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THE OPPOSITION TO AMERICAN METHODISM UP TO 1836

by

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To my wife who has devotedly and patiently  
helped me in the writing  
of this thesis

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## INTRODUCTION

# THE OPPOSITION TO AMERICAN METHODISM UP TO 1836

## INTRODUCTION

### A. The Subject Introduced

#### 1. The Subject Examined

"'Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds,' said Herodotus of the messengers of the great Persian king. That boast has now been applied to the agents of the mail service of the United States government; it might have been with equal truth applied to those itinerant preachers of early Methodism."<sup>1</sup> In truth, this was a picture of the early Methodists of the American continent in the beginning, especially during the period of the circuit riders. There was a power that overcame all obstacles in their path which was greater than any material might employed in the world. And the work was not easy.

"There is one thing about that early itinerancy which should not be overlooked. It was as merciless a calling as ever challenged brave men. We have spoken of mobs, of jails, of long rides through the rain, of nights in the open, of days in the malaria-soaked swamps of the new frontier. 'How did they ever stand it?' someone asks. The answer is that they didn't stand it. They died under it.

They died, most of them before their careers were much more than begun.....Of the first 737 members of Conferences to die--that is, all who died up to 1847----203 were between 25 and 35 years of age and 121 between 35 and 45....of 672 of these first

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1. Luccock and Hutchinson, The Story of Methodism, p. 218.

preachers whose records we have in full, two thirds died before they had been able to render twelve years of service!"<sup>1</sup>

To examine closely all of the hardships of these early Methodists would be an endless task for there was much of it, and those who have written about them have had high words of praise for the valor and self denial of these men.

Yet, there is a strange paradox in the whole scheme of things. As one reads about these men one sees much of the hardship of their lives. But one also sees especially in their own writings, a glorious sense of success and of achievement for the Lord. They spoke much about the hardships of their work, but far more about souls won for Christ. When an unusually rough mob tried to break up a certain meeting conducted by Francis Asbury in Charleston he remarks, "I have more liberty to preach in Charleston this visit than I ever had before, and am of opinion that God will work here, but our friends are afraid of the cross."<sup>2</sup> This was typical of the reaction of these early Methodists to the opposition against them. They were under the impression, not that God was fighting their battles, but that they were fighting God's battles. They would be beaten by ruffians and the next day, still bruised and sore, they would be exhorting these same men to turn to the Lord. They were not going to fight men, they were fighting the Devil, but they could never praise God enough for their successes no matter how meager they were.

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1. Ibid., p. 229

2. W.H. Daniels, History of Methodism, p. 514



These unschooled men matched their wits against graduates of universities and were often victorious--not unscathed but better because of it.<sup>1</sup> They went into the well-churched New England communities and there met even greater opposition, far harder to overcome than the opposing mobs of the churchless frontier. They went into any situation where there was a chance of saving men from eternal doom. No storm was too bad, no mob too violent, no indifference too

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1. This story is told illustrating the wit of Jesse Lee:

One time when, riding between Boston and Lynn, he fell in with two young lawyers, who promptly ranged themselves on each side of the itinerant and prepared for sport.

"I believe you are a preacher, sir?" asked the one who rode on his right.

"Yes; I generally pass for one."

"You preach very often, I suppose?"

"Generally every day; frequently twice, or more."

"How do you find time to study when you preach so often?" the young lawyer on Lee's left asked.

"I study when riding, and read when resting."

"But do you not write your sermons?"

"No; not very often."

"Do you not often make mistakes in preaching extemporaneously?"

"I do sometimes."

"How do you do them? Do you correct them?"

"That depends upon the character of the mistake," Lee replied.

"I was preaching the other day, and I went to quote the text, 'All liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone;' and, by mistake, I said, 'All lawyers shall have their part---!'"

That so venerable a joke as this should not have been known seems strange, but evidently it was not. The young lawyer on Lee's left rushed into the trap. "What did you do then?" he interrupted. "Did you correct it?"

"No, indeed," said Lee calmly. "It was so nearly true, I didn't think it worth while to correct it."

"Humph!" snorted the young fellow on the right, "I don't know whether you are the more knave or fool."

"Neither," the preacher quietly replied looking from one to the other, "I believe I am just between the two!" (From Luccock and Hutchinson, *The Story of Methodism*, p. 227.)

impenetrable to hold back these men of the burning heart. A historian who lived in the middle of the nineteenth century said, "Our Church has never yet been frightened from its duty by difficulties. However hard the work, or however great the danger, there have always been eager volunteers for the service; and such, no less than heretofore, is the state of the case today."<sup>1</sup> And again in speaking of some of the accomplishments of the earlier Methodists he says, they "learn how to mollify magistrates, face down mobs, outwit the skulking Indian, out-argue the well-intrenched Calvinist, put out some of the false lights of Unitarianism and Universalism by preaching a Gospel larger and a greater salvation than they ever offered, trample on State-churchism till it has been ground into the dust, and thus, step by step march down the century."<sup>2</sup>

Thus, there are many questions that come to ones mind. Where did these Methodists come from? Where did they get such a vision? What forms did the opposition take? How did these men overcome the opposition? What did that have to do in building the Methodist Church? Perhaps the opposition was not so important as what was done in spite of the opposition, yet in order to understand what they did it is necessary to understand the forces against which they had to fight.

## 2. The Subject Stated and Delimited

With this examination of the subject in view, the problem

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1. Daniels, op. cit., p. 12.
2. Ibid., p. 371.

of this study is to define, examine, illustrate, and interpret the opposition to the early Methodists in its historical setting in order to show something of the strength and real accomplishment of this movement. The opposition to Methodism in England was much more violent and prolonged, and there developed different results. That is not the subject of this study. It is the American problem in which this study is interested. Certain parts of the opposition studied here will not be unique to those people called Methodists but will be common to all religious peoples. There were, for example, small groups of Moravians and Mennonites that had much in common with the early Methodists but they became increasingly insignificant in the American scene. Other items of opposition will be those had in common with all early American and frontier people. Yet, the early Methodist preacher gave them all one classification, simply saying that the Devil was trying to stop the work of the Lord.

The time scope of this study will cover slightly more than fifty years of the history of Methodism in America. Though unofficially Methodists came to America during the middle of the seventeenth century, they were not of much importance until just before the American Revolution. The Methodist Episcopal Church was not officially organized until 1784. The year 1836 has been chosen as the termination of this study because at the General Conference of that year, according to many historians, there was somewhat of a change in the Methodist

ministry from the itinerancy to the station.<sup>1</sup> This study will be mainly interested in the Methodist preacher as he went about his work. A study will be made of the most important and most typical men. Dominant among these will be the itinerant preacher, Jesse Lee, and Bishop Asbury who though bishop, lived as hard a life as any under his supervision. Incidents from lives of others will be used as illustrative material. The number of men and the range of their activities make it impossible to study them all in detail, yet because they were all so similar, a surprisingly accurate evaluation of the opposition can be gathered from the study of a few.

The general geographic area studied will be the states along the Atlantic coast, although before 1836 there were many preachers following the settlers inland. New England has its place, although because it was well established and well churched, the Methodists did not have the success there that they had in the South and the West. Most of the opposition during the American Revolution came from the northern states while those on the western frontier were not so conscious of the war.

The general matter of this study will be opposition from outside the Methodist fold. It is true that at times regarding certain

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1. The itinerancy was the traveling ministry. The men who thus traveled had no real home but went from place to place. "Location" at one particular point or station during this period invariably meant incapacitation. Those ministers who were stationed were the ones that had worn themselves out in the itinerancy. After this period, "locating" ministers at one or two churches became the policy of the church.

subjects the Methodists did not get along with each other. With time there developed serious discussion and dissension on the problem of the episcopacy and slavery, which was to split the church. On the whole there was no serious internal dissension during the early period so it is of little use to bring that into this study. The great trials arose from a hostile, self-assured yet insecure, outside world.

It is not within the scope of this study to trace the opposition to the Methodists back to England though some mention will be made of that. On the whole, all opposition, outside the Doctrine of the Church and Calvinism, took on typically American tactics and were for the most part an American reaction. Thus this study will be limited to this country as far as is logically possible.

#### B. The Significance of the Subject

In the light of all that is written about the history of Methodism, how can such a subject be justified? The significance of individual incidents of opposition has been stated here and there in various histories and biographies of Methodism, but the general gathering together of all of them has for the most part been neglected. A chapter now and then has been the extent. H. C. DeCanver, in 1846, published a catalogue of works in refutation of Methodism. These, however, are mostly English in Origin and the compilation was definitely from an anti-Methodist viewpoint with an attempt to invalidate all Methodism. Many of the works are unsigned, undated pamphlets.

The question then arises as to how much this opposition contributed to the success of the Methodists. It is said that in the first centuries of the Christian Church, the intense persecution of the Roman Empire purified the Church and kept it pure thus strengthening it by that very persecution. Though this is not an exact parallel, there are some striking similarities.

Then too, in this study we have one answer as to how this English group became strikingly American in spirit. It began as a social movement in England and ended as an American Church.

### C. The Sources

It is necessary to limit the amount of source and reference material used in this study. As far as is known, such a study as this has never been adequately made. However, there are numerous histories and reference works which do supply material on this subject, so much, in fact, that it would be a life work to explore all. Therefore, only standard histories have been selected at this time.

Not only must one limit the amount of source material for this study but the type of material must also be selected. The reason for this is that there is much duplication of material especially in the secondary sources. Notably in the books of history must there be selection. Those used in this study are as follows: Jesse Lee, A Short History of the Methodists. This was chosen because it is the oldest of the histories of Methodism. It is limited and does not have the perspective of some of the later works, but it has something of the personal experience of the first few years of Methodism in

America. W.H.Daniels', The Illustrated History of Methodism has been used because of the style in which it is written and the excellent ability he has of choosing the incidents relevant to this study. Stevens', History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, is still considered the classic in Methodist histories. Luccock and Hutchinson's, A Story of Methodism, was written in this century and not only has the correct facts, but also has the perspective in looking back at the events in the light of more than a century of progress. There will be some reference to other histories to clear up points that are missed in those just mentioned. Any other books used which include biographies, pamphlets, and autobiographies, were used for what they had to offer in the way of incident and illustration which go to prove the general statements of this thesis.

#### D. The Method of Procedure

The purpose of this thesis will be to show the extent and the importance of the early opposition to the Methodists in America. To do so the period covered will be studied as a whole. A brief historical background will be the first consideration to set the stage for what follows. Because the time covers only a little more than fifty years, there will be no attempt to follow the years chronologically except as incidents are related to the American Revolution. Outside of the Revolution, both before and after, the period is a unit in the history of Methodism. The opposition will be classified according to the general type, considering separately that concerned with the Revolution,

the American frontier, the Established Church, and Calvinism. There will be no specific geographical classification except in the cases where the type of opposition was confined to one area. Illustrative of this is New England where the Established Church was the main problem.



CHAPTER I

THE BEGINNINGS OF METHODISM IN AMERICA

# CHAPTER I

## THE BEGINNINGS OF METHODISM IN AMERICA

### A. Introduction

In order to more fully understand the setting of this study, a brief historical background of Methodism up and through the period studied is necessary. The approach is made in a way so as to help best understand the American situation. English Methodism was different than American Methodism yet the Americans are directly indebted to the English. What Methodism did in England is wonderful and in a sense miraculous, but the study here must be limited to America. It is hoped that this chapter will accomplish two main things. The first is a brief historical background. The second is a comparison of American Methodism and the Americanism of that frontier period. In reality they might be considered a part of a single whole. The early Methodism became Americanized almost completely after the War. In a direct manner the United States was not officially conscious of the Methodists though the Methodists were conscious of their country, and along with other religious groups contributed some things to make the United States what it was and is.

### B. Brief Survey of Its English Beginnings

"If England to-day is not what England was then, if the English-speaking world of the twentieth century differs in thought and

outlook from that of the eighteenth, it is to a large extent due to the fact that this little man turned his back on a career at Oxford or a comfortable benefice within the Established Church and went out to just such places as Moorfields to meet his fellows when all their guards were down and call them to a new kind of life."<sup>1</sup>

Thus Methodism at its beginning was quite unorthodox in the eyes of the standing order. It was a reformation, not particularly of religious doctrine but of the lives of men. As John Wesley himself wrote,

"Two young men without name, without friends, without either power or fortune, set out from college with principles totally different from those of the common people, to oppose all the world, learned and unlearned; and to combat popular prejudices of every kind. Their first principle directly attacked all the wickedness; their second, all the bigotry in the world. Thus they attempted a reformation, not of opinions (feathers, trifles not worth naming!) but of men's tempers and lives; of vice in every kind; of everything contrary to justice, mercy, or truth. And for this it was that they carried their lives in their hands; and that both the great vulgar and the small looked upon them as mad dogs and treated them as such."<sup>2</sup>

Politically, socially, and spiritually England was sick in the eighteenth century. Religious and political controversies had left running sores. Many, even in the church, believed that God was defeated. Into this situation came Wesley's evangel. As Dr. Joy says,

"Wesley's evangel was the medicine for that sick century. It not only warmed hearts, it cleared minds, calmed fears, soothed nerves, rebuked specific sins, and kindled a love for one's fellow men, which did not end in fruitless sentiment, but found expression in substantial acts of benevolence. He taught men--men at the very foot of the social ladder, and with small opportunity or ambition to climb it--that they were sons of God, and that, though sinful by nature and choice, they might find pardon and peace, and the joyous assurance of divine acceptance. Not content with securing

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1. Luccock and Hutchinson, op. cit., p. 14
2. James Richard Joy: John Wesley's Awakening, p. 9

such change of heart--'conversion'--he insisted that the saved man should demonstrate the genuineness of his faith by bringing forth works meet for repentance."<sup>1</sup>

The change in England toward the end of the eighteenth century is mostly attributed to Wesley.

