many hours, even days. This led to the development of a typically American institution, the camp meeting, which was quickly exported to England, leading to one of the more important British denominations, the Primitive Methodists. The same factor was at work in the quarterly conference of large groups of societies, descended from the circuit quarterly meetings in England. At such gatherings in America it became the practice to hold not only business ses-

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<sup>18</sup> Fred Hood, "Community and the Rhetoric of 'Freedom': Early Methodist Worship," Methodist History, IX, No. 1, pp. 13-25 (October, 1970).

<sup>19</sup> Lester B. Scherer, Ezekiel Cooper, 1763-1847 (Lake Junaluska, N. C.: The Commission on Archives and History, The United Methodist Church, 1968), pp. 13-16; Sketches of the Life and Travels of Rev. Thomas Ware, written by himself (New York: Mason and Lane, 1839), pp. 70-8.



sions, but the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, a love-feast, and also a watchnight service.<sup>20</sup> This also became typical of the multiplying number of annual conferences, and these annual occasions sometimes preserved the vestigial remnants of the love-feast long after more local observances had died out.

Closely allied to the problem of large distances in America was the fluidity of the population. Where it is unlikely that roots are going to penetrate very deep, permanent traditions are less likely to develop, complexities and peculiarities of observance tend to be pared away, and all that is left is the lowest common denominator of Sunday worship. This made it easier, of course, for migrants to link up with any frontier denomination, but it also tended to make those denominations less distinctive and less virile.

Another cause for the decay of British Methodist traditions was a definite antagonism towards things un-American, especially toward those which savoured of the Established Church of England. The native preachers in particular were understandably jealous of their national identity as Methodists. Of this we catch a hint in Jesse Lee's account of the general repudiation of Wesley's adaptation of the Book of Common Prayer--by which he surely meant specifically the Orders for Morning and Evening Prayer--even though in generations to come American Methodists tended to become more liturgically-minded than their British brethren.<sup>21</sup>

All this was strongly aided, and even prompted, by the transformation of American Methodism in 1784 from society to church. Granted that the large bulk of the Form of Discipline outlining the constitution of the new church was a repetition or adaptation of the regulations arrived at by slow stages for Wesley's British society, as incorporated in the Large Minutes

<sup>20</sup> Lee, Short History, p. 42; Asbury, Journal, I, 88; William Duke, manuscript journal, Aug. 2, 1774 and Dec. 5, 1775, the latter reading: "Our quarterly meeting--in forenoon business and a love-feast, and as usual had a watchnight."

<sup>21</sup> Lee, Short History, p. 107; Bucke, op.cit., I, 313-15.

of the British Conference, nevertheless it was a selection consciously made, which could almost as readily be revised or rescinded; it was, in fact, speedily rearranged by Asbury and Dickins in a manner which somewhat disguised its origins.<sup>22</sup> Eventually the proliferation of new legislation tended to overshadow and then to crowd out many of the original regulations, but the Discipline still retains unmistakable traces of Wesley's Minutes.

#### Methodist Theology

Thus during half a century the British Methodist constitution was Americanized, to become something similar yet different. In theology, however, hardly any difference is to be seen from the parent body, either in what was accepted, what was emphasized, or what was rejected. Like Wesley, American Methodists insisted that they were orthodox, having no peculiar teachings, merely placing greater emphasis upon those doctrines which concern man's need for God and God's initiative in supplying that need. Original sin, justification by faith, assurance of salvation, Christian perfection, were in British Methodism termed (and are still termed) "our doctrines". These were also singled out for special attention in early American Methodism, as is demonstrated most clearly in the printed doctrinal standards. Wesley's Sermons and Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament were accepted as in British Methodism, but Americans went a step farther by officially adopting Wesley's abridgment of the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England, pruned by him of those which supported Calvinistic predestinarianism. These three documents were clearly in mind when the General Conference of 1808 passed its restrictive rule making them an inviolable part of the Methodist constitution. Also included by this rule was a series of publications in which Wesley illustrated these specific doctrines, a series including his Plain Account of Christian Perfection as well as some anti-predestinarian tracts. These were printed with

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<sup>22</sup> Asbury, Journal, I, pp. 499, 510; John J. Tigert, A Constitutional History of American Episcopal Methodism, 6th ed. (Nashville: Smith and Lamar, 1916), pp. 534-602: three-quarters of the Discipline is directly transcribed from the 1780 Minutes.

the early Disciplines, which explains why the title of these volumes was The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1812, with the increasing size and complexity of this work, it was published in two parts, the "doctrinal tracts" forming a separate volume. This work, somewhat colourlessly entitled A Collection of Interesting Tracts, nevertheless remained technically one of the immutable standards of American Methodist doctrine, going through at least fifteen editions during the nineteenth century, even though forgotten in the twentieth.<sup>23</sup>

Not only in its printed standards, but in its theological climate, American Methodism remained very similar to British Methodism. It is therefore fair to speak of our "theological ethnicity", the modes of theological thought which distinguish us from other denominations. These have come down to us from Wesley with very little change in content, though with variations in manner and warmth of expression.<sup>24</sup> In particular the generations following Asbury became very timid about the doctrine of Christian perfection, on both sides of the Atlantic, but especially in America. This timidity, which sometimes amounted to panic, promoted the development of Holiness denominations which might otherwise have formed perfectionist groups within Methodism.<sup>25</sup> The nineteenth century undoubtedly witnessed a lowering of the spiritual temperature within Methodism both in Britain and America, and, in America especially, a subtle change from religious enthusiasm to more controlled humanism, "from revelation to reason," "from sinful man to moral man," "from free grace to free will"--to use some of the chapter headings from Robert Chiles, Theological Transition in American Methodism.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless Methodism's theological presuppositions have never been forsaken nor even sternly challenged, and at this present time there appears to

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<sup>23</sup> Frank Baker, "The Doctrines in the Discipline," The Duke Divinity School Review, XXXI, 39-55 (Winter, 1966).

