

Mission to Nova Scotia

by Norman A. McNairn

When Freeborn Garrettson and James Cromwell stepped ashore from their ship at Halifax in February of the year 1785, they came to Nova Scotia as the first foreign missionaries of the Methodist Episcopal Church. That Church had been inaugurated less than two months earlier at the famous Christmas Conference in Baltimore. At that Conference so many precedents were set, so many urgent tasks set afoot, and there were so great demands made upon its slender resources by the challenge of the American frontier, it is all the more remarkable that a foreign venture was undertaken at the same time.

It should be perfectly clear that Nova Scotia was then a foreign country, every bit as much as England had become after the passions and struggles of the Revolutionary War. The British navy had a major base at Halifax. A British Governor ruled the Colony. The Church of England, though numerically in the minority, enjoyed a position of special favour and influence. In such a situation American missionaries were bound to be regarded as aliens, even by some as undesirable aliens. Yet the Christmas Conference sent to Nova Scotia two of its best men, and they would be followed by several more during the ensuing fourteen years.

How the American Church Became Involved

The Apostle Paul began his mission to Europe in response to a vision of a man from Macedonia who said, "Come over and help us." In similar fashion the American Methodists acted in response to a man who travelled from Nova Scotia to Baltimore in order to plead for help. The man was William Black. Five years previously he had been converted in a meeting of Yorkshire English Methodists in a frontier settlement,¹ and since that time he had become on his own initiative a full-time preacher and traveling evangelist. On his tours he had covered almost the whole of the settled portions of the colony, bringing about a revival of evangelical religion. Now twenty-four, handsome, earnest and persuasive, he made a favourable impression on the preachers gathered in Baltimore, and he seems to have taken part in the Conference as an accepted Methodist preacher.²

Black had first tried to get help from England. He had written

¹ A letter from Black describing his experience was entered in Wesley's *Journal*, April 15, 1782. *Works of Rev. J. Wesley* (5th edition; London: 1860), IV, 235.

² Sweet, *Methodism in American History*, p. 109n.

to John Wesley, and was given some hope of assistance in February, 1783.³ In October of the following year, being unable to furnish volunteers for the mission, Wesley wrote from London:

In the other Provinces there (is) abundance of preachers. They can spare four preachers to you better than you can spare one to them. If I am rightly informed, they have already sent you one or two; and they may afford you one or two more, if it pleases God to give a prosperous passage to Dr. Coke and his fellow labourers. Does there not want a closer and more direct connexion between you of the North and the Societies under Francis Asbury? Is it not more advisable that you should have a constant correspondence with each other and act by united counsels? ⁴

Before this letter arrived, Black had come to a similar conclusion and set out for the United States. Traveling south from New York, "he joined Whatcoat, Vasey, Asbury and Coke at Abingdon, on the way to Perry Hall, where all the travelers but Whatcoat arrived on December 17."⁵ Black thus had more than a week prior to the opening of the Conference in which to become acquainted with Coke and Asbury in particular, men who were to be the first bishops of the Church and to exert a decisive influence on the fortunes of his cause.

It has to be remembered that Coke, Whatcoat and Vasey were also arriving in the United States for the first time. John Wesley had sent them, and in a move without precedent, had ordained them for service in America, Vasey and Whatcoat as elders, with authority to administer the sacraments, and Coke as superintendent. He realized that American Methodism could no longer rely on Anglican clergy for the sacraments, or for ordination, and must become a church with a measure of independence. Coke was under instructions to arrange for the ordination of Asbury as joint superintendent with himself of the new church. He was also undoubtedly aware of Wesley's concern for the work in Nova Scotia.

The role of Dr. Thomas Coke was thus a major factor in getting the American Methodists involved in the Nova Scotia mission. More than any other Methodist of his time he cherished and promoted the cause of foreign missions. During the course of the Conference he preached the cause of missions so effectively at one noon-day service that a collection of thirty pounds sterling was

³ Telford, ed., *Letters of the Rev. John Wesley* (8 vols.; London: Epworth Press, 1931), VII, 169.

⁴ *Letters of John Wesley*, VII, 244.

