



THE "FREE PRESS,"

By Geo. Howard,

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TO THE MEMBERS OF THE Methodist Episcopal Church.

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It is known to many of you, that a contest in the Methodist Episcopal Church, has been carried on for several years, the one side called *Reformers*, or *Radicals*, insisting that the Church Government should be so far modified as to admit of a representation, in the councils of the church, from that part of its members hitherto not represented, consisting of the local preachers and lay members of said church; and the other side insisting with much vehemence, against the right as well as the expediency of such a measure. It is also known to you, that in furtherance of the views of the Reformers, and as a means to effect them, Union Societies have been established in different sections of this vast Republic, and two in this State, one in Granville county, Tar River Circuit, and one in Halifax county, Roanoke Circuit. It must be also known to many of you, that for establishing these Union Societies the members of the church have been expelled, first in the state of Tennessee, then in Tar River Circuit, and then in Baltimore. A degree of alarm has subsisted, and does still subsist among Reformers generally, that while their opponents are lopping off their brethren almost daily all around them, they would be making calculations altogether futile, for one moment to expect, that the arm of power will be stayed in their favor. In submitting, therefore, to your consideration the following documents, the Roanoke Union Society presumes upon your indulgence, in expressing a hope that you will give them a candid examination, and judge, whether under present circumstances they have committed wrong.

On the 4th day of April, 1828, at a Union meeting assembled at Bradford's Meeting-house, Roanoke Circuit, the Society being informed, that the Rev. Wm. Compton was appointed to take charge of Roanoke Circuit, and being acquainted with his views of the contest now existing from the part taken by him, in an adjoining Circuit, in expelling several members there, for the solitary fact, that they had become members of a Union Society—the Roanoke Union Society entered into the following resolutions, and ordered a copy of them to be furnished their minister, requesting his reply:

Resolved, That the expulsion of Lewellen Jones and others, in the Tar River Circuit, in the year 1826, for joining the Union Society there—and more particularly, the part borne in that unfortunate transaction, by the Rev. Wm. Compton, now appointed a minister in this Circuit—meets with the decided disapprobation of this Society.

Resolved, That individually, we apprehend a similar course is intended to be pursued towards ourselves; it being a sound maxim, that what has been done, in all probability will be repeated.

Resolved, therefore, That before we can receive as a messenger of peace the said Rev. Wm. Compton, we must be assured, that he will endeavor to repair the wrong he has committed, by using his best efforts to restore to the Methodist Episcopal Church the said Lewellen Jones, and others that were expelled for the same cause."

To which resolutions the following reply was received:

"To the Members of the Roanoke Union Society.

"Dear Brethren: From the friendly and respectful treatment I received from the Reformers, on my first round on the Circuit, I had flattered myself, that however we might differ in our sentiments on church government, that nothing unpleasant would occur between you and me through the year. But, from a communication received from you, I am apprehensive that I shall be disappointed. For be ye well assured, that I am not conscious of having done wrong in the part that I acted in Quarterly Conference, in reference to Lewellen Jones and others. As to the Reformers in this Circuit, I had indulged a hope that they would not interfere with me or my concerns,* but were willing that I should think for myself, and that they would cast their influence with mine into the same common scale of truth, and do what they could to help forward the interest of the Redeemer's kingdom. While I had concluded within myself, that if they continued to conduct themselves as they had done, since I came into the circuit, so far as I had knowledge of their proceedings, that I should leave them as my predecessors had done before me. You seem to have resolved not to receive me as a "messenger of peace," unless I give the "assurance" you have demanded—this I shall not do, and of course I am rejected. But I should like to know by whom, not in the aggregate, but by name. For I cannot consistently darken the door or eat the bread of any man, into whose house I am not received a "messenger of peace;" and if it be by a majority of the representative department of any Class, that I am thus rejected, I should take it as an instance of candor and honesty to be advertised of the fact, that I may shape my course accordingly. I have no hesitation in saying that I am on the old side, where I mean to continue, unless my mind should very materially change, or the majority should say that there shall be a change in the government of the Methodist Episcopal Church. Nor have I any idea that any of the Reforming brethren in this Circuit will change their ground, for the same reason that I shall not change mine.

