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THE
WESLEYAN PEOPLE;

OR,

THE GREAT POWER AND TRUE POLICY

OF THE

PRIVATE MEMBERS OF THAT BODY.

A LETTER TO A FRIEND,

FORMERLY A CATECHUMEN, NOW ONE OF THE SOCIETY.

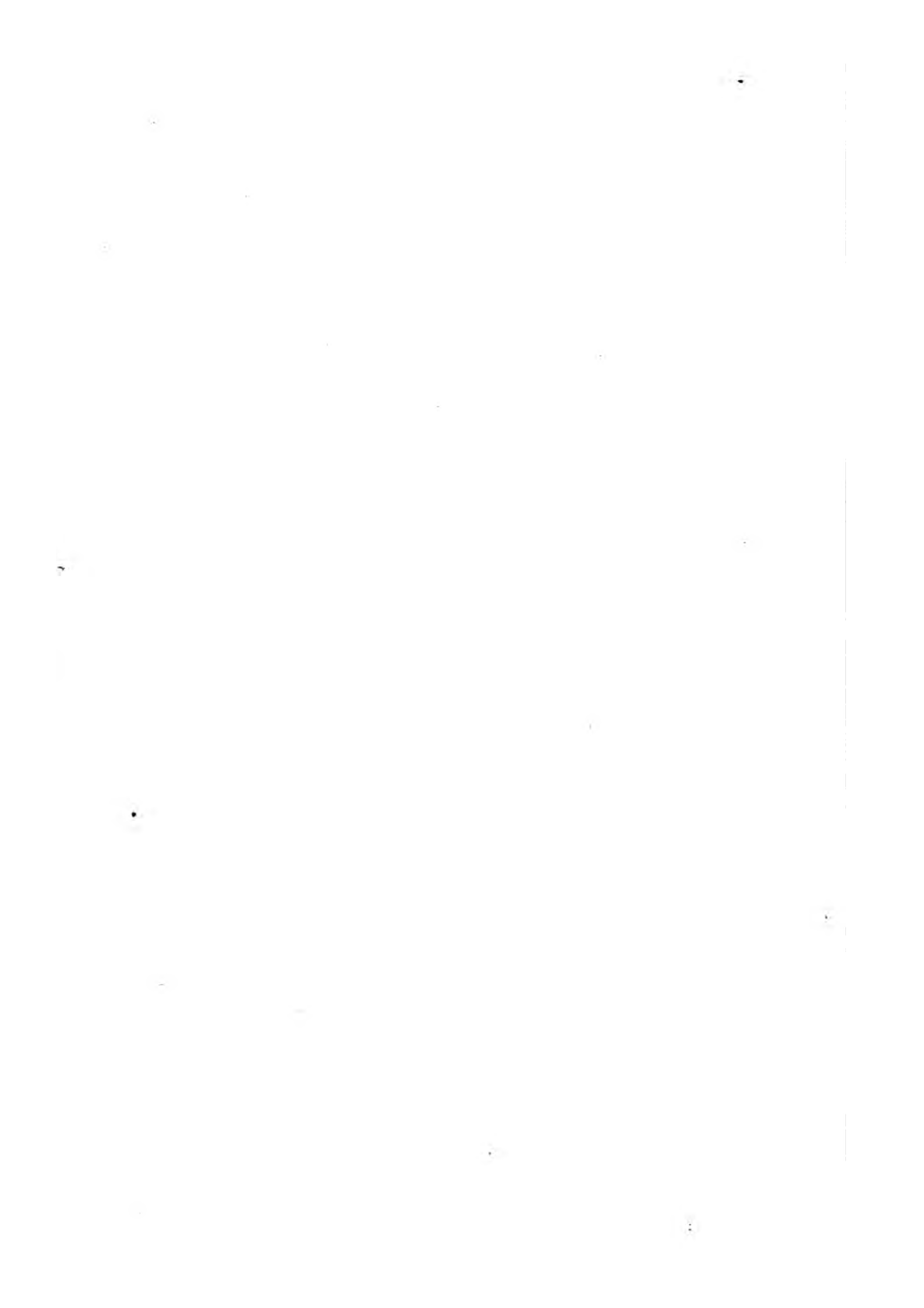
BY SAMUEL JACKSON.



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1853.

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A LETTER.

DEAR SIR,—

IN some of the Southern States of America, to give the elements of general knowledge to a slave is an offence against the laws. Such information is deemed likely, in the judgment of the legislators, to render him dissatisfied with his condition—to awaken a desire for freedom—and to put him upon efforts which may possibly result in its actual attainment. Had a connection with Methodism been, as is often affirmed, a state of ecclesiastical bondage, there was no difficulty in foreseeing that our intercourse with each other, in years past, must be attended with future danger, at least to myself, as a Wesleyan minister. We have spent two years in carefully reading and comparing the four Gospels, and one in going through, in a similar manner, the “Acts of the Apostles.” In these sacred books are found the origin and first principles of all true church government; and such an introduction is very likely to lead you to read and enquire further into this difficult, and perplexing, but highly important subject. If therefore, as had been often said, the members of the Methodist society are slaves, you are very likely to discover the fact, and will assuredly attempt to break both their chains and your own; and probably, in your just indignation, will demand the overthrow of that system, with which, now for many years, all my interests have been identified. But so far have I been from thinking of such a thralldom, such a discovery, and such an emancipation, that, in perfect simplicity and confidence, I have been doing my very best, in order that you might become, not an ignorant but an intelligent member of the society.

As you are not now, nor intend ever to become a professed divine, it would be scarcely fair to require you to decide on a system of church government, supported only by arguments drawn from the New Testament, as these involve to such an extent the principles of scriptural interpretation, with which you may not yet possibly be quite familiar. But there are notorious facts in the history of Methodism, and a few obvious inferences to be deduced from them—and of these, when brought to bear on questions of Wesleyan discipline, you can easily comprehend the meaning, and correctly estimate the force.

I. You became a Methodist after the societies had obtained an increase of popular *power*, but it will be your *policy* not hastily to conclude, that the original Wesleyan system, as it existed during the lifetime of its founder,

was a form of inherent tyranny and injustice. The system was established, not by acts of despotism, but on principles of essential liberty.

Both its doctrines and its laws were proposed by the ministers, and accepted by the people, in the way of universal suffrage. That such was the simple principle on which Mr. Wesley proceeded is evident from his own statement. In the preface to his sermons, after giving an account of his method of studying the Bible, he adds, “‘What I thus learn, that I teach.’ But some may say, I have mistaken the way myself, although I take upon me to teach it to others. It is probable many will think this, and it is very possible that I have. But I trust whereinsoever I have mistaken, my mind is open to conviction. I sincerely desire to be better informed. I say to God and man, ‘what I know not, teach thou me.’” What he found in the Bible, after due examination, whether matter of doctrine or of duty, that he boldly, but simply, proposed to his fellow-men, for their consideration and acceptance.