⁵ Abel Stevens, *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America* (4 vols.; New York: Nelson and Phillips, 1867), II, 179.

raised. Sixty pounds currency in addition was raised by Coke following the Conference, in Philadelphia and New York, and further sums for the cause came out of his own pocket and from the sale of pamphlets in England.⁶ Much of this fund was specifically intended for the support of the mission to Nova Scotia. The appointment of Garrettson and Cromwell to that field was undoubtedly due to the urging of Coke and to his willingness to accept responsibility for the supervision and support of the enterprise.

What part Asbury played in regard to the Nova Scotia undertaking remains obscure, insofar as direct evidence is concerned. It is safe to assume, however, that while he was in principle sympathetic to the expansion of Christianity in the world his dominant concern was for the evangelization of the United States, and he only grudgingly consented to allow his preachers to be assigned to Nova Scotia.

Asbury was also trying to adjust to the divided superintendency. Hitherto he had been in sole control of the Methodist cause in America. Now Wesley had foisted on him a new man who was an unknown quantity and who had no experience in the American situation, and he was expected to share authority with this man. Coke was able, charming and enthusiastic, and Asbury welcomed him with good grace. Yet inwardly he was annoyed with Wesley for not making him sole superintendent. As he wrote to an old friend later,

for our old, old Daddy (Wesley) to appoint conferences when and where he was pleased, to appoint a joint superintendent with me, were strokes of power we did not understand. He told me he would not ask the preachers' consent as to whom he should appoint.⁷

Asbury's main concern was to maintain the momentum of Methodist expansion, and to this end he felt it necessary to avoid any division of control over the personnel and practical administration of the Church. No proper policy for sharing the superintendency was worked out. Instead Asbury left Coke at liberty to look after whatever odd jobs might remain while Asbury got on with his own business. If Coke wished to get involved in foreign mission work, Asbury was willing to let him, for it simplified his own role as the John Wesley of America.

It was essentially this role conflict, combined with Coke's personal loyalty to Wesley, and the generous impulsiveness of this able

⁶ Warren A. Candler, *Life of Thomas Coke* (Nashville: Publishing House of the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, 1923), p. 84, quoting from Coke's *Journal*.

⁷ *Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, III, 63.

and well-meaning man that account for the seemingly erratic behaviour of Coke in the years that followed. Outmaneuvered by Asbury, he was never able to become an effective superintendent in the American Church, and was thus never able to ensure the steady supply of preachers for Nova Scotia which the mission required for its success.

The Field and Its Peculiarities

At the time of the American Revolution the colony of Nova Scotia was not in any sense a part of Canada. It was as distinct from its neighbouring provinces as Maryland was from Pennsylvania. At that time it included, however, the territory that would later become the provinces of New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. This huge area was only sparsely settled, the total population, apart from Indians, amounting to no more than eighteen thousand. Of these perhaps two thousand were French Acadians. At least twelve thousand were New Englanders who had been drawn to the province by offers of free land.⁸ Halifax, being the center of colonial government, was the largest town and the most English. Lunenburg was a settlement of German and Swiss Protestants. In Cumberland County a number of English settlers from Yorkshire had located, and some of these had been devout Methodists before emigrating to the New World.

The social structure at that stage must have seemed for the most part like an extension of New England. The communities, apart from Halifax and Lunenburg, were mainly organized on the New England pattern; the majority of churches were Congregational, and were served by ministers from New England. The island of St. John, later to be renamed Prince Edward Island, was then thinly occupied by a few hundred Acadian, New England, and Middle Colonies inhabitants. What is now New Brunswick had as yet been hardly touched by settlement.

This frontier country, with its small population scattered among farming and fishing villages around a coastline deeply indented by bays, rivers and marshes, depended largely on the sea for its communications. There were few roads; even the trails were difficult. And the sea itself was dangerous, chilled by the Labrador current, and on the Fundy side swept into some of the highest tides and the fiercest rips in the world.

