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The March of Democracy in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South
A HISTORICAL STUDY

An Address Delivered Before the Historical Society of the South Carolina Annual Conference, Methodist Episcopal Church, South, at Anderson, S. C., November 26, 1912

By JOHN LEMACKS STOKES, D. D.

I. OUR SUBJECT.

An explication of this must begin with a definition of "democracy". It is "demos" (the people) kratéo (to rule—i. e. ruling) so the rule of the people; or the widest distribution of opportunity and service.

As another introductory word, we beg to observe, that our sketch is not a bit of history, but simply as it purports, a historical study. It is an interpretation, a critical appraisement, of certain facts of our history that lie open to all of us. Let us, indeed, seek to free ourselves from cumbrous, often misleading, details, that we may the better trace the golden thread of progress, emancipation, and ever-widening opportunity for which democracy stands.

II. OUR METHODIST PARADOX.

Why should we ever fear a paradox? A "paradox" is only a seeming, not a real, contradiction.

Our Methodist paradox is, that with such an origin as our Church has had, it has yet been always a "people's Church"—instinct with the spirit of real democracy.

Methodism had its rise, not (as often taken for granted) in the common walks of life, but in the very centre of learning and high-churchism, aristocratic Oxford University. A recent writer has said, "Protestantism is democracy in religion." But the early John Wesley was far enough from that. A distinguished Canadian Methodist declares
of Wesley: “In religion, until he was thirty-five years of age, he followed the teachings, not of a liberal Protestantism, but of a mediaeval and Catholic type of Anglicanism.” And it may be added that this discriminative judgment applies not alone to Wesley as a theologian, but as an ecclesiastic as well. For him—as, indeed, for all the high-anglicans of his day—it was simply Canterbury instead of Rome as the seat of authority in religion—Primate of all England instead of His Holiness of Rome.

This paradox of ours, however, is by no means singular. It can readily enough be matched elsewhere. It finds one of many illustrations in that most interesting development of the British government—an evolution, by-the-way, never yet quite justified in the logic of the schools, but only in that larger, more generous, “logic of events”. Beginning with the oldtime autocratic king, it has “broadened down from precedent to precedent”, making

“The bounds of freedom wider yet”—

until the great Laureate’s words come true, and it is seen to be—

“Broad-based upon the people’s will.”

And the same paradox is more signally presented in the establishment and growth of the Christian Church itself. It began with “one Lord, one faith, one baptism”; it was planted by chosen Apostles of our Lord. But these Apostles have had no “successors”; nor our Lord a “vicegerent” on earth. At once the appeal began to be made to the masses; privilege and opportunity (twin brothers) passed naturally to the rank and file; so that in less than a single century the Church had become an almost perfect democracy. It was the corruptions of later times that made possible a recalcitrant Thomas à Becket or a fulminating Hildebrand. So it was but a return to earlier conditions that rendered Protestantism “democracy in religion”.

But our paradox is our paradox, however we may match it elsewhere, and seek to justify it. Still must we reckon with it as we trace the “march of democracy” among us. Beginning as a legalist and sacramentarian of the most pronounced type, from all this narrowness John Wesley was most happily delivered, when, May 24, 1738, in Aldersgate street, London, he “felt his heart strangely warmed”. Indeed, as Bishop McTyeire aptly says, “That was the end of legalism and formalism and sacramentarianism, and that was the genesis of Methodism”.

But, observe, that this is only true because Methodism in its essence is a revival of religion and not an ecclesiastical organization. It is not claimed, nor is it true, that our Founder in this epochal experience, was as wondrously delivered from the prepossessions of ecclesiastical high-churchism. We know on the contrary, how tenaciously he clung to “Church order”, and how, only little by little, unmistakably led by the hand of Providence, would relinquish aught of it. It is only a simple matter of history that he was as veritable an autocrat in Methodism as his grace of Canterbury among the Anglicans, or his holiness of Rome among the Catholics. In all his conferences, he “conferred” indeed with
his preachers, but the final determination of every matter lay with himself. It was all perfectly open and above board. It was the purest paternalism. He was the father, the patriarch; they the children. And this same high authority he transmitted to his first “General Assistants” (as they were called) in America, Rankin and Asbury. This same high authority he also sought to transmit to the bishops of the new Methodist Episcopal Church.

