

The Wesleyan.

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* * * Unpaid subscriptions to the *Wesleyan* are requested to be forwarded immediately.

BEFORE we bring the present volume to a close, we think that it will be acceptable to our readers generally, and to those in particular who are not intimately acquainted with the internal economy of British Wesleyan Methodism, but are desirous of understanding its ecclesiastical constitution—to present them with a compendious view of the Polity of the Wesleyan Societies, as it relates to British Methodism, throughout the world. Indeed, considering the name and design of our Journal, we confess ourselves remiss in not having attempted before, in this respect, the discharge of a duty so naturally devolving upon us, as conductors of this periodical. Even now, however, we can only furnish a very brief outline:—

British Wesleyan Methodism, although it originated in an Episcopal and National Church, and though its first Ministers were Episcopal Clergymen, is *Presbyterial* in its Polity. It is true, that the Rev. JOHN WESLEY, convinced of the identity of the order, if not of the office of the primitive "Elders," and "Overseers," or "Bishops,"—being himself a regularly-ordained Minister and Elder, or Presbyter of the Church of England, and believing himself as scriptural a Bishop as any Prelate in that church; proceeded to ordain the Rev. Dr. COX, who was also in Priest's orders—a *Superintendent*, or, as he was subsequently called, Bishop of the American Societies, and gave to those Societies the Episcopal form of Church government, for reasons suggested by the then existing circumstances of the American States. The Societies, however, or connexion in Great Britain and Ireland, has been from the beginning *Presbyterian* in its economy; if not in the strict sense in which the Church of Scotland and some other churches are so constituted and denominated, yet in the appointment and order of its Ministers, and the general character of its discipline, ordinances, and worship.

The Wesleyan Polity, though *presbyterial*, is not congregational, but *Connexional*. The Societies or churches which compose the great Methodist body, unlike the Independent or Congregational churches of Britain and America, stand in an intimate relation to each other, and the whole of them are in connection with the Conference, the visible and paternal head of the body. "As the primitive Christian churches were as closely connected as circumstances would permit; as a family, an army, a city, a nation or a kingdom, is one body, under one common government; as the Christian Church resembles the human body, having 'joints and bands,' and one head, so the Wesleyan churches are as intimately united as national distinctions and geographical situation will admit; and each of the four departments, instead of consisting of insulated and independent congregations, forms one compact and harmonious whole. Every class, containing twelve members, or sometimes more or less, is united under one leader; several classes in a town or chapel, make one Society; several societies or classes form one Circuit or Station, under the pastoral care of one Superintendent; several circuits constitute one District, under the supervision of a Chairman; and the several districts into which the whole field is divided, form one Connexion, under the government and direction of the Conference,

which is the collective Pastorate or Presbyterate of the whole Church; the President being the general overseer in the interim of the Conference."

Thus the Wesleyan Connexion may be described as an extensive circumference, embracing several interior circles. Of this circumference, the Conference is the centre—next, the District Committees or Meetings—next, the Quarterly Meetings—then the Leaders' Meetings—then the Class and Band Meetings, with other ordinances and institutions connected with worship and discipline, in all of which the members are personally interested, through which they are represented, and by which they recognise in their collective and associated character, their intimate connexion with the Conference as the centre, and their fraternal relation to the most distant parts of the extended whole.

ORIGIN & CONSTITUTION OF THE CONFERENCE.

THE REV. JOHN WESLEY, M.A., FOUNDER OF THE WESLEYAN METHODIST SOCIETIES.—Born June 17th, 1703,—Died March 2, 1791.

The first Society was formed at Oxford, in November, 1729.

The Methodist Itinerancy began in 1739.

The First Convention of Methodist Preachers, assembled as a *Conference*, was summoned by the Rev. J. WESLEY, and took place at the Foundry, in London, June 25, 1744,—Present, JOHN WESLEY; CHARLES WESLEY; JOHN HODGES, Rector of Wenvo; HENRY PIENS, Vicar of Bexley; SAMUEL TAYLOR, Vicar of Quinton; and JOHN MERRITON.