The American Revolution created a major upheaval in the life of Nova Scotia, and the life of its churches was thrown into dis-

⁸ Marcus Lee Hansen and John Bartlett Brebner, *The Mingling of the Canadian and American Peoples* (2 vols.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1940), I, 37.

array. Nearly all of the Congregational preachers and some of their congregations departed, leaving behind a spiritual vacuum. Into this vacuum moved a young native evangelist named Henry Alline. Self-appointed and without formal education, Alline was nevertheless a man of real gifts and considerable contagious spiritual warmth. Beginning in 1776 he traveled about the Province, stirring up a revival wherever he went, until his death in 1784 at the age of thirty-six. The hot New Light gospel preached by Alline made an immense appeal to large numbers of people whose only previous acquaintance with religion had been a cool variety of Calvinism. On the other hand it alienated many of the old-line Congregationalists. As a result, many of the existing congregations were disrupted. Eventually most of Alline's following became Baptists.

This New Light revival was in full swing when the Methodist revival was just beginning in another part of the Province. The Yorkshire settlers in Cumberland County, having built their homes and brought their farms into production, began to meet together for Scripture reading, prayer and exhortation. In such meetings the young William Black was converted in 1779. Soon afterward he began to preach, gradually extending his range and influence, and in 1781, when he came of age, he launched out on his own initiative as a full-time traveling preacher.

Sooner or later the New Lights and the Methodists were bound to confront one another. In 1781, when Black was away preaching, Henry Alline came among the Yorkshire Methodists and remained for some weeks preaching at well-attended services. He was warmly received because of his evangelical zeal, his emphasis on conversion and the new life in Christ, and the assurance of eternal salvation. Soon, however, differences of doctrine and polity began to emerge. Inherent in the New Light message was a conviction that the elect could not fall from grace even if they might be guilty of moral lapses. To the Methodists, who set great store by the doctrine of perfection and the duty of cultivating moral excellence, this seemed like a dangerous slackness. It was the very thing attacked in one of the widely circulated Methodist tracts, Fletcher's *Checks to Antinomianism*.

Alline attempted to persuade the Methodists to give up the Methodist discipline for the Congregational system, which had enabled him to capture so many churches elsewhere. This they were unwilling to do, though some were won to his point of view. After leaving the community Alline sent one of his lieutenants, T. H. Chipman, to exert further leverage. "But, alas!" wrote Black, "he sowed dissension, and poured out a flood of the rankest Anti-

nomianism, which afterwards produced dismal fruits.”⁹ The Methodist Society in Cumberland had about two hundred members at that time, but the New Light doctrines “tore the society into pieces.” Black was obliged to hasten back to Cumberland and work long and hard to repair the damage that had been done.

This episode is symptomatic of the tension which continued to trouble the two evangelistic movements. There can be no doubt that such competition was a major factor in hindering the progress of the Methodist cause in Nova Scotia.

The year 1783 introduced another and even greater change into the social situation of the province. This was the massive influx of pro-British refugees from the United States. “By far the greater number of refugees,” writes William H. Nelson, “settled eventually in what remained of British North America, most of them in Nova Scotia and what became New Brunswick.”¹⁰ It has been estimated that fifteen thousand of these new settlers arrived in 1783 and their number subsequently grew to nearly thirty thousand. Thus the population of Nova Scotia was suddenly increased by more than one hundred and fifty per cent!

These refugees are labelled Tory by American writers and Loyalists by Canadians. Neither designation is entirely satisfactory. “Tory” is a political party label, and many who adhered to the British side did so for reasons that had nothing to do with party politics. For instance, there were at least two thousand former slaves who had run away from their masters and joined the British in the field. Brought to Nova Scotia after the War, these Negroes were given their liberty, which would not have been available to them in the new republic.

Among the refugees were a number of Methodists, with whom William Black soon made contact. One of these was John Mann. Mann was an old friend of Francis Asbury, who refers to him in his *Journal* as far back as 1774. A longtime member of the John Street Methodist Society in New York, Mann was preacher in charge there in 1782. After moving to Nova Scotia the following year, he soon began a ministry in that Province at the age of forty-five which continued for many years. It is without doubt the presence of John Mann in Nova Scotia which gave John Wesley the mistaken impression that one or two preachers had been “sent” there from the States.