That it was morally impossible for this extraordinary man to attempt anything beyond this is plain from the nature of the case itself. Suppose the “united societies” had chosen not to submit to Mr. Wesley’s “rules” after he had made them. What then? Or suppose the hundred preachers named in his famous “Deed Poll” had all refused to give effect to its provisions. What then? Why, as in the case of a man who makes a will, which after his death nobody will execute, or even render valid by proving, there had been an end of the matter.

When people read any of Mr. Wesley’s books, or heard a sermon from himself, or one of his preachers, a proposal was virtually made to them, which they either declined or accepted. Some of them, either at once or after long and anxious deliberation, in solitude or in the company of their neighbours and friends, resolved to embrace the Wesleyan doctrine and submit to its discipline, and did this by joining the society. Matters of doctrine were chiefly fixed from the beginning, and alterations or improvements in points of discipline were effected, as at first, by a proposal emanating from the ministry, which each private member personally considered, and then accepted or declined. These proposals became “laws” to those who chose to accept them, as every man is bound faithfully to keep his own engagements.

2. In this procedure these men were perfectly consistent with themselves, for their practice fully agreed with the theory they avowed and defended. Wesley and his coadjutors conceived themselves to be called of God to preach his Gospel, and felt obliged and constrained to fulfil his gracious designs. In his written word he has caused his Gospel to be preached to every creature. Beside what he has done through the inspired writers, he has ordained a subordinate class of men, and sent them to re-propound to their fellow-sinners the offers and the laws of his Gospel, that they may

embrace the one and submit to the other. This was the work to which the first Methodist preachers thought themselves divinely appointed. Each felt laid upon his own soul, by the hand of God, the burden of re-stating and re-offering to sinful men, the matters contained in the written Gospel. As Christ's ministers they were to do nothing *less* than this. In the fullest sense they were directed to "preach the word." Paul's was the example they were to imitate, and he had not "shunned to declare the whole counsel of God." If possible, they were to persuade men to consent to be saved by the grace of the Gospel, and to be governed by its laws. This was to be attempted, whether the results to themselves were likely to be gainful or costly. By this course they might secure a respectable maintenance, or they might "suffer the loss of all things." This course might bring to them and to their hearers either "peace," or a "fire" and the "sword." But at all risks God's great proposal was to be made to rebel men, in all its breadth and fulness. This the early Methodist ministers did, without stopping to enquire whether men "would hear, or whether they would forbear," or in what way the consequences of this conduct were likely to be felt by themselves.

While these men were bound to do nothing *less* than this, so neither were they authorized primarily to do anything *more*. As true ministers indeed they were Christ's ambassadors and God's delegates, but their business was precisely defined. God himself, in the first instance, merely makes proposals to sinners, and calls them to submit to himself. There he stops and awaits the issue. His ministers are to "go and do likewise." Our fathers attempted not to coerce, or to exercise dominion, but simply proposed the claims of God, and persuaded men practically to acknowledge them. For the manner in which their message was treated their hearers alone were responsible.

3. Ever since Mr. Wesley's death the Conference has legislated on the same principle, taking upon itself the responsibility of proposing laws to the people, which they accepted or declined, in the way of individual and universal suffrage. This is plainly involved in a well-known provision, as explained by the acts of the Conference itself. It is a standing and authorized regulation that any new rule, in future adopted by the Conference, shall not be binding on the societies, until it has received the approbation of a majority of the quarterly meetings. Circuit officers are to approve or reject, because they are the parties best qualified to express the true sense and feeling of the great body of private members. That is the one great point to be secured. Should all the quarterly meetings in the kingdom agree to a new rule, and a great body of individual members still remain dissatisfied, such enactment would be reconsidered, changed, repealed, rendered inoperative, or something would be done to give popular content and satisfaction. This the Conference has actually done. During the recent

agitations, none of our laws were so loudly vituperated as were those passed in 1835. How did the Conference meet this clamour, and try to bring it to an end? Not by pleading the notorious fact that the proposal of these laws was sanctioned by a mixed assembly of ministers and laymen, approved by all the quarterly meetings in the kingdom, and hence inferring their permanent authority, but by making certain alterations in the laws themselves, which it was hoped would render them 'generally agreeable. All this plainly proves that the true power of Wesleyan laws resides, not in the mode in which, or the parties by whom they are proposed, but in the fact of their being personally and individually accepted by the people. An honest man will faithfully keep his own covenant; but then, before making that covenant, he will enquire, not merely who makes the proposal, and what other parties have acceded to it, but also whether it be right in itself, and proper for him; and in religious matters he will assent only to that which "commends itself to every man's conscience in the sight of God."

It has been said, indeed, by an authority in Methodism, that the Conference, whenever contemplating any considerable change in its rules, is bound to convene and consult a number of laymen, inasmuch as it has entered into "a compact," and cannot now legislate without the people. If the Conference has ever formally entered into any such engagement it has done a very unnecessary thing. As well might a seller bind himself, by a solemn vow, never to make a bargain without a purchaser. Conference cannot now, and never could, "legislate without the people." It may, indeed, pass resolutions, but these are virtually mere proposals, and not "laws," as they have no authority, or obliging power, until accepted by the parties to whom the proposal was made. Conference has entered into a "compact" with every man, woman, and child, who has joined the society, and that "compact" is renewed every quarter by the act of giving and receiving a ticket. A man may have formed a "compact" with his neighbour already, but is still at liberty, as much as he ever can be by the intervention of any third party, to make a further proposal, in order to a new "compact," whenever that may be deemed expedient.

At the same time it is proper you should be apprized that, to this simple mode of ecclesiastical legislation for a great christian community, by a proposal made by its ministers to the bulk of its people, and affirmed by individual suffrage, many objections have been made. As a system it has been denounced as political toryism, absolute despotism, and vulgar slavery. Some of the objections and exaggerations, which have been advanced, for the purpose of bringing this "old Methodist plan" into disrepute, will receive a future notice in this pamphlet. At present we merely observe, that upon the great principle it involves, affairs of merchandise are transacted, landed estates are transferred, and arts, literature, and philosophy cultivated and extended, while it enters largely into the diffusion

and perpetuation of christianity in the world. Ministers, as directed, go "everywhere preaching the word," and their hearers individually embrace or reject the "great salvation," and that process by which men's eternal condition is determined may be sufficient to regulate their ecclesiastical relationships, which can continue but a very short time.

