

A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE DIVISION
METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH
THE INTER-CHURCH TRANSACTIONS
THAT DIVISION

By
W. F. Glenn

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We, the undersigned, heartily commend the writing and publication of the above record, as it carries information that every member of our Church ought to possess. We bespeak for it a careful reading by all of our people. We are also in full agreement with the views expressed by the writer in the last paragraph of the article.

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Since there has been so much talk about Methodist union and unification, there is an increasing demand by many of the thoughtful and substantial members of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, for authentic information as to the past relations and communications of the two leading branches of Methodism in this Country. These members want to know who it is with whom it is proposed to bring them into closer relation. They want to know whether the conditions that forced the division of the Church in 1844 and have continued that division have passed away, and the conditions for closer relations are now more promising. They do not want to be carried into other relations merely for a name, and that would bring no real brotherhood or spiritual life into the unified body.

To answer this demand for information, I have undertaken to present from the historic records a brief account of the various transaction between the two branches of the Church. In doing so I draw, and even copy, largely from McTyeire's "History of Methodism," Myers's "Disruption of the Methodist Episcopal

Church" and "A Record of All Agreements Concerning Fraternity and Federation," published in Nashville in 1914.

Previous to 1844 the abolition spirit in the North was pronounced and active, and yet the General Conference of the Methodist Church in 1836 declared itself positively as opposed to having any of its members take any part in discussing abolitionism, or "interfering in any way with the civil and political relation between master and slave as it exists in the slave-holding states of the Union." But so great and rapid had been the change in the temper of the times that, in the General Conference of 1844, convened in New York, the delegates from the North and the South were arrayed in conflict over issues growing out of the question of slavery.

Bishop James O. Andrew, because that by bequest and marriage slaves were under his control, became the storm center. Conditions were such that he could not transport one slave nor liberate the others. So it was insisted that he resign his Episcopal Office. "For peace's sake he was willing to resign; but when he saw himself a representative man, and that his brethren must stand or fall with him, resignation was out of the question, and the final issue was joined on his case."

The discussion continued through many days. There was no law against ministers or bishops holding slaves. Bishop Andrew, by request made a full and candid statement of his relation to the slaves in his charge, but that made no change in the sentiment against him.

As there was no law applicable to the case, the Northern delegates contended that the question of expediency should control it. The delegation from the South, a very strong one, discussed with great ability both the expediency features and the constitutional rights of the General Conference in the case.

On the expediency features, Dr. Green of Tennessee, said in part: "If Bishop Andrew be deposed, and the South were to submit—that is the preachers of the South—to such an unjust and extrajudicial proceeding, it would disable the preachers in such a manner that we could not serve our people, and it is very certain that those who deposed him could never supply our place."

A recommendation by the bishops to postpone action on the case until the next General Conference was rejected, because the New England delegates threatened to withdraw if action was not taken at once. So on June 1st the celebrated Finley resolution was adopted by a party vote, namely: "Resolved, that it is the sense of this General Conference that he (Bishop Andrew) desist from the exercise of his office as long as this impedient exists." (His relation to slavery).

Division was then inevitable. Steps were taken for a peaceable separation, and in a spirit of amity a plan of separation was adopted that was just, and accepted by both parties. We give that plan in full, because of its light on subsequent events.

"1 Resolved by the Delegates of the Annual Conference in General Conference assem-

bled, that should the annual Conferences of the slave-holding States find it necessary to unite in a distinct ecclesiastical connection, the following rule will be observed with regard to the Northern boundary of such connection: All the societies, stations and conferences adhering to the Church in the South by a vote of a majority of the members of said societies, stations and conferences, shall remain under the unmolested pastoral care of the Southern Church; and the ministers of the Methodist Episcopal Church shall in no wise attempt to organize Churches or Societies within the limits of the Church, South, nor shall they attempt to exercise any pastoral oversight therein, it being understood that the Ministry of the South reciprocally observe the same rule in relation to stations, societies and conferences adhering, by vote of a majority, to the Methodist Episcopal Church; provided, also, that this rule shall apply only to societies, stations and conferences bordering on the line of division and not to interior charges, which shall, in all cases, be left to the care of the Church within whose territory they are situated.

“2 Resolved, that ministers, local and travelling of every grade and office in the Methodist Episcopal Church, may, as they prefer, remain in that Church, or, without blame, attach themselves to the Church, South.”

