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Maynard, William B.

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William B. Maynard

THE CONSTITUTIONAL AUTHORITY OF  
DR. JABEZ BUNTING OVER WESLEYAN  
METHODISM AS SEEN THROUGH HIS CORRESPONDENCE

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Master of Arts Thesis, 1970

The Constitutional Authority of Dr. Jabez Bunting over Wesleyan Methodism as seen through his Correspondence, attempts to outline the influence of Dr. Bunting within the Wesleyan Methodist Church. To date very few books have been written which adequately describe Bunting's exact role within the Methodist Conference. By using Bunting's correspondence it is possible perhaps to remove much of the conjecture regarding the basis of Bunting's authority.

Bunting's rise to prominence is closely linked with the lack of effective leadership following Wesley's death. His oratorical skill, his intelligence and his ability to organize soon won him a place amongst the more prominent of the Wesleyan Ministers, where he soon won their confidence. From this position, Bunting was able to introduce a series of innovations which were to form the basis of the Wesleyan administrative machine.

As a prominent Minister Bunting was called upon to defend the Connexion from serious divisions, and in the process of so doing created a philosophy for the government of the Connexion which was a mixture of "Wesleyanism and Buntingism". On three occasions he entered the ring against what he called "radical elements" in defence of his conception of Methodism. Each time the Connexion severely rocked but on each occasion Bunting emerged from the fray with the confidence of a majority of the Ministry.

His extreme conservatism and his seemingly unshakeable seat of power won him many enemies. Following the Leeds Organ Crisis in 1828 the disaffected elements within the Connexion made personal attacks against Bunting, as well as attacking his policies.

To be fair to Bunting it must not be forgotten that the 19th Century economic situation was, at best, rather unstable and must have been a contributing factor in the frequency and seriousness of the Connexional troubles. It should again be noted that whatever Bunting did (or did not do) had been sanctioned by a majority of the Ministry. It should be mentioned that following each period of crisis Bunting was rewarded for his efforts by being elected to the Presidency of the Methodist Conference.

In the final analysis, The Constitutional Authority of Dr. Jabez Bunting....., is not an attempt to vindicate him of the responsibility for the disruptions within the Church. However, it does attempt, by indicating the basis of his authority, to point out that if there is any blame to be apportioned, that blame must be equally shared between Bunting and the majority of the Wesleyan Ministry.

To my Mother

## PREFACE

The Constitutional Authority of Dr. Jabez Bunting over Wesleyan Methodism as seen through His Correspondence, is an attempt to outline Dr. Jabez Bunting's influence over the Wesleyan Church from the moment of his entry into the Ministry in 1799 until the time of his retirement in 1853.

There are two difficulties involved in attempting such a project: the first is that until Jabez Bunting's influence began to tell, Methodism suffered from a malady caused by the very lack of an effective constitution. Therefore when making a study of the 'Constitutional Authority of Jabez Bunting' it must be borne in mind that much of his efforts went into forming and developing that very constitution. The second difficulty is caused by the nature of the evidence used to compile this study. Dr. Bunting's correspondence which is the basis for this thesis, though complete, is not as complete as it might be. In his Will Bunting requested his two elder sons to examine, on his death, all the papers, letters and correspondence in his possession, edit them, and "to destroy such portion thereof as in their judgement it might be expedient so to dispose of".<sup>1</sup> It is apparent, especially in the

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<sup>1</sup> Percival Bunting, The Life of Dr. Jabez Bunting, London. p.vii.

post-1843 correspondence, that his son Percival complied with his father's wish.

I wish most sincerely to thank my supervisor Professor W.R.Ward for his kind help and patience in the preparation of this thesis. I also wish to express my deepest gratitude to Mr. and Mrs. M. Murray Threipland for allowing me to use the peace and "quite" of their home, where much of the actual writing was done. Finally I wish to thank Mrs. Joan Gibson for her invaluable help in the final production of this thesis.

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## CHAPTER I

1791 - 1800.