"Wherefore then, permit me to ask, is the necessity of our agitating this subject, when we know that both the one and the other are fixed in their purpose? Have we time hanging so heavily on our hands, that we must necessarily pass it off in a way which is often the means of harrowing up the feelings of brethren? Would we not act more wisely to "agree to disagree," and let this subject be more still in our frequent conversations with each other? Surely, my brethren, we must admit that there has been too much asperity on both sides already, and that it is high time for us to deplete the languishing state of Zion in this Circuit. Time is flying with the rapidity of light, and souls more precious a thousand fold, than the gold of Ophir, are peopling the eternal world by myriads. And should we not then, instead of catching at shadows, nerve the strong arm of faith, and take of the things of God and eternity, and show them to a dying world? Let this be the burden of our concern, and the object of our contention, and then may we hope to see the waste places of our beloved Zion restored. And finally, let it be for the man of sin, but not for the man of God, (and more especially the minister of Jesus Christ,) to say, that the man who does not see exactly as he sees, is not a "messenger of peace." Reject me if you think proper, brethren, and with me the Gospel of Christ; but take care that in so doing you do not "re-

*From this passage it is very plain that the author of the letter wishes it to be inferred, that he is the aggrieved party in this affair, and is endeavoring to turn the scales and make himself a persecuted being, to whom the right of private judgment is denied—and he writes with as much assurance as if the fact were so. In the name of goodness, who would suppose, from perusing the passage referred to, that W. Compton had ever in his life censured, (much more punished, and that severely too,) a brother for the same thing he affects to plead for? Who could suppose that with so much charity on his lips, he had ever raised his hand against an inoffensive man? Yet it is so—this identical W. Compton, (unless he believe the eastern tale of the *derwise* killing the king, and leaving his own body add taking up his abode in that of his majesty—and that this is only W. Compton in appearance, and the soul in the body is quite another existence,) within less than two years, in one day's journey of Bradford's Chapel, had exerted all his influence, (and boasted in the accomplishment of his object,) not only to censure, but to punish Jones and several others, for attempting practically to exercise the very principle he so affectedly rants about. Such is the fact—Surely this is "something new."

ject the counsel of God against yourselves." With these remarks I conclude, by taking the liberty of subscribing myself, dear brethren, yours in the kingdom and patience of Jesus.

WM. COMPTON.

"May the 5th, 1828."

On the 6th of June, 1828, the following Report was handed in by the Committee of Correspondence, and concurred in by the Society:

"Your committee think they will not be deemed, by this Society, to take any thing on themselves, but what as a committee of correspondence they ought to do, if they endeavor to exhibit to the Society, its situation as a Society in regard to the perils of its members, and to justify the course of the Society in the adoption of the resolutions aforesaid—in doing which it becomes proper to examine the circumstances under which they were adopted.

"Recent information from Baltimore, giving details of occurrences there, in which the Rev. Mr. Hanson acted so notable a part, had placed the matter beyond the reach of a reasonable doubt, that it had become the decided determination of the rulers in our church, to expel from its membership all such, as had the hardihood, in their estimation, to question their justice or their infallibility. It was, in other words, declared an offence, and for its commission the party was expelled, if in the exercise of a right, guaranteed to us all by our fundamental laws, any member should declare, in his opinion, a minister of the Gospel had committed wrong; an offence of so trivial a nature, as not to be fineable, if committed towards the highest officer recognized by these United States. It was also a fact, beyond the reach of denial, that one Lewellen Jones, in Tar River Circuit, had been but lately expelled for becoming a member of a Union Society—it was also a fact equally notorious, that in the transaction the Rev. Wm. Compton had taken a decisive and active part in behalf of irresponsible power.

