

**LETTERS ON THE
ORGANIZATION AND EARLY
HISTORY OF THE METHODIST
EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

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Letters on the Organization and Early History of the Methodist Episcopal Church by Alexander M'Caine

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ORGANIZATION AND EARLY HISTORY

OF THE

METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH,

BY

REV. ALEXANDER M'CAINE,

AUTHOR OF "HISTORY AND MYSTERY OF THE METHODIST EPISCOPACY," AND "DEFENCE OF THE TRUTH."

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P R E F A C E .

THE following letters were published in the **BOSTON OLIVE BRANCH**, in numbers, weekly ; and have been widely circulated through the United States and British North American Provinces. But their great importance has made it desirable that they should be put in a form in which they can be preserved. These letters give the best history of the peculiar organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church, now extant, or that can ever be published. Those old ministers, who possess many of the facts given in this book, have their reasons for keeping them from the public, as the character of the first bishops of that church are painfully implicated in these letters. Certain ecclesiastical frauds were practiced in the church in order to impose upon it a sort of Episcopacy in the revered name of **JOHN WESLEY**, the founder of Methodism. Painful as are these truths, the author of these letters fully proves them. Methodists of the present and future generations, should be informed in matters connected with the origin and present organization of their church ; the historian and the general reader, also call for the truth—the whole undisguised truth. In these pages, the unvarnished tale of all the facts connected with the origin of Methodist Episcopacy, is given. The letters are from the graphic pen of the reverend and venerable **ALEXANDER M'CAINE**, a man who has been almost three score years a minister, either in the elder or younger branch of the Methodist Church. He who flattereth with his lips is our enemy. **Mr. M'CAINE** is not guilty of

glossing over the faults of the bishops and their agents in the management of the Methodist Episcopal Church. He faithfully tells the most unpalatable truths, and fails not to make such inferences from his facts as the case may require, though they in some instances bear with terrible weight on the character of the actors in those scenes.

Such as the work is, we have felt it to be our duty to Methodists, and the world, to give it to mankind; having full permission of the author to give it a more extended circulation than that which it had in the *BOSTON OLIVE BRANCH*. In that, we printed an edition of more than twenty thousand, which have been sought after, and read perhaps more earnestly than anything else appearing in its columns. With these remarks, we submit the work to the reader, in the form of letters as received from the venerable author, and published as above described.

THOS. F. NORRIS.

BOSTON, October, 1850.

METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH.

NUMBER I.

The liberal principles by which your paper has been characterized ever since its establishment, to the present period, and the impartiality and boldness with which those principles have been advocated and maintained, have induced the writer to select it as the channel through which he thought he might hope to place before the tens of thousands who read its columns, some remarks on the proceedings of the General conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church of 1844 in the case of Bishop Andrew. His attention has been called to this subject, though several years have elapsed since those proceedings took place, by reading in the secular papers of the day, that the "Methodist Episcopal Church, South," has instituted, or is about to institute, legal proceedings against the "Methodist Episcopal Church, North," to recover what she thinks is her proportion of the funds of the "Book Concern," inasmuch as the "Methodist Episcopal Church, South" was, up to the General Conference of 1844, a part of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and when the two branches were united and constituted but one body or church, the Church South contributed by her labors to the establishment of the "Book Concern," and aided by her contributions to swell the amount of its funds as well as that part of the church which is now called the Church North. Avoiding all minuteness of detail as being altogether unnecessary, this is a plain and unvarnished statement of the cause of the lawsuit as the writer has been able to collect the particulars from published documents.

Although the question cannot now be asked, has the Methodist Episcopal Church been divided? this fact being known in every part of the United States, if not in every part of the civilized world, it may be asked, as it has been asked already by some, had the General Conference of '44 any right, power, or authority to divide the church into two parts, "the church, north" and "the church, south," each part being independent of the other, and if so whence did it derive this authority?

That the General Conference of '44, the members of which were the representatives of their respective annual conferences, had no authority to divide the church is manifest from this fact, that there

is not in the constitution of the church any provision made to divide it under any circumstances whatever; nor is there in the book of discipline a chapter, section, paragraph, sentence, line, or word giving authority to the General Conference or any other body to do such a suicidal deed. To suppose that the book of discipline contained such provision or gave such authority, is to suppose that it contained the most monstrous absurdities by making provision to destroy itself.