"If we do not respect our laws what wonder that our people should not heed them".<sup>1</sup>

"You cannot get them to talk of politics so long as they are well employed..."<sup>2</sup>

With the death of Fletcher of Madeley in 1785, John Wesley was faced with the difficult problem of not having a successor. In an attempt to solve this dilemma, he mapped out in the "Deed of Declaration" a system of government based on collective leadership. As a substitute for his one man authoritarian rule, Wesley established a governing body known as the Legal Hundred. This was to contain one hundred of the most able members of the Ministry, who were to be appointed for life. Not only did this form of collective government fail to carry on the Wesleyan tradition of strong central authority, but its conservatism became a stumbling block to Bunting's eventual efforts at reintroducing the spirit of order and discipline.

On Wesley's death, the problems of Conference, both internal and external, could no longer be controlled. From outside the Conference, the Ministry was faced with renewed attempts on the

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Gregory, Conflicts of Methodism, p. 53.

<sup>2</sup> Gayer, Rostow and Schwartz, The Growth and Fluctuations of the British Economy, 1790-1850, p. 108.

part of the lay trustees to subvert the Central Authority of Conference. Their potential authority had always rivalled Wesley's power, but he had been able to keep them in check and their influence at a minimum. His successor, the Legal Hundred, was unable to withstand the assertion of trustee authority.

In addition the Ministry was faced with internal difficulties caused by differences of opinion about Methodism's relationship to the Established Church. For an understanding of the rise to power of Jabez Bunting it is necessary to discuss briefly these difficulties of the 1790's, for the conclusions he drew as an observer of this tumultuous decade were to colour his policies until his retirement.

Before his death, John Wesley was forced, by circumstances, to introduce certain practices into the Wesleyan tradition which, afterwards, were to be the cause of much ministerial unrest. Ordination and permission to give the sacrament fanned the smouldering fires for separation from the Church of England. Certain members of the Ministry felt a need to define their status as that of regular Ministers. This Ministerial self-consciousness, though affecting but a few, was strong enough to cause general unrest throughout the Conference. Many felt that:

"The continual movement of the Wesleyan preachers prevented them from presenting the appearance of settled ministers. But

the success of their preaching and of their pastoral work meant that they grew in popularity and in defacto authority as the years went by..."<sup>3</sup>

By 1791 the tradition of the extraordinary mission was gradually evolving into that of a settled Christian community. The itinerancy was developing a sense of being a group apart; of being dedicated men, whether or not they were ordained; of being "the Methodist Preacher", for them a title of honour as well as of notoriety.<sup>4</sup> To those ministers thus affected there was much to fight for and when their right to give the Sacrament was questioned they felt it necessary to take the offensive. Though on most occasions the Ministry was successfully rejecting attempts at becoming a formalized ministry, the issue of giving the Sacrament was to become most serious.

It has been stated that the trustees had been the potential rivals to the authority of Wesley. When he died it was soon discovered that the central power replacing Wesley was weak. The trustees therefore found it easier to force into the open the "ancient Christian feud between lay-men and clerics".<sup>5</sup>

"... Determined local officials who controlled the money, invited collision between Conference and its congregations; between central government and local authorities;

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<sup>3</sup> John Kent, Age of Disunity, p. 49.

<sup>4</sup> Kent op. cit., p. 50.

<sup>5</sup> Owen Chadwick, The Victorian Church, p. 377.

between high clerics and low laymen".<sup>6</sup>

With the Legal Hundred unable to maintain order and discipline within the Ministry during the sacramental disputes, the trustees felt that by taking sides they could force Conference to relinquish much of its authority and return it to the local level.

In 1794 that portion of the Ministry and laity who supported the administration of the Sacrament in Methodist Chapels came into open conflict with Conference and the Legal Hundred. In the face of Connexional wide opposition, the Conference decided to force the issue and thus affect a cure.<sup>7</sup> The battlefield was Bristol where, but a few weeks earlier, the government had been forced to use troops to dispose rioting colliers.<sup>8</sup>

From 1793 to 1820 the Connexion was living under the nightmarish shadow of the French Revolution; a condition made more serious by the plight of the people, caused by falling prices and rising costs. For the Wesleyan Ministry the unrest was all the more ominous as a result of the recent breakdown in relations between themselves and the laity. Incident after incident solidified in the minds of the Conference the need for action which would ensure the preservation of their office, and a future for the Connexion.

In May 1794 an:

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<sup>6</sup> Owen Chadwick, The Victorian Church, p. 373.

<sup>7</sup> MS. evidence obtained from Professor W.R.Ward.

<sup>8</sup> Robert J. Thompson and David Charles, Essays on Agrarian History...

