

**A MANUAL OF
METHODISM AND OF
WESLEYAN POLITY**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649337507

A manual of Methodism and of Wesleyan polity by Henry R. Burton

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Cover @ 2017

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BY

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London:

HODDER AND STOUGHTON,

27, PATERNOSTER ROW.

MDCCLXXXI.

110. h. 774

Hazell, Watson, and Viney, Printers, London and Aylesbury.

PREFACE.

FROM the "Minutes of the Wesleyan Conferences," and from other sources, I commenced, some years ago, to compile a summary of Methodist laws and usages, to meet the urgent need of a good many persons who desire a succinct and comprehensive view of Methodism and of Wesleyan discipline. Meanwhile, Dr. Williams published his "Constitution and Polity of Wesleyan Methodism." This valuable compendium is, however, too voluminous and expensive for the masses. I therefore issue my book, believing that it is a desideratum. For a more minute and full delineation of Wesleyan Methodism I refer readers to Dr. Williams' volume. Pierce's "Principles and Polity of the Wesleyan Methodists" gives copious details of earlier Methodist polity and its developments. The twenty octavo volumes of "Minutes of the Methodist Conference," with the subsequent yearly "Minutes of Conference," give officially and *in extenso* the laws and regulations enacted to meet the ever-changing requirements of the parent body of that family of churches which together form so large and important a section of the Christian Church.

HENRY R. BURTON.

ARAUCARIA LODGE,
IPSWICH, September, 1881.

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A MANUAL OF METHODISM.

CHAPTER I.

METHODISM.

METHODISM is a great fact. According to the last official returns (A.D. 1880) there are, in connection with the various Methodist churches throughout the world, 31,467 ordained ministers, and 4,676,005 church members. Approximately, there are also some 100,000 Methodist lay preachers, with probably more than a quarter of a million other persons who are employed as class-leaders, Sunday-school teachers, stewards, or otherwise, in actively striving to promote the benefit of the Church and the world. The writer on Methodism in the *Edinburgh Review* for July, 1881, rates the Methodist ecclesiastical property in Great Britain and America at twenty-nine millions sterling. He also computes the number of English and American Methodist adherents at nineteen millions. *Whitaker's Almanac* for

1881 says, there are fourteen and a half millions of "Methodists of all denominations throughout the world." The *Saturday Review* (July, 1881) thinks there are about seventeen millions of Methodist hearers and members, and, probably, this is the most correct estimate. Among the millions of persons who attend the Methodist ministry are many others, beside the office-bearers above specified, who are directly or indirectly employed for the diffusion of Divine truth and the extension of Christ's kingdom, one Methodist motto being that those connected with it must be "all at work and always at work" in trying to do good; and Methodism finds a post as well as appropriate duties for all its members who are willing to be employed. The term "Methodists" was applied to a sect of physicians in the century before Christ, who taught that all diseases could be cured by a prescribed methodical course of life, diet, and medicine. The name was also given to those polemical doctors of the Romish Church, of whom the most eminent arose in France towards the middle of the seventeenth century, who, in opposition to the Huguenots or Protestants, adopted a precise method of disputation. Certain Protestants of the same century, as Dr. Calamy informs us, "who stood up for God, were called Methodists." Hence, when John and Charles Wesley, with other religiously disposed collegians at Oxford, began to be very methodical in their course of study, and in their religious and other duties, some one

made the remark, "Here is another set of Methodists sprung up among us;" and they were thenceforth distinguished by this name. As the term Christian has often been one of reproach, so has Methodist. But each of these terms has by multitudes been regarded an honour. Conformists and Nonconformists have alike recognised the beneficial influence of Methodism, directly and indirectly; and whilst some have spoken of it as "Christianity in earnest," or "a revival of apostolical Christianity," there are now few godly persons who do not agree with Wesley, that it is "a great work of God;" for every true Methodist will more or less answer to Wesley's definition of the name—"One that lives according to the method laid down in the Bible."

John Wesley, who, under God, was the founder of the Methodist Churches, was born in 1703. His father was a Church of England clergyman of honourable descent, and his mother was the daughter of Dr. Annesley, a very celebrated and godly Dissenting minister. Till he was eleven years of age John Wesley was mainly under the care and instruction of his very excellent mother. He was then for some years at the Charter House School in London, from which he went to Christ College, Oxford. Subsequently he became a Fellow of Lincoln College, after which he was ordained deacon, and then priest. For a while he was his father's curate, and then for some time a tutor at Oxford. On the death of his father, in