Wesley was a scholar. He had studied hard and had great ideas on living the Holy Life. But he had failed mainly because he forgot the importance of the heart. He made a trip to America in 1735 to convert the Indians but was a sad failure. He was merciless with himself in his personal habits and thoughts, but he discovered that he could not work his way to heaven. Then one evening at a little prayer meeting back in England he felt his heart "strangely warmed." This was really the beginning of Methodism. Until that time John Wesley had failed. When the Spirit of God took over, Wesley went out to change the face of the earth. A complete story of what happened would take volumes that have already been written. We can say that Wesley compassed the whole of England and many times went into Scotland and other parts of the British Isles. He did not start a new church. He was not much concerned with an ecclesiastical reform. The church that did arise was patterned very closely after the mother church. Basically the articles of religion and the form of government were the same. It was not a church or institution of any kind that he was after, it was people. It was not the established church that he was fighting, it was the bigoted irreligious conduct of leaders and members.

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1. Ibid., p. 113.

As a reform movement in England, Methodism succeeded; as a new church it accomplished little. It did not sweep England as former reform had done, with a new State Church. The Methodist Church in England was Wesley and when he was gone, though there yet remained many Methodists, the movement in England slowly lost its place in the limelight.

### C. Survey of American Beginnings up to 1784

The story of how Methodism came to America is interesting but long if given in detail. A brief sketch of important men and incidents will have to suffice for this study.

Whitefield arrived in America in 1739, the natal year of Methodism, for his first visit to America. In 1769 he made his thirteenth and last trip to America where he died.<sup>1</sup> During his times in America he preached up and down the east coast. According to Stevens he was "the greatest preacher, it is probable in popular eloquence, of all the Christian ages."<sup>2</sup> No wonder then that Buckley says, "To him while time shall last must be given the credit of introducing the spirit of Methodism into the New World. Wondrously did he prepare the way for Wesley's missionaries."<sup>3</sup>

However, during this period there were none that could really be called Methodists. There is some controversy as to what was actually the beginning of Methodist organization in America,

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1. Abel Stevens: History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Vol. I, p. 101.
2. Ibid., p. 32.
3. James M. Buckley: A History of Methodism in the United States, Vol. I, p. 151.

Philip Embury in New York or Robert Strawbridge in Maryland. However, we can agree with Pilmoor, Garrettson, Lee, Boehm, and Bourne, that Embury was the first.<sup>1</sup> He came to New York in 1766 and soon after he was persuaded by Barbara Heck to begin preaching to the people.<sup>2</sup> Though Robert Strawbridge was from the same locality in Ireland as Embury, there is no evidence as to the date of his arrival in America, except that it was soon after Embury. With these two names one can date the beginning of Methodism in America. Considering the newness of the country and the scarcity of people, it grew rapidly. It seemed as though men were hungry for the Gospel as these early Methodists presented it. Some of them had heard it and been converted under the Methodist itinerants in England and Scotland and were hungry to hear it again.

These people wrote letters to England asking John Wesley to send them missionaries. Two men, Boardman and Pilmoor were sent in 1768. In 1771 Wesley sent two other young men to America. These men were Francis Asbury and Richard Wright, one of them to become the leading spirit of the Methodists in the New World; the other after a brief ministry, to go back to England and never to be heard of again. In 1773 two more men, Rankin and Shadford, arrived from England. These men, helped by those they converted, traveled around the colonies preaching, starting classes and societies. The result of their work is seen in that some of their converts became the

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1. Ibid., p. 142. These are men that have considered the subject controversial.
2. Philip Embury and Barbara Heck were both converted in Ireland under John Wesley's preaching.

itinerants who carried on the work during the Revolution when all of the "missionaries" except Asbury went back to England.

The first conference of the Methodist church was held in Philadelphia in July 1773. There were present seven preachers, all of them English. All of these by the time of the American Revolution were forced to return to England except Francis Asbury.

The American Revolution was an extremely difficult time for the Methodists. Their leaders were all English and for the most part Tories as far as they had any political leanings. The followers of these were looked upon with suspicion until they could prove their loyalty. Wesley was definitely a Tory and made the bad mistake of meddling in political affairs. Asbury said that he was sorry the "venerable man" ever dipped into American politics.<sup>1</sup> The pamphlet "A Calm Address to our American Colonies, by the Rev. Mr. John Wesley, M. A." did more harm to the American Methodists than any other one thing. The English preachers in America had to return to England. Some of them fled for their lives; some were driven out, and others thought it expedient for them to go. This is not strange considering that they were Tories and that some of them distributed Wesley's pamphlet which was definitely Tory and against the cause of American independence. Some Methodists try to excuse Wesley of any real hostility against the Americans during this period on the presumption that the "Calm Address" was a mistake that Wesley recognised and soon admitted. Other writers outright boast of Wesley's attitude.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Stevens, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 301.
2. Buckley, op. cit., p. 199.

Therefore, Methodism came to a standstill during the Revolution, though the native itinerants were still preaching, especially on the frontier where the war was not being waged. Asbury himself preached most of this time, though at times under great difficulty. Methodists in sections where the British army was in control were given quite the normal freedom in their worship though often their meeting houses were taken over for use of the army. On the whole, the Methodist's attitude toward the war was neutral in any political sense. Most of them wanted freedom but they were against war. Many were pacifists. Asbury's attitude may be taken as typical; his job was to preach the gospel no matter where or under what circumstances. More details concerning the war will be given in Chapter two.

In a way, the Revolution, which had separated England and America, separated the American Methodists from their English brethren. Wesley was still considered the leader but he himself saw the advisability of making the American church independent. So in 1784 he sent Dr. Coke over to organize the American Methodists into an autonomous unity separate from England, and in the famous Christmas Conference of 1784 the Methodist Episcopal Church was organized.

This first period of Methodism in America was a period of testing and hardship but also of growth. The early itinerants, though assured that God would accomplish His will, were not always sure of their ability to do what God wanted. That their power came from God cannot be doubted. Practically the only thing about which these early itinerants were sure, was God. But that was enough for them. They wore out themselves and their horses traveling all over the



Eastern Seaboard of this new country. They also went into the frontier with the settlers as they moved west. This period set the pace for the next when the circuit rider traveled from coast to coast. The first Protestant sermon to be preached on the west coast was delivered by a Methodist circuit rider by the name of Jason Lee.<sup>1</sup>

This was a time of preparation for the tremendous struggles of the next fifty years. This was only the beginning, but it was a good beginning. At the time of the first conference there were only ten preachers and seven of them were English and were leaders. In 1784 at the Christmas conference there were over eighty.<sup>2</sup> This growth is significant, considering the fact that the number of Methodists had decreased during the war. This increase was not from England, from the mother church; it was the result of the preaching right here in America, by men who heard God's call. Methodism had truly made a place for itself.

#### D. Organized Methodism in America from 1784 to 1836

Though one most often thinks of any religious history in terms of church history, the Methodists did not start out as a church. Up until this time many of them were members of other churches. Many who belonged to no church, when they were converted, joined a church. Most of the Methodists went to the Episcopal Church for communion, baptism, and other religious ceremonies. Whenever they were allowed,

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1. Luccock and Hutchinson, op. cit., p. 295.

2. The records themselves are not so precise as to the exact number.

the Methodists held their classes and preaching services in regular churches, not distinguishing themselves in terms of a church or denomination. However, Wesley and other leaders saw the need for organization. There was also pressure from the people for the administration of the sacraments, for Methodists went into many places where there was no ordained clergy. Thus was organized the Methodist Episcopal Church.

From this Christmas Conference of 1784 the Methodist itinerants on their horses went out to cover a continent. Some were sent to established circuits for a year. Their home was their saddle and all their belongings simply those which would fit into their saddle bags. They would be sent into the frontier where they were assigned not only to circuits covering a large county or whole state but sometimes even to establish their own circuit. They had no churches, no regular appointments. They were sent wherever there were men in need of the Gospel of Salvation.

An incident is told of a remark by a Methodist preacher named Nolley which illustrates well the expansion and travels of the Methodists. One day Mr. Nolly was travelling in a remote section of Mississippi when he came upon fresh wagon tracks. He followed them and overtook a settler just unloading his goods on a new homestead. After learning who Nolley was the man said in disgust, "Another Methodist preacher! I left Virginia for Georgia to get clear of them. There they got my wife and daughter, and I came here, and here is one before I get my wagon unloaded!"

"My friend," said Nolley, "if you go to heaven, you'll find Methodist preachers there; if you go to hell, I'm afraid you'll find some there; and you see how it is on earth, so you had better make terms with us and be at peace."<sup>1</sup>

"By 1830 the frontier of the United States was west of the Mississippi. By that time the circuit-rider was west of the frontier--its advance agent!"<sup>2</sup> Jesse Walker entered St. Louis in 1818. Indiana was entered in 1800, Michigan in 1808. Illinois was entered in 1804 and for twelve years was a single circuit. Fifteen years later there thirty circuits. Jesse Walker's statement when he entered St. Louis could well have been that of all these preachers: "I have come in the name of Christ to take Saint Louis, and by the grace of God I will do it."<sup>3</sup>

The degree of success these preachers achieved varied. Some places they started large churches, other places only a handful were "gathered for the Lord." But the significant fact is that they went--no matter what the hardship, opposition, or lack of success--they went and preached the Gospel wherever they could find one or two to listen.

During this period the Methodists were organized into a Church. They had their bishop and annual conferences. The early bishops were circuit riders also. Bishop Asbury had the whole United States as his circuit, and ride it he would though often he suffered with a fever and the weather was bad. He preached, held conferences, ordained preachers, and acted as their adviser.

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1. Luccock and Hutchinson, op, cit., p. 293.
2. Ibid., p. 292
3. Ibid.

These early conferences were looked forward to by all. They usually lasted about ten days or two weeks. They had preaching as often as four times a day at some of them. The preachers brought up many items of business. There were always men to ordain and other problems to consider. Men who had married or had poor health were "stationed" in an area where there was not so much traveling. A man had not quite received his forty dollars for his year's "salary" (though they didn't call it salary then.) Of course the main business of these conferences was to appoint the preachers to their fields of work. Many of them had ridden their faithful horses to the conference and of course were free to go anywhere in the world. Within ten minutes after the conference was over they were on their way to new appointments, some of them never to return.

#### E. A Comparison of Early Methodism with Early Americanism

##### 1. The English Taint of Early Methodism

As has been mentioned the earliest Methodists were all English. Consider the import of this in light of the fact that early Methodism was having its beginning during all that period of unrest just prior to the American Revolution. No wonder the preachers were put in jail, fined, and mobbed; fleeing often for their very lives!

But though many of the leaders were Tories and Wesley himself was definitely so, American Methodists tried to overcome this. As has been said, all of the British Methodists left America during the war except Asbury; and because he was himself pro-British,

he faced many difficulties. It was not long after the war that the Methodist movement became truly American.

The way in which this English taint was removed is shown well by E. S. Tipple in his biography of Asbury, "The Prophet of the Long Road." This information from the life of Asbury is important because of the fact that this Englishman became the leading spirit of Methodism in America.

"This man, who wrought more deeply into American life, in its social, moral, and religious facts, than any other man who lived and acted his part in our more formative period, was an Englishman when he stepped upon these shores, and an American when he breathed out his life in 1816 in the home of his friend George Arnold. In a letter to his mother, not long after his arrival in America, he wrote, evidently with much feeling, 'Old England for me.' During the war of 1812, when the presence of the British not far distant from the house where he was a guest, was referred to, he said with even greater emotion: 'They have no business here. Let them go home from whence they came. I shall pray against them with my might; that is all I can do.' The passing years had wrought the change, but not time alone. Francis Asbury's earliest years in America were the stirring years of the American Revolution. They were days of storm and stress. The experience through which Asbury passed was providentially ordered and divinely used for the accomplishment of God's purpose. Historians of the United States write of a revolution in America in the eighteenth century, but there were really two revolutions; for not only did the colonies become free and independent of the mother country, but the Methodist societies in America broke from the parent organization in England, and the two revolutions went forward side by side to complete success. It was inevitable that the break should come in both cases sooner or later, but the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States was unquestionably hastened by the revolt of the colonies and numerous significant events during the period covered by the War for Independence."<sup>1</sup>

## 2. The American Ideal for Freedom

America in this period was young and because of the vast frontier there were certain things that were bound to happen. The

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1. E. S. Tipple: Francis Asbury the Prophet of the Long Road, p. 112-113

country to whom Americans were supposed to give allegiance was many weeks on the other side of the Atlantic; Americans were used to doing what they pleased; they were a rugged people settling in a rugged country and thus developed a rugged individualism. As long as England let them alone, they were quite content to remain under the English flag, but let leaders from the other side of the water who were as proud in the eyes of the Americans as the Americans were "uncouth" in the eyes of the English, try to tell them what to do and they were willing to fight. Many of them had come to America for freedom and now they had it and they were not going to give it up again. Even the American constitution and its government were too much for some of them. Patrick Henry was eloquent in his attacks against the Constitution and the republican form of government. Thus, the America into which the Methodists came must be kept in mind.