"unlawful assembly of colliers met on Rodway Hill (near Bristol) on account of the dearness of provisions and had to be dispersed by troops. And similar meetings, some of which led to rioting, took place in other parts of England".<sup>9</sup>

By 1795 the economic strains on the population had become so severe, that when the Conference of that year met in Manchester it was in fear for its safety. In 1797, in spite of an attempted conciliation with the laity, Conference was forced to endure the Connexion's first great schism. By the end of the 1790's 'the wonder is not that there was a secession, but that the whole Connexion did not break up in confusion'.<sup>10</sup> The result of the internal disorder, the economic instability of the country (which generated much of the disorder), the fears aroused by the civil war of the Luddites, the riots in East Anglia, and the events at Peters Field, was a ministerial movement away from the people. By 1820 the pastoral office, in alliance with the wealthy laity, was becoming a device for social control.

By then the Conference, due largely to the efforts of Jabez Bunting, had developed a system of administrative committees

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<sup>9</sup> W.E.Minchinton ed. Essays on Agrarian History: 'Agricultural Returns and the Government During the Napoleonic Wars'. by W.E.Minchinton, p. 105.

<sup>10</sup> John Bowmer, The Lords Supper in Methodism, p. 13.

for the day-to-day administration of Methodism. The Ministry had been frightened into implementing a policy for the protection of their newly-developed institutions, and for the protection of their gradually evolving position of regular Ministers. Bunting felt that for the safety of the movement the Ministry must not only make an alliance with the more stable elements in the Connexion but must also be seen to be acting in the best interests of the country. Bunting fought for closer ties with the government and 'attempted to curb anything that might be said or done to prejudice the Church of England - that bastion of the English way of life'.<sup>11</sup>

Behind the desired need for a change in ministerial policy was the extreme social unrest caused by the unsettled state of the economy. 'Virtually all who work within the terrain of history or the social sciences must seek to relate economic forces and political events'.<sup>12</sup> During the period of Bunting's rise, there were at least three major economic forces that contributed at intervals to the social and political unrest: cyclical unemployment, technological unemployment, and fluctuations in the domestic harvests.<sup>13</sup>

The most serious social unrest resulted from cyclical depression and high food prices.<sup>14</sup> The high food prices affected

<sup>11</sup> Bowmer, op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>12</sup> W.W. Rostow, British Economy of the 19th Century, p. 126.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 109

<sup>14</sup> Rostow, op. cit., p. 109.

the employment of handloom weavers and can be traced as a direct cause for the Luddite riots of 1811-16 and the Chartist movement. Although, during the period of the French war, agriculture prospered, the working classes still suffered from minimum prices being paid for their produce. The result was that important segments of the farming community, as well as the urban populations, became discontented and defensive. The consequence of this affected the whole sequence of political life,<sup>15</sup> especially within Methodism, which was primarily a rural system.<sup>16</sup> Throughout the whole period of Jabez Bunting's influence, Methodism was affected by these cycles of the economy.

In the British Economy of the Nineteenth Century, Rostow notes that political unrest generally fell within periods of economic depression.<sup>17</sup> It is significant to note that Methodism's greatest trials also fell within the periods Rostow outlines, or certainly close enough to be influenced by them. In each case of national political unrest there is a 'fairly direct connexion between unemployment and mass dissatisfaction'.<sup>18</sup>

During the troughs in the trade cycles the population was most susceptible to carrying their dissatisfaction to the extreme

<sup>15</sup> Rostow, op. cit., p. 131.

<sup>16</sup> W.R.Ward, Tithe Question in England in the Early 19th Century offprint from 'The Journal of Ecclesiastical History', p. 67.

<sup>17</sup> Rostow, op. cit., p.121 - years of political unrest: 1811-12, 1819, 1837, 1839 and 1848-49.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

of actual rioting. From 1791 to 1850 the Methodist Church was certainly influenced by the volatility of the people. The religious differences of many Methodists came at a time when the people and Conference as a whole seemed least capable of coping with the difficulties. Economic conditions and the general state that of politics meant/large percentages of the Methodist societies became involved in Connexional disputes. Fears raised by the events in France drove Conference to push its will to a doctrinal level, thereby forcing severe collisions between the ministry and the laity.