Along with John Mann came also his brother James and two

⁹ “The Life of William Black, Written by Himself,” in *Lives of Early Methodist Preachers*, ed. Thomas Jackson (4th ed.; London: Wesleyan Conference Office, 1873), V, 260.

¹⁰ William H. Nelson, *The American Tory* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), p. 168.

more trustees of the John Street Church, Charles White and Philip Marchington. Another leading Methodist was Robert Barry. Black first met this group encamped on the site where it was proposed to build the new town of Shelburne.

A good number of the Tory refugees were Anglicans, and the Church of England was thus considerably strengthened in the Province. Charles Inglis, formerly rector in New York, and friendly to the Methodists, came to Halifax and became the first Anglican bishop in Nova Scotia. While the Church of England enjoyed a privileged status, it failed to take advantage of its opportunities, being hampered by its economic dependence on England and the poor quality of the missionaries available.¹¹

This then was the situation into which the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States was sending its first two foreign missionaries. It presented a number of encouraging factors in terms of the widespread religious destitution of its inhabitants, in the evangelical revival already under way, in the presence of a number of Methodists already in the field, and in the work and experience of William Black and John Mann. Added to this was the good will of the leading Anglican clergyman in the province. On the other side there were several difficulties, some of them unique. The geography of the field was formidable. The potential hostility of the Tory refugees had to be reckoned with. And the conflicting activities of the rival New Light movement posed a problem for the expansion of Methodism in Nova Scotia.

Garrettson's Term in Nova Scotia

From the time of his arrival in the Province Freeborn Garrettson was clearly in charge of the Methodist mission. He was in touch with Asbury, Coke and Wesley through correspondence. At the start there were only himself and Cromwell and John Mann to serve as preachers, for William Black did not arrive until May. It is curious that Black lingered so long in the United States. One might expect him to be on hand to help the missionaries get their bearings in the Province. We can only surmise that he had given them full information before they embarked. And we have to remember that he was, unlike most Methodist preachers, a free agent, and not under appointment by the Conference. Besides he was finding the American cities stimulating, after so many years in frontier settlements. Moreover he was enjoying popular success as a preacher in Boston, where increasing crowds came to hear him and he had to move into a larger hall.

¹¹ S. D. Clark, *Church and Sect in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1948), pp. 64-71.

The field of labour in Nova Scotia was so large that each available preacher could go where it was convenient for him and find plenty to do. Black, after his return, ranged widely on his evangelistic tours. Mann and Cromwell worked in more limited areas. Garrettson tried to lay out a long circuit along the principal trail across the province. In 1786 Garrettson wrote to Asbury:

I have seen neither brother Cromwell, Black, nor Mann since last fall. My time this winter has been in Halifax and in the different towns between that and Annapolis.¹²

On these travels Garrettson kept a journal, difficult as it must have been under frontier conditions. Wesley repeatedly urged him to send his journal to England, for he wished to appraise this promising young man. He had larger responsibilities in view for him, and he also wanted to publicize the work of the Nova Scotia mission. On one pretext or another Garrettson kept him waiting, and the journal has since been lost.

In his correspondence with Wesley, Garrettson asked for an English missionary, and he inquired about the possibility of getting funds for the building of a church. This was firmly discouraged.¹³ He seems to have raised questions about how to deal with the problem of discipline, and with the challenge of the New Light revival, for Wesley urged teaching accurate observance of "all our rules," and aspiring after full perfection.¹⁴ Garrettson had also asked for a consignment of Methodist books from England, and when these failed to arrive, had a number printed in Halifax. On being informed of this, Wesley wrote, "I do not blame you for printing those tracts."¹⁵

Garrettson was thus the principal mediator between the Nova Scotia Methodists and the Superintendents. He was doing all he could to bring some order into the situation.

He succeeded eventually to the point where it became possible to arrange for the first Methodist Conference in Nova Scotia, which was held in Halifax, October 19-22, 1786. The Conference had been called, as Smith says, because both ministers and laymen "had, for some time, felt the disadvantages arising from their irregular mode of working."¹⁶ It was expected that the Superintendent, Dr. Coke, would be present to preside over the Conference, and he

¹² John Fletcher Hurst, *History of Methodism* (7 vols.; New York: Eaton and Mains, 1902-1904), VII, 14.