Was all this, we may pause to ask, to Wesley’s discredit? By no means. It was perfectly natural and inevitable. But the wonder is that out of it came our Methodist paradox, a “people’s Church”. The marvel is that this man’s lofty unselfishness and ardent love for men, made him, as no other man can claim the title, England’s “Great Commoner”. Wonderful is it, too, how the very atmosphere of independence he created for Methodism reacted upon himself, and led him to break in most surprising fashion with the venerable past.

III. THE FIRST GUN OF DEMOCRACY.

It came from a most unexpected quarter. It was fired by our Founder himself. In the Church the two great antitheses, the irreconcilable principles, are the hierarchy (practically priest-rule-priestcraft) and democracy. The palladium of the hierarchy is the “divine right” of bishops, bishops the “successors of the apostles”. It is thus the rule of the few, instead of the many, in its most offensive form—founded on a “pious fraud”—a monstrous “fable”, repugnant alike to common-sense and true religion. This theory is, indeed, only strong in its pretensions. Such rule is necessarily that of a “close corporation”. At once it is lost if it comes into the open, seeks the light, dallyes or compromises.

So that when the Rev. John Wesley, “presbyter (mind you!) of the Church of England”, came to consider himself as much a “Scriptural episcopos” as the bishop of London himself, and straightway proceeded to ordain Coke and others—well, however unconscious he may have been of the full significance of his act; however Francis Asbury may have misunderstood it, and afterward discounted “Presbyterial ordination”; yet the axe was laid for all time at the root of ecclesiastical pretension, and the day of democracy had dawned.

IV. THE SECOND GUN OF THE CAMPAIGN.

Again it is the unexpected that happened. Francis Asbury (no less!) is at the gun. It provokes a somewhat irreverent smile as we look back now and see what Father Wesley meant when he called himself a “scriptural episcopos”. It was a veritable patriarchate, that seemingly innocent bishopric of his. He would organize the American Church. He would appoint the bishops. All was prearranged. It is doubtful if a conference was contemplated at all; but if so, yet a conference in which the bishop, Wesley’s appointee, should have the final determination. Evidently “demos” was not “ruling”, at that Christmas Conference of 1784—until Francis Asbury, knowing well the temper of the people,
and (perhaps we may add) with the echoes of the American Revolution ringing in his own ears—Francis Asbury arose in that Christmas Conference, and, with simple dignity, declared that he could not accept the office of bishop by Wesley's appointment, but only by the free election of his brethren!

Let us pause to take it in. It had been more than a thousand years since a bishop of the church of Christ had been thus elected. It differentiated and limited our Methodist episcopacy more effectually than a thousand statutory safeguards could have done. It said in effect: "If I am a bishop, I am not by succession from the apostles, but by the free election of the church. I am no appointee of Pope or Prime Minister. I recognize no one-man power, nor 'close corporation'. Even my honored father in the gospel, John Wesley, cannot bestow the office upon me. I derive it from my brethren and the church they represent, and hold it in trust for them." And when the Conference gravely proceeded with his election, they set their broad seal upon this early declaration of right.

V. Bishop McKendree's Flank Movement.

Unquestionably Wesley's lead had set the pace for Francis Asbury. Practically he bore the same relation to the American church that Wesley bore to the English. He, too, was the father of a people. He, too, had earned the right—if this were ever possible—to have his own way. Nor was it a time to stand upon a punctilio here or there. Duty was too real, responsibility too pressing. And, conscious only of his whole-hearted devotion to the work, it was not strange that Asbury, though elected as he was, forgot that his episcopal actions should be reviewed by the General Conference.

