



DISCOVERY

Edited by
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SALMAGUNDI AND A PERSONAL RECOLLECTION OF THE KENNEDY CONTROVERSY

In spite of the fact that I have given several collections of books and manuscripts to a variety of universities, I still possess a number of interesting items that form a Salmagundi. Here, for example, is an ordination certificate signed by Bishop Asbury, ordaining a person, whose name is hard to decipher, to the office of deacon. Here is another by Bishop Enoch George and a third by Robert R. Roberts in addition to several lesser known bishops. I have also an elder's certificate written and signed in the meticulous hand of Joshua Soule. Soule, it is said, burned many of his personal papers, and it is difficult to find any manuscripts written by him. John Dickins, the first Book Editor of the Methodist Episcopal Church, also destroyed much of his correspondence and, I believe, his journal. Since these men were important leaders in early Methodism the loss for historians is irreparable.

In turning the leaves of my scrapbooks I find a lengthy letter from Asbury Dickins, son of John Dickins, to Major John M. O'Connor, written when Asbury Dickins was Secretary of the United States Senate. Dickins was apparently backing William H. Crawford, Secretary of the Treasury, for the Presidency. Unfortunately, Dickins backed the wrong horse or he might have risen to great heights in government.

Young Dickins was named for Bishop Asbury and apparently in his youth did little to enhance the name of either Asbury or the Methodists. Dr. Leland Case, former Editor of *Together Magazine*, spent some time in tracking down the facts surrounding Asbury Dickins' alleged youthful indiscretions but with small success. Asbury was forced to flee from Philadelphia to England because of a suit brought against him, but what was the cause for the suit and how it ended has never been discovered. A disastrous fire is supposed to have destroyed many of the early records

of Philadelphia among which, apparently, were the Dickins papers. In spite of the dearth of material, Asbury Dickins deserves to have his biography written. Before fleeing to England he played an important role in Philadelphia life as a publisher and as a recognized leader of the literary lights of his day. He apparently returned to America and eventually became the Secretary of the United States Senate.

Among my Methodist souvenirs, there is also a class meeting ticket signed by Richard Allen in 1809 and made out to Oliver William, member of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

There is also a mildly amusing letter from Bishop E. S. Janes, who was characterized by Bishop Matthew Simpson as a "preacher of rare power and excellence." The letter is apparently in reply to a friend who was asking for a decision on a question relative to withdrawal from the church. Janes first states bluntly that he is "not authorized to give any decision. You will remember that the General Conference forbid the bishops giving decisions out of conference." He then adds that "Bishop Ames, one of the Senior bishops, is the President of your conference and the one proper to be consulted on the question."

Then, amusingly enough, Bishop Janes, "unofficially and as a friend," outlines his ideas on the matter. Whether or not the good brother who wrote the bishop made use of this "unofficial" statement is not known. It would be fun, however, to try to track it down and see what happened.

Methodists everywhere would probably be proud of another letter in my possession written by George William Childs in which he says of Bishop Matthew Simpson, "He was President Lincoln's most intimate personal friend." Childs, himself, was a figure of importance being a publisher, author and philanthropist. His statement is not to be taken lightly.

During my effective ministry I have corresponded with numerous bishops and have been fortunate to number many of them among my friends. I suppose, through the years, I was closest to Bishop Gerald Kennedy. In meeting Gerry, or Jerry as he often spelled the nickname, one became aware of the man rather than the position that he held. He was well informed on many subjects, and exceedingly witty, hated administrative details, was an outstanding preacher and author and a marvelous traveling companion. Together with Gerry and his wife, my wife and I were with the Kennedys in several parts of the world including Greece where I snapped Gerry's picture at the very spot where Paul probably preached on Mars Hill.

And this leads me from Salmagundi to the Kennedy Controversy.

Bishop Kennedy became the center of a controversy when toward the end of his time as an effective bishop he was invited to become pastor of First Church, Pasadena. The question centered on whether or not a bishop had the right to appoint himself to a church and whether a former effective bishop could legally accept an appointment to a church after his retirement or before.

The Council of Bishops seemed especially disturbed about the matter. Finally, I believe, the Judicial Council ruled that a bishop can appoint himself only to his own duties. I am writing from memory and I am a bit hazy on the details, but the controversy deserves further research since it delves into the whole question of duties, responsibilities and privileges of the episcopacy.

I, myself, never could understand why a bishop was not supposed to return to the pastorate—probably the highest calling in Methodism—but could accept a post as a college president or an editor or a teacher or some lesser position. The problem deserves study.

At any rate Kennedy wrote me at least two letters during the controversy which display his usual wit and charm and his love of the pastorate. They read in part:

October 17, 1968.

Thank you for your good letter. If I have any word of advice, it is never to try to do anything in the Methodist Church for the first time. The second thing would be that if you do anything new, don't tell anybody about it and don't let anybody find out about it.

I have had quite a time during these past days and Mary and I are looking forward to another career at the end of this one. I have been homesick for a pulpit as you know and I was certainly surprised when that church (First Church, Pasadena) insisted that I was the one they wanted to preach as often as possible until I could retire and then do it full time.

The controversy grew in intensity and on October 31, 1968 he wrote to me again:

. . . There has been a great commotion across the church about this business of mine and I am surprised. I feel like a fellow going out for a Sunday afternoon walk and finding himself in the middle of a riot.

If I have any understanding of the reaction, I think that for the most part the preachers approve wholeheartedly. All of those who think that the bishops are a kind of stuffed shirt species anyway are grateful. I know that some of the bishops themselves are troubled and I will hear more about it next week when I attend the Council of Bishops meeting. None of them have written me in any bitter spirit but I guess that when anybody suggests that there is something more important than being a bishop, it causes some consternation.

I am going with the assumption that when the church lets me retire I shall do it and become a pastor. . . .

Gerry did preach quite frequently at First Church, Pasadena, and on several occasions invited me to occupy the pulpit. He was always a good friend and several times invited me to take a church in his conference, but my roots were in the east, and although I preached a great many times in the larger churches of California, I preferred the east for a permanent home.

PAPERS ON AFRICA

We recently received a note from a good friend and an outstanding Methodist historian on the availability of some important papers on Africa. Walter N. Vernon writes:

A collection of papers of Bishop Joseph C. Hartzell (489 items, covering the years 1862 and 1900 to 1906) are located in the Department of Archives and Manuscripts at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge.

Bishop Hartzell was a Methodist Episcopal preacher, editor and bishop who was prominent in New Orleans in Reconstruction years. However, these papers do not cover his years in Louisiana, but chiefly his term as Missionary Bishop in Africa.

Our thanks to Dr. Vernon who, by the way, is one of the authors of *The Methodist Excitement in Texas*.