While, therefore, you properly value and are careful to preserve that increase of popular power, which as a modern Methodist you possess, (for some of the regulations subsequent to Mr. Wesley's death were real improvements ;) yet away with the notion that our system, in the hands of its founder, was egregiously tyrannical and wrong, for it has blessed and saved tens of thousands, while it has injured none ; and it requires great wisdom to create, what simple folly may be sufficient to injure or destroy.

II. You are now invested with the *power* of judgment, being called to decide on the comparative merits of the old and new methods of Wesleyan legislation, and it will be your *policy* to hold the balance with an even hand, not to be swayed by popular opinions, but to "judge righteous judgment." How Wesleyan laws were made in days of old you have been already informed ; but now, it is said, instead of a proposal emanating exclusively from the ministers, and individually and practically accepted by the people, the entire community, or a great part of it, should be called together by proxy, to deliberate and discuss, and then, by solemn vote, to adopt and fix the laws, by which they are in future to be governed. With all sorts of nominal Methodists this appears to be a favourite plan. Even the so-called reformers thought if a body of delegates could but meet the Conference, a few days' discussion would end in everything being settled, on a sound and scriptural basis. Those who have taken the names of "moderates," by demanding an interview with the Conference were plainly of the same opinion ; while the Conference itself has repeatedly invited large bodies of lay friends to assemble in different places, and to give it the benefit of their advice, in preparing a proposal for the alteration and improvement of the laws which govern the connexion. This new mode of legislation is generally hailed as a manifest and important benefit. Yet looking to results, this improvement appears to be nominal rather than real ; for however many "delegates" or "friends" might be brought together, however full and wise their discussions, and at whatever conclusions they might arrive, unless these were of such a character as would satisfy the religious convictions and feelings of individuals, they must soon become laws without a people to submit to them, and a constitution without a community, which is one of the most useless things in the world.

2. Dissenters have told us what they think of our former proceedings, and how much, in their judgment, we need some change or reform. Hear one of them : "Doubtless the Conference holds the legal power, according to the deed of Mr. Wesley. But what right had Mr. Wesley, any more

than Constantine, or Henry VIII., or any civil power or state, to enact laws for the Church of Christ? But if there must be a central power on earth, or in a nation, then it is better to submit to the supremacy of the crown, than to the supremacy of convocation or of Conference; for what convocation would be without the check of the royal supremacy, that Conference is, at the present moment, in relation to the Methodist connexion; and in a far worse degree than convocation, because it is irresponsible in the strictest sense, and subject to no check which the laity could employ against it." All this is very amusing. The writer seems not to know whether, in spreading the Gospel, a "central power" is useful or otherwise. Yet modern christians generally think well of missionary societies, and each of these is a "central power" in the great work of human evangelization. If in any church a "central power" exists, he thinks it should be secular, not ecclesiastical. He would have a sovereign or a parliament, rather than a bishop, a "convocation," or a "Conference." Christian people for many ages have held a different opinion. He also says that "convocation," as the Puseyites wish to have it, and the "Conference," "at the present moment," are exactly similar institutions. It is certainly easier to affirm than to prove, that a clergy possessed of large and independent revenues and a ministry entirely sustained by the voluntary contributions of living people, an established church and a non-established sect, are in precisely the same position. What he says respecting the "irresponsibility" of Conference, has no parallel in the English language, except there can be found a writer upon the politics of the country, who chooses first of all to ignore the entire subject of the taxes, and then, just as if there were no such things in existence, proceeds to argue that the executive is "irresponsible" to parliament, and the people have "no check" upon the Queen's ministers. His question, "What right had Mr. Wesley, any more than Constantine, Henry VIII., or any civil power or state, to enact laws for the church of Christ?" is of course deemed equivalent to a demonstration. As to "Constantine, Henry VIII., or any other civil power or state," we may leave them to answer for themselves, as they are not without living and competent advocates. To the demand, "what right had Mr. Wesley" to do all that he ever did, our reply is, just as good a right as the editor of the British Quarterly has to write one book and to review another. When Mr. Wesley proceeded, as this gentleman chooses to phrase it, to "enact laws," it is notorious from the nature of the case itself, that he merely ventured to make certain proposals. To do this he had a "right" as a man, and to make evangelical proposals was his solemn duty as a minister of the Gospel. Any man has "a right" to draw up "rules" for the government of societies, and even to execute a "Deed Poll" if he think proper. We knew a gentleman who prepared a constitution and code of laws, but the community for which they were intended

has never yet existed. Whoever does the same thing with similar results becomes ridiculous, but commits no wrong ; and when another gravely questions his "right" to do all this, he has an opponent worthy of himself. Many men can write and reason in this way to any extent, but the Methodists will scarcely think of changing their mode of making laws, without something rather more convincing upon the subject.

3. But the right of proposing all new rules to the societies is thought to involve an amount of power too great to be exercised by ministers exclusively. That the Conference should sit with closed doors, and the public know nothing of its deliberations, until they come out in the shape of a formal proposal for a new law to be submitted to the people, is thought to be a prerogative too extravagant for it to claim, or for others to concede. Still, while there is a legitimate power arising from pecuniary support, there is also a power equally legitimate arising from moral responsibility, and while the former is great and paramount, it has always treated the latter with considerable deference and respect. Take for instance the case of a common Sunday-school. Subscribers and donors very properly possess great power, for they can embarrass and perhaps end the institution, by withholding their support. But the managing committee are morally responsible for the satisfactory working of the establishment, and they claim, and are generally allowed to exercise, the right of proposing such measures as are necessary for the attainment of that end. A wealthy patient has power over his medical adviser, for he can dismiss him at pleasure ; yet so long as his professional attendance is required, and he is responsible for the issue of the case, he exercises the power of proposing the way in which it shall be treated. All clients have a similar power over their legal agents. Still a barrister retained, and thereby made responsible for the result of a pending law-suit, will have the power of proposing in what way the case shall be brought before the court and conducted to its termination. Every mercantile firm feels the power of its own customers, who can send their orders to a rival establishment. But no set of managers, who are responsible for the results of a business, will surrender the power of proposing the mode in which it shall be conducted. The British people have great power over any ministry which the Queen may appoint, for they can sustain them in office, or hasten their fall. But so long as a cabinet exists it retains its responsibility, and therefore exercises the power of proposing to parliament, such measures as it deems necessary for the peace and well-being of the country. We need not say who was originally and morally responsible for Methodism. That point the world has already determined. Everybody who thought on the subject at all, concluded the system was either bad or good, and blamed or praised John Wesley accordingly. His responsibility was partly pecuniary as well as moral, for his lay preachers looked up to him as their guide and protector. Yet Wesley was a poor man, and there-