With the broad-minded Bishop McKendree originated the next forward step. Elected as the colleague of Bishop Asbury, after the death of Whatcoat, McKendree read his "episcopal address" (or more properly *report*) to the succeeding General Conference. The significance of the act was not lost upon the aged Asbury. At once he was on his feet, asking why this innovation. With beautiful courtesy McKendree disarmed him: "You are our father, we are your sons; you never had need of it. I am only a brother, and have need of it." It is added by the chronicler, that "Bishop Asbury said no more, but sat down with a smile on his face". The sweet-spirited old patriarch was satisfied—but McKendree had his way, and the significant innovation remains.

VI. Recognition of the Cabinet.

The years roll by, and many changes come. To some of these we will revert further on; but logically, if not chronologically, belongs here a bit of often-overlooked legislation. It was only two-and-a-half years ago, at Asheville, N. C., that it came to birth. It seems an accident almost; a sort of legislative *obiter dictum*; something that somehow slipped in; and yet the more we examine it, the more important it
appears. It is none other than that seemingly innocent provision, that hereafter, in the stationing of the preachers, no appointment shall be made by the bishop that has not been previously announced to the cabinet. Now this is really the first time that this well-known word "cabinet" ever found its way into the Discipline. It is the first official recognition of the cabinet of presiding elders. It is the first provision of law that gave the presiding elders even the right of protest in the making of the appointments.

We cannot then be mistaken, in interpreting, in critically appraising, this action as well-nigh revolutionary. It gives the cabinet a really legal status. It is no longer a mere creature of custom, to be regarded, as the presiding bishops may elect. It shifts—by a handbreadth you may say—yet it shifts, the "centre of gravity" in the appointing power. It brings this into closer touch with the Conference; and, so far, is undoubtedly a democratic development.

(And now if we can only unfrock that old hierarch, "Bishop Almanac", so inexorable every four years! And if we could—but would Methodist flesh and blood stand it? If we could then remove that venerable "ban of secrecy"! What say you, Conscript Fathers? But I desist.)

VII. LAY REPRESENTATION.

In the larger review of this subject, we are indebted wholly to McClintock & Strong's Cyclopaedia, of which we have made the freest use. All of us recognize that authority.

In the Old Testament Scriptures we find early allusions to the laity, in Deut. 18, 3, where upon them is laid the obligation of paying a tithe to the priest when offering sacrifice; and in Ezekiel's vision of the new temple, where the "ministers of the house" are to boil the sacrifices of the laity. So also in 1 Chron. 16, 36, all the laity said amen and praised the Lord, when Asaph and his brethren had finished the psalm given them by King David.

In the New Testament Scriptures this distinction seems to be ignored by Christ and his apostles; for, although there are passages in which the laity are spoken of as a class, yet it is nowhere intimated that they were not allowed to exercise in large measure the prerogatives of the clergy. Coleman, one of the best authorities on Christian antiquities, holds that in the early stages of Christianity "all were accustomed to teach and baptize", a practice to which Tertullian (born about A. D. 160) soon objected. From the writings of the early fathers, moreover, it is evident, that only in the 2nd and 3rd centuries after the establishment of the churches, a stricter discipline was inaugurated. The introduction of the Episcopal office, however, first definitely settled the status of the laymen in the church. As early as A. D. 182, or thereabouts, Clement of Rome points to the laity as a distinct class. In a letter of his to the Corinthians respecting the order of the church, after defining the positions of the bishops, priests and deacons respectively, he adds, "The laymen are bound by the laws which belong to laymen".
A little later Cyprian (born about the beginning of the 3rd century) uses the words “clerus” and “plebs” as of the two bodies which make up the Christian Church. But the idea that the priesthood formed an intermediate class between God (Christ) and the Christian community first became prevalent upon the corruptions that ensued upon the establishment of the prelacy. Gradually as the power of the hierarchy increased, the influence which the laity had exercised in the church was taken from them, and in 502 a synod held at Rome under Symmachus finally deprived the laymen of all activity in the management of the affairs of the church.