Again, whoever is acquainted with the history of the Methodist Episcopal Church from its organization in 1784, to the General Conference of 1844, a period of 60 years, knows, that at different times, and in various quarters, loud complaints were uttered against the powers of the bishops, and many efforts were made to check or abridge those powers by some modification of the government of the church. And how were those complaints answered? Quite in a summary way. One general sentence of condemnation was passed upon their authors, by all in the itinerant ranks from the bishop to the mere licentiate; and history justifies the assertion, that it mattered not with those gentlemen what was the necessity or reasonableness of the change proposed, what were the sacrifices the complainants had made for the sake of the church, or how long they had labored, or with what success, to promote Methodism, if ever they made the least complaint against episcopal powers, or intimated a wish to abridge episcopal prerogatives, they were all included in one sentence of condemnation, and were all branded with the same opprobrious mark—*enemies of the church*, who wanted to destroy the *unity* of the church by destroying its episcopacy. Union, then, was the watchword of Methodism. This was the Shibboleth by the proper pronouncement of which its friends were to be known. This was the talisman that was to preserve the church from all malignant influences, and it was relied on by the friends of the hierarchy as possessing a potency every way sufficient to silence every argument advanced against episcopal powers, and as being perfectly adequate to put down every effort that was made to circumscribe or abridge episcopal prerogatives. Nor was it merely to repel alledged attacks on episcopacy that such an emphasis and stress was put on the term. It was capable of being applied, and was applied, to other purposes also.

When the Methodist societies were to be supplied with an ordained ministry, it was represented that it would be best for all the societies to be united together, and formed into a "separate and independent church under a MODERATE EPISCOPACY," and every step that was subsequently taken by Dr. Coke or Mr. Asbury "to strengthen the episcopacy," was represented as being taken to preserve the *union*. Was it deemed necessary to establish the bish-

ops in their newly acquired powers more firmly than they were? the "Notes on the discipline" were written. Did symptoms of opposition begin to show themselves, at an early day, to the exercise of the enormous powers of the bishops? The causes and cure of heart and church divisions, was published. Did any enquire why the office of "Presiding Elder" was created?—why the bishop was to have a "council?"—or why a "General Conference" was to be held? the same answer was given to all those enquiries that was given by Mr. Asbury to Mr. O'Kelly when he asked "what will be the business of the council, what powers shall it be invested with, and what benefits may we expect to receive from it?" Mr. Asbury's reply was, "there must be something to preserve the union." It is plain then, that the settled policy of the church was to be united, and many a travelling preacher made it the theme of his rejoicing, as well as Dr. Caper's of the General Conference of '44. "I thank God," said the Dr. "for this unity; a unity which stands not in the episcopacy only, but pervades the entire of our ecclesiastical constitution. We have not one episcopacy only, but one ministry, one doctrine, one discipline—every usage and every principle one for the North and the South." And yet this union which had subsisted so long—which had been the policy of the church to preserve unimpaired—and which had been the boast of travelling preachers in private circles and in their public ministrations, has been disrupted and the church divided by the General Conference of '44, and that which had been charged against those who aimed only at the abridgment of the power of the bishops, namely: that they were enemies of the church, and wanted to destroy its unity, has been done by the travelling preachers themselves, and because of *episcopacy*. Well may we exclaim in the language of St. Paul, "O, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God, how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out."

If the General Conference derived no authority for their proceedings from the constitution or the book of discipline, and if their conduct was adverse to the policy by which the church had always been governed, did they derive any authority from the Scriptures to make the division? And here it may be necessary for me to say, that I do not purpose to canvass the general question—has a church of Christ authority from the Scriptures to divide itself into two or more parts, and if so, what are the circumstances which will justify the act? My remarks shall be confined to the subject which I have undertaken to discuss, which is this—had the General Conference of '44 any authority to divide the *Methodist Episcopal Church*? This body of christians I have always recognized as a Church of Christ, according to the definition which she herself has