fore dependent upon others for his pecuniary supplies. Contributors acquired power, which they both felt and used. Many thought Wesley's power extravagantly large, and wished to reduce it; but none offered to share his responsibility. If they had, the attempt must have failed, for the simple reason that the thing was impossible. Circumstances had for ever made John Wesley the responsible man; and, therefore, amidst many murmurings, he wisely retained his power, which after all was nothing more than the simple right of first proposing what he deemed the most scriptural and advantageous method of working the system, and then calling upon people to fulfil the engagements with him, into which they had entered. After Mr. Wesley's death, the question uppermost in shallow minds was, Who shall succeed to his power? But the real point to be determined was, Upon whom shall now devolve his responsibilities? Who will undertake to work out that system which Wesley had founded, which was so big with promise, and so beset with peril and difficulty? Men who felt morally obliged to put their shoulders under this burden were the most likely to bear it with advantage. Eager volunteers could not command general confidence. The only plausible excuse which can be offered for many, who readily undertake responsibilities and suretyships to which they are totally unequal, is, that "they know not what they do." Whoever undertook the responsibility of Methodism, must take along with it the power of proposing from time to time the regulations necessary for the welfare of the connexion. No thoughtful man could become responsible for a system which he was unable, at least morally, to influence and direct. It is useless to speculate on any merely possible hypothesis. In fact, this great obligation devolved upon the Conference, and if that body has not the right, and the power in itself, of proposing any new law it deems necessary for the well-being of Methodism, then is it in the position of a lawyer without the power of directing the cause he has undertaken to conduct to an issue, and of a physician without the power to prescribe for the patient for whose life he has become responsible.

4. Turn we now to the new method of legislating for Methodism, which is, by a mixed committee of ministers and laymen, to prepare a proposal to be afterwards submitted to the quarterly meetings. Laymen are so summoned, either as representatives of the great body of the people, or simply as the friendly advisers of their ministers. If they are *proxies* of the people, private members should consider well before they sanction any general scheme of representation in Methodism. Ordinarily they are not wise who employ others to do for them what they are well able to do for themselves. It is true we send representatives to parliament, and there are persons who think a similar institution in Methodism would be a great advantage. An elected body would possess vast powers, be able to question the Conference, as parliament sometimes does the Queen's ministers, and convince the people they

are under a responsible government. Representatives, however, are less respected when without the power of taxing their constituents. So long as convocation was able to tax the clergy, it was authorized to proceed to business, but ever since it surrendered that power this permission has been withheld, and its credit and influence have passed away. Sometimes delegated powers have been used for personal purposes, and the deputies of others have had ends of their own; and the newspaper system of this country abundantly proves that people think it expedient to watch the proceedings of their representatives. Methodists, therefore, had better tax themselves than appoint others to do it for them; and instead of delegating their power to others, retain it in their own hands.

If these lay friends were called together simply as the advisers of their ministers, we can scarcely wonder at such an arrangement. While Mr. Wesley modestly proposed to men that they should believe God's testimony and submit to his laws, he found that, under the actual circumstances of human nature, this required no small amount of moral courage and daring. Such conduct was construed into an insult and an offence. For this he was at first assailed by rude mobs, and to the end of his days was, even by professedly religious people, reproached as a "Jesuit" and a "Pope." Within the last few years, when the country was filled with complaints respecting the "tyranny" of the Conference, and the cry of "down with it!" was raised through the length and breadth of the land, it is no wonder if Wesleyan felt like other ministers, when placed in trying and difficult circumstances. When Arianism was triumphant in Christendom, orthodox ministers had some seeming reasons for suppressing Trinitarian truth. Martyred reformers, in whose souls the word of the Lord long resembled a struggling fire, were urged by various considerations to conceal the articles of the Protestant faith. During some great outbreak of Antinomianism, it is only the courageous minister who will nobly assert the claims and vindicate the laws of his Master. Even an inspired prophet once said, "the word of the Lord was made a reproach unto me, and a derision daily. Then I said I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name." No wonder, therefore, if under the recent circumstances of Methodism, members of Conference became alarmed, and began to enquire—What shall be done? What mode of relief so likely as that of a convention of friendly laymen, for consultation and advice? Such a meeting was held in Sheffield in 1835, when the connexion was convulsed to its centre, and the fearful agitation was effectually allayed. To the principle of such a mode of settlement parties in general were already agreed. Yet any expedient for escaping from a difficulty, which involves a division of responsibility, must always be regarded with suspicion. Men who eagerly appropriate all *honour* to themselves will readily share with another any probable *disgrace*. A commander-in-chief, hard pressed by an enemy, and conscious

that his own resources are exhausted, will call a council of war. A physician who has a case in hand which baffles his own skill, advises a medical consultation. A tradesman, seeing no other course to be taken, resolves to call his creditors together. All such acts awaken distrust, and nobody is surprized when a retreat follows in the first case, a death in the second, and a bankruptcy in the third.

You, my dear sir, love your ministers, and will always be ready to befriend them. But remember friendship may injure while it intends to confer a benefit. To propound Christ's laws to men is the proper business of Christian ministers, and you promote their best interests by urging them to a faithful performance of their duty. Jesus has said to them, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." In this promise our fathers had unlimited confidence. They sang, "no danger I fear, nor start from the trial while Jesus is near." No man of business, however embarrassed, thinks of calling together his creditors, so long as he can fully rely on the promised assistance of a competent friend. All who believe the Bible expect the Christian ministry to survive its struggles, and look for the day when the word of God shall "mightily grow and prevail." It has been said that Wellington never called a council of war. Mr. Wesley was often urged to surrender his power, but felt he could not divide his responsibility. He, therefore, held on his way, nobly and at all hazards, proposing to others, whether matter of doctrine or discipline, that which he found in the Bible. For this he was loaded with abuse, but he did his duty, and when the summons came, was found prepared to give an account of his stewardship. We have his recorded judgment that "it is the part of a good champion to be flayed alive, and to conquer." Should a minister of Christ lose his courage, and wish to be dismissed from the post of difficulty and danger, that is a question between him and his Sovereign. So long as he holds his commission he must accept its attendant toils and trials. What have Christian ministers to fear? The discipline they are to propose is a pure emanation from the great source of all truth, and wisdom, and goodness. It is an unmingled benefit. Even *that* they are not sent to impose upon a reluctant people, but simply to offer it for their acceptance. True kindness on your part will urge them forward, and keep them with Paul in the thick and centre of this battle, until each can say, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness."