In the church of the Reformation a very different spirit prevailed. All Christians were looked upon as constituting a common and equal priesthood. Still the desire of making a distinction, that should be visible and practical, often led even the Protestant church astray; and has left unsettled to this day, in some denominations, how far the laity should share in the government of the church; and also just how much significance attaches to the words “clergy” and “laity”. Some very strict Protestants prefer the words “minister” and “people” instead of “clergy” and “laity”.

Farrar thus draws the distinction between the laity and clergy of the Protestant church: It is for the people that the ordinances of religion exist. The clergy are the dispensers of these benefits. It is, however, questioned by some, how far the professional distinctions of clergy and laity are desirable. Of course the clergy may be supposed to be better fitted, as religious teachers, to explain and enforce the evidences, the doctrines and obligations of our holy religion. But they are not expected, by virtue of a special illumination, to understand more of those things surpassing human reason than God has made known in revelation to the whole church.

Yet the laity, says Farrar, are in danger of perverting Christianity, and making it two religions, one for the initiated few, and one for the mass of the people, when they yield themselves to the complete guidance of the clergy, trusting to their vicarious wisdom, piety, and learning. They should be on the alert, and beware of that lurking tendency in the hearts of all men to the very error that today discredits the Roman and Greek communions—the error of thinking to serve God by a deputy or representative; or as regarding the learning and faith, the prayer and piety, and the scrupulous sanctity of the priest, as being in some way or other transferred from him to the people.

The laymen are, indeed, to be warned that the source of these errors lies in the fact of regarding the clergy as a priest (in the sacerdotal sense of that word); as holding a kind of mediatorial position, which makes him distinct from the people; as being, therefore, no proper rule for themselves—a view which at once unduly exalts the clergy, and tends most mischievously to degrade the tone of morals and religion among the people.

Finally this same English churchman says—we are still following
McClintock and Strong's quotations—that the laity should be reminded that there is really no difference in church standing between them and the clergy, except that the clergy are the officers of each particular church, to minister the word and sacraments to that portion of its members over whom they are placed.

The right of the laity to representation in the councils of the church has ever been one of the points of difference between Catholics and Protestants. But in the development of Protestantism the lay power was unfortunately absorbed by the State. The State-Church system has hindered the free growth of the Christian community; but wherever Protestantism has had the opportunity of freely unfolding its principles, lay representation has been recognized as just and fitting.

The history of lay representation in the Methodist Episcopal Church has been quite eventful. Originally, and for many years, the church was governed by the travelling preachers, through the Annual Conferences, and the delegated General Conference. But early in the past century symptoms appeared of a desire for a change. About 1822 the Wesleyan Repository, a paper advocating “reform” (as it was called), was established in Philadelphia. This was followed, in 1824, by a convention of “reformers” in Baltimore, who established as their periodical organ in that city The Mutual Rights. The objects of attack were episcopacy and the purely clerical government of the church. In 1827 Dr. Thomas E. Bond issued an appeal to Methodists, which exerted a great influence in staying the tide and maintaining the existing system. At the General Conference of 1828 the subject was discussed in the celebrated “Report on Petitions and Memorials”, which denied the claims of the petitioners. This report was unanimously adopted. By this time proceedings had been instituted against some of the “reform party” in Baltimore, which resulted in expulsion. Others withdrew; and, in 1830, the “Methodist Protestant church” was organized.

This brings us to about a decade and a half of the organization of the M. E. Church, South; and our discussion must now be narrowed to the progress of the movement within our own bounds.

(But we may be allowed to add, briefly and parenthetically, that another effort to obtain lay representation in the M. E. Church (North) was made in 1852. A convention of laymen, repudiating the contentions of the old “reformers”, and claiming representation as a matter of expediency, petitioned the General Conference of that year. Dr. Bond was willing for the church to get together on that platform, and proposed a plan of “lay coöperation” in the Annual Conferences. But nothing was done. And, though the agitation continued and grew, it was not until 1872, after the experiment had been tried in the Southern Church, that it issued in any practical plan.)