¹³ *Letters of Wesley*, VII, 274.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Letters of Wesley*, VII, 394.

¹⁶ T. W. Smith, *Methodist Church Within Eastern British America*, p. 180.

had in fact set sail from England, bringing three missionaries with him. Unfortunately their ship was blown off course by Atlantic gales, and they were obliged to land in the West Indies, where two of the missionaries remained. None of the party ever saw Nova Scotia, and the Halifax Conference had to proceed without them.

Two new preachers had been recruited during the year. Garrettson brought James Mann into the work. The other was William Grandine, who had become a Methodist in New Jersey before settling in Nova Scotia. Of him Garrettson wrote, "Grandine is a young man we have taken on trial; I think he will be a preacher."¹⁷ Both men rendered years of good service.

It proved impossible at this stage, or even later, to draw a distinct line between itinerant and local preachers, or to follow the American practice of assigning each preacher to a different circuit each year. John Mann was nearing fifty and could not be dislodged from his home. Black had married and settled his family at Halifax. The scarcity of preachers and the geography of the country as well as the personal circumstances of the men made stationing difficult. However the Conference appointed Garrettson and Black to the Halifax circuit (Halifax to Digby), John Mann to Liverpool, Cromwell and James Mann to Shelburne and Barrington, and Grandine to Cumberland. The preachers' pay was set at \$16 per quarter plus board and lodging. Five hundred and ten members were reported from the Province, as recorded in the English Conference *Minutes* for that year.

Garrettson encountered some opposition and criticism in Nova Scotia. S. D. Clark, in his study, *Church and Sect in Canada*, attributes this to the evangelistic fervor of the American preachers, and avers that they were more interested in emotion and numbers of converts than in building up and strengthening the church following.¹⁸ It is a view unsupported by evidence, and reflects a bias against evangelicalism. Garrettson himself indicates the true nature of the difficulty in a letter to Francis Asbury:

I made bold to open matters to Mr. Wesley, and begged him to send one preacher from England, as a number of people would prefer an Englishman to an American. Many have refused hearing me on this account.¹⁹

It was Garrettson's main aim to bring a more efficient organization to the work in Nova Scotia. For this task he had the authority,

¹⁷ Stevens, *History of the M. E. Church*, II, 390.

¹⁸ Clark, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

¹⁹ Nathan Bangs, *Life of Freeborn Garrettson* (4th rev. ed.; New York: 1832), p. 178.

the experience, and the ability, as others on the scene did not. Black had never worked under the discipline of a Conference. Cromwell was hampered by illness. Coke failed to appear on the scene. So it is to Garrettson that the credit must go for the organizational progress of this period.

As a matter of fact he has been accorded all too much credit, and his exploits grew into something of a legend. For this Nathan Bangs is partly responsible, in his biography of Garrettson. Others went further, as did James M. Buckley who declared that Garrettson's influence in Nova Scotia was almost equal to that of Wesley in Europe and Asbury in the United States.²⁰ This, of course, is a wild exaggeration. Garrettson served in Nova Scotia only twenty-six months. When he left there were about six hundred Methodists in the Providence, and although the obituary in the American Conference *Minutes* of 1828 credits Garrettson with winning all six hundred, the likelihood is that nearly five hundred were already in Society when he and Cromwell arrived.

Nevertheless the mission so ably begun by Garrettson and Cromwell gave new heart and new impetus to the work in Nova Scotia. They symbolized the support and the experience of the American Church. And there is more than a little truth in the evaluation of Robert Drew Simpson that Garrettson "brought form and force to the work in Nova Scotia out of all proportion to the two brief years he spent in the Mission."²¹ It was therefore a great loss when the two American missionaries sailed away in April, 1787, never to return, and replacements were not sent by the American Conference.