Methodism grew from ten preachers at the first conference in 1774 to nearly one thousand by 1836. It had spread from only a few preaching places to a great many, almost covering the continent. It had become an organized church with all of the necessary working organs. It had accepted the challenge of frontier America and had conquered.

#### F. Summary

To understand the beginning of Methodism in England one must consider two factors: John Wesley and the condition of England in the eighteenth century. Wesley did not set out to start a new church but because he was what he was and because he found England in

skeptical and immoral state, a new church was the inevitable result.

In America up until 1784 the Methodists were a part of English Methodism. As early as 1739 Whitefield came to America for the first time. Around 1760 one finds two Irishmen preaching in America, Philip Embury and Robert Strawbridge. They were both converted under Wesley's preaching. In the years 1768 1771, and 1773, missionaries arrived from England, sent by Wesley. The first conference of the Methodist Church in America was held in Philadelphia in July 1773.

During the Revolution the Methodists had some very difficult times because most of them were English and some were Tories. Partly because of the Revolution and partly because Wesley saw the need for a free American church, the Methodist Episcopal Church was organized at the famed Christmas Conference of 1784. From this conference, the preachers went out to cover the continent within a few years. Francis Asbury was made Bishop and the country was organized into conferences.

Early Methodism and early Americanism were not compatible at first because of the strong English flavor of Methodism. The Americans had an ideal of freedom that reacted violently against the "English tyranny." This reaction carried over to anything that was English and thus included Methodism. However, during the period following the Revolution, Methodism became thoroughly Americanized.

CHAPTER II

POLITICAL AND SOCIAL OPPOSITION TO METHODISM



## CHAPTER II

### POLITICAL AND SOCIAL OPPOSITION TO METHODISM

#### A. Introduction

As was very briefly discussed in the preceding chapter, there were two general conditions which caused much of the opposition to the Methodists. The first was the connection of the Methodists with England. The second was the ideal of freedom which pervaded the American people. Certain of the Methodist missionaries were quite indiscreet in their political action and thus they brought upon all Methodists the hatred and persecution of the people.

One also finds another point of conflict in the high moral standards and the conscientious scruples of the people called Methodists which is not only prominent during the revolutionary period but also extends throughout the frontier period of American history. This was caused by the fact that in the American ideal of freedom there was much license. It is entirely natural that the Methodists would preach against this abuse of freedom and on that account they were sorely persecuted. Persecuted during the war because they were not in favor of the spirit and practice of war and on the frontier because they opposed the moral license practiced by those who abused the freedom of the frontier.

Added to all of this were the natural hardships of anyone venturing into the frontier. There were storms, disease, danger from Indians and many terrors of the wilderness trail.

The first consideration of this chapter will be the American Revolution with all of its political and social problems. The second part of the chapter will deal with the opposition on the American Frontier.

## B. The American Revolution

### 1. The English Background--a Cause of Persecution

Says one who witnessed the afflictions of the Methodists during this period,

"They had almost insupportable difficulties, violent oppositions, bitter persecutions, and grievous sufferings to endure. So many of the preachers being Englishmen, and Wesley, who was considered the founder and chief ruler of the Methodist societies, being in England, and known to be loyal to his king, and of course unfriendly to the American measures, occasioned jealousies and suspicions that the Methodists were, politically, a dangerous people."<sup>1</sup>

#### a. Anglo-American Preachers

The blame for such persecution does not rest completely upon either the Americans or the Methodists. There were mistakes on both sides but more than that, they all seemed to be caught in the circumstances in which they found themselves. The English Methodist preachers who were thoroughly loyal to their king were caught in a dilemma when the Revolution broke out. Could they stay in America and preach the Gospel and still be loyal to the king?

Some of them were like Rodda, an outspoken Tory.

"Rodda, like Wesley, labored under the impression that loyalty to

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1. Stevens, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 277-278.

King George was an essential part of an Englishman's religion. The rebellious spirit of the colonists aroused his wrath, and in his efforts to withstand the manifest destiny of America he was accused of circulating over his district, in Delaware the Royal Proclamation against the rebels; on which account he was obliged to fly for his life. He took refuge on board a British man-of-war, which had been sent out to chastise those undutiful subjects; and at length was carried to England."<sup>1</sup>

Rankin, likewise, was too outspoken and so was forced to flee in like manner.

Other of the English preachers considered their work in America finished and returned to England. Shadford was one of these. Stevens says of him, "He could not travel without a pass, nor have a pass without taking the oaths."<sup>2</sup> Most of the states along the eastern seaboard required Englishmen to renounce their loyalty to the King and take an oath of alligence to the state. Later when Shadford parted with Asbury to return to England he said, "My work is here done; I cannot stay; it is impressed on my mind that I ought to go home, as strongly as it was at first to come to America."<sup>3</sup> He then obtained a pass from military authorities to go to Philadelphia and set out. That night, however, he was accosted by an armed man who presented a musket at his breast. Somehow he was allowed to proceed and he says, "through the mercy and goodness of God, we got safe into Chester that night, and the next night into Philadelphia. Here we met three or four of our preachers, who like ourselves, were all refugees."<sup>4</sup>

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1. Daniels, op. cit., p. 426.
2. Stevens, op. cit., p. 339-340.
3. Ibid., p. 340.
4. Ibid.

The cause of much of the hatred and persecution can be traced to John Wesley himself. It is generally acknowledged among historians that Wesley made a bad mistake when he published his pamphlet, A Calm Address to Our American Colonies. Some think that had Wesley known the consequences of such a publication he would not have published it. In the Address Wesley not only opposed the rebels but he also opposed war in general. "He hated war, and knew too well the devastating effects which war always has on the religious life of the people who engage in it."<sup>1</sup> The effect of this and other statements of Wesley that reached America were far reaching and sudden as far as the Methodists were concerned. For one thing, it drove all the Methodist ministers except Asbury out of the country. It brought upon all Methodists in the country a stigma that was very difficult to erase. All that was necessary to have a Methodist persecuted, imprisoned, or tarred and feathered was for someone to call out the word, "Tory" or "enemy to the country".<sup>2</sup> Almost overnight friends became enemies. No wonder Methodism lost ground during this period. With their preachers gone and their lives in danger because they were Methodists it is easy to see why very few were induced to join their ranks and why many left them.

#### b. American Preachers

As has been mentioned before, Francis Asbury was the only Englishman among the Methodist preachers who remained in America.

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1. Luccock and Hutchinson, op. cit., p. 153.
2. Stevens, op. cit., p. 279.

So it was that Asbury and a handful of native Americans were left to shepherd the Methodists on the American continent. Upon them fell the brunt of the political persecution of the angry colonists. It seemed not to matter that many of them were thorough patriots; they were Methodists and all Methodists were objects of suspicion. Some of them, it is true, proved their loyalty and were given some freedom. Jesse Lee was not troubled because of lack of patriotism, but because he was a pacifist as were most of the Methodists.<sup>1</sup> One could spend a volume telling of these men who carried the Methodist evangel to the young republic, men like Jesse Lee, Freeborn Garrettson, and Joseph Hartley. Without men like these and Francis Asbury, Methodism would have indeed had a hard struggle for its very existence. They were fined, put in jail, tarred and feathered and in many ways looked upon as enemies to the country.

Francis Asbury was, indeed, an exile from several of the seaboard states because of the fierceness of the persecution. Jesse Lee in his History says that Asbury was in hiding for two years and one month.<sup>2</sup> Asbury, however, would qualify such a statement. Henry Boehm who was Asbury's traveling companion in his later years says that he was with Asbury when he first read Lee's history<sup>3</sup> and that Asbury made record in his journal,

"I correct him (Lee) in one fact. My compelled seclusion in the beginning of the war, in the State of Delaware, was in no wise a season of inactivity; on the contrary, except about two months

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1. For greater detail of this, see section 2 following.
2. Jesse Lee: A Short History of the Methodists in the U.S.A. beginning in 1766 and continued till 1809, p. 73.
3. Henry Boehm: Reminiscences, pp. 291-292.

of retirement, from the direct necessity, it was the most active, the most useful, the most afflictive part of my life. If I spent a few dumb Sabbaths, if I did not for a short time steal after dark, or through the gloom of the woods, as was my wont, from house to house to enforce that truth I, an only child, had left father and mother to proclaim. I shall not be blamed, I hope, when it is known to my patron, good and respectable Thomas White, who promised me security and secrecy, was himself taken into custody by the li- at horse patrol. If such things happened to him what might I expect, a fugitive and an Englishman?"<sup>1</sup>

Boehm mentions certain writings of that period that criticise this notion of Asbury's and call it cowardice when compared with the trials of John Wesley, Freeborn Garrettson, Benjamin Abbot and Joseph Hartley who faced up to the persecutions rather than run away.<sup>2</sup>

Asbury tells something of the arrest and trial of Judge White in whose home he was hiding at the time when the Judge was taken. He mentions the day as "April second 1778" and that he spent the next day in fasting and prayer for his friend.<sup>3</sup> Stevens tells that the Judge was arrested on the charge of being a Methodist, and though the charge was true he was released after five weeks detention.<sup>4</sup> As bad as the persecution was during this period, in certain localities there were places of refuge such as Judge White's. The Methodists had made friends who knew their loyalty and so helped them all that they could. In fact in the South and the West the Methodists could go about their work unmolested by any feeling arising from the war.

In the Middle Atlantic Colonies the persecution was the greatest. All the Methodists were looked upon with suspicion.

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1. E.S. Tipple (Editor): The Heart of Asbury's Journal, P. 625.
2. Boehm, op. cit., pp. 292-293.
3. Tipple, The Heart of Asbury's Journal, p. 124.
4. Stevens, op. cit., Vol. I., P. 309.

Many of them went west during this period, thus preaching throughout the frontier area. Many of the societies were dispersed or could not assemble, many of their male members were drafted, and when the militia was called out, had to go into the army to fight for their country.<sup>1</sup> Lee says of the year 1776,

"The Methodists met with some particular persecutions this year. Mr. Asbury says on the 20th day of June, 'I was fined near Baltimore five pounds for preaching the gospel.' It was with great difficulty that our preachers could travel their circuits on account of the war which was spreading throughout the land."<sup>2</sup>

At times the persecution was violent for feelings ran high during the war.

"Freeborn Garrettson another of our traveling preachers, was much persecuted. One day while he was riding in Queen-Ann's county, on the eastern shore of Maryland, about the beginning of July in the same year (1778), J. Brown met him, and taking his horse by the bridle, began to beat Mr. Garrettson over the head and shoulders with a stick, and continued to beat him for some time, and then called to the servant in the field to come and help him. But Mr. Garrettson getting loose from him, gave his horse the whip, and rode off as fast as he could. Brown mounted his horse and persued him, and taking a near way, he overtook him, and making another stroke at him, by some means Garrettson was thrown from his horse falling very hard, was stunned and nearly killed."<sup>3</sup>

This incident is typical of many that happened to Garrettson and other of the itinerant preachers. In Dorchester county, Maryland, Garrettson was condemned to jail for preaching the Gospel. Many evil men took advantage of the feeling of the war to vent their spite upon these loyal citizens.<sup>4</sup> Daniels very ably presents a picture of this period:

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1. Ibid., p. 415.
2. Jesse Lee, Op. cit., p. 60.
3. Ibid., p. 65.
4. For more details of this see section 3 following.

"Pedocord, another itinerant, was attacked and beaten on the public road with such violence that he carried the scars to his grave. Foster, Wren, and Forrest were thrown into prison, and only released by their furnishing bonds for their future 'good behavior': which was understood to mean not to preach any more in the county. But there were always more counties somewhere, and thus the brave pioneers held to their work, literally obeying the command of Christ, 'When they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another,' and patiently accepted the truth of his declaration that, 'The disciple is not above his Master, nor the servant above his Lord.'"<sup>1</sup>

Truly the position of the itinerant was perilous. Danger could not frighten him from his work but sometimes the laws of the land were such as to place insurmountable barriers in their path,

"In Maryland, for example, a test oath was ordered to be administered to all doubtful persons; which oath was a pledge to take up arms in aid of the Revolution if called to do so by the colonial authorities. Of course such oaths were not for the clergy; but the itinerants were not 'clergymen'; they were only 'preachers'; and here was a convenient cudgel with which to belabor them. Whatever may have been the personal politics of Asbury, he had not come to America to shoot men, but to save them; and therefore, after being denounced as an Englishman, and escaping the death intended for him by some active revolutionist, who put a bullet through his chaise but failed to reach its occupant, he took his departure for the Colony of Delaware, where the test-oath was not so rigidly enforced."<sup>2</sup>

## 2. The Pacifistic Tendencies of Some of the Preachers

This leads to another cause of persecution which grows out of the English background of the Methodists as well as the natural suspicion of the people. Most of the Methodists were pacifists.

"Some of the Methodists were bound in conscience not to fight; and no threatenings could compel them to bear arms or hire a man to take their places. In consequence of this, some of them were whipped, some were

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1. Daniels, op. cit., p. 488.

2. Ibid., p. 454.



fined, and some imprisoned; others were sent home and many were much persecuted."<sup>1</sup> Such treatment in time of war seems natural enough, for in every war "conscientious objectors" are similarly treated. However, it was no doubt a heavier burden for these because they were also labeled as "English" and "Tory".

Jesse Lee's experience with the Army is the only one that we have recorded in detail. This experience is typical of what happened to many except that others did not have it as easy as Lee.