The economic condition of the country during the 1790's , generally speaking, was not good. 1794 and 1795 saw a "rise in foodstuff prices due primarily to bad harvests. Although money wages rose, they rose in a very inadequate proportion to the increased price of the necessaries of life".<sup>19</sup> In attempts to maintain their wage levels in the face of rising costs, men resorted to various types of combinations. The combination movement was a peaceful expression of discontent and fear but the usual mode of expression seemed to be the local bread riot or strikes. The unrest was 'at times successfully linked with republican ideas'.<sup>20</sup> It was during this period that Conference had been threatened while meeting in Manchester; that the sacramental dispute came to a head; and that Alexander Kilham left the Connexion taking 5,000 Methodists with him.

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<sup>19</sup> Rostow, op. cit., p. 114.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 115.



Through the early years of the nineteenth century the Ministry, in the face of the rather violent expression of Christianity by the people in the form of revivals, attempted to move closer to the Establishment. By 1816 conditions had so deteriorated throughout the country that riots and disturbances were becoming everyday occurrences in the towns.<sup>21</sup>

From 1820 to 1842 prices were comparatively low, and farmers complained loudly of the unprofitable nature of their business. That the situation among the farmers was serious can be gathered from the Parliamentary 'inquiries of 1821, 1833, 1836 and 1837 into the depressed state of the industry...' <sup>22</sup> . Preceding the troubles in Manchester, Liverpool and Leeds (1826-28), was the crash of 1826. After 1828 there were additional serious slumps in 1832 and again 1837. The period from 1836 to 1842 saw industry in a depressed state and a 'high level of unemployment especially after 1839.' <sup>23</sup>

From 1843 to 1848/<sup>the</sup> domestic price index showed a gradual rise to a peak in 1845 followed by a decline by August 1846. An enormous rise in the price of wheat took the index to a second

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<sup>21</sup> A.J. Peacock, Bread or Blood: A Study of the Agrarian Riots in East Anglia in 1816, p. 59.

<sup>22</sup> E.L. Jones, G.E. Mingay eds., Land, Labour and Population in the Industrial Revolution, p. 80.

<sup>23</sup> Minchinton, op. cit., 'An Enquiry into the Rent of Agricultural Land', p. 61.

peak in June 1847 but after which it steadily declined until 1850.<sup>24</sup> It is important to note that the period 1846 to July 1847 saw the highest price for wheat since 1838-42.<sup>25</sup> It should also be noted that import index reached its lowest point for the period 1790 to 1850 in September 1848.<sup>26</sup> The year 1847 saw a major financial crisis caused in part by the Bank Act of 1844.<sup>27</sup>

Whatever the cause for the financial troubles the result always seemed to be the same. The Sheriff of Lanarkshire, A. Alison, wrote in 1848:

"I have observed during the whole time I have been in Lanarkshire that any rise in the rate of discount at the Bank of England has been immediately, or at least shortly, followed by an increase both of crime and of civil suits..... As I am an official member of the prison board and of most of the Charities, I have always made it a rule to say... 'Gentlemen, the Bank of England have

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<sup>24</sup> Gayer, Rostow..., op. cit., p. 306.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 311.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 331.

raised their discounts, you had better immediately take measures for enlarging the prison accommodations and for extending the infirmaries and poor House'." <sup>28</sup>

Though one should not attempt to generalize/a <sup>on</sup> topic so broad and complicated as the economic history from 1791 to 1850, an attempt must be made, for it is an undeniable fact that the economic cycles did much to change Methodist policy and greatly aided Jabez Bunting's initial rise to eminence. 'Historians of every shade of bias admit the importance of the influence of economic situations on political and social events'. <sup>29</sup>

The Legal Hundred was unable to maintain law and order in Bristol, and also failed in its attempt to protect the powers of Conference in 1795 and 1797 from the attacks of the people. In 1810 Jonathan Crowther wrote of the legislation of 1797 that:

"For fear of a larger division, the Conference agreed to make considerable sacrifices, the preachers resigning considerable portions of powers, respecting temporal matters, divisions of circuits, receiving and expelling members, the appointment and

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<sup>28</sup> Rostow, op. cit., p. 108.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

removal of leaders, stewards and local preachers".<sup>30</sup>

In spite of the surrender of much of its authority, the Conference was still unable to prevent the major schism caused by Alexander Kilham.