The Crisis of 1787

Had the responsibility for the Nova Scotia mission been more clearly vested in the American Church, the work might have made better progress, for in that case the Conference would have recognized its obligation and sent out a steady flow of reinforcements. As things were, the weight of responsibility was laid on Thomas Coke. While he willingly accepted this as part of his superintendency, Coke made a tactical error by seeking funds and personnel outside the Methodist Episcopal Church.

Coke's behaviour following the Christmas Conference of 1784-5, instead of reinforcing the American Church's interest in the mis-

²⁰ James M. Buckley, *A History of Methodism in the United States* (2 vols.; New York: The Christian Literature Co., 1897), I, 369.

²¹ Robert Drew Simpson, "Freeborn Garrettson: American Methodist Pioneer." Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Drew Theological Seminary, Madison, New Jersey, 1954.

sion, left considerable doubt in their mind. He remained in the States only five months, and although he worked incessantly during his stay, he hurried back to England in the summer of 1785, where he reported to Wesley, and busied himself with publicizing the missionary cause and raising funds for Nova Scotia. The picture was further confused when he procured three volunteers for the mission the following year in England, with Wesley's consent. The accident of their being driven to Antigua, and Coke's switching his interest to the mission opportunities there, throws an interesting sidelight on Coke's character.

It has frequently been remarked that Coke was an ambitious man who wanted to be a bishop. At the same time he was unquestionably a sincerely devoted servant of the gospel, who wished above all to make his life count for the spread of true religion. In America he found that Asbury had effectively shut him out from any significant share in the superintendency of the Church. Coke was Wesley's man, and he felt that the new Church was proving itself not sufficiently amenable to Wesley's direction. Back in England Coke and Wesley arrived at an agreement about the way things ought to proceed in the American Church. They concluded that two additional superintendents should be appointed, Richard Whatcoat and Freeborn Garrettson, the latter to be given authority over the work in the British North American colonies.

Just how far Asbury was consulted in all this planning that was going on in England is not clear. Bangs cites a letter from Garrettson to Wesley stating that he had heard from Asbury and Coke desiring him to superintend the work "in the north."²² The impression is given that the idea originated with Asbury, but it is fair to ask whether Asbury wrote to Garrettson before or after Wesley had proposed him for the superintendency.²³ The probability is that Wesley's aim in adding to the number of superintendents was to check the autocratic tendencies of Asbury.

Wesley committed a tactical error in instructing Coke to call a General Conference to meet in Baltimore on May 1, 1787, a different time than that set by the previous Conference. In this he miscalculated the temper of the American Church. From its inception the Methodist Episcopal Church clearly intended to be autonomous. It would reverence the grand old man of Methodism, but it was not disposed to take orders from him. In the 1787 Conference the preachers revolted against all foreign interference.

²² Bangs, *Life of Garrettson*, p. 173. The letter is dated September 25, 1786.

²³ Cf. Edward J. Drinkhouse, *History of Methodist Reform and of the Methodist Protestant Church* (2 vols.; Norwood, Mass.: Board of Publication of the Methodist Protestant Church, 1899), I, 313.

Coke was publicly humiliated and forced to sign a paper relinquishing most of his powers in the United States, and all of them relating to the American Church while outside of the country.²⁴ By vote of the Conference, Wesley's name was dropped from the list of those having superintendency over the Methodist Episcopal Church. The Conference refused to ordain Whatcoat and Garrettson to the superintendency. Garrettson and Cromwell were assigned to work in the United States. No appointments were made to Nova Scotia.

The Nova Scotia mission was thus a casualty of the jurisdictional struggle within the 1787 Conference, and the Methodists in that Province seemed for the time to be nobody's responsibility. Francis Asbury emerged from that struggle in a stronger position than ever. He had characteristically held himself aloof from the debates on the floor of the Conference, allowing his preachers to wound and humiliate Thomas Coke.²⁵ Since Asbury made the appointments, his failure to designate anyone for the foreign field is an indication of his underlying lack of interest. More promising fields at home had greater claim on him; they were more amenable to his firm disciplinary supervision, and he was reluctant to spare good men from his own area of responsibility.