These holy men thus assembled, met to confer together how they might best promote the interests and extension of religion—to "consider well their first principles"—how they might contribute "to reform the Nation, more particularly the Church, and to spread Scriptural Holiness over the Land."—(*Minutes*, 1744.)

These Conventions or Conferences continued to be held during forty successive years. Meanwhile, the number of Preachers, Members, and chapels, rapidly increased, until it became evident to Mr. WESLEY and the Preachers, that in order to secure the chapels to the Connexion for ever, according to the intention of the Trust Deeds, and to impart to posterity the revival of religion, which, under God, they had been the instruments of effecting, it was necessary that he, as the author and head of the Conference, should take some step, by which that body might be legally recognized, and the constitution and discipline of Methodism thereby perpetuated.

It was then, that the Rev. JOHN WESLEY, in his Deed of Declaration, and Establishment of the Conference, executed by him, February 23, 1784, and enrolled in His Majesty's High Court of Chancery, nominated one hundred of the Travelling Preachers to constitute, (and their successors for ever,) "The Conference of the People called Methodists." The design of this was to give a legal specification of that phrase—"The Conference of the People called Methodists," which is inserted in all the Deeds of Chapels. By virtue of this Deed, the Conference claims the power of appointing Preachers to officiate in those chapels. The whole Deed is too long to be inserted here.

* See "Centenary Sermon," by Rev. J. G. Manly; to which we have again the pleasure of referring our readers, as containing much valuable information relative to the "Nature, Origin, Progress, Present State, and Character of Wesleyan Methodism." For sale at the Wesleyan Depot, Mission House, Montreal.

The following Clauses or Regulations are extracted:—

"The Conference shall and may admit into Connexion with them, or on trial, any person or persons whom they shall approve, to be Preachers and Expounders of God's Holy Word, under the care and direction of the Conference, the name of every such person or persons so admitted into Connexion, or upon trial as aforesaid, with the time and degrees of the admission being entered in the Journals or Minutes of the Conference."

"No person shall be elected a Member of the Conference, who hath not been admitted into Connexion with the Conference as a Preacher and Expounder of God's Holy Word as aforesaid, for twelve months."

"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," &c.

Deed of Declaration.

"The hundred Preachers mentioned in the enrolled Deed, and their successors, are the only legal persons who constitute the Conference."

Rules of Pacification, 1795.

The above extracts show the absolute impossibility of admitting "Lay Delegates" to "the Conference," and that the Conference can exist only as constituted of Preachers alone.

This will be admitted by any man of common candour, who reads that Deed with attention. Throughout the whole of the Deed, Mr. Wesley speaks of the Conference as consisting of Preachers, and of Preachers only. And as though he intended to settle the question for ever, he inserted a clause in the following words:—"No person shall be elected a member of the Conference," &c. (*See above*.) The preceding clause, to which reference is obviously made, is in the following words: "The Conference shall and may admit," &c. (*See above*.) In this last clause, Mr. WESLEY evidently contemplated the arrival of a time when there might not be forty Preachers; but instead of providing for the perpetuity of the Conference by the admission of Laymen, to perfect the number, he declares that "the Conference of the People called Methodists, shall be extinguished." Can any thing be more decisive as to the absolute impossibility of admitting "Lay Delegates to the Conference?" If the Preachers had the inclination to incorporate the people with them in the Conference, they have not the power to do it. Mr. WESLEY has taken care not to leave the matter even to the will of the Preachers.

The Business of the Annual Assembly of Conference is—to perpetuate its own existence according to the Deed of Declaration—to receive or reject Candidates for the Ministry, who have been regularly recommended—to examine, try, acquit, suspend or exclude any travelling Preacher in the Connexion—to receive and decide upon all appeals and petitions whatever, from all subordinate Methodistic jurisdictions—to appoint every Travelling Preacher in the Connexion his work, according to the terms of the Chapel Tenure, the Deed of Declaration, and the general economy of the whole Body, including appointments not only to Circuits, but to various official situations in the Connexion—exclusively to make, alter, or rescind laws for the whole Connexion, the authority of which is, however, restricted according to the 7th of the Regulations made at Leeds in 1797—to ascertain the numbers in Society in each Circuit—to consider the state of the Connexion at large, and to make regulations suited to the peculiar cir-