<sup>24</sup> See William J. McCutcheon, "Theological Ethnicity," Methodist History, XII, No. 3, pp. 40-56 (April, 1974).

<sup>25</sup> See John L. Peters, Christian Perfection and American Methodism (New York: Abingdon, 1956), espec. pp. 90-101, 188-200.

<sup>26</sup> New York: Abingdon, 1965. Similar conclusions are reached in Winthrop S. Hudson, "The Methodist Age in America," Methodist History, XII, No. 3, pp. 3-15 (April, 1974).



be an increasing awareness of their timeless validity, and of the great promise which their rediscovery offers to a rootless generation.

### Social Concerns

American Methodism similarly inherited from British Methodism a strong social concern. It is noteworthy that the Discipline deliberately took over from Wesley's Minutes his expression of the two-fold general purpose of Methodism. Both Minutes and Discipline asked, "What may we reasonably believe to be God's design in raising up the preachers called Methodists?" The British answered, "To reform the nation, particularly the church; and to spread scriptural holiness over the land." The American answer naturally disavowed any connection with the Church of England, and modified the closing phrase so as to describe more adequately the enormous mission field which confronted them, reading, "To reform the continent, and to spread scriptural holiness over these lands."<sup>27</sup> The strong educational urge of American Methodism was undoubtedly derived from Wesley, through Asbury and Coke,<sup>28</sup> as was the abortive attempt to purge Methodism of slavery, so sadly frustrated by native American opposition.<sup>29</sup> Social holiness, however, was supposedly a part of the pledge of every church member, for in adopting Wesley's General Rules American Methodism accepted the principle that every Methodist must evidence the sincerity of his professed desire for salvation by avoiding every kind of social evil, "especially that which is most generally practised," and by doing good to the bodies as well as to the souls of all men.<sup>30</sup> Even though

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<sup>27</sup> Tigert, op.cit., p. 535.

<sup>28</sup> Asbury, Journal, I, pp. 324, 358, 490, 555; Thomas Coke, Extracts of the Journals (Dublin: Napper, 1816), pp. 16, 22; Lee, Short History, pp. 113-18.

<sup>29</sup> David H. Bradley, "Francis Asbury and the Development of African Churches in America," Methodist History, X, No. 1, pp. 3-29 (October, 1971), and Edwin Schell, presenting the unexpurgated text of Asbury's Journal for Feb. 23, Mar. 27, and April 23, 1779, in Methodist History, IX, No. 2, pp. 34-6 (Jan., 1971); John Vickers, Thomas Coke, Apostle of Methodism (Nashville: Abingdon, 1969), pp. 94-8.

<sup>30</sup> Lee, Short History, pp. 29-33.

there were indeed lapses from these high standards, and even though American Methodists, like the British, were for many years more occupied with philanthropy than with social reform, yet again like the British a concern for the spiritual welfare of their fellows found its natural corollary in a deep concern also for their material welfare.

### Conclusion

The differences between modern American Methodism and modern British Methodism are many and important. They arise from the unfolding history of the generations, mainly from the same ideas being developed along slightly different lines in the two countries, but occasionally because a divergent procedure was introduced in response to some challenge or opportunity. Yet it is important to realize how in its beginnings American Methodism was almost a facsimile of British Methodism both in general ethos and in details of organization. This was especially true during the first decade. Even after the breach caused by the Revolutionary War and the formation of a new and independent church the child-parent relationship remained conspicuous, although the daughter church had come of age and was developing strong opinions and customs of her own. As in a family the shape of the nose, a trick of laughing or of walking, may persist through ten generations, so striking personality traits and physical characteristics derived from the parent Methodism persisted in America, and persist still. This was furthered because American Methodism not only derived hereditary factors from a British mother, but was strongly influenced during her childhood by the environmental factor of a British nurse, in the person especially of Francis Asbury. Asbury was not remarkable for uncritical loyalty to Wesley in his declining years--"our dear old daddy," as he called him;<sup>31</sup> nevertheless he was loyal to the elements in Wesley's Methodism which might prove of value for adoption and adaptation in the New World. By the time of his death

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<sup>31</sup> Asbury, Journal and Letters, III, p. 62; cf. his neutrality over the minute binding the Americans to Wesley's rule, ibid., II, p. 106; III, pp. 545-46.

in 1816, almost all the major features of American Methodism had been introduced, introduced mainly from the British background and under the tutelage of expatriate Britons--of the first four bishops (excluding Wesley, of course) three were British (William McKendree, elected in 1808, was the first native bishop). As a result the history of American Methodism after Asbury's death consisted to a large degree of renovations and improvements to a basically British structure, rather than of constructing a new church or a series of reconstructed churches from freshly drawn blueprints. In spite of all the later accretions, Francis Asbury remains the true architect of American Methodism, and Asbury built upon the foundations securely laid by John Wesley.

Methodist History NOTE

The annual listing in April of Doctoral Dissertations on Methodist subjects will appear in the July, 1975 issue rather than at this time. This has been an annual presentation since the first listing in April, 1970.