The absence of William Black from this Conference, the discomfiture of Coke, and the delicate situation of Garrettson, left the cause of Nova Scotia without a spokesman. It is possible that some moves were made after the close of the Conference to rectify the situation and find some missionaries, but some conflict in the dating makes the records uncertain. Findlay and Holdsworth, the English historians, state that two volunteers came forward at the Conference of 1788, Woolman Hickson and William Jessop.²⁶ However, Jessop is listed in the English *Minutes* for 1787 among the Nova Scotia preachers, and Asbury's *Journal* contains the following note dated June 28, 1787: "I found it necessary to stop Hickson from going to Nova Scotia." It would seem likely therefore that these men were recruited after the Conference, probably by Coke. Hickson was a sick man with only a short time to live, and it was doubtless on this account that Asbury intervened.

Wesley was understandably perturbed by the developments in Baltimore. He attempted to do something for the Nova Scotia mission from his side. He sent out James Wray to be the new

²⁴ Here I differ with Candler, *Life of Coke*, p. 122, who claims that Coke signed the paper without suggestion or constraint from the Conference. More convincing is Phoebus' version of the incident, cited by Drinkhouse, *op. cit.*, I, 328.

²⁵ Hurst, *History of Methodism*, IV, 282.

²⁶ G. G. Findlay and W. W. Holdsworth, *The History of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society* (5 vols.; London: Epworth, 1921-1924), I, 295.

superintendent. "Although he has not much learning," he wrote to John Mann in June, 1788, "he has (which is far better) uprightness of heart and devotedness to God."²⁷ Wray arrived in the Province with a determination to apply the English discipline, but soon encountered unfamiliar frontier conditions and resistance on the part of the preachers and some of the laity. If Garrettson had met with criticism because he was an American, Wray met with it because he was an Englishman. Wesley was furious. Writing to James Mann in February, 1789 he exclaimed, "They make objections to James Wray that he is an Englishman! Oh, American gratitude! Lord, I appeal to Thee!"²⁸ Wray asked to be relieved of responsibility, to which Coke consented, and Wray was transferred to the West Indies.

Some new and better arrangement obviously had to be made. Accordingly Black and the Mann brothers went in 1789 to the meeting of the Conference at Philadelphia, where all three of them received ordination. From this time on, save for a short break, Black acted in the role of Presiding Elder over what was in effect the Nova Scotia district of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

The Crisis of 1791

John Wesley, the venerable founder of Methodism, died in March of 1791. So many strands of Methodist affairs had been held firmly in his own hands that his passing marked a crisis in the leadership and coherence of the whole movement. At the time Coke was in the United States. The news reached him as he and Asbury were making their way at the end of April toward a Conference in North Carolina. Word also came to William Black in Nova Scotia and caused him to hasten south to consult with Coke as to the future arrangements for his Province.

Hurst observes that to Black the death of Wesley "seemed like a final severance of the missions of the eastern provinces from the mother country. Black's hopes had rested entirely on Wesley's personal interest."²⁹ This is hardly the case, for in ten years only two missionaries had arrived from England.³⁰ Black and his colleagues had found that the main support for their work must come through the interest of Thomas Coke and the American Church. The question now was what might happen if Coke's sphere of

²⁷ *Letters of Wesley*, VII, 68 f.

²⁸ Findlay and Holdsworth, *op. cit.*, I, 295.

²⁹ Hurst, *op. cit.*, VII, 18.

³⁰ A. J. Bishop came from England in 1791, but after two years transferred to the West Indies. The other missionary from England was Wray, who also went to the West Indies.

action should be transferred to England. More than ever the support of the Methodist Episcopal Conference would have to be solicited.

Nova Scotia Methodism had made little headway in the four years since the departure of Garrettson and Cromwell. The English Conference *Minutes* report 530 whites and 200 blacks in Society. New missionaries were greatly needed. Fortunately the Conference which met that year in New York produced six volunteers. Findlay and Holdsworth conjecture that this was due to the efforts of Garrettson. Whatever the cause, the arrival of the six gave a tremendous new impulse to the Nova Scotia work.

It was fortunate that the American Church was able to supply men at this time, for the English Conference was in no position to do so. They were having difficulty in adjusting to the loss of Wesley's leadership and were preoccupied with these internal problems for some years to come.