These resolutions were adopted by a vote of 139 yeas to 17 nays. “It was also provided: That all the property of the Methodist Episcopal Church in meeting-houses, personages, colleges, schools, conference funds, cemeteries,

and of every kind, within the limits of the Southern Organization shall be forever free from any claim set up on the part of the Methodist Episcopal Church, so far as this resolution can be of force in the premises."

"The turning over to the proper agents of the Church, South (Should one be formed) an equitable share of the common property at New York and Cincinnati, and of the Chartered Fund was arranged for, and a common right to use all the copyrights that had been secured before the separation. Commissioners were named and the order and manner of payment planned, and nothing was left undone that could be foreseen for an equitable settlement and an amicable separation."

"To avoid any difficulty in dividing the property of the "Book Concern in New York and Cincinnati; a resolution was adopted so adding to the "restrictive rule" that guards that property as to give perfect liberty in the division of it. This being a constitutional change, it needed to have a two-thirds vote of the General Conference and three-fourths of the Annual Conferences. The vote of the General Conference given was 146 yeas and 10 nays, far more than two-thirds. The bishops were requested to get the vote of Annual Conferences as soon as possible.

Some of the Northern delegates did all that they could to prevent the necessity for this division, but the tide was too strong against them. At midnight, June 10, that eventful conference adjourned.

The next morning the Southern delegates met to consider. In view of the excited condi-

tion of their constituency, and to prevent hasty and divided action, they recommended that nothing be done until the Conferences interested could meet in convention. They also suggested May 1, 1845, as the time for that convention, and Louisville, Kentucky, as the place.

The convention was held at that time and place, and proceeded, not to organize a new church; but according to the plan of separation, only to so modify its discipline as to meet the conditions of a separate existence. Plans were devised, and a General Conference provided for, to meet in Petersburg Va., May 1, 1846. So it was then and there that the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, was started on a career of unprecedented success in winning people to Christ.

The General Conference met according to plan in 1846, and Dr. John Early presided until the arrival of Bishop Andrew. On the second day, Bishop Joshua Solue, then Senior Bishop of American Methodism, presented himself and declared his adherence with the Church South. That conference by an unanimous vote delegated Dr. Lovick Pierce to bear fraternal greetings to the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church which was to meet in Pittsburg, Pa., May 1, 1848.

Dr. Pierce was early at the Conference in 48 and respectfully informed that body that he was present and ready to deliver the Christian salutations of the Church South. After two days he received this reply: "Whereas there are serious questions and difficulties

existing between the two bodies, therefore resolved that while we tender to Rev. Dr. Pierce all personal courtesies and invite him to our sessions, this General Conference does not consider it proper at present to enter into fraternal relations with the Methodist Episcopal Church, South."

Dr. Pierce duly acknowledged the personal courtesy tendered him, but declined it, saying: "Within the bar I can only be known in my official capacity." He then informed them that his mission was at an end, but if at any time they should wish to renew propositions for fraternal relations on the "plan of separation," the Church South would cordially entertain the propositions.

The ephemeral generosity that characterized the formation of the Plan of Separation in 1844 seems to have died out in the North before the meeting of their General Conference in 1848, for they not only closed their doors in the face of our fraternal delegate but they repudiated the whole plan of separation, and thus opened the way for endless trouble. "This General Conference pronounced the division unconstitutional and because of this, and because of alleged infractions of the compact on the border, and because the change of the Restrictive Rule had not received a three-fourths majority, they formally declared the plan of Separation null and void." The Church South was then forced to appeal to Caesar.

In this connection, it is proper to state that when our Commissioners were forced to appeal to the United States Supreme Court to

adjudicate our claims, that body in their decision unanimously declared, in substance, that the Church South was as much a part of the former organization as the Church North, and as much entitled to her proportionate part of the property as was the other party. And hence no change in the Restrictive Rule was needed to secure our claims. This also settled the constitutionality of the Plan of Separation.

The United States Circuit Court in New York decided in favor of the Southern Church, the Court in Cincinnati decided against us, but on appeal the Supreme Court reversed the lower court and gave the Church South all her claims.

“Southern Methodists were less concerned for the pecuniary outcome of these painful lawsuits than for its judicial and moral vindication before the whole world.” Party spirit ran high on both sides and many charges were brought against the Church South which by these Court Decisions were proved unjust. It is pertinent to quote here the words of the wise and good Bishop Morris: “If the Plan of Separation had been carried out in good faith and Christian feeling on both sides, it would scarcely have been felt more than the division of an Annual Conference.”