The separation of the Northern and Southern branches of the church had now taken place. Circumstances that need not be detailed here, had conspired to render the Southern church exceedingly cautious and conservative. As one of our oldest and best informed writers has said,
"The Southern Church up to 1866 was very conservative, and 'democracy' was an odious term".

Curiously enough this was so; for the South was the very citadel of civic democracy; and Tigert shows that in the threatened schism of the Church in 1779—in the controversy over the sacraments—that it was a progressive South against a conservative North.

It was in New Orleans, in 1866, that the General Conference of our Church faced and courageously met a great crisis. It was a new world then. The old order had passed away forever. Slavery was a dead issue. "States'-Rights" was peacefully sleeping. The time had come when without any embarrassment from past relations we might welcome the "new occasions" teaching "new duties". Our very poverty and humiliation were the providential conditions of our freedom and progress. The ministry, too, stood appalled, it would seem, at the magnitude of the task before the church; and instinctively we stretched out our hands to the laymen of the rank and file.

It will, indeed, be many a day before we have justly measured, and adequately honored, those of our leaders, who, in that grand and awful crisis, "had understanding of the times to know what Israel ought to do". Some one, half facetiously let us hope, says that "Drs. McTyeire, Wightman, A. L. P. Green, John E. Edwards and others were a 'self-constituted juncto' to see these measures of reform through". But all honor, say we, to these men of large vision and generous sympathies!

At that time it was, then, 1866, that our splendid system of lay representation was inaugurated, substantially as we have it today: equal representation of laymen and ministers in the General Conference, the great law-making body of the Church; four representatives from each presiding-elder's district, elected by the District Conference, to the Annual Conference; the District Conference composed of a majority of laymen elected from the various charges, as each Annual Conference may provide; the Church Conference where each member of the Church is recognized.

Upon this scheme—according to the plan of our "study"—the following observations may be made: 1. The provision for representation of the laity in the General Conference goes to the limit of full recognition, and cannot be improved upon.

2. The comparatively small representation in the Annual Conference may be justified on the ground of the practical necessities of the case; and by the further fact that the Annual Conference is not a law-making body. While the custom of admitting laymen to practically all the Conference boards and committees, at first as a minority, and now in equal numbers, as nearly as possible obviates the objection of restricted privilege.

3. The District Conference is emphatically a laymen's body. It has been seriously discounted in the past by the narrow electorate (the Quarterly Conference) upon which it rests. But, it will be observed that this is not a part of the fundamental law; and already one of the South-
Western Conferences has taken the lead in making it more nearly representative by constituting the Church Conference the electorate.

4. The Quarterly Conference, in its personnel, remains the anomaly of our system. It alone is out of harmony with our modern organization. Evidently it has been brought over without change from the past, either from a lack of proper attention to the misfit under present conditions; or from that natural aversion of legislative bodies to a completely progressive program.

Of course there is a real place for the Quarterly Conference in our system—as real as ever. Our criticism is alone of its make-up—or, more strictly, of the method of its make-up. The anomaly of it is in the fact that it alone is a self-perpetuating body; and, in the last analysis, does not even rest upon the free suffrage of its own members, but upon the nomination of the preacher-in-charge.

In our humble judgment, the Church Conference should elect all of the lay members of the Quarterly Conference. In that way the Quarterly Conference would become in reality the executive committee of the Church; and our electoral chain would be complete, from the Church Conference of the whole membership clear up to the General Conference making our laws, electing our bishops and connectional officers, and shaping the policy of the Church.

5. It only remains to say of the Church Conference, that it ought to be a power, where it is only a name. And it would, we believe, be instinct with life and power, if it had such real duties imposed upon it as the election, and consequent supervision, of the members of the Quarterly Conference. If this were done, it may be added, then the Quarterly Conference might well elect the members of the District Conference, and so the process be symmetrical throughout.

VIII. Woman's Place.

But surely no democracy can be complete, that is but a democracy of man, and not of woman as well. Else would we be obliged to alter Mrs. Browning's fine verse. She tells us in her "Lady Geraldine's Courtship",

"And the shadow of a monarch's crown was softened in her hair".