"He was drafted into the Revolutionary army, and was compelled to go into camp. His conscience revolted from war. 'I weighed the matter over and over again,' he says, 'but my mind was settled; as a Christian and as a preacher of the Gospel, I could not fight. I could not reconcile it to myself to bear arms, or to kill one of my fellow-creatures. However, I determined to go, and to trust in the Lord, and accordingly prepared for my journey.' He was nearly two weeks on his way to the camp. On the evening that he came in sight of it he 'lifted up his heart to God, and,' he adds, 'besought him to take my cause into his own hands and support me in the hour of trial.' He was ordered on parade. The sergeant offered him a gun, but he would not take it; the lieutenant brought him another, but he refused it. The lieutenant reported the case to the colonel, and returned again with a gun and set it down against him; he still declined to take it; he was then delivered to the guard. The colonel came and remonstrated with him, but unable to answer his objections, left him again to the custody of the guard. Far away from his brethren, solitary amid the clamors and vices of the camp, considered as a fanatic or a maniac, he knew not what would be the issue of his singular condition but he was determined to obey his conscience."<sup>2</sup>

Lee spent much time in prayer while under guard and his peace and security in God never left him. That was the first and last night that he was under guard. In the morning as began preaching and touched the hearts of many of the soldiers. Again the colonel

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1. Jesse Lee, op. cit., p. 77.
2. Stevens, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 408.

talked with him on the subject of bearing arms, but he says, "I told him I could not kill a man with good conscience, but I was a friend to my country, and was willing to do anything I could while I continued in the army, except that of fighting."<sup>1</sup> For the rest of his service in the army Lee drove the baggage wagon continuing to preach whenever he had opportunity.

There was never any doubt as to Lee's loyalty but other preachers were considered Torys and that, along with their pacifism, brought them much persecution and hardship.

### 3. Political Confusion and Practical Christianity

The general unrest and confusion of the war period was the cause of much persecution that cannot be blamed directly on the war. People were stirred up and violent, and the Methodists were among those who were objects of this wrath. Many of them were ill-treated merely on being accused of preaching the Gospel. On the twenty-fifth of February, 1780, Freeborn Garrettson was judged and condemned in Dorchester county, Maryland, for preaching the Gospel. Two days afterwards he was thrust into Cambridge prison, and the keys were taken away to prevent his friends from administering unto him.<sup>2</sup> At another time Garrettson was nearly beaten to death for no other offense than that of being a Methodist preacher.

The experience of John Hartley is worthy of note. In Queen Ann county he was "bound over" in penal bonds of five hundred pounds

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1. Ibid., p. 409

2. Jesse Lee, op. cit., p. 74

not to preach any more in the county. So he went to Talbot county. Here he was put in prison where he was kept for considerable time. However, he took up his ministry from the window of his cell. Soon great crowds came to hear him and the work of the Lord progressed faster than ever. On Sundays the people came for fifteen miles around to hear him preach and many were converted. The feeling ran so high in favor of Hartley that the magistrates were glad to turn him loose on the condition that he would preach no more in Talbot county.<sup>1</sup>

#### 4. The Results of the Political Opposition

Though it was freely maintained that the Methodist body was an agency for Tory propaganda, there was no proof of that assertion. In New York the leading Methodists were thorough loyalists. Elsewhere the membership was divided as to political sentiment. However, the prejudice against the Methodists was so pronounced that many innocent individuals suffered.

##### a. The Methodists were separated from the English Methodists.

Such conditions are bound to have some ensuing results, and indeed they did have. As has been said before, all of the English preachers except Asbury hurried back to England. The result of this was virtually to sever the American Methodists from England. Though they still showed a reverence for John Wesley and a willingness to take his orders, they were really now free.

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1. Daniels, op. cit., p. 499.

This tended to show John Wesley the advisability of setting up an American Church. It is to be doubted that the organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church would have come at all or at least not as soon as 1784, had it not been for the persecution of the Methodists during the war in the face of their real loyalty to America. It is true that the Episcopal Church in America faced the same persecution. Yet when their English clergy returned to England, they did not have the native leaders to take over. One can little doubt that the credit for the continued growth and strength of the Methodists is owed to those native itinerant preachers who literally gave their lives for the sake of the Gospel they were called to preach.

b. The Methodists were scattered over the continent.

Another result that has far reaching claims upon the success of the Methodists in the years to come was the fact that the persecutions scattered them throughout the frontier of America. Thus, when the war was over, there came from all parts of the west, through the mail and personal entreaty, the call for preachers to come. It cannot be doubted that such a condition was an important cause of tremendous work which was undertaken by the circuit riders in the next fifty years. Surely if it had not been for this scattering of the people called Methodists, the Methodist Church today would not be the biggest Protestant body in the United States.

c. The Methodists were purged of weaklings and undesirables.

A third result, which is important but difficult to judge as to its effect upon the growth of Methodism, was the fact that the persecution tended to weed out many of those who were not of strong character. The records spend very little time in discussing or evaluating this result because those that fell by the wayside are no more heard from and those who persevered are the ones who, with the help of God, built the American Methodist Church. Many of the English preachers that returned to England were good and great men. However, they made little lasting contribution to the American church as such, except for the fact that many of the great souls such as Lee, Garrettson, Hartley, and Abbott were converted under their preaching. Many of them were great preachers but they did not have the courage and vision of Francis Asbury to carry forward Methodism in a new country. So it can be said, at least of many of them, that their return to England was an asset to the American Methodists.

Thus when the peace came in 1783 and a new nation entered the family of nations, it was timely too for a new church to enter the family of churches. "Asbury might well say, 'I am truly sorry that the venerable man (Wesley) ever dipped into the politics of America.' But, sorry or not, the harm had been done, and a breach created which made it impossible much longer to conduct the work in America merely as a branch of a main movement in England."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Luccock and Hutchinson, op. cit., p. 155.

### C. The American Frontier

In the face of all manner of troubles and persecutions the Methodists continued to preach the Gospel. Their message, though as broad as the scriptures would permit, contained two main emphases. The first was a condemnation of all manner of specific sins. The second was that the grace of God is free for all men and avails for even the vilest sinner and can save him from his sin. There was a definite note of joy and gladness in their hearts when they saw sinners brought to Christ.

In the face of such a message the Devil was ever at work. Evil people of the frontier did not like these preachers because they exposed wickedness wherever they found it. According to the Methodist preachers the mobs and ruffians of the frontier were the work of Satan himself. Indeed, throughout all the history of the Christian Church one finds this sort of persecution wherever the Church condemns specific evils of the day.

In spite of the troubles of the frontier as well as those of the war one need not think that these Methodists became victims of a persecution complex. In fact the writings of these men who endured these experiences, speak far more of the glory of winning souls for Christ than they do of the hardships through which they were passing.<sup>1</sup> It is only in the light of contemporary history and through the eyes of some of the men who lived through this period

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1. See Introduction, p. iv.

and then stopped to look back, that we see the true picture. Jesse Lee, Henry Boehm, and Francis Asbury have comparatively little to say about the hardships. Yet, such hardships were important to the development of the early Methodist church -- seen as much in what these men did as in what they said.

#### 1. The Indian and the Natural Barriers of the Frontier

The itinerant ministry of the Methodist church of this time was not a task for weaklings. It took all there was of a man and very often his life in the early years of his ministry. Many died in the work from disease and the dangers of the frontier. Others were so broken in health that they could no longer travel and so were stationed in one location where the people were close enough together to be ministered to with little travel. They were truly heroes, and only men of such caliber could have done what they did. Martyrs? Some of them, no doubt, could be called so. Yet they would not have themselves called martyrs, for they succeeded in conquering the fields into which they went.

Daniels says of William Watters who was the first native born American to enter the Methodist itinerancy,

"To enter this ministry was to face the certainty of poverty, privation, dangers, ridicule, and opposition. with a good prospect of mob violence and martyrdom; and in this view of the subject the act of this young man in leading what was to be the long column of American itinerants was one of the most heroic things ever done in this country."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Daniels, op cit., p. 439.

### a. Indians

The Methodist itinerants along with the other pioneers on the frontier were confronted with the problem of the hostile Indian. The red man was not content to remain still and watch the progressing encroachment of the white man upon his hunting grounds. Thus, American history tells of massacres, scalplings, and numerous encounters with the Indians. The history of Methodism is not different from American History in this respect. It was considered one of the ordinary dangers of the road when the roll-call of the frontier conference would bring out among other responses, "Killed by the Indians."

"How many itinerants fell victim to their zeal and faithfulness it is not possible to determine; but the chance of being pierced by an arrow or a bullet and of being scalped afterward, was one of the ordinary dangers which the itinerants of those times and regions deliberately encountered. If they escaped it was well; if they were killed, they only reached glory the sooner."<sup>1</sup>

### b. Storm, Flood, Cold

These men, however, had even a greater barrier on the frontier than the Indian. Such things as cold, storm, and flood, took a toll of their strength. Richmond Nolley gave his life to the cause and died on a trip from freezing weather.<sup>2</sup> The preachers themselves might be blamed for such hardships, for they never turned back. It seemed as though they were under compulsion to go on to the next place of service, rain or shine, and go they did. Francis Asbury is one supreme example of these itinerants. There is a statue of him that stands in Washington. It shows a rider in bronze-

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1. Ibid., p. 572.

2. Ibid., p. 520.



but a rider far different from the general equestrian monuments in the capitol city. This rider is weary, and astride a weary horse. The fatigue of hard trails lies heavily on man and beast.

"Even the high collar of the riding cape has failed to keep out the chill and the rain and the snow. The legs of the horse are heavy with mud. The boots of the rider are alike bespattered. There is a feeling of intense exhaustion, even in the cold bronze. But, from under the wide brim of the low hat, two burning eyes look out. Those eyes see little of the wilderness trail, with all its hardships. They see a new nation at birth. They see that nation devoted to the service of God. And it is not so much because of the incredible toils which he endured as because of the boundless visions which he followed that Francis Asbury rides to-day in the nation's capitol."<sup>1</sup>

And because Francis Asbury was the man that he was, he could face the hardships of more miles than even the great founder of Methodism, John Wesley. Dr. Tipple condenses this phase of his life in a paragraph:

"Asbury was constantly in personal danger. Wolves follow him; his horse falls; he crosses the Patomac in an open boat; he is lost in the swamps of South Carolina -- 'O how terrible to be here in the dark!' in the blackness of the night he is bruised by trees; his saddle turns and he falls from his horse; he fords the Catawba and finds himself 'among the rocks and in the whirlpools,' escaping with difficulty; through another's carelessness he is 'nearly burnt up'; he falls downstairs; his horse, startled, throws him into a millrace, and his shoulder is hurt; a whirlwind, accompanied by hailstones 'of such a size that three stones filled a pint measure' nearly overcomes him; his horse falls on the ice, and Asbury's leg is caught under him; night overtakes him the mountains, 'among the rocks and woods and dangers on all sides'; he has to 'swim a long creek'; ruffians seek his life, a bullet grazing his head as he rides through the forest."<sup>2</sup>

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1. Luccock and Hutchinson, op. cit., pp. 233-234.
2. Tipple, The Prophet of the Long Road, p. 170.

## c. Disease

Perhaps the greatest foe of the frontier preacher was disease. And there is little wonder, with bodies weakened by overwork, undernourishment, and lack of sleep. Asubry was really unfit for travel much of the time he was on the road. He writes in his journal for July 14, 1774, "I have now been sick near ten months, and many days closely confined; yet I have preached about three hundred times, and rode near two thousand miles in that ime; though very frequently in a high fever."<sup>1</sup> Again on July 8, 1782, he writes, "I am sick and weary--ah! how few are there who would not choose strangling rather than life and the labors we undergo, and the hardships and privations we are compelled to submit to! Blessed be God, we have hope beyond the grave."<sup>2</sup>

"He journeyed when he had a kind of chill and headache; he went more than six hundred miles with an inflammatory fever and fixed pain in his breast; he traveled for a period of four months during which he was constantly ill, and covered not less than three thousand miles; he went when he had a boil on his face and another on his eye; when his leg was inflamed; when his breast was inflamed; when he had influenza; when he had a 'putrid sore throat'; when he had a toothache; when he had a high fever; when he was so weak he was ready to faint; when he was in pain from head to foot; when he had a running blister on his side; when he was so ill that his friends expected his speedy death; so ill that to him death would have been welcome; when he had only strength enough to write in his Journal, 'pain, pain, pain'; through rain and snow, through heat, drought, and dust, without food, without drink, over mountains, through deep rivers and muddy creeks, on, on, on, day after day, month after month, year after year, one decade, two, three, four decades, until he reaches the end of the Road and is at rest."<sup>3</sup>

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1. Tipple, The Heart of Asbury's Journal, p. 69.
2. Ibid., p. 210.
3. Tipple, The Prophet of the Long Road, p. 172.

The example of Francis Asbury is used for it is typical of all the itinerants. The only difference lies in the fact that the leader had for his circuit the whole of the United States that was settled, while his associates had shorter circuits of only one state or a few counties. And he survived such a life longer than most of them! Was it the "Long Road" that made these men the giants and heroes that they were? Probably not, but it tested, tried, refined, and toughened the steel out of which they were made!