"When this Society was informed, that the said Rev. Wm. Compton was appointed to take charge of this Circuit, it could but occur to the Society, so apparently that it was impossible but it should notice it, that its own membership stood on a foundation somewhat precarious—with a minister who had avowed his determination not to be *neutral*; who had compared Reformers to "thieves and Tories;" who charged them with designs to overturn whatever he considered lovely or venerable in our church; who had boldly and with complacency declared, that Reformers might be expelled, though they were guilty of no immoral act; who had avowed it to be both "just and generous," to ransack the conversations of men at great distances and fix whatever was exceptionable in them on the accused person, however innocent he might be of their thoughts or ignorant of their expressions—it is conceived by your committee, that the Society was urged, both by a sense of sympathy to the injured and safety to itself, to adopt the resolutions.

"The Society feeling, as it ought to have done, the weight of its responsibility, was bound by every consideration that ought to influence it, to ascertain in direct terms, whether its fears were reasonable or groundless; thinking if they were the latter, no candid, no religious man could or would, for one moment, refuse to make reparation for an injury committed by him. If the former, how is it possible that it could receive, as a brother, as a minister, as a "messenger of peace," the man who, of all others, had made himself so conspicuous in committing *havoc* among its brethren? It is not in nature to do so.

"Your committee are of opinion, that the apprehensions of the Society were reasonable, and that the answer of the said Rev. Wm. Compton to the resolu-

tions of this Society, has reduced to certainty that they were so. The letter declares the writer had come to the conclusion to leave the Reformers here as he found them; but at the same time gives us to understand that he had done so, from the very friendly treatment he had received from them; and even this small boon is taxed with the condition of their demeaning themselves in the same way, as far as his knowledge of their conduct extended. Your committee, while they express the satisfaction of knowing, that the very friendly conduct of the Reformers, had disarmed a *belligerent*, are at the same time of opinion, that the difficulty of obtaining a Court, to answer his purpose, in the manner prescribed by the Book of Discipline, might, very possibly, have been an inducement in the formation of the said determination. The answer to your resolution further declares, and that too in a manner that we cannot hesitate to believe the truth of the declaration, that as respects the conduct of the Rev. Wm. Compton in the affair of Lewellen Jones, he feels no degree of compunction. Your committee, therefore, cannot hesitate to think, that in regard to each one of your Society, his abilities would be exerted and his power lent to place us where the said Lewellen Jones is—out of the pale of the church.

But our brother Compton affects to believe, that your resolutions are predicated on the circumstance of his being *anti* reformation—that his belief is but affectation becomes apparent from the fact, that it must be known to him, that no such resolution was adopted in regard to the Rev. Mr. Carson, the Rev. Mr. Bain, the Rev. Mr. Doub, or the Rev. Mr. Hooks, all known to be in principle against reform; and from the fact, that the resolutions themselves do not even so much as imply such a construction.

"The resolutions say, in the first place, that the Society disapproves the expulsion of Lewellen Jones, and that disapprobation is founded on the circumstance of Lewellen Jones being a Reformer and being expelled therefor. In the second place, the Society disapprove the part taken, in regard to Jones, by the Rev. Wm. Compton. In the third place, the Rev. Wm. Compton being appointed to take charge of this Circuit, the Society says it is apprehensive a similar course is intended to be pursued in regard to each member—and in consequence of all these circumstances united, it resolves, that before it can receive as a "messenger of peace, the said Rev. Wm. Compton, it must be assured that he will repair the wrong he has committed, by using his best efforts to restore to the church the said Lewellen Jones." Your committee beg leave to call the attention of the Society to the fact, that the Rev. Wm. Compton takes no notice whatever, in his very mild and friendly letter, of the second resolution, the one most interesting to this Society. Our brother seems to reproach us with a waste of time, and that too in a manner calculated to harrow the feelings of brethren—in one respect your resolutions were a waste of time, since on him they seem to be of no effect. From the tenor of his letter your just fears seem to be regarded in the same light as a crowned head would the remonstrances of his subjects, when he was determined to disregard them.

"The world is not centred, however, in one man—your committee are of opinion, that the cause for which this Society is contending, and in furtherance of which the resolutions were passed, seems to them, at least, to be of that importance, that a few days, or weeks, or years, may be very profitably devoted to it, without deserving the reproach of a waste of time. Since, however, it is almost criminal in the view of the Rev.