Bear in mind that the Church South did not secede from the Methodist Episcopal Church; they only submitted to a forced separation—a separation in the same sense in which the Northern delegates separated from us. Bear in mind also, that up to the time of President

Lincoln's emancipation Proclamation there were slave holders in the Methodist Episcopal Church.

The unfriendly animus of our Northern brethren became conspicuous during and after the Civil War. "By right of influence exerted and services rendered, their officials enjoyed favor with the Federal Government, and this was of great advantage to them in pushing their lines Southward and Westward." Bishop Kavanaugh, a Southern Bishop, while on a visit to the Pacific Coast was arrested at a camp-meeting near Stockton and carried before the Commander of the Post at San Francisco as a dangerous person; but on searching his papers nothing worse was found than list of quarterly meetings.

"Southern Methodism endured more than ordinary misfortunes. One thing however, they did not look for, and it made a deep wound. After the Federal forces had occupied large sections of Southern territory, Bishop Ames with preachers of the Methodist Episcopal Church followed the victorious army with an order procured from Secretary of War Stanton and took forcible possession of Southern Methodist pulpits, even to the exclusion of ministers appointed by the Church Authorities and desired by the congregations. These violent pastors held on after the war ceased, and had to be ousted ungracefully and reluctantly."

More than that. After the war ended and the South was crushed and impoverished, the Northern Church sent emissaries through the South with the slogan: "Disintegrate and ab-

sorb the Southern Methodist Church." There was never a finer opportunity for the exercise of noble and unselfish fraternity and generosity but it was used as an opportunity for disrupting our Church, and thus the wound was deepened and the breach widened.

Fortunately, however, the loyalty of our members was so strong and firm that only a few responded to the alluring appeals, and most of that few soon returned to their former allegiance

We dwell on these events not simply to show the unbrotherly spirit, but also to show that they were in flagrant violation of the Plan of Separation, which our representatives had accepted in good faith and were trying to carry out.

The next move came from the Northern bishops. Failing in their efforts to disrupt the Church South, they then turned their offices toward the reunion of the two bodies. Mark you, there were no expressions of sorrow or regret over their past treatment of us, but with apparent assumption that all had been right, they presented their plea. Thus on May 8, 1869 Bishops Janes and Simpson, representing the College of Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, presented a paper to the bishops of the Church South assembled in St. Louis, the purpose of which was expressed thus: "As the main cause of the separation has been removed, so has the chief obstacle to the restoration."

There were other expressions as to the responsibilities of chief pastors on both sides,

to which our bishops responded most courteously and with approbation. But they did not agree that the chief cause of the separation had been removed. "Slavery," they said, "was not, in any proper sense, the cause, but the occasion only, of the separation, the necessity of which we regret as much as you. But certain principles were developed in relation to the political aspect of the question involving the right of ecclesiastical bodies to handle and determine matters lying outside of their proper jurisdiction which we could not accept." They called attention to the fact that their construction of the constitutional powers of the General Conference which they assumed and acted on were oppressive and destructive of the rights of the minority represented in that highest pudiciary of the Church. They also called to mind the fact that what was called "the main cause of the separation" had existed in the Church from its organization, and yet for sixty years there was no separation.

At the General Conference of the Church South assembled in Memphis Tenn., in 1870, Bishop E. S. Janes and Dr. W. C. Harris of the Methodist Episcopal Church appeared as delegates from that Church and again proposed reunion. Of course they were courteously received, and their mission considered. In the course of formalities, Dr. Keener later elected bishop, called attention to the fact that by the records of their General Conference those visiting brethren were commissioned "To confer with a like commission from the African Methodist Zion Church to arrange for the union of that body with their own; were also

empowered to treat with a similar commission from any other Methodist Church that may desire a like union." That meant that they might also treat with churches desiring union with them, but not to knock for admission at the doors of other churches.

In considerate terms our General Conference replied in substance: First, that the reply of our bishops to the bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church the year before "has the full endorsement of this General Conference, and accurately defines our position with reference to any overtures that may proceed from that Church having in them an official and proper recognition of this body." Second, "that in our judgment, without great violence in constructing the language of said resolution, it cannot be regarded as constituting, by your General Conference, a commission to make proposals of union to the Methodist Episcopal Church, South." Third, "That if this distinguished commission were fully clothed with authority to treat with us for union, it is the judgment of this Conference that the true judgment of this Conference that the true interests of the Church of Christ requires and demands the maintenance of our separate and distinct organization."