5. In the new mode of Wesleyan legislation, some things are taken for granted, which all are not yet fully prepared to concede. It is assumed that before Christian ministers make a proposition to the people, there are *two* questions they are bound to ask; whereas, hitherto, ours have generally made but a *single* enquiry. That solitary question was, "What is the word which cometh forth from the Lord?" Whatever was clearly taught in the

Bible, that, without further enquiry, they boldly propounded to their hearers. Now another point is suggested for consideration. Friends are to be convened, in order that they may tell us what are the opinions and feelings of their brethren, and the intended proposition is to be modified accordingly. We are not sure that this principle has been embodied in the instructions of the Master, Jesus, or that it will be recognized by him in the day of final account.

In this new arrangement it is also assumed, that the great principle involved in it is sound and scriptural. If so, it must be applicable to matters of doctrine equally with questions of discipline. If in a time of agitation and general clamour against some obnoxious law, or it may be against all law, the Bible is not to be considered as a sufficient guide ; and, before proposing its contents to our fellow-sinners, certain friends are, for obvious reasons, to be consulted ; then when Arianism, or Antinomianism, or any other form of speculative error is dominant and rampant, ministers are bound to take the same preliminary step, before announcing " the truth as it is in Jesus." But neither can this point be conceded without further light.

In the same plan of procedure it is also assumed, that, without some such change, devout and intelligent laymen cannot make their proper influence fully to be felt in Methodism. But this assumption cannot at present be conceded. Considering the present state of general intelligence in our country, the various modes of rapid communication which exist, and especially the great and all-pervading influence of the public press, the Wesleyan people at this day resemble a great popular convocation in perpetual session. Any man who has a useful thought to offer on any subject, whether of doctrine or discipline, on laws either old or new, can easily find the means of expressing his mind, and securing an audience. Every layman may put forth all his influence in preserving or improving the character of Methodism, without the trouble and expense of going far from his business and his home.

6. Nor can we dismiss from our minds the thought, that the new, as compared with the old way of legislation, is attended with a larger amount of risk and peril to Methodism. Times of agitation and uneasiness will doubtless come round again. Since former mixed meetings for altering our laws have passed off so well, others will be held under similar circumstances, and for the same end. When our adversaries, for selfish and unavowed purposes, choose to assail our laws, a body of friends are to be called in to review them. On former occasions great unanimity has prevailed, but that may not be so always. For recent unanimity special reasons may be assigned. Very many members of society of declared anti-Wesleyan opinions, though otherwise eligible to attend, never received any notice of the special meeting. Several who were present had been thrown by circumstances into

an attitude of hostility towards the Reformers, and therefore the more easily agreed with the Conference. It is scarcely to be expected that a body of laymen of independent minds, who think for themselves, will always think with the Conference. On the difficult subject of making new laws nothing is more probable than a difference of opinion. Votes in popular assemblies are often influenced by unexpected and even by trivial circumstances. Sooner or later a decision hostile to the Conference may not unreasonably be anticipated. Ministers outvoted in a mixed committee, selected and convened by themselves, will indeed be a "critical case" in Methodism. Old fashioned Wesleyans will hardly be terrified into submission by the first roar of ecclesiastical artillery. Parties will be formed. A struggle will ensue. Who can foretell the result? Methodism, be it remembered, is not the absolute property of its living adherents. It is a solemn trust committed to its ministers and people, which they are bound, by many and sacred obligations, to transmit unimpaired to coming generations. Trust property you know is not to be exposed to needless hazard; for it an investment is to be sought, the most secure that can be obtained. This new method of making laws introduces combustible materials into the city, in the hope that should a fire be accidentally kindled, the skill, promptitude, and energy of friends, will put it out again. The old method, by admitting such materials in far smaller quantities, increases the probability of its remaining, as its founder intended, either to be gradually deserted by its inhabitants, who will most likely leave it, when they have found a holier or a happier home, or permanently to increase in extent and population. By the new method of legislation, an axe is laid at the root of this tree of paradise, ready to be taken up and used under the excitement and uncertainty of a public meeting. By the old method the tree is left to brave the tempests of time, and to receive the influences of circumstances, and of human passions and opinions, until it either perish by a slow decay, or live to bless the world by its fruit for many years to come. "No man having drunk old wine straightway desireth new," and we expect you, after carefully comparing the old and new methods of legislation, will say "the old is better."

III. You possess the *power* to be or not to be a Methodist. It will be your *policy* to remember that all rights involve responsibilities, and to use this liberty with care and moderation. Popery claims to be the mother of all nominal christians. Wherever a baptized person may be found, and by whomsoever the ordinance may have been administered, Rome regards him as her subject, and asserts her right, if she deem it expedient, to coerce him into submission to her authority. Even the tolerant Church of England says that every British subject, not claimed by any other religious denomination, is rightfully of her communion. There are minor sects who admit to church-fellowship all children of their people who have not

formally repudiated the community of their fathers. But persons born of parents belonging to Methodism, baptized by its ministers, and brought up in close connection with its ordinances, are neither fully admitted to its privileges, nor do they come under the operation of its discipline, until, by a personal act of their own, they have joined the society. Nor do they, even after this, enter into any engagement to remain in the community they have chosen to enter, not even for a given time, but feel perfectly at liberty to leave it again whenever that is their pleasure. You will jealously refuse to surrender a single iota of all this ample freedom and power ; but at the same time do not forget that the act of consenting to become a Methodist, involves an important change in a man's position. Indeed, being a joint act, all the parties to it, including the minister, the society, and the recently admitted member, thereby enter into new relations, are invested with new rights, and obliged to the performance of new duties.

Neither John Wesley nor the Conference ever concealed their principles, or failed explicitly to state the regulations under which they were prepared to hold religious fellowship with their brother men. Even from the beginning, these have been vituperated under the name of "tyranny," sufficiently to make them abundantly known. No plea of ignorance on this subject can for a moment be admitted, either in the case of any minister who offers his services to the Conference, or in that of any private member who has chosen to join the society. This it will be your *policy* to keep in mind. Nor should you forget that no man can justly exercise his own rights in a way which inflicts a pecuniary injury upon other people. It may be that five hundred persons choose to join the Wesleyan society, and to meet their case, to the circuit in which they reside, an additional minister is appointed. On the ground, too, of the efforts and avowed intentions of the same parties, one more missionary may be sent to occupy some distant station among the heathen. Afterwards these persons may suddenly quit the society they have freely joined, and leave the two ministers, called out under their influence, to be provided for by the people with whom they have so flagrantly trifled. By freaks like these, individuals dishonour themselves, while they sap the foundations of mutual confidence among religious people, damp the ardour of evangelical enterprise, and delay the conversion of the world. With such characters you can have no sympathy, being convinced that power is always connected with duty, and having learned to regard the rights of others as equally sacred with your own.