#### d. The Road They Traveled

Besides the hardships of the natural elements and of disease there were other conditions of the "Road" that were far from desirable. At the end of a long hard trail they had no soft bed to sleep in, nor time nor place to study and read. Asbury says of such conditions,

"In many circuits the preachers have hardly an opportunity of reading their Bibles, much less anything else. A great part of the day is taken up in riding, preaching, and meeting the classes; and very often at night there is a large family, but one room for all, and sometimes no candle; so that I think it would be well, under such circumstances, if the preachers could have one spare day in every week for the purpose of improving themselves."<sup>1</sup>

Most of these men were truly men without homes. The only things they could call their own were their horse and saddle bags. Yet they had many homes, for the people learned to love them and the home of every loyal Methodist was open to them. They were as Abraham, "sojourners" in the land, and as their Master they had no place to lay their heads. Modern scholars may "smile" at their methods and find flaws in some of

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1. Tipple, The Heart of Asbury's Journal, p. 138.

their theology, but the devotion they had to their task is not matched by today's preachers.

Bishop Asbury tells of his experiences on the road in Tennessee:

"What a road have we passed. Certainly the worst on the whole continent, even in the best weather. Yet, bad as it was, there were four or five hundred crossing the rude hills while we were. I was powerfully struck with the consideration that there were at least as many thousand emigrants annually from East to West. We must take care to send preachers after these people. We have made one thousand and eighty miles from Philadelphia; and now, what a detail of sufferings might I give, fatiguing to me to write, and perhaps to my friends to read.....I too have my sufferings, perhaps peculiar to myself---no room to retire to; that in which you sit common to all, crowded with women and children, the fire occupied by cooking, much and long-loved solitude not to be found, unless you choose to run out into the rain, in the woods. Six months in the year I have had, for thirty-two years, occasionally, to submit to what will never be agreeable to me; but the people, it must be confessed, are among the kindest souls in the world. But kindness will not make a crowded log cabin, twelve feet by ten, agreeable; without are cold and rain, and within six adults, and as many children, one of which is all motion; the dogs, too, must sometimes be admitted. On Saturday I found that among my other trials I had taken an uncomfortable skin disease; and, considering the filthy houses and filthy beds I have met with, in coming from Kentucky Conference, it is perhaps strange that I have not caught it twenty times. I do not see that there is any security against it, but by sleeping in a brimstone shirt. Poor bishop!"<sup>1</sup>

According to Daniels, the chief struggle of the day was with distance.<sup>2</sup> Philip Catch, who entered the itinerancy in the same year as William Watters, had the whole of the State of New Jersey for his parish. On May 16, 1806 at the age of sixty Asbury writes, "Since April 16, 1805, I have, according to my reckoning, traveled five thousand miles."<sup>3</sup> And these men did not have the air conditioned

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1. Ibid., pp. 537-538.
2. Daniels, op. cit., p. 372.
3. Tipple, The Heart of Asbury's Journal. p. 576.

pullman cars in which to ride! Neither did they have the automobiles nor the fine roads that cross America today! They traveled on horseback and by foot, over trails that were all but impassable even in good weather. Thus, few as they were, they accepted the whole of the country as their parish and covered it even when they had to make new trails. Wherever men made trails into the wilderness there these itinerants followed them.

One cannot say that distance in their travels was entirely negative in its contribution. Though it slowed them up in their attempt to reach every man it gave them time to do their reading and thinking. As difficult as it was to read in the saddle, that was about the only time they had for it. They would compose their sermons as they traveled from one place to the next. So the time was not all lost.

## 2. Frontier Rowdiness -- License of Frontier Freedom

The hardships of the American frontier discussed in the former section were of a natural type that any pioneer might encounter. The Methodist itinerants, however, met another kind of opposition which proved to be especially difficult in their particular work. Satan ever places his human agents in the way of the Christian missionary and the American frontier harbored its share of these!

"It is noteworthy how a holy daring, an almost reckless abandon has characterized the itinerants of Christian history....They were always in the forefront of every peril, counting not their lives dear unto themselves so that they might finish their course with joy. Fearlessness is an essential element of a conquering faith, and this the Methodist itinerants never lacked. Why should they be afraid? The man who is here to-day, and to-morrow forty

miles further on, need have no fear of the wrath of hearers whose consciences have been awakened and whose unholy practices have been denounced. But this is not the explanation. What they possessed was the holy venturesomeness of consecrated men, which always carries with it tremendous powers of conviction and persuasion."<sup>1</sup>

This opposition was similar to much that happened during the Revolution. In fact there was many a moral reprobate during the Revolution that used patriotic excuses for persecution of the severest sort. Since the trials of the Revolution have been thoroughly discussed this section will deal mostly with those frontier troubles not related to the war.

Moral conditions on the frontier were desperate. Kentucky at that time was on the edge of the western advance. The moral conditions were very low and the preachers entering the country aroused intense hostility, mainly because they preached against specific moral evils.<sup>2</sup> And such was their purpose. Benjamin Abbott was an itinerant that went into the worst areas of lawlessness and crime. "Such a bold invasion of the strongholds of Satan was likely to be resented by that great adversary of souls, and various and desperate were the efforts made by his servants to frighten or defeat this sturdy evangelist." At one place he heard of a crowd of ruffians who had threatened to tar and feather any Methodist preacher who should venture to open his mouth in their settlement. But the settlement was in his line of duty and there he went-- though he says he considered the disagreeable effect of tar to his

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1. Tipple, The Prophet of the Long Road, pp. 169-170.
2. W.E. Arnold: A History of Methodism in Kentucky, Vol. I, pp. 19-34.

clothes and hair! When he arrived at the house where he was to preach he was trembling so that he could hardly speak. He gave out a hymn but no one sang. So he knelt in prayer. Before the prayer was over the Spirit of God fell and he says, "it instantly removed from me the fear of man." He preached so powerfully that there were tears in the eyes of many, even of those who were his enemies.<sup>1</sup> Truly, it was by means of prayer and bold preaching that these itinerants were able to conquer their enemies most of the time!

a. Mobs

As the itinerants went into the communities and preached against the specific evils there, it often seemed as though the very forces of evil came out against them in the form of mob violence. In Charlestown, Asbury was trying to hold a conference and twice in one day he was attacked by a mob.<sup>2</sup> This was but another trial that they were ready to endure as part of their work. In places on the frontier they were just as much in danger from the "semi-barbarous" white men "who had a constitutional hatred for all ministers, especially these," as from Indians and storms.<sup>3</sup> Almost every new community in which the Methodist went there were mobs that were bent on hindering and stopping the work of the preachers if that was possible. The strange thing about it was that they very seldom succeeded. It is a human story and one finds various things other than the religious endeavors of the itinerants that helps to quell the mobs. Henry

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1. Daniels, op. cit., p. 444.
2. Ibid., p. 514.
3. Ibid., p. 517.

Boehm tells of a time when he went into a new community about ten miles from Wilmington and with some of his brother preachers had succeeded in setting up a society of Methodists. He describes this incident:

"When we first preached there some tried to mob us. They gathered around the door and tried to rush in and seize us. I was preaching, and Brother Hunter was with me. There was a strong man who stood at the door with a stone in his hand and took sides with us, and threatened to knock down the first man who touched us. So he frightened the rowdies, and we preached on unmolested. He was a large Irishman, and one reason he interested himself so much on our behalf was that Brother Hunter was an Irishman, and he was determined that his countryman should not be abused."<sup>1</sup>

There were still other incidents of mob action that did not turn out so fortunately for the preachers. They were beaten and there were many fights brought on by the well-meaning allies of the preachers. There are even incidents where the preachers themselves were not content to be passive resisters when it came to mobs and rowdies. Peter Cartwright was one of these. Bangs tells of an incident during a camp meeting when a crowd of rough fellows came to break up the meeting. It turned into a free-for-all, with the preachers taking part. Cartwright himself a man of great physical prowess had a hand in roughing up a few of the rowdies including their leader. The next day all of the preachers in camp except Cartwright were so conscience-smitten by what had happened, that none of them would get up and preach. However, Cartwright took over and the camp meeting went on as usual.<sup>2</sup> But such incidents were comparatively few, for those

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1. Boehm, op. cit., pp. 169-170.

2. Stevens, op. cit., Vol. IV, pp. 373-375.



preachers more often won by the power of their personalities and of God than by physical prowess. A more typical scene is that of a preacher preaching the mob under conviction for their sins.

Often the action of the mobs took on the form of the destruction of property rather than of life.

"The first meeting house that was ever built by the Methodists on the eastern shore of Maryland, was in Kent county, about 9 miles below Chester town, in the spring of 1774, and was called Kent meeting house. Many of the wicked neighbors were violently opposed to the building of that house, and after the workmen had prepared the frame in order to raise it the next day, some evil designing men came in the night, and broke the rafters to pieces, to prevent the house being raised."<sup>1</sup>

Francis Asbury tells a personal experience that he had when he was traveling on the frontiers:

"We rode down to the Crab Orchard, where we found company enough, some of whom were very wild. We had a company of our own, and refused to go with them. Some of them gave us very abusive language, and one man went up on a hill above us, and fired a pistol toward our company. We resolved to travel in our order, and bound ourselves by honor and conscience to support and defend each other and to see every man through the wilderness. But we could not depend upon wicked and unprincipled men, who would leave and neglect us, and even curse us to our faces."<sup>2</sup>

Such seemed to be the nature of many groups in which the frontier itinerant found himself.

#### b. Indifference

One of the types of opposition on the frontier which was even more difficult to combat than the mobs, was that of indifference to the Gospel. Asbury tells of coming to a town, "that seat of sin," where the people were gay and idle and he says about this, "I am

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1. Jesse Lee, op. cit., p. 50.

2. Tipple, The Heart of Asbury's Journal, p. 363.

afraid I shall spend nine or ten days here to little purpose."<sup>1</sup>  
 There were no mobs of ruffians but it was a harder barrier to pierce than if there had been. The men that went out to take St. Louis were so discouraged about that place that all except Jesse Walker left for more fertile fields. He too almost gave up but stopped after he had ridden a few miles and thought of his failure. Thinking of the power of God that he had at his back, he turned around and went back to "Take St. Louis". And take it he did.<sup>2</sup>

Henry Boehm tells of his experiences at Reading, Pennsylvania in 1803:

"I had made an appointment to preach in the court-house at Reading but the commissioner refused to give up the key, so a large number who had assembled were disappointed. There was in this town a deep-rooted prejudice against the Methodists, which continued for years. When I passed through Reading in 1810 with Bishop Asbury the boys laughed at us,...and said, 'There go th Methodist preachers.' They knew us by our garb, and perhaps thought it no harm to ridicule us....In 1822 I succeeded in planting Methodism in Reading, and formed the first class there----We put up at a public-house, for there was no family to entertain us. Some young men rented the school-house for us to preach in, but we still met with much opposition and ridicule."<sup>3</sup>

#### c. Immorality, Drunkenness, Adultery

By far the most frequent type of opposition on the frontier came from individuals who were under the influence of liquor and the spirit of evil, a type of opposition that one finds wherever there is evil to be fought against. Things similar to this meeting described by Asbury happened many times and in many different

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1. Ibid., p. 365.
2. Steven, op. cit., Vol IV, pp. 361ff.
3. Boehm, op. cit., pp. 108-109.

communities:

"In the afternoon there was an uproar among the people. Some intoxicated young men seated themselves by the women, and refused to remove until compelled. They fought those men who came to take them away, and when the presiding elder interfered they struck at him, and one of the guards also, who was helping by order of the constable. The Owego gentry fled away cackling falsehood like wild geese. One Kemp, chief bully, arrested A. Owen, on Monday morning, for Sabbath-breaking, drunkenness, and fighting of this Kemp and his crew. The presiding elder was charged with having struck Kemp and his crew, and then running away. Nor was the poor bishop spared. He too had been fighting. It was well for him that he was not on the ground at the time. I was quiet in my room."<sup>1</sup>

Philip Gatch was in need of all the courage that he could muster to continue his work. In Maryland a ruffian attempted to strike him with a chair while he was kneeling in prayer. On another occasion he was seized by two men who tortured him by turning his arms backward in a circle, almost dislocating his shoulders. In another place a conspiracy to murder him was uncovered. Why was he subjected to all of this treatment? Simply because he continued to rebuke the sins of the people.<sup>2</sup> He had the idea, like most of these men that would dare to enter the Methodist itinerancy, that where there was most evil, there they should go and preach the Gospel!

To explain these actions one must understand the thinking and the accepted way of acting on the frontier. There was much consumption of liquor. Sweet says, "In the rough society of the frontier the amounts of liquor consumed were incredible. Everyone, with practically no exception, seemed to have indulged, including

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1. Tipple, The Heart of Asbury's Journal, pp. 588-589.
2. Tipple, The Prophet of the Long Road, pp. 194-195.

women, and even the preachers."<sup>1</sup> Whisky was considered with bread and meat as one of the necessities. Under such conditions it is not surprising that there was excessive drinking and much quarreling and fighting. And in much of the fighting no rules were observed.