It was the conflict in Bristol, and the events that followed, which showed the Connexion and the young Jabez Bunting, then residing in Manchester, the impracticability of the Legal Hundred and the need for greater central authority.

It became apparent from the difficulties of the 1790's, that the Conference suffered from three major weaknesses. The Constitution of the Connexion, as formed by Wesley, was ill-suited to the facts of Methodist life.<sup>31</sup> The Ministry had much to fear from the people, especially in light of the revolutionary fervour of the period. And there was a growing need for a minister capable of commanding enough respect within Conference to draw in the reins of the floundering movement.

At the time of Wesley's death, there were only a limited number of ministers with high enough standing within the Ministry to succeed him as the focal point of order and discipline. Three

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<sup>30</sup> MCA Jonathon Crowther, The Methodist Manual 1810.

<sup>31</sup> Chadwick, op. cit., p. 371.

of the ministers most likely were the Revs. Thomas Coke, Joseph Benson and Adam Clarke.

In spite of the fact that by 1797 the Ministry must have seen the need for a strong leader to support the inadequate collective leadership of the Legal Hundred, they nevertheless refused to accept the primacy bids of Coke and Benson; and Clarke, though able, refused to take an interest in assuming the leadership of Conference.

The Rev. Thomas Coke was an irrepressibly zealous and enterprising man, but he was also impetuous and ambitious, and unfortunately for his ambitions he was unable to hide these defects in his character. Coke alienated his fellow ministers at every turn. While in America in 1784 he allowed himself to be called Bishop, and permitted a College to carry his name.<sup>32</sup> He attempted to play the role of Wesley among the Americans, and without prior authority proposed an unpopular scheme of union with the Protestant Episcopal Church, and made public his wish to be appointed a Bishop of the United Church. Finally, after he had sent an improper congratulatory letter to George Washington, Conference lost all patience, and officially censured him for his indiscretions in America.

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<sup>32</sup> Rupert E. Davies, Methodism, p. 161.

Wesley's death brought Coke back to England, to claim the "vacant dictatorship" <sup>33</sup> but Conference showed its trust in Coke by electing William Thompson first President of Conference.

In 1797 Coke was elected President and the Ministerial fears of Coke in a position of authority were realized. He attempted on his own initiative to curry favour with the Archbishop of Canterbury. He proved himself untrustworthy to the powerful London preachers, and forced on the Kilhamite schism which resulted in the loss of over 5000 members of the Connexion.

Coke's actions cost him what little trust the Ministry had in him, and following this period he directed most of his energies to the field of the Missions; a path on which he continued until his death.

In 1809 Coke once again became the topic of discussion among some of the more influential Ministers, when it was discovered that he had, without authorization, promised the Dean of Jersey that the Sacrament would not be administered in Methodist Chapels on that island. In a letter to Richard Reece, Jabez Bunting wrote what seemed to be the typical complaint against Coke.

"With the highest respect for the ends  
at which Dr. C., I believe sincerely aims,  
I cannot but dislike exceedingly, the

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<sup>33</sup> Rupert E. Davies, Methodism, p. 161.

system of manouver and secret management  
by which he too often endeavours to  
obtain purposes".<sup>34</sup>

Similarly, after Wesley's death, the Rev. Joseph Benson was in a position to become leader of Conference, but like Coke he failed because he lacked the necessary standing amongst the Ministry.

In 1794, during the disputes over the Sacrament, Benson was unfortunate in that he supported the minority, who in alliance with members of the laity, openly challenged the authority of Conference. Benson felt the administration of the Sacrament by Methodist Preachers was injurious to Methodism. He felt that during the troubled times of the 1790's Methodism, if it was to survive, must remain in close harmony with the Establishment. He saw the administration of the Sacrament as being a step away from the protection of the Crown. Before the Conference in Manchester in 1794, Benson wrote:

"We entreat our Societies at large to continue as usual in connexion with the Church of England... according to that simple original plan of Methodism, established and left to us by the late Rev. Mr. Wesley".<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to Richard Reece.

<sup>35</sup> James MacDonald, Memoirs of the Richard Joseph Benson, p. 87.

In spite of the loud clamour for the administration of the Sacrament Benson remained obdurate and pleaded for order and peace, but to no avail. The Ministry was divided on the issue.