But if Demos be only a man, then we will surely have to fix him up quite differently, with the crown on his bald pate instead! Or, perhaps we are willing for woman to have the royal "shadow", while we make off with the substance!

But a truce to this trifling. Really just as soon as we squarely face a question like this, is not Demos a woman too? Why the answer is inevitable—

"And pealing, the clock of time
Has struck the woman's hour!"
We cannot, indeed, venture far afield here, but must at once confine our inquiry to the progressive recognition of woman in the Church, and especially in our own Church.

1. Just as soon as a generous scholarship was ready to let the Scripture read, “Phoebe a deaconess of the Church which is at Cenchrea”—at once more than half the battle was won.

2. But long before that, and indeed preparatory to it, the very logic of events, of practical necessities, was teaching us that “Paul’s padlock” (as some have irreverently called it) upon woman’s lips could not at most have been but a local and temporary injunction. The fact is no one can keep woman’s lips shut. The Master’s message burns in her heart as well as in ours. And to do so would close our Sunday Schools and paralyze half of the church’s activities. And just as soon as we are forced to grant woman the privilege of giving any instruction in the Church the right to do all of which she is capable inevitably follows.

3. In the city of Atlanta, in May, 1878, it was gravely debated, not should we inaugurate a Woman’s Missionary Society, but should we recognize a movement already launched by that elect lady, Mrs. Juliana Hayes, and others.

We men are timorous mortals, aren’t we? Women shy at mice, to our endless amusement; but we at just as small danger sometimes. So we were afraid, and hesitated. Our good sisters, too, were afraid of our fears; and they protested, and still protested. They meant no harm. They would be ever so careful. But this was but surface play. Our actions spoke louder than our words. We were building better than we knew. All the time the tide was rising; and no broom sweeps back the broad Atlantic. So, mocking all our petty fears, silencing our good sisters’ protestations, the movement had its own way, and won yet another vantage ground in the age-long emancipation of woman.

4. But another thing has happened, seemingly very small, but boundlessly significant we take it. Woman wants her place in our legislative councils. Our Wesleyan brethren of Great Britain have welcomed her. Our big Northern sister has taken her by the hand. She naturally, rightfully, asks the like recognition among us.

So woman was present at our last General Conference, present with her arguments, and with her champion. The Conference had to get down to its marrow bones to defeat the proposition. And the gentlemen of that august body were marvellously polite about it. They escorted Miss Belle Bennett to the platform—to the platform, mind you! and heard woman’s own eloquent plea.

Possibly—but we would not be ungracious—yet possibly, they thought to give our sisters a “stone” instead of “bread”, a graceful compliment in lieu of more substantial recognition; but if so, this “old-world courtesy” act was quite overdone. As soon as woman’s little foot was planted on that platform it came to stay! As soon as her (gentle) stamp raised its venerable dust—just then “the shot was fired that echoed round our Methodist world!”
"Oh, no!" you say. Yet wait and see. It was the thin edge of the cleaving wedge. Revolutions go not backward. Recognitions in courtesy forerun recognitions in right. If Miss Bennett had any earthly right on that platform, then she had, and has, a right on the floor!

IX. Forecast.

Surely, after this review, we will now be permitted a forecast.

This fine motto, I have heard, finds appropriate place at the Johns Hopkins University: "History is past politics; politics is present history." That is, we can never separate what has been from what is to be. We must treat every historic fact as a seedcorn of future facts. So it is—according to the trite saying—that "history repeats itself". We may pass, then, naturally from our retrospect to our forecast.

1. If we have read Methodism aright, it has been always democratic in spirit. If we have not missed our way, then her history witnesses to a constant effort to embody her democratic spirit in democratic law. If our appraisement be correct, we have already, in large measure, accomplished that self-imposed task. But we are in ferment still. Still the "go" is in our feet. It is an inevitable movement—an inherent tendency.