Any Methodist who may afterwards so far change his mind as to begin to violate the rules he had engaged to keep, but is unwilling to quit the society he has joined, should remember that he has already, by his own act, invested his brethren with the indubitable right of relieving themselves

from what is felt to be an oppression and a wrong, by a forcible separation. Expulsions, of which so much has been recently said, are to be defended, not upon some disputed theory of church government, or the critical construction of particular texts, but upon the broad moral principles, which must ever regulate the profitable intercourse of human beings with each other. A connection with Methodism must always involve a proposal made by one party and accepted by another ; after which, any gross violation of its rules is a distinct breach of contract, by which an injury is inflicted, and justice demands that redress of which the nature of the case will admit. An ecclesiastical expulsion follows one form of this offence just as legal damages do another ; and that whether the offender and his friends are willing or unwilling, and whoever may object and complain.

IV. You have complete *power* over your own funds, but it will be your *policy* not to use this without some thought and discretion. Methodism it is well known, is sustained in its finances, not by state grants, nor the bequests of the pious dead, but by the voluntary contributions of its living friends. Even the enemies of the system have never charged it with corrupting the principles of religion for the sake of gain, or in any way teaching that the gift of God may be purchased with money. No leverage is supplied by the laws, or customs, or educational prejudices, prevalent in our country, by means of which a ministry so circumstanced can *extort* money from a free people. Nor is it possible to adduce even the shadow of a scriptural warrant given to Christian ministers to dispose, by their sole authority, of other people's money. When our Lord sent forth his Apostles he invested them with very extraordinary powers, but gave them no control over the property of the persons who entertained them. Should they be received into an house they might eat such things as were set before them, as labourers worthy of their hire. But should both food and lodging be refused, their only resource was meekness and submission. Their Master, in a similar case, "went to another village," and they were at liberty to follow his example. Modern ministers are sent on a similar errand, and are left equally dependent on the providence of God, and the kindness of his people.

While you justly prize and jealously guard this form of popular *power* in your own case, you will see the *policy* of judgment in its exercise. When crossed and offended you may rashly resolve at once to "stop the supplies." There are some things which are possible but not expedient. Occasionally a man had better not to do all that he has the right and the power to do. This bold step may be taken too soon. It was an *unwise*, as well as an *unkind* thing, in the man who acted with such prompt rigour towards a "fellow-servant," who owed him "an hundred pence," and, in the first instance, "took him by the throat" and "cast him into prison till he should pay the debt." Bad passions are generally blind, and men,

under their guidance, in avoiding one inconvenience, often stumble upon another. Our self-called Reformers thought only of annoying the Conference, and forgot there was a public opinion in the world. Yet, in all societies supported by voluntary contributions, withholding the customary donation, always and everywhere, has been considered equivalent to a resignation of membership. A decree of the delegates was thought sufficient to banish this popular notion, and reverse this part of the policy of mankind. But the parties were mistaken. The decision, and its authors, instead of being borne onward by a flood-tide in public opinion, were deserted by a natural, though an unexpected ebb, and leviathan became stranded and helpless.

Nor will it be discreet in you, while holding the purse, to join in the complaint that the Wesleyan people have "no power." During many years, both in the present and in a former generation, it has been said the Methodist people exercise no control over the affairs of their church, and when oppressed by their ministers are without the means of self-defence. Hence the private members have been designated "slaves," our ecclesiastical system a "tyranny," and recently the country has been filled with the cries of persons who affirm they have been grievously wronged. But this complaint is contradicted by others, which have been made by the same parties, and is moreover at variance with notorious facts in the history of our religious community. Wesleyan ministers have been charged with courting the rich and neglecting the poor ; but this complaint clearly assumes that those who have money to give exercise some sort of influence or power over those who are hoping to receive. In the memorable years of 1795 and 1797, the Wesleyan people had the power to convulse the connexion, and, according to some, to "extort" concessions from the Conference. When the delegates decreed to "stop the supplies," they supposed themselves to have power, for that was a measure clearly intended to coerce their opponents. Nor was the scheme without plausibility. Conference had made itself morally responsible for the maintenance of more than a thousand ministers at home, and upwards of three hundred abroad, together with a proportionate number of families, supernumeraries, and widows. If bankers have reason to dread what is called "a run" upon their establishments, then had the authors of this cry some power over a Conference which had generously placed itself in these very serious circumstances. Nor is this argument invalidated by the fact that the attempt made has proved a failure ; for even very powerful people have been morally defeated, when they happened to be in the wrong. Assuredly the numerous signers of the lay declarations, issued in 1835, and again in 1851, avowing adherence to Methodism, and promising to uphold its constituted authorities, believed themselves to have some power, since, without that, they could not possibly fulfil this solemn and public engagement. Nor can it be doubted that the

ministers who convened the lay friends in Manchester, in 1851, and again in London in 1852, by that act, at once admitted the power of the people, and shewed themselves to be aware of its extent. Every quarterly meeting demonstrates the power of the people in their several circuits, for there they fix the salaries of their ministers, and determine what bills shall be paid or refused. Nor are the people powerless in the matter of ministerial appointments, since they frequently pass by one preacher and invite another, and find their private arrangements confirmed by the Conference. Are there not instances in which popular influence has kept even an aged and respected minister out of a circuit, to which he had been led, and not without reason, to turn his attention? Many a quarterly meeting has suspended the operation of a Conference rule for one year, within the limits of its own circuit.

It is true, among so many things which the Wesleyan people can do, there are some others which they cannot do. Nor should this be to us a matter of surprise. Wesleyan ministers believe themselves to be called of God to the office they fill; and as he "will bring every work unto judgment," many of them at least are resolved to be faithful to him. A religious community which does not include a class of men who cherish a lively sense of personal responsibility to a Master in heaven, and are firmly resolved at all risks to fulfil his intentions, may be what you please, but cannot be a Church of Christ; for that is built upon "a rock," and partakes of the immutability of him who is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." Without such an element of fixedness, a society of human beings must be as unstable as the wind, and veer about to all points of the compass. A "clique" of men, who know their Master's will, and are immovably bent upon doing it, will often be charged, like Moses and Aaron, with "taking too much upon" them, and attempting to "put out the eyes" of the people. Majorities may attempt to coerce these sturdy spirits, and find them immovable. Even the power of the purse, sustained by the secular arm, when it has wantonly rushed into a conflict with the spirit of religion, has often sustained a defeat. Parties worsted in such a struggle may complain of a want of power; but all such complaints are unreasonable and untrue. As well might it be said that Nebuchadnezzar was without power, because, at the height of his prosperity, and when he was master of the world, he absurdly interfered with the human conscience and with God; and was, therefore, very properly resisted, defeated, and humbled, in a memorable contest with a small minority of his own servants and captives.