Along with the drinking of liquor came much immorality such as rape, bigamy and adultery. The moral life of much of the frontier was definitely at a low ebb. A missionary at Painsville, Ohio, in 1827 reports that of the more than one hundred families in the town with seven stores, four taverns, one printing house, five lawyers, and four physicians, the local church had only one male member and six females. No wonder that he goes on to say, "the moral and religious condition of this region is more deplorable than that of any other which I have known."<sup>2</sup>

Thus, when the Methodist preachers came into these communities they preached against these things. But not only did they preach against them but they presented a way of life to follow. There were two results of this type of preaching that stressed a doctrine of holiness. The first was that the Methodist Episcopal Church was the fastest growing of all the churches because it was that which met the moral need of the frontier. The second was that evil did not give up without a struggle and thus one needed brave and strong men to take the Gospel into the parts where evil abounded. There are times when modern critics look down upon the rough and outspoken preachers of

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1. W.W.Sweet: Men of Zeal, p. 196.
2. Ibid., p. 199.

that day as though they were very stupid and uneducated in their approach. Blundering into evil situations and condemning specific evils of any situation is just not done today! Yet, in the recording of their acts, history has vindicated them. In no other way could these men have succeeded in the task of "taking America".

This opposition of evil men was not only a natural result of their approach but it led them to great things. It gleaned the chaff from out of the wheat. Men who were weak in spirit could not take it, and men who were strong were strengthened.

Here again is found that strange paradox: though these frontier preachers were subjected to much extreme opposition, one does not find them dwelling much on it in their journals and their letters. They were more interested in what was accomplished than in the hardship they endured.<sup>1</sup>

#### D. Summary

The political and social opposition of the period from 1770 until 1836, was most often that of violence and hatred. During the Revolutionary War the Methodists became an object of hatred because they were considered enemies to the freedom for which the colonists were fighting. The Methodists were imprisoned and beaten. They had to fly for their lives at times. They were suspected and hated. All of this was caused by the fact that they definitely had an English "taint". All of their preachers at the beginning of the

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1. Cf. Introduction, p. iv.

War were Englishmen and they were all forced to leave the country except Francis Asbury who went into hiding for over two years. After the English preachers left, native Americans took over and carried the work of Methodism forward. They did so at the very peril of their lives. Another factor in their persecution was John Wesley himself. He was considered the leader of the Methodists and known to be an ardent Tory. It was natural that the Methodists were thought to hold his ideas.

Then too, it was seen that the Methodists for the most part were pacifists. They considered that God had called them to save men, not to kill them. They refused to fight and to sign loyalty pledges.

These things along with the political confusion and moral laxity of the period brought many severe, and often violent acts of persecution.

The result of this opposition was three-fold: 1. It scattered the Methodists over the Colonies driving many of them to the frontier to escape persecution. 2. It drove all of the English preachers home thus preparing the way for an independent American church. 3. Only those strong in spirit and courageous could live as the Methodist preacher had to live, and so many unworthy members were left by the wayside. This tended to strengthen the church.

Opposition on the American frontier was for other reasons than the persecution during the Revolution. In the first place the frontier was a wilderness with many troubles and trials of the pioneer. There were Indians, storms, and disease. Moreover, there were no good roads and no place for the traveller to sleep outside of

his own blanket. In the second place, there was much evil and immorality on the frontier. This tended to make people hostile to Methodists, when they were found preaching against evil and exhorting to a holy life.

CHAPTER III  
DOCTRINAL AND ECCLESIASTICAL OPPOSITION



### CHAPTER III

#### DOCTRINAL AND ECCLESIASTICAL OPPOSITION

##### A. Introduction

In approaching the doctrinal and ecclesiastical opposition to early Methodism, it is necessary to understand that this was quite different from the political and social opposition of the last chapter. Whereas the latter more often assumed the form of physical persecution, this, though there were cases of violence, was far more an opposition of ridicule and argument. Slander is sometimes harder to bear than physical violence and many a Methodist meeting was broken up in an argument over some trivial point -- raised with that intention.

The different sections of this chapter will be somewhat overlapping in that they are interrelated. The first consideration will be with the particularly hard field, New England. The section on Calvinism could easily be combined with this one on New England because most of New England was extremely Calvinistic. However, it is hard to tell how much of the New England opposition stems from doctrine. There were other and more real issues there. The real problem was economic, social, and psychological. The well educated clergy of New England looked down upon the uneducated Methodist itinerants who were coming into their territory. Then too, they were afraid that the economic security they had achieved might be endangered by these new arrivals. They received their pay from

taxes levied upon all except those who could prove their support of a dissenting church.

The next point to be discussed will be the Doctrine of the Church, which was challenged on one side by the Episcopalians as not being authoritative and on the other side by the Baptists, Presbyterians, and Congregationalists as being too much of a hierarchy. Some attention will be given to New England in this respect. But it was in the South, the stronghold of the Protestant Episcopal Church, that most of the opposition of this nature arose.

Finally a section will be devoted to doctrinal opposition. One finds that the Congregationalists in New England and the Presbyterians and Baptists all over the country were opposed to the Methodists on the ground of Arminianism. These three considerations will round out this study of early colonial opposition to Methodism in this country.

#### B. The Intellectual, Political, and Economic Security of the Established Churches in New England

This section is dealing specifically with New England because it is there that the Methodists found their strongest opposition. It will slightly overlap the material of the following two sections and yet it is necessary to consider New England separately because of the intellectual, political, and economic condition of the established clergy in that section of the country. Though the doctrinal differences and the struggles that arose from them were sometimes violent, the real motive behind much of the opposition was fear that the Methodists

were endangering the security of the established churches and their clergy.<sup>1</sup>

"The red Indian did not watch the encroachments of the pale-faces upon his hunting-grounds with more anxiety and jealousy than did the orthodox Churches of New England watch the efforts of the first itinerants to establish the Methodist order and the Arminian theology in their midst."<sup>2</sup>

The best characterization of New England at that time comes from Minton Thrift who knew, not only the country, but also the men that went into New England to establish Methodism:

"In attempting to portray the religious views and feelings of the people in the New England states at that period, it will be necessary to apprise the reader that the Revolutionary War, which had changed the civil administration of the United States, did not produce any material change with regard to the ground which was occupied by the standing order of the Eastern States. It is true that the powers of ecclesiastical courts were circumscribed, and the right guaranteed to every one that he should worship God according to the dictates of his own conscience. But though this was the case, their ecclesiastical and civil regulations were so interwoven that the one derived support from the other. All who could not produce a certificate that they attended worship and paid for its support in some dissenting congregation, were obliged, by law, to pay in proportion to their income, to the standing and privileged order, the Presbyterians and Congregationalists. All were born of these orders. This was their religion supported by law. And having long maintained these exclusive rights and immunities, and being exceedingly tenacious of their privileges, and the peculiarities of their theological tenets, they were prepared to resist any innovations which might be attempted. And as Methodism, in several respects, presented points directly at variance with their established doctrines, it required no little intrepidity to enter their enclosure, and present, as must be done, a hostile attitude."<sup>3</sup>

In order to understand the opposition and the reasons for it, it is necessary to understand something of this background. New

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1. Cf. Daniels, op. cit., pp. 541-546.
2. Ibid., p. 539.
3. Minton Thrift: Memoirs of the Rev. Jesse Lee, pp. 106-107.

England by this time had recovered from the Great Awakening. Assurance of salvation to the New England clergy was heresy and they openly proclaimed from the pulpit that the preacher need not have any personal experience to proclaim such to others. Many of the clergy were "converted" under the preaching of Whitefield but on his third trip to America he found that in New England many of the clergy associations had issued statements condemning him. Thus the intellectual opposition that had deposed Edwards from his pulpit was bringing hostile pressure to bear against Whitefield and later in the period covered by this paper, brought that pressure also to bear against the Methodist itinerants. That is not to say that the Great Awakening did not have its great effects and that men like Jonathan Edwards did not leave their mark. But when the faculties of both Yale and Harvard took the battlefield against men like Whitefield and Edwards, one finds that the spiritual prospects of the New England Church were not bright. In Boston itself in 1785, which was five years prior to Jesse Lee's arrival, there were alive actually less than half the churches that had existed a half century before. No wonder that Methodism felt there was work to be done in New England! <sup>1</sup>

#### 1. Jesse Lee

New England was officially entered by the Methodists in

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1. Cf. Stevens, op cit., Vol. II, Book 4, Chapter 5, and Baker: An Introduction to the History of Early New England Methodism for a more detailed account of the condition of New England during this period.

1790, although itinerants had wandered into that territory since the beginnings of Methodism in this country. This particular chapter of its history would never have been written, had it not been for Jesse Lee, one of the greatest religious pioneers of his time.<sup>1</sup>

"A less resolute mind would have shrunk from so arduous an undertaking. But Jesse Lee moved under an impression that he was called of God, especially to this work; and the result fully justified his pretensions, and evinced the purity of his motives, and the rectitude of his conduct. Neither the terror of an established ministry, arrayed in all the armour of human learning, and supported as it was, by the civil authority, nor the anticipated opposition of the majority of the people, who were known to be strongly attached to all their peculiarities, could intimidate or in the least dishearten the soul of Jesse Lee."<sup>2</sup>

The time of Methodism's establishment in New England is dated from the initial visit of Lee to Boston:

"On a serene afternoon of July, 1790, a man of middle age, of a benign but shrewd countenance, and dressed in a style of simplicity which might have been supposed the guise of a Quaker, took his stand upon a table to preach....Four persons approached, and gazed upon him with surprise, while he sang a hymn. It was sung by his solitary voice; at its conclusion he knelt down upon the table, and stretching forth his hands, prayed with a fervor so unwonted in the cool and minute petitions of the Puritan pulpits, that it attracted the groups of promenaders who had come to spend an evening hour in the shady walks, and by the time he rose from his knees they were streaming in processions, from the different points of the Common, toward him. While he opened his small Bible and preached to them without 'notes', but with 'the demonstration of the Spirit and of power,' the multitude grew into a dense, mass three thousand strong, eagerly catching every utterance of the singular stranger, and some of them received his message into 'honest and good hearts.'"<sup>3</sup>

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1. Cf. Stevens, op cit., Vol. II, p. 491. Lee is placed along side of such men of New England as Mathers, Williams, Edwards, Channing, and Ballou.  
Cf. Luccock and Hutchinson, op. cit., p. 226. At the general conference of 1800 Lee was defeated for the bishopric by only four votes.
2. Thrift, op. cit., p. 107.
3. Stevens, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 403-404.

One might think from an auspicious beginning that things from then on would have been easy for the preacher. But such was not the case. He had to preach out on the Common that day because there was no building open to him. The lasting results of that meeting could be seen when Lee came back to Boston at later times and was hardly able to find a place to sleep.

"Who would have anticipated such serious impediments as Mr. Lee found in the city of Boston? Prejudice and bigotry held such dominion over the minds of these good Christian people, that no house of worship, not even a school-house, could be procured for a Methodist preacher."<sup>1</sup>

Lee himself tells of a typical happening in his ministry. He came into the town of Fairfield and obtained the use of the town hall for his preaching. He also advertised in the school. He says, "I waited till after the time, and no one came; at last I went and opened the door, and sat down."<sup>2</sup> Finally three or four women came and by the end there were about thirty or forty there. But Lee does not dwell upon the opposition. He only speaks about the success!

Many places where this Methodist preacher went, he could get the use of no building and had to preach in the open.<sup>3</sup> In some towns a private home was opened to him. In other places there was a more "liberal" church that would open its doors. At times when he had the use of the town buildings he had to do his own janitor work should there be need of a fire or the moving of chairs.

Again and again he spoke of meeting with the ministers who

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1. Thrift, op cit., p. 168.
2. Stevens, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 419.
3. Cf. Thrift, op. cit., p. 108.

were almost always against him. He says in his journal:

"A congregational minister came by, and being informed who I was, asked me home with him; and after I had been there a while, he asked me some questions relative to matters of doctrines and I endeavored to inform him what kind of doctrines we preached; he said he could not invite me into the meeting-house, because I held what he thought was contrary to Gospel."<sup>1</sup>

An incident like this is of the mildest sort. At one time he was denied lodging at a certain place he had stopped before, a public inn, because the minister of the inn-keeper had complained.<sup>2</sup>

In another locality after Lee had preached, one of the two preachers in the audience left saying that "he should set himself in order against the next sabbath day, to expose the errors which his people had heard that day."<sup>3</sup> Another experience that he tells shows the change of the thinking of some of the people because of the opposition of their leaders. He had just preached at Stratfield where he had been before.

"After the meeting I observed that some of the people who always spoke to me went away and took no notice of me; and no person gave me an invitation to his house, which was an uncommon thing, for formerly I had various invitations. But I understood that they had been buffeted by the ministers from the pulpit, and by their acquaintance in private, till they hardly knew what to do. One minister had been trying for two or three times, in his sermons, to prove that a man could not fall from grace; and another turned loose upon us and said from the pulpit there were six hundred of us going about the country, preaching damnable doctrines, and picking men's pockets."<sup>4</sup>

Scudder helps in understanding what was said against the

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1. Ibid., p. 111.
2. Cf. Stevens, op. cit., Vol II, p. 426.
3. Thrift, op. cit., p. 127.
4. Stevens, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 426.

## Methodists:

"The pulpit of every prominent denomination of the land uttered and repeated its denunciations against them...the people were warned against Methodist preachers as 'wolves in sheeps clothing.'.....The itinerants were assailed, and drawn into controversy, at their various appointments, and compelled to defend Methodism against every form of cavil and misrepresentation."<sup>1</sup>

Contempt, scorn and all sorts of name-calling issued from the clergy of New England. The itinerants were accused of being intruders into other men's parishes and "stealing sheep." A letter by Dr. Huntington says, "The modern Methodist teachers are men of Machiavellian principles, and do, without any scruples, make use of truth and deceit promiscuously, as they judge will most promote the interest of their party."<sup>2</sup> There were sermons and tracts published against the Methodists with extreme charges of heresy.