2. This being so, we venture to make several optimistic prophecies: We will take no backward step. Whatever is practicable for us to do to realize our ideal, that we will assuredly do. We are sure of ourselves. We are not anarchists. We are not revolutionists. We are not mere theorists. As we go along, we are "proving all things, and holding fast that which is good". But the Methodist—and especially the Methodist preacher—is a natural democrat. He has learned a few things from history. He recalls with a sympathetic thrill, that those grand old Scotch Covenanters made their immortal protest against papacy, prelacy, and priestcraft in the interest, as they expressly put it, of "the crown rights of King Jesus". They maintained, and all history backs their contention, that these "crown rights" of our Lord are not safe with the hierarchy, but only with the whole (democratic) Christian Community.

(And let me say a word here, parenthetically. Sometimes we speak of the Church as a "Kingdom"; sometimes even characterize the Methodist Church as a "Kingdom". Let us beware! This is the language of high-churchism. It carries with it certain implications and suggestions that must be patent to every thoughtful man. There is, of course, a "Kingdom of God" on earth; but we cannot so narrow it as to make it synonymous even with the Church universal, much less our own particular denomination! Says Dr. Van Dyke in his "Gospel for an Age of Doubt", "at times the Kingdom of God has been identified with the visible Church as an outward embodiment of power in the world. And surely this interpretation is far enough away from the thought of Christ, who taught expressly that the Kingdom was invisible and universal".)
But to come back. The Methodist, we say, is a democrat because he has read history, and especially his own history. He has not forgotten how the Anglican hierarchy literally turned John Wesley on the street. He knows full well what short shift they would have given him and his "Scriptural episcopas" idea, if they had had half a chance. He knows as well that our ecclesiastical establishment can be justified on no grounds of "apostolic succession" or "divine right of episcopacy". He realizes that ours is a "presbyteral episcopacy", as we have always claimed, or it is nothing; and that a "high-church Methodist" is a contradiction in terms!

Yes, the Methodist—preacher or layman—is a natural democrat, a natural advocate of a "square deal" all around. He is an idealist, an optimist. And our "grave and reverend seigniors" the presiding elders, are verily "of the same ilk". And really—when our own John Kilgo is around—we are tempted to a new translation of our time-honored episcopal motto, "Primus inter Pares". "First among equals" seems entirely too tame; and we would render it, "Primus among the boys"! Yes, even our honored Bishop Kilgo one of us boys!

3. We cherish the conviction that no sentiment will ever bar a great reform. Argument, of course, real logic, practical necessities, may be so many breakwaters; but mere sentiment will not even stay the tide. If a thing stands simply because it is endeared by age and association, and for no other reason, then it must go. If all that we can urge is that we love it, and hate to see it go, already it is discredited with the open mind and christian conscience. If a thing persists simply because of our fears, then even now the ground of our opposition is slipping beneath our feet. No mere sentiment can ever bar a great reform.

4. The rounding out of our legislation will surely come. Solecism and anachronism will be eliminated. But it will, of course, take time, and call for patience. Sometimes we seem to move on the eccentric instead of the straight line. One piece of advanced legislation seems to call a halt and frighten us into ultra-conservatism in a score of other matters. But the centuries are ours; and the long march turns not back. The rounding out, the full symmetrical development, of our legislation will come at last. Let no one fear. Nothing really good will go. Nothing really evil will come in. It will be no new government—no, not even when our sisters sit by our side. We will still have our true and tried itinerancy, episcopacy, Conference life and procedure; but the parts of our system will be more closely articulated, the harmony more complete, the spirit more beautiful.

X. A CLOSING PERSONAL WORD.

I speak as one from the inside, as "one of the family". I may claim this modest right. I came into the Methodist Church by natural birth nearly fifty-nine years ago. For over forty-five years I have been a communicant. For thirty-eight years I have been on the firing line with my brethren, and taken "pot luck" in the Conference camp. As
one has finely put it, “I love the Methodist Church among the denom-
inations as I love my mother among all good women”. I love, too,
this great militant itinerant brotherhood. I desire, if it please God,
to fall at some appointment given me by a Methodist bishop. I trust
to be buried with our blood-stained banner wrapped around me!