Did the Wesleyan people duly consider the entire circumstances of their own case, this loud and frequent complaint would never be heard again. With the British House of Commons is lodged the power of voting the annual supplies; and, by a discreet use of this advantage, that body

has gradually become the most influential of all the three estates of the realm. Yet it might have used this power in a manner so manifestly factious and unreasonable as to forfeit the public confidence, and become the author of its own humiliation. Whoever holds the public purse, either in the state or in the church, is certainly in a position favourable for the attainment of influence. This, indeed, does not inevitably follow. All Samsons are not Solomons. There may be great power, with but little wisdom to use it in a profitable manner. A celebrated Roman has said, "luxuriance may be checked, but barrenness has no cure." If, in any community, those who provide its public funds can exercise little or no efficient control in the management of its affairs, the cause of that weakness must be sought for, not abroad, but at home. It exists, not in others, but in the parties themselves; and arises, not from any faulty system, but from some personal and inherent imbecility, "for which there is no known remedy, and which prudent people often conceal but never proclaim.

V. You have the *power* to assist the Wesleyan ministers with your advice; and, while performing this dignified and honourable service, it will be your *policy* not to withhold or overlook those humble and everyday rights which they have acquired, by transactions which, for years together, have been notoriously taking place between other people and themselves. Parties have repeatedly demanded an interview with the Conference, as they wished to propose to it the terms of a new agreement. Many of these persons had been Methodists ten or even twenty years, when they suddenly resolved no longer to observe the rules of the body, until these had been modified in accordance with their own views. Some of these, on joining the society, had been formally asked by the minister admitting them, whether or not they approved of our standing regulations; and had given an answer in the affirmative. In all other cases, similar avowals were understood to be virtually, if not formally made. Actions speak louder than words; and, unless such a consent be included in such an act, we must come under the operation of a system of universal concealment and deception, and cannot, in future, know what a man means by what he does, nor can the tree any longer be "known by its fruits." It may be that persons acting in this manner had not *considered*, and did not *understand*, the rules of Methodism; but, assuredly, they promised to *keep* them. Any man who does not feel obliged to observe the rules of the Connexion, by the act of joining the society, is not likely to be Methodistically bound by anything; and it would be a piece of folly in the Conference to make with him any new agreement. Should you ever deem it right to offer advice, or to suggest proposals proper to be submitted to the quarterly meetings, you will, of course, in minor matters, respect the rules you have already engaged to keep; as acts of charity do not supersede the claims of justice, and those who give alms should not refuse to pay their debts.

VI. Without at all undervaluing or neglecting the great *power* you undoubtedly possess, it will be your *policy* earnestly to consider the providence of God, and to place all your trust in him. This world is the theatre of a mighty struggle, where human passions and interests are in fierce and ceaseless conflict with each other. Good civil or ecclesiastical constitutions, equal laws, and personal rights may be secured, and, like the "horse," be "prepared against the day of battle;" but the course and issues of the war are unknown and uncertain, and after all, "safety is of the Lord." For want of this trust there are many, even intelligent minds, greatly disturbed by needless fears. They have adopted the maxim that all men are fond of power; that ambition is inherent in every priesthood; and that the Wesleyan ministers are almost necessitated, by their position, to seek their own aggrandizement at the expense of the liberties of the people. Hence they are haunted, as by a spectre, with the perpetual apprehension of chains and slavery. Reference is continually made to the history of the papacy; and it is maintained that Methodism, as at present constituted, tends in the same direction, and must lead to an extravagant exaltation of its ministry, and a corresponding degradation of its people. Human beings, who choose to lose sight of God, often "walk in a vain shew," and disquiet themselves in vain. Ministers of religion, like other people, doubtless have their temptations, their passions, and their perils. Still there is one whose "kingdom ruleth over all;" who has prescribed to every private man his own proper duty; and then, assuming he will do it, has added, "let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." Perhaps the "love of money" is a worldly passion as intense in degree, as ceaseless in operation, and as wide in its influence, as is that of the love of power. Merchants are as intent on gain as are priests on the acquisition of power. There are men who cultivate the various arts by which money may be honestly transferred from other people's pockets to their own, as assiduously as do ecclesiastics the means of subjecting laymen to their own authority. But no wise man on that account lives in the constant fear of being reduced to poverty. There were acute, clever, and successful money-getting men in the days of David, who nevertheless said to every ordinary man, on the assumed condition that he minded his own business, "trust in the Lord and do good, so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed." There had been no rise of the papal power, had not the common people first chosen to be ignorant and wicked. It is very true that kings and priests should have educated the people; and equally true that they should have taken care of their own souls. Instead of this, they first mentally and morally crippled themselves; and then became the easy victims of a fell and crafty despotism. Africa was first voluntarily demoralized, and then forcibly enslaved. Methodists can never lose their freedom, until they have surrendered their intelligence, their principles, and their character. We have

been told that "knowledge is power;" and a greater than Bacon has said, "the hand of the diligent shall bear rule." Whoever minds his duties as a Christian, has learned to "overcome evil with good;" has entered on a victorious career; and must ultimately become, not a slave, but one of the "princes of the people."

VII. While using the *power* you possess in all matters of church government, it will be your *policy* practically to consider the true end of its appointment. Schemes of ecclesiastical discipline deserve but little attention, unless they are in accordance with scripture, and thus manifestly "from heaven," and not merely "of men." Any system of church government which has God for its author, is but the means in order to an end—the husk of a precious kernel, the fleshly body of a living soul, and the "earthly ground" in which has been deposited a "celestial seed," intended to flourish and bear "fruit unto life eternal." Whether that form be episcopacy, or presbyterianism, or independency, which is of divine origin, that which is so contemplated not merely the present freedom and welfare of individual Christians, but their hopeful death at the appointed time, and their enjoyment of paradise in the disembodied state. In the present arrangements made by the great Head of the church, the future blessedness of individual believers is as distinctly contemplated as was the intellectual improvement of the four Hebrew children by Nebuchadnezzar, in the provision he made for their maintenance and education, as recorded in the first chapter of the book of Daniel. It would have been an easy thing for these four youths to have frustrated the noble design of that great and politic sovereign. They might have passed the "three years" allotted them for preparation, not in severe study, and the acquisition of useful information, but in discussing the qualities of their diet, and the comparative elegance or rusticity of their habitation and its furniture. But then, "at the end," when they were called to "stand before" their sovereign, and underwent an examination in his presence, he must have felt the insult offered by this defeat of his royal purpose; and each pupil, as well as the "prince" to whose care they had been committed, might have "endangered his head to the king." Eternal salvation is God's end of "ecclesiastical polity," as truly as the sufferings of Christ, and the glory which should follow, were from the beginning a part of his plan, when he so loved the world as to send into it "his only begotten Son." But the full extent of this glorious scheme the disciples were unable to comprehend. With the utmost tenacity they continued to cherish the notion of a temporal kingdom, to be erected by their Master, under which they expected earthly dignity and power. When, therefore, they saw that Master affixed to the cross, undoubtedly dead, and borne away to his tomb, this splendid fabric of their fancy was scattered to the winds, and in a tone of despair, they exclaimed, "we trusted this had been he which should have redeemed Israel." Many