"The doctrines of the new sect were thoroughly canvassed, and as thoroughly caricatured in the pulpit, in the vestry, at the village inn, and at the fireside. Both its preachers and its people were incessantly harassed with assaults about 'principles'....The preacher, deacon, and lawyer generally formed, in those days, a trio of leadership in the village society of New England. The former usually assailed the new comers with distant dignity from the pulpit, and the deacon pursued them with rigorous questions of orthodoxy to meetings and social circles, and the lawyer, strictly conforming then as now, to the strongest local influence, followed, to ply with his logic, the deacon's metaphysics."<sup>3</sup>

In the face of all this type of opposition, it is little wonder that Methodism grew only slowly in these New England States. Lee tells of preaching in one place three times without even becoming acquainted with any one.<sup>4</sup> Though many times people would listen

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1. M. L. Scudder; American Methodism, p. 301.

2. Stevens, op. cit., Vol. III. p. 246.

3. Ibid., p. 242.

4. Cf. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 427.



attentively to what he had to say, Lee found the coldness of New England hospitality very chilling. Three months after his arrival in New England the Methodist church consisted of three women. After seven months of indefatigable toil had passed<sup>1</sup> there were only five members of Methodist societies in New England. Many another man, even those who had stood up under the violent opposition of the Revolution, would have been tempted to give up New England as a bad job, but not Lee. Stevens says of him, "He was supported by the consciousness that Methodism was needed in New England, and could, therefore, sooner or later, be divinely prospered."<sup>2</sup> Thus Jesse Lee set out to conquer New England for Christ with the same attitude that Jesse Walker had when he entered St. Louis on the frontier and that Francis Asbury had when he approached the American Continent. Anything less would have failed in this climate which was cold and forbidding to any dissenting religious group.

By the time Lee reached Boston for the first time, the whole of New England was buzzing with tales of his work. A fine characterization of this man is found in Steven's history:

"The whole state (Massachusetts) was rife with rumors of him as a strange man who had come from the South, and was traveling through its villages on horseback, and in a costume of Quaker-like simplicity; a very 'remarkable,' who preached every day and several times a day, and went everywhere; without knowing any person; exceedingly good humored, witty even; of a most musical voice, making his hearers smile or weep as he pleased, but mostly weep; 'holding forth' in the court-houses, the school-houses, sometimes in the more liberal village churches, but oftener under the trees of the

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1. Lee preached every day and several times a day and he traveled more than any other Methodist preacher with the one exception of Asbury.
2. Stevens, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 433.

highway; that he frequently lighted the court-house himself, and then rang the bell to call out the people; that the pastors and deacons valiantly resisted him as a heretic, for he was an Arminian; that they turned his discourses into interlocution by their questions and disputations, but that he confounded them by his tact, if not by his logic; that he scattered the village wits or wags by his irresistible repartees; and that many drunkards and other reprobates were reformed, and many a good man, despondent under the old theology, was comforted by his refreshing doctrines. Many who liked his theology could not approve his preaching, because he acknowledged that he was not an 'educated minister'. The pastor, and sometimes the village lawyer or doctor, tested him with Latin and Greek phrases; he responded in Dutch, a knowledge of which he had picked up in his childhood; they supposed this to be Hebrew, and retreated, or took side with him as competent to preach. But above all, they saw that he was evidently an earnest and devout man. He prayed mightily, and preached overwhelmingly."<sup>1</sup>

This man, whose spirit was unquenchable in the face of the worst of spiritual and intellectual opposition, whose mind was alert enough to put to silence the educated minds of New England in spite of the fact that he was an uneducated man, alone established the Methodist Church in that territory. Even Bishop Asbury who went through New England on his episcopal travels thought the task almost impossible. He writes in his journal on June 4, 1791 when travelling through Connecticut,

"We are now in Connecticut, and never out of sight of a house; and sometimes we have a view of many churches and steeples, built very neatly of wood -- either for use ornament, piety, policy, or interest, or it may be some of all of these. I do feel as if there had been religion in this country once; and I apprehend there is little in form and theory left. There may have been a praying ministry and people here, but I fear they are now spiritually dead."<sup>2</sup>

Now the "iron curtain" of coldness and intellectual opposition was being entered by the itinerant Jesse Lee. The response was not

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1. Ibid., p. 434.
2. Tipple, The Heart of Asbury's Journal, p. 318.

as extreme as it was on the frontier. There was not as much emotionalism, but there were people who accepted this new teaching and new doctrine to the betterment of their lives and the lives of their communities.

## 2. Conflicting Ideals in New England

Omitting the doctrinal conflict for later sections, it is necessary to understand some of the points of conflict between the established churches of New England and the Methodists itinerants.

### a. Emotionalism vs. Intellectualism

The first issue between the Methodists and New Englanders was the conflict of emotionalism vs. intellectualism. The Methodist itinerants were uneducated men who preached and taught a religion of the heart and of life. Though they had certain doctrinal beliefs that colored their preaching, they were interested primarily in the lives of men. In New England an uneducated man was looked down upon. Many of the doctrinal attacks on the Methodists were not so much because of doctrine but because the opponents wanted to show their intellectual superiority. Thomas Ware said that the attack came most often from the students of divinity or "loquacious and controversial laymen."<sup>1</sup> Thus we can see that the strongest attack came from the intellectual "front". Many people were opposed to the Methodists simply because of their lack of learning. They were called "ignorant" people. Even Lyman Beecher who was one of the finest leaders of the Established

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1. Cf. Stevens, op. cit., Vol. III, P. 243.

Church published a tract on the religious condition of America in which he excludes the Methodists as being unfit to preach because of their lack of education.<sup>1</sup>

In considering this type of opposition we can see that only a man like Jesse Lee could have triumphed. His humor and quick wit were more than a match for the educated intellect of the university graduate.<sup>2</sup> However, the main way in which Lee countered the intellectualism of the day was through his preaching. He could bring tears to many eyes, even of his enemies, and they had never heard such praying. Thus, when the spiritual was put against the intellectual, many fields were won.

#### b. State Churches vs. Free Churches

A. second point of conflict was with the "state-churchism" of that day in New England. Says Thrift in speaking of Lee,

"In Marblehead, Ipswich and other places he with much difficulty made out to preach; but he could scarcely move a step without being entangled in a knot of committee men. These guardians of town laws and privileges, constantly watched the movements of other ministers."<sup>3</sup>

In certain localities the Baptists joined with the Methodists in combatting this connection between the political government and

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1. Cf. Nathan Bangs: Life of Garrettson, pp. 228-233.

2. Cf. Introduction, p. v.

3. Cf. Stevens, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 374. "While engaged in preaching, he was not a little mortified to discover many of the congregation taking rest in sleep, and not a little annoyed by the loud talking of the people in the yard. Pausing long enough for the absence of sound to startle the sleepers, he raised his voice and cried out, 'I'll thank the people in the yard not to talk so loud; they'll wake up the people in the house!'"

3. Thrift, op. cit., pp. 169-170.

the church.

"The civil relations of the Church in these states had created other than spiritual motives for the profession of religion. None could hold office or vote, in her early days, unless he were a member of the Church. It would be superfluous to comment upon the inevitable influence of such a fact; religion becomes more a matter of form than of principle -- a qualification for the state, for society, or for patronage in business, rather than a preparation for heaven -- and pharisaism and hypocrisy are more likely to prevail than a sincere personal faith."<sup>1</sup>

One need not doubt that this was the cause of much of the severest opposition. The established clergy were afraid that their monthly pay check was endangered. As has been said, they received their pay from the State as it was collected by means of income taxes. Everybody had to pay the tax for the support of the church.

Then too, the Methodist doctrine of free grace did not fit too well with this idea of taxation for religious purposes. It cannot be doubted that the Methodists were somewhat at fault for starting this conflict with their emphasis upon the separation of Church and State and the message that the Gospel was for all. In this controversy the Methodists finally won out because the whole philosophy and thinking of the new nation was behind them.

#### c. Comfortable Settled Clergy vs. the Itinerants

A third point of conflict could be called psychological. Because the clergy were well paid, with no worry about their security, they had become self-satisfied and had settled down to enjoy the good thing that they had. It was rather uncomfortable to be disturbed by

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1. Stevens op. cit., Vol. II, p. 406.

a foot-loose Methodist preacher. A conversation between Thomas Ware and the principle officer of a church in New England is recorded:

"My advice to you sir, and to your itinerant brethren, is, to go home, or, at least, to desist from disturbing the order of things among us. We want none of your instruction; and, indeed, you are not competent to instruct us. You make the people commit sin in the loss of so much precious time as is wasted in attending your meetings on week days when they ought to be at labor; or, on the Sabbath, in leaving the places where they ought to worship, to run after you. We have learned and able ministers, and all the necessary means of grace among us, and we do very well without you. Why, then do you trouble yourselves about us?"<sup>1</sup>

The appeal of many ministers against Lee came, saying that he was there to break up the Congregational Churches and drive away their ministers:

"When in Fairfield, Connecticut, it became known that there were three women who intended to join his Society, there was great excitement and alarm, and a convention comprising forty-five ministers and ninety deacons was held, with a view of forming a compact combination against the intruders."<sup>2</sup>

Definitely these men resented the intruding competition!

The background of the itinerants was entirely different than that of the established clergy. They did not have any homes or families. They did not received any support for themselves in the way of money. Their one passion was to win souls for Christ which was considered heresy among the clergy in New England.

### 3. Results of the Opposition in New England

Jesse Lee tells of a very striking result of this type of opposition. He speaks of preaching to a large congregation;

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1. Baker: An Introduction to the History of Early New England Methodism, p. 8.
2. Daniels, op. cit., p. 548.

"The house was much crowded, though it was very large. I suppose the reason why I had so many to hear me was owing to their ministers preaching against me two Sabbaths in succession--- I generally find, in this State, that when I am most opposed, I have the most hearers."<sup>1</sup>

Thus the very opposition was hurting its own cause by making people curious to hear this heretic, and having once heard him they could remain no longer as they were.

Another result was that the spiritual was lined up against the intellectual and secular. Such a condition tended to show up the intellectual and the secular for what they really were, and many people accepted the Methodist way out of dissatisfaction with the established church.

A more far reaching result of these controversies was the eventual separation of Church and State. This was not all accomplished within the period that this thesis covers but the early opposition was a wedge in that direction.

A more general result came in the changing conception of the ministry. In New England it was a profession. To the Methodists it was a "calling". And because of this difference the "professional" ministers were no little stirred up and the people came to respect the ministry of the Methodist preachers.

#### C. Doctrinal Opposition -- Calvinism

##### 1. The Doctrine of Most Established Churches of the Day

The basic reason for an intense controversy on this subject

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1. Stevens, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 431.

is expressed by Scudder: "Every large denomination in America was Calvinistic. Methodism was Arminian."<sup>1</sup>

Wherever the Methodists went there were always Calvinists, and many arguments arose. In the West, as in New England and the rest of the American continent, one of the greatest opponents of the Methodists was Calvinism. In Kentucky there was bitter opposition. Epithats enough were not found on both sides of the argument.

"To differ with the creed of the land, which, by education and common consent, was generally accepted when Methodism entered New England, was to leave oneself open to the criticism of infidelity. The Revolutionary period had known the prominence and following given the deistical writing of men like Tom Paine, the thinking of Thomas Jefferson, and the influence of the French Revolutionary writers. The Methodists were often classed with Deists and infidels because they differed with many of the doctrines of the Calvinistic clergy as heartily as the Deists."<sup>2</sup>

From the period being studied come evidences of this opposition to the Methodists. In a letter to Edward Dromgoole a Methodist itinerant tells of his work:

"One obstacle in our way(is that) here as in other places there are a great many Baptists, and Presbyterians, who have filled the Peoples heads with Predestination. They have opposed pretty warmly sometimes past, but at present they are pretty quick."<sup>3</sup>

And from the Journal of Benjamin Lakin:

"The Baptists in this place have (been) bitterly opposed to Methodism, by misrepresenting the doctrine, and by opposing us in almost every shape, appeared resolved to keep us out of the place if possible.....(in speaking of the Baptist preacher) I believe he was brought for the purpose of ridiculing the Methodists."<sup>4</sup>

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1. Scudder, op. cit., p. 297.
2. Baker, op. cit., p. 33.
3. Sweet: Religion on the American Frontier, Vol. IV, p. 133.
4. Ibid., pp. 256-257.



The Methodists preached many sermons against predestination. Some of them are recorded in Professor Sweet's collection of sources.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Sweet makes this comment on these sermons:

"The greatest opponents of the frontier Methodists from a theological standpoint were the Presbyterians and the Baptists. The Methodists locked horns with Presbyterians over the doctrines of predestination and election and with the Baptists on their insistence that immersion was the only scriptural form of baptism."<sup>2</sup>

From this period come many polemical arguments on Calvinism. Very often these took the form of sermons preached in answer to sermons,<sup>3</sup> or again they would be in the form of an exchange of letters which have been preserved to this day.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. The Methodist Doctrine of Free Grace and Salvation for All

The Methodists could not agree with the Calvinists in their doctrines of predestination and election. Over against this they preached a doctrine of free grace and salvation for all who would accept. Much of this conflict was brought over from England, where the Calvinists were even more bitter against Wesley than they were in America.