Failing in their overtures for union, and as Dr. Pierce indicated in 1848, the General Conference of the Northern Church in 1872 instructed their bishops to appoint fraternal messengers to the next General Conference of the Church South, to be held in Louisville in May 1874. These delegates were appointed and were most cordially received by our

Conference in 1874. At that Conference Dr's Lovick Pierce and James A Duncan and Chancellor Garland were commissioned as fraternal messengers to the General Conference North in 1876.

From that time to the present, there has been an interchange of like messengers, and they seem to have contributed both to the pleasure and profit of the Conferences.

At the Conference of the Church South, Dr. Alpheus W. Wilson later elected bishop, offered the following resolution which was adopted: "That in order to remove obstacles to formal fraternity between the two Churches, our College of Bishops is hereby authorized to appoint a Commission, consisting of three ministers and two laymen, to meet a similar commission authorized by the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church, to adjust all existing differences." The commission was appointed, and in 1876 the Church North responded by appointing a like commission.

These commissions met in Cape May August 17, 1876 and were in session until August 23. "Conflicting claims to property were adjudicated, both on general principles and in special cases, and directions were laid down regulating the occupation of places as well as property, and it will be well for the peace of both parties and the honor of Christianity if they be well observed. (MyTyeire).

But sad to say, they were not well observed. The rules laid down and the adjustments made were fair and gave general satisfaction, but in many if not all cases they were so ignored that

the Civil Courts had to be invoked again to secure property that had been seized during the war. And that did not make for peace.

The General Conference of the Church South held in 1894 created a commission on the Federation of Methodism, and in 1896 the Church North created a similar commission. The joint commission met in Washington, D. C., January 9, 1898. After two days deliberation they recommended measures concerning joint publishing interests in China and Japan; adjusting missionary work in foreign fields; a common order of public worship, and for receiving travelling preachers from one Church into the other. They also recommended "that where either Church is doing the work expected of Methodism, the other Church shall not organize a society or erect a Church building until the bishop having jurisdiction in the case shall have been consulted and his approval obtained."

All of these recommendations were adopted in 1898 by the Church South. The General Conference of the Church North adopted them all in 1900 except the last one quoted above, regulating the organizing of societies and building Church houses. That they modified leaving the question of organizing societies and building Churches in the hands of presiding elders and preachers in charge. The General Conference of the Church South called attention to and quoted the original resolution and expressed regret that it was not adopted by the Church North and the hope that it would be done by their conference in 1904. It was adopted by that body at that time, but unfortu-

nately, the resolution suffered the same fate of others.

The joint commission and the Federal Council of Methodism were engaged for some years on various matters, mainly discussing union and unification; until December 16, 1914, when the Federal Council met in Atlanta. At that time they took up again the question of conflicting Churches. We have no records of that meeting, but the information given out was that they acted on the same principle as that quoted above: that is, where one Church was strong and able to cover the field, the weaker Church should withdraw.

This council had plenary powers and its decisions were final. The Southern members of the Council at once began steps for withdrawing our preachers from Seattle where our Church was weak in comparison. On the other hand in Atlanta, where the Methodist Episcopal Church had about two or three hundred members and the Church South had about twenty thousand and was able to cover the field, the plan was repudiated by the Northern officials and the Church building on Ponce de Leon Avenue ordered to be carried to completion. That Church was dedicated about two weeks ago; and they are still trying to organize and build other churches in Georgia and the South. Thus another effort of our Church toward co-operation was frustrated. And it seems that nothing short of arganic union, or a unification leading that way, will ever meet the favor of that Church.

I do not ignore the probality, or the fact if you please, that there have been mistakes

and wrong doing on the part of the Southern branch of the Church. But I believe that it can be truthfully asserted that the Church South would have faithfully observed every item of the Plan of Separation if it had not been repudiated by the Northern General Conference. And if both parties had been faithful to that plan, there would have been none of these long years of painful contentions and broken contracts. I believe too, that the Church South would have faithfully carried out all that series of later agreements if they had not first been ignored by the other party.

Here you have a brief record of seventy-six years transactions between the two divisions of Methodism in this Country. Perhaps a backward glance may help the members of our Church to a clearer vision as it did so often in God's dealings with the children of Israel.

And for myself, let me say: We can never have Church unification or union by mere conference resolutions. When we have that oneness for which our Savior so earnestly prayed, then and not until then can we talk wisely about closer church relations. And as that oneness for which our Savior so earnestly prayed, then and not until then can we talk wisely about closer church relations, and as that oneness does not now exist in either branch of the Church, we had better adhere to that wise old "Plan of Separation" and live it until we are one in Him, or more nearly one than we are at present.

W. F. GLENN

Atlanta, Ga., March 24, 1920