prominent talkers and writers on the subject of church government, at this day, have their imaginations full of matters equally earthly and impertinent, and are likely to experience similar disappointment and mortification. Popery is an ecclesiastical scheme, intended to secure to a priesthood the civil rule of this world. There are churches and political communities which are likely to stand or fall together, and the former are defended for the sake of the latter. Smaller organizations, called churches, are often the focus and hotbed of political democracy and agitation, and their supporters are contemplating, not heaven, but something present and earthly. All these idle fancies may be called "church government," but they are as utterly foreign to the high ends contemplated by the adorable founder of Christianity, as were the dreams of the fishermen of Galilee. Nothing but a miracle can prepare such worldly members of the church for death and heaven, as it required the coming of the Holy Ghost to fit the minds of the disciples for the session of their Master at the right hand of God, and for their own department of labour, in "preaching the Gospel to every creature." To live under any system of church government, and never to obtain "the forgiveness of sin, and inheritance among them which are sanctified," is to go to school without becoming a scholar ; to serve an apprenticeship, and learn no trade ; and must end in the doleful lamentation, "the harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved." Such persons, like the foolish virgins, take their lamps and their vessels, but leave the oil behind, and go out to meet the bridegroom only to be excluded from the feast, and left in the outer darkness.

You are now a member of the Wesleyan society, and will, of course, exercise your undoubted rights, by seeking and intermeddling with all matters connected with its laws and their administration. Since you are the "Lord's freeman," it is proper that your entire conduct should be in harmony with that exalted character. It should not, however, be forgotten that you became a Methodist by professing "a desire to flee from the wrath to come, to be saved from your sins," and that it was Mr. Wesley's wish that all those who choose to follow him at all, should follow him to "Abraham's bosom." To attain heaven was the one end of his long and busy life ; and, in his judgment, any man who refuses to "walk by the same rule, and to mind the same thing," had better cease to bear his name, and to belong to the people called Methodists ; for he has left it upon record, for the guidance of those who watch over that soul, "if he repent not, he hath no more place among us."

VIII. You possess *power* which is amply sufficient for all purposes of self-defence, and it will be your *policy* to abstain from all feelings of hostility, and every act of aggression towards the Conference. Much, indeed, has been recently said of the Wesleyan ministers meeting every year—sitting with closed doors for two or three weeks in succession—the ambition in-

herent in the priestly character—and the certainty of clerical claims being advanced by slow and imperceptible degrees, until they imperil the liberties of common people. We may ask all such frightened persons—What Conference can enslave you, so long as you are subject to no laws, and pay no taxes, except such as are imposed by yourselves, in the way of separate, personal, and formal consent? Perfectly safe in the possession of this power, you may leave the Conference as free to act, as you wish to be yourselves. Some people are fond of comparing the Wesleyan Conference with a convocation of the clergy of the English church, although circumstances have established between the two cases such an essential and manifest difference, that they never were and never will be compared, but for some sinister purpose. Attempts have been made to fetter the Conference under the plea of affording assistance. Ministers, it is said, are not men of business, and when left to themselves are apt to become sentimental and enthusiastic. They need the presence of laymen to render their plans sober and practical. God has commanded the world to be evangelized, and a considerable part of it still “lieth in wickedness.” Whether men be sober, or beside themselves, his great designs of mercy must be fulfilled. For many years John Wesley was called an enthusiast, and during that period Methodism was created. Dr. Coke was said to be wild and inconsiderate, and it is certain had he been more like ordinary men, the Wesleyan missions had not so rapidly reached their present magnitude and importance. English newspapers have felt themselves quite competent to convict and condemn Captain Gardiner and his brave companions, who went on a mission of mercy to Patagonia, and were famished on its inhospitable shores. But their case involves a question to be settled, not on earth, but at the judgment seat of Christ. It may be the solemn duty of true ministers of Christ to undertake distant and perilous missions, and to perish in attempting them. If you do not feel at liberty to aid any particular undertaking, retain your money; but, instead of hindering such reputed enthusiasts, rather bid them “God-speed,” for that is the spirit which is to evangelize the world. Many Christian enterprises may be deemed impracticable by those who decline all share in their execution, and yet be carried out with triumphant success by those who have embarked in them their life and their all. The ministerial is the missionary spirit. It has the world to subdue, and must not be restrained. Such an agency for the evangelization of mankind as that which is supplied by Methodism, cannot be wielded in the best manner without a great central power to give it the needful impetus and direction. If Wesleyanism is to advance the conversion of the world to Christ, then its ministry must be kept pure. But what court, except the Conference, ever did, or is ever likely, effectually to deal with a talented and popular, but erring, factious, or immoral minister? If ever our dark and sinful world is enlightened and purified, it will be by the

diffusion of simple evangelical truth. An annual Conference of ministers is necessary, in order that our doctrines may be preserved in accordance with the "faith once delivered to the saints." Even in Britain living Christianity appears to be advancing at a rate less rapid than the increase of the population ; and, as many other countries are less favoured than our own, the millenium seems to be receding, rather than advancing. A true lover of Christ, and of mankind, will not therefore even think of dispensing with the Conference, until he has something better, or at least equally good, to put in its place. All men love liberty, and Wesleyans are no exception to the general rule. But, together with their own individual freedom, they desire the honour of God, and the holiness and happiness of their fellow-men. Their wish is to see united, in their system, the largest degree of personal freedom, with the greatest amount of evangelizing efficiency. Show us a system which gives more ample liberty to individuals, and, at the same time, is equally mighty in the work of converting sinners, and we will adopt it without delay. In the mean time, it need not be matter of surprise, if "the love of Christ constrain" us to act with the Conference, to submit to the rigid discipline of a great evangelical army, and even to surrender a portion of our individual freedom, when that is necessary, for the preservation of the purity of the church, and for the advancement of the salvation of the world.

Hoping you will be a free, useful, and happy Wesleyan layman,

I am, dear Sir,

Yours affectionately,

S. J.