The Decline of American Support

It is hard to assess the extent of American support for the work of Methodist expansion in Nova Scotia. In terms of financing it was negligible. The real contribution was in personnel. Goldwin French observes,

At least twenty men came to help Black in his momentous and sacrificial labours, but the majority of these were shadowy figures who passed too quickly through the field to leave a significant imprint on it.³¹

To a degree this is correct. There were three men who served no longer than one year, and four who served only two years, and of several only scanty information remains. However, the impress of individual personalities may count for less in the long run than the continuity of ministry, and in this respect the Methodist cause in Nova Scotia encountered its most serious difficulties.

A tally of the Methodist preachers in Nova Scotia down to the year 1800 shows that seven were produced in the Province itself and thirteen may be regarded as American missionaries. In terms of man years of service the Nova Scotia preachers put in somewhat more time than that totaled up by the American missionaries. The average length of service was about four years for the Americans as compared with eight years for the Nova Scotian preachers. What had even more influence on the effectiveness of the work was the fluctuation in the number of preachers available to serve the scat-

³¹ Goldwin S. French, *Parsons and Politics: the Role of Wesleyan Methodists in Canada, 1780-1855* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1962), p. 34.

tered Methodist groups. We have seen that two were serving as missionaries in 1785 and 1786. There were none in 1787. One came in 1788; there were two in 1789, two in 1790. Then there were seven serving in 1791. This number increased to ten in 1792. Then it began to decline year by year, first eight, then five, then three. Not all of those who might be regarded as American missionaries were sent by the Conference. Some, like Thomas Whitehead, seem to have come on their own initiative. Another was recruited by William Jessop in 1793. Some came as missionaries, as did Boyd, and stayed on.

William Black was constantly troubled with the problem of procuring preachers in the face of this dwindling supply of missionaries. He traveled once more to Baltimore in 1796 in an attempt to obtain more helpers from the United States. This time he was curtly rebuffed by Asbury. "The young men who have returned to us," the Bishop told him, "are not so humble and serious as when they went to Nova Scotia."³² Two volunteers were willing to go, but Asbury refused to permit it.³³

There could be some truth in Asbury's objection, discipline in Nova Scotia being as slack as it was. But other reasons may account for the change in policy. Far more spectacular gains were being made by the Methodists in the United States, and Asbury was unwilling to spare any more of his young men when he could use them to better advantage at home. Furthermore, Bishop Coke seems to have given up the effort to enlist support in America for the cause of Nova Scotia missions. His heart was more committed to the work in the West Indies which was meeting with considerable success, and he was quite capable of drawing men away from Nova Scotia to work in the Caribbean. At one point he even drew William Black to the West Indies, but there was so much clamor for his return that Coke had to let him go after a few months.

No further missionaries were sent to Nova Scotia by the Methodist Episcopal Church, though two or three remained there for a time. The year 1799 is generally taken to mark the end of the mission, so far as the American Church is concerned. The American mission had gradually dwindled away after 1793, the year when the last missionary arrived. There is actually no particular reason for fixing on 1799 as the terminal date, for the American missionaries had not actually departed, as Hurst states, by that year.³⁴ Thomas Whitehead had located in the Province, John Cooper

³² Hurst, *op. cit.*, VII, 26.

³³ French, *op. cit.*, p. 50, referring to Fidler Papers in Drew University Library, letter from Black, Dec. 26, 1796.

³⁴ Hurst, *op. cit.*, VII, 18.

carried on, and was ordained in 1802 by Bishops Asbury and Whatcoat.³⁵ And Benjamin Wilson, after eight years of service, located in 1800, and seems to have remained in Nova Scotia.³⁶ However the year 1799 did mark a turning point in the history of Methodism in the Province, for that was the year when William Black, finally deciding that there was no hope of further help from the United States, set sail for England.

In 1800 Black returned to Nova Scotia with four English missionaries. From then on the Methodist work in the colony remained under the authority of the English Conference.

³⁵ Findlay and Holdsworth, *op. cit.*, I, 308.

³⁶ Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 271.