Benson had been appointed by Conference to Bristol but it is evident that he realized/<sup>that</sup> the city was to be the scene of a major conflict, for he attempted to be removed to a different circuit.

"Seeing no prospect of peace I determined, if possible to get myself appointed for another circuit. But many of the preachers being gone to their circuits those that remained were unwilling to alter what had been done, so that the Conference broke up and I remained upon the list of Bristol".<sup>36</sup>

At Bristol, Benson joined forces with the trustees against Conference, an act which was to end his influence as a Conference politician. At the District Meeting called to handle the dispute, Benson voted against the desire of Conference, and then actively supported the trustees by "Preaching in the pulpits from which his legitimately appointed colleague was excluded".<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> MacDonalD, op. cit., p. 268.

<sup>37</sup> George Smith, History of Wesleyan Methodism, Vol. II, p. 28.



Benson, who had preached a powerful sermon at the preceding Conference against schism, was condemned by the District Meeting for that very offence - schism. Later, during the difficulties caused by Taylor's bill, he again put himself in a position for criticism when he made statements to the effect that he had been right in 1794, and that if Conference had listened to him the Connexion would not be under government attack in 1800.

By failing to support his fellow Ministers at a time when Conference was becoming acutely sensitive to the social unrest, and to the attempts by the trustees to usurp their authority, Benson ended all hope of being accepted by the Ministry as a successor to John Wesley.

Adam Clarke, like Benson and Coke was a personal friend of Wesley. He had been considered by many the hero of Conference and was not "without some right to the title of apostle..."<sup>38</sup> but unlike Benson and Coke, Clarke had no aspirations to becoming the leader of Methodism.

Adam Clarke was perhaps the best educated Minister in the Connexion and was content to spend his time "engaged in the prosecution of his studies and in the labours of authorship".<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Kent, op. cit., p. 114.

<sup>39</sup> J.W.Etheridge, The Life of the Rev. Adam Clarke, LL.D., p. 144.

During the troubled 1790's Clarke rarely entered into the Connexion's public disputes, but spent his time working to establish himself as an author and scholar.<sup>40</sup> From 1800 to 1809 his reputation as a scholar grew, and in that year he was given a position in the government commensurate with his talents. In addition to Clarke's literary efforts, much of his time between 1800 and 1810 was taken up with membership of a number of societies and institutes.

Though elected President of Conference three times, he had no political aspirations. Before he would accept his first term as President he had to be "literally dragged into office..."<sup>41</sup> and during the Conference of 1828 Clarke expressed views on the office of the Presidency which certainly were not those of a politically ambitious man. He felt that the office of the Presidency was but a three week job, and went on to say that during his terms of office he treated it as such. Clarke felt it was wrong to give the President of Conference the kind of discretionary power which would enable him to act beyond the period of Conference.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> During the Sacramental dispute he did write from Bristol:

"If ordination and the sacrament  
be given up some preachers will  
undoubtedly withdraw, among  
whom Adam Clarke will be found".  
Letter from the Bristol Conference, 1794.  
Etheridge, op. cit., p. 417.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>42</sup> MCA Minutes of the London Conference, 1828.

By 1805 Clarke was being criticised, not for over-zealousness and bad judgement as in the cases of Coke and Benson, but for lack of activity within the Connexion. It was being said that he "used his authority as a superintendent in order to secure time for his literary pursuits..." <sup>43</sup> In 1808 Joseph Entwisle wrote to Jabez Bunting,

"For some years, indeed, Mr. Clarke has not done the regular work of a preacher as you know. His mind has been occupied about other things, and he has not preached often but on Sundays. If Dr. Clarke would direct his whole attention to the work of the Ministry, and employ the whole vigour of his mind in it, he would shine as a star of the first magnitude, and he would be singularly usefull in the Connexion.

I am of your opinion that he is completely secularized by accepting a civil office; as much so as if he became a linen draper.... Perhaps we had better give him the honorary title of Supy. for a few years. But let him not have any office or vote in our Conference, nor any other man who is settled except our own officers. My Brother, let travelling preachers guard against all local men whether clergy or

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<sup>43</sup> Thomas Percival Bunting, The Life of Jabez Bunting, D.D., p. 253.

laity, that would attempt to gain influence and authority over them, as a body".<sup>44</sup>

In 1809 Dr. Clarke had been stