

work after the departure of Rankin. The hostility of the Maryland authorities drove him into exile. For two years he remained in Delaware.

The ranks of his itinerants were recruited now entirely from among the colonists. Some were unfit for a permanent place in the ministry, but they did a useful work. Others were destined to become leaders in the ever-increasing mission fields. These men often lacked education, but they had an experimental knowledge of true religion. One of these itinerants, a man named Gatch, was assailed by an Anglican clergyman for teaching the doctrine of the new birth and for extempore praying. Gatch replied that for his own part he knew that he had been born again and as for the prayers, when Peter was sinking he did not go ashore for a Prayer-Book, but cried, "Lord save, or I perish." Such witty replies often saved the day for the Methodist preachers in the frequent attacks made upon them. Even during the war a great wave of revival swept over Virginia. The societies continued to multiply and to increase in membership, notwithstanding the withdrawal of the experienced men who had returned to England. Some one remarked on the opening of a new chapel during war time, that it was foolish for the Methodists to put up so large a building, for after the war was over, he was of the opinion that a corn crib would hold them all. But when the war was ended it was found that the membership had grown to 15,000. There were false prophets in those days.

The problem of providing for all the religious needs of these people now became acute. There was not an ordained minister among the 83 men who were in the work at the close of the war. Many of the Anglican clergy from whom they had been accustomed to receive the sacraments, had returned to England. Many of those who remained were unspiritual men. The time had come for a radical step. John Wesley had taken the whole case into consideration. The Bishop of London had refused to ordain a man for the Methodist Societies in America. Under the circumstances Mr. Wesley felt that he was justified in exercising a power that he had long been convinced he and all ministers possessed, the power to ordain when necessity arose.

The necessity had arisen. Wesley was in his 81st year. Provision must be made for the perpetuation of his work after his death. It had never been in his mind to found a Church. But now he took the step that afterwards led to a full and final separation from the Church of England. He appointed Rev. Thomas Coke Superintendent of the societies in America and gave him a Bishop's ordination. With the aid of Coke and a clergyman named Creighton, he ordained Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey as ministers for the work in America. Coke was authorized to ordain Asbury as soon as he should reach America. Asbury was to continue as Superintendent also. Together they were to ordain such men from time to time as they should judge to be fit and proper persons for the work of the ministry.

Thomas Coke was almost as great a gift to America as Asbury. He was one year younger than Asbury, and he lacked the experience that thirteen years in the colonies had given his fellow-superintendent, but he had enjoyed advantages that helped to compensate for this lack. His father was a man of means, and Coke had received a university training at Oxford, from which he graduated with the degree of Doctor of Laws in 1775. He was ordained as a clergyman of the Church of England, but he was soon ejected from his parish at South Petherton because he was "tainted with the Methodist heresy." At once he flung himself passionately into the Methodist work under Wesley. From the very first Wesley gave him positions of trust. He was a strong preacher and a man of fine executive ability. In 1782 he was made President of the Irish Conference. And in 1784 he had committed to him the most momentous work that could be given to a human being, the work of organizing a new Church.

On his arrival in America he was at once received with the utmost cordiality. His scholarship, his orders, his appointment by Wesley won him a standing not accorded even to Asbury. His tact, his zeal, his personality gave him power and prestige, but he never became, in any sense, the rival

of Asbury. From the very beginning these two men who so profoundly influenced the religious life of America, became the closest friends.

It was early in November, 1784, when Coke landed in New York. Asbury was touring the Delaware circuits. Coke and his company at once set out to find him, preaching as they went in true Methodist fashion. Just as Coke had finished a sermon in one of these Delaware chapels, Asbury walked into the chapel. Coke's account of this meeting reads, "After the sermon a plain, robust man came up to me in the pulpit and kissed me. I thought it could be no other than Mr. Asbury, and I was not deceived." Asbury's journal has its record of the meeting: "I came to Barra's chapel. Here to my great joy I met those dear men of God, Dr. Coke and Richard Whatcoat. We were greatly comforted together."

At once Dr. Coke unfolded the plan for the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church in America; but nothing was to be done hastily. A general Conference was called at Baltimore for Christmas, 1784, to lay the matter before the preachers. While messengers were making this known to the men in the distant fields, Asbury was making full use of Dr. Coke. Between preaching and baptizing and talking over plans for the future, his time was fully occupied up to the very meeting of the Conference.

Space would fail to tell in detail all that was done at that epoch-making meeting. Sixty Methodist preachers, the oldest still under forty, met in that memorable Conference; but few of them, perhaps, realized, as Asbury did, that they were making history. Coke presided, but Asbury was still the ruling spirit. His ordination, first as deacon, then as presbyter or elder, and finally as Bishop, was the first business. It was simply the public recognition and confirmation of what he had been in fact from the very first. Not until the preachers had declared by their votes that they wished him to continue as Superintendent would he accept Wesley's appointment. A week was now spent in formulating Discipline and nominating and ordaining preachers. Coke frankly admired the American preachers. He found them a body of devoted, disinterested men. Three of the men who were in that notable company, linked it up with our Canadian Methodism. These were Wm. Black, Freeborn Garretson and James O. Cromwell, whose labors in Nova Scotia marked the beginning of the Methodist movement in the Maritime Provinces.

To tell the subsequent story of the labors of Coke and Asbury would be to trace not only the rapid growth and wide extension of American Methodism, but of British Methodism as well. Coke by no means confined himself to one continent. He could have said, as John Wesley did: "The world is my parish." From the very beginning of his career he burned with missionary zeal, and was constantly planning for missionary effort in foreign fields. In 1784 he drew up a plan and raised funds for the society that afterwards became The Methodist Missionary Society. His career rivalled Wesley's. He was as unweary in travel as either Wesley or Whitefield. He crossed the Atlantic eighteen times, took a leading part, as we have seen, in organizing The Methodist Episcopal Church, and planted that large group of Wesleyan missions in the West Indies, which became the admiration of the whole Protestant world.

To personal labors he added financial ability and he is said to have raised more money for religious work than any Protestant of his time. His close connection with the British Conference, of which he continued to be a member, and his wide missionary activities took so much of his time that the bulk of the work in America fell upon Asbury. In eight years Coke spent an aggregate of only eighteen months in America, although he made five visits during that time. In 1797 and again in 1805 he was president of the Wesleyan Conference. During Wesley's closing years he had been his most trusted assistant. Like Wesley, he was "an ardent evangelist, a great administrator, and had a genius for managing men." But he had qualities that Wesley lacked. He had the gift of imagination. He saw with surer vision than Wesley, and much earlier, whereunto Methodism would grow. He has been well called "the Foreign Minister of