This kind of controversy and opposition continued beyond the limits of the period studied in this thesis and it is very difficult to discover any real and direct results unless it tended to make the Methodists formulate clearer ideas of the doctrine that

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1. Cf. Ibid., pp. 722-724.

2. Ibid., p. 721.

3. Baker, op.cit., Bibliography. Typical are the Rick-Metcalf, and Haskel-Bangs controversies.

4. Ibid., Typical is the Ruter-Brown controversy.

they taught. In this period, also, one can see the beginning of agitation for more education among the Methodist preachers. The publishing house was started and colleges were proposed. How much of this activity was the result of intellectual and doctrinal controversy is impossible to say, but that it did have its influence can be affirmed.

Though a volume could be written about this Arminian -- Calvinistic controversy in America, its importance for this study is negligible as far as its influence upon the resulting Methodist Church. One thing can be said, however, concerning the doctrine taught by the Methodists. The doctrine of free grace was a doctrine that fitted the American mind much better than did the Calvinistic doctrines, and the fact that the Methodists preferred to show their religion rather than argue about it had a great influence upon the American people. When it comes to the intellectual and systematic formulation of doctrine, the Methodists were found lacking, and according to a modern day editorial, still are.<sup>1</sup> But when it came to a practical demonstration of what they believed, they were both willing and competent.

#### D. Ecclesiastical Opposition

As the Methodist movement made its way into Maryland and Virginia and into parts of the South, it met much opposition from the Anglican clergy. There was a much closer relation between the

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1. Cf. Life Magazine, November 10, 1947.

Anglican Church and the Methodists in origin but "the Methodists were distrustful of the sincerity of the Episcopalian clergy, whom they deemed generally unconverted while the Episcopalians were contemptuous of the Methodists, whose preachers they considered ignorant laymen."<sup>1</sup>

# 1. The Episcopacy and Authoritative Ministry and Sacraments

The Methodist preachers, themselves did not assume the authority of an ordained minister until after Methodism was organized in 1784. Most of them went to the Episcopal churches to receive the sacraments. They were still high church enough to refuse to take on the duties of the ordained minister. In this period there was little opposition for ecclesiastical reasons. However, after the Christmas Conference of 1784 the Methodists went out in increasing numbers with the authority of the ordained ministry and this received a barrage of opposition from the high church clergy. They were always presenting proof that the Methodist ministers had no authority. This attacked the validity of the Methodist episcopacy. Typical is a letter that was written to a Methodist by a presbyter of Maryland in which he traced the history of the Methodist episcopacy showing not only the invalidity of their episcopacy but going on to show that the Methodist doctrines and the church itself was based on false premises. The letter attacked mainly the idea that the Methodists called themselves

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1. Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, Vol. IV, p. 29.

a church. A secondary attack was made upon the idea of experiential religion.<sup>1</sup> Of course with the Methodist episcopacy invalid, the argument would naturally be extended to question the order of the ministry and the right to perform sacraments.

This attack was carried on by means of sermons from the pulpit and by means of the publication of anonymous tracts which tore down the authority of the Methodists as a Church. One of these tracts was entitled, Tracts for the People No. 4---Methodism as Held By Wesley by D.S.P. This particular tract seemed to attract sufficient attention from several of the Methodists that they wrote and published replies. The thesis of this tract No. 4 as stated in its own words is, "It will be proved, that Methodism is not a church --- has no sacraments; no ministry; no divine warrant. WESLEY IS THE WITNESS."<sup>2</sup> The procedure of much of this sort of writing was to base all the arguments on the thinking of Wesley. George Peck in examining and answering this tract says that he had mislaid his copy and when he went to a bookstore to get another he was told that a bishop of a western diocese had purchased the whole amount. Then he went to a Protestant Episcopal tract Society and there found a copy. He then proceeds to show how these arguments are unfounded.<sup>3</sup> However, there is some truth in what the tract said, for Wesley had to change his

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1. Cf. A Letter to a Methodist by a Presbyterian of the Diocese of Maryland, a tract.
2. George Peck: An Examination of a Tract Entitled "Tracts for the People No. 4.---Methodism as Held by Wesley by D.S.P.", p. 5.
3. Cf. Ibid.

mind. Wesley had once said, "My affection for the Church is as strong as ever, and I clearly see my calling which is to live and die in her communion." Then the tract No. 4 goes on to show that the Methodists are a heretical sect that cannot truthfully be called a church.

This tract No. 4 also inspired a series of letters between Rev. Allen Steele and James A. Bolles, Rector of St. James' Church, Batavia, New York. Steele first accuses Bolles of passing the tract around among the people in order to keep persons from uniting with the Methodist Episcopal Church. He then attacks the tract saying it is "garbled extracts and false statements."<sup>1</sup> Steele's idea is that;

"An effort has been made again and again to prejudice this community against Methodism by proclaiming that we are not a Church---had no Ministry nor Sacraments; efforts which I could but look upon as jesuitical, wanton, unauthorized and inconsistent with the charities of the Gospel, and without a parallel in my experience!"<sup>2</sup>

Bolles answers these charges by denying them and says that the Methodists themselves could have published this tract and others like it so that they could have some excuse for persecuting the Episcopal Church.<sup>3</sup>

There were other pamphlets written and exchanges of letters that say almost the same thing. P. Bell published a tract entitled, Stricture upon the Methodist Episcopal Church: or Methodism exposed, and shown to be inconsistent with itself and the word of God.

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1. James A. Bolles: The Episcopal Church Defended, p. 7.
2. Ibid., p. 9.
3. Cf. Ibid., p. 13.

Samuel Pelton published a tract on The Absurdities of Methodism. This was answered by Laurence Kean in A Plain and Positive Refutation of the Rev. Samuel Pelton's Unjust and Unfounded Charges Entitled "The Absurdities of Methodism." Timothy Merritt in defense of the Methodists had published a Review of a pamphlet entitled, "Letters Of Methodism"; purporting to have been written by one or more clergy men, in answer to the enquiries of a female. These letters were circulated by orthodox clergymen "employing detraction and slander, to ruin the influence of Methodists --- their moral character, rather than doctrines are attacked."<sup>1</sup>

There was only one Episcopal clergyman that was fully cooperative and sympathetic with the Methodists and that was Devereux Jarrett. He was a man like Asbury with a mission to do in America. He was the only English clergyman of the Protestant Episcopal Church that did not return to England during the Revolution.

However, the other clergymen were not like Jarrett. In one place Thomas Ware was preaching at a Church of England chapel when they came and tried to throw him out. He also heard a young English clergyman's trial sermon which was a sermon against the Methodists.<sup>2</sup> While the Methodists noticed this opposition from the English clergy they did not spend much time trying to combat it. The itinerants were too busy, and those who were stationed did not think it worth while to pay much attention to such argument.

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1. Cf. Baker. op. cit., Bibliography.

2. Cf. Robert W. Todd: Methodism on the Peninsula, p. 23.

## 2. The Results of Ecclesiastical Opposition

What effect did this opposition have on the Methodists? Such opposition definitely strengthened the Methodists. Most of the people took sides with them, thus giving them a favorable public opinion. The real result was not at all favorable to the established churches. They lost out especially on the frontier where the Methodists preached an experiential religion in the face of all opposition.

A more important result, however, was that this sort of opposition made the Methodists more American. The protestant Episcopal Church remained English whereas the Methodists became thorough Americans. This difference made the Methodists depend more on themselves thus giving them that typical American trait. This is seen very clearly in the way they treated Dr. Coke in his various trips to America. The lowliest itinerant treated the Doctor as an equal which was something unheard of in England. This opposition was not the sole cause of this democratic spirit, but it was a contributing factor.

### E. Summary

The Methodist preachers were rough and unschooled men, yet in a larger sense they triumphed over the ecclesiastical and doctrinal opposition because they placed the spiritual above the intellectual. Men like Jesse Lee were able to stand up to such opposition. Without them it is doubtful that the Methodist influence and growth would have been as great as it was.

The Methodists had to defend themselves against the New England ecclesiastical hierarchy, the Calvinistic doctrines of most of

the larger denominations of America, and the high church doctrines of the Protestant Episcopal Church. These are in reality one controversy, for there are the same basic reasons behind them all. The first of these reasons was that the Methodists were not schooled men while the other churches placed a premium on intellectualism. Another basic reason was that the established churches that held these doctrines were jealous of the Methodist itinerants' success with the people. They were afraid that these Methodists would empty the established churches and overthrow their doctrines. Except on the frontier, the Methodists were considered intruders and in most places were, in one way or another, invited to leave. From the Methodist point of view the established churches were fighting them because of pride, jealousy, and fear. From the point of view of the churches themselves they were fighting against ignorance, superstition, and heresy.

This chapter does not mean to place all of the established churches of the country as opposed to the Methodists. There were many congenial relationships between some of them and the Methodists, but that is outside the purpose of this thesis.

The results of this type of opposition can be summarized as follows:

1. The intellectual position of the Methodists was clarified.
2. Methodism grew rapidly not always in spite of the opposition, but sometimes because of it.
3. This opposition was evidence that the established order was being stirred up and in some places purified.



4. Such opposition tended to unify and strengthen the Methodist organization. Not until this external opposition was somewhat abated did internal dissent seriously disrupt the Methodist unity.

5. The most far reaching result of the immediate period was the fact that in this controversy the spiritual and practical were placed over against the doctrinal and ecclesiastical; an experiential religion was placed over against an intellectual one.<sup>1</sup>

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1. By this it is not meant that there were no good points on the doctrinal and ecclesiastical "side of the fence". In fact a positive study of them would reveal much. Neither does it mean that the Methodists were perfect. A detailed study of Methodist history and doctrine would doubtless expose some flaws. However, during the period studied in this thesis, the conflicts between these two sides tended to show up the worst parts of the doctrinal and ecclesiastical intellectualism on the one side and the best parts of the spiritual and practical emotionalism on the other.

CHAPTER IV  
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

## CHAPTER IV

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

William Warren Sweet says of the early Methodists, "Of all the religious bodies in America at the close of the American Revolution, the Methodists were the most insignificant in point of both numbers and of influence."<sup>1</sup> By 1836 this religious body was the largest and the most influential in the United States. This period is, generally speaking, the period of the itinerancy in the Methodist church. The itinerancy was more responsible for the spread of Methodism than any other single factor. This thesis has been dealing with only one phase of that most important factor - the opposition. In the light of this study one can see what this opposition contributed to the success or failure of these pioneer men.

#### A. General Summary of the Opposition

A recapitulation of the main outline of this thesis will show the material covered:

1. Political opposition because of the war with England, arising from the relation of the Methodists as basically English to begin with as over against the passions of a people struggling to be free from England.

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1. Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, Vol. IV, p. 3.

2. Social conditions of the frontier caused violent opposition. Sin, disease, and natural elements were arrayed against the teaching, living, and traveling mission of the itinerants.

3. Political and social conditions of New England were not versatile enough to take in the strange doctrine and teaching of the Methodists.

4. There was a continuation of Calvinistic - Arminian controversy on this side of the Atlantic. Most religious bodies in America were Calvinistic when Methodism challenged that doctrine.

5. The ecclesiastical heirarchy of the Protestant Episcopal Church found it difficult to accept the unlearned Methodists as a Methodist Episcopal Church.

#### B. Forms of Persecution Taken by the Opposition

A study of the forms of persecution reveals three main ones;

1. Direct physical violence was the form of most of the opposition during the War.

2. Rowdy disturbance and mob violence were much seen on the frontier.

3. The form much of the ecclesiastical and doctrinal opposition took was that of ridicule and argument. Though this was non-violent, it was the most difficult to overcome.

The Methodists themselves did not classify the opposition but wrote it off as the work of Satan.

### C. Results of Opposition<sup>1</sup>

The lasting results of the opposition to Methodism can be summarized as follows:

1. The Methodist Church was separated permanently from the English churches and in the process of less than fifty years became a typically American church.
2. Methodism was spread throughout the whole of the American continent.
3. In its early and formative years, the Methodist Church was kept cleansed and strong by the opposition.
4. Though the effect of the Methodist church on the social and moral character of American society cannot be dogmatically declared, its positive contribution is evident.

### D. Countering the Opposition

A gathering together of the ways in which the Methodists overcame and overlooked the opposition would bring us these ideas:

1. They learned by it.
2. They outlasted it.
3. They out-lived it.
4. They out- preached it.
5. They out-prayed it.

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1. Opposition is not the sole cause of these results, but a dominant contributing factor.

6. They out-grew it.

7. They ignored it.

Historians summarize briefly this phase of Methodism's growth:

"Puritanism, disappointed in old England, came to New England to found an empire for itself; Anglicanism, by virtue--say rather, vice--of its political status at home, claimed supremacy in most of the Southern Colonies; Methodism, transplanted hither in the hearts of a few humble emigrants who never dreamed of empire, soon outgrew them both, and in a little while became the great religious power of the land; yet not as having dominion over its faith, but as a helper of its joy."<sup>1</sup>

"Methodism was born in a prayer meeting, but it learned to walk on a battlefield. Brickbats were a constant and enlivening feature of its early history. Nor were all its battles those of defense. The Methodist movement did not grow up in a theological vacuum, but was inextricably in the midst of life....None of his(Wesley's) sayings is more characteristic of the man than the one quoted so often as to become a bit threadbare: 'I desire a league offensive and defensive with every soldier of Jesus Christ.'"<sup>2</sup>

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1. Daniels, op. cit., pp. 369-370.
2. Luccock and Hutchinson, op. cit., p. 463.

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