I believe in the doctrines and the discipline, and especially in the
genius, of Methodism. I believe our itinerancy to be the best system
for ministerial supply the world over. It has its hardships and sacri-
fices; has always had them, and will always have them. It is no place
for the time-server or the sybarite. It is a military system. It has its
necessary touch of autocracy; but that has been greatly tempered, and
will be still further tempered in the future. Farther and farther will
we get away from the idea of the bishop as “our reverend father in
God”—whatever of worth or tenderness that idea may contain—to that
of the bishop as “elder brother”—which is far better every way! The
old Wesleyan and Asburyan paternalism will yield to the conception
embodied in that fine phrase, “chief pastor”.

2. And I steadfastly believe that this glorious system of ours will
endure, if not forever, yet for generation after generation to come. Yet
let me say explicitly, what has, perhaps, already been more than implied,
that it will not stand in any strain or abuse of it, but by reason of its
large-minded, great-hearted administration. This, indeed, has ever
been Methodism’s “saving clause”. Our system cannot stand at all
without this. We give too much power to certain men, unless those
men be holy. Our system cannot stand, but as a mockery, in the hands
of the reactionary and the high-churchman. It cannot stand exploited
by the self-seeker and ecclesiastical politician, presuming upon, trading
upon, the fine, chivalrous loyalty of the rank and file! The breaking
point is sure to come on that line.

In the hands of men who recognize these things; who read at once
the “mind of the spirit”, and the “signs of the times”; who keep close
to God and close to the people; who are foremost to serve and not to
rule—in such godly hands our future is secure as our past has been
glorious.

This is the democracy, the Christian democracy, which we have been
studying, and for which we venture to plead. It has been said that
“America spells opportunity”. Well, our humble hope is that this shall
be as true, aye, even truer, with our Methodism. That every one shall
have the opportunity, freely offered by brotherly hand, not needing to
be won in worldly competition, to show what he can do, what burdens
he can bear, what privileges he can claim—from Bishop down to that
slender girl in her teens, teaching a Sunday school class, or leading an
Epworth League service.

3. I wish further to express my solemn conviction, that no hardships,
nor sacrifices, nor poverty, nor even want, will ever keep men out of
the itinerancy. We hear much of this nowadays, of the small salaries
and the like turning men away from the Methodist ministry. I do not
believe a word of it. The strain upon consecration and loyalty is not there. Nor do I believe that the true "knight of the saddle bags" will ever flinch from the episcopal "go". He will only wish to feel sure, without question, that the "deal" is "square", and the opportunity of service is real!

I may also add, that I do not believe that our good sisters are ambitious and seeking the "chief seats", but only asking a wider field of service. And if it should be said that our dear brothers of the laity are content with things as they are; I answer that it is because they are "at ease in Zion", and must be "rounded up" for the "man's job" before them.

4. This is all that democracy means, and all that is worth contending for, this democracy of opportunity—unhampered by prejudice or precedent or prerogative! this democracy of "all at it, and always at it"! This democracy with the watchword, "from each according to his ability; to each according to his need"!

And this fine democracy we shall surely have, if pure bud gives promise of perfect flower!

"New occasions teach new duties; time makes ancient good uncouth; They must upward still and onward, who would keep abreast of Truth; Lo! before us gleam her camp-fires! we ourselves must pilgrims be, Launch our Mayflower and steer boldly through the desperate winter sea, Nor attempt the future's portal with the past's blood-rusted key!"

Nor is this all—but I have not time. Methodism is not alone on the grand march. This high, sane progress is in the air. Deep calls to deep. Height answers to height—

"From peak to peak the rattling crags among Leaps the live thunder. Not from one lone cloud, But every mountain now hath found a tongue, And Jura answers through her misty shroud Back to the joyous Alps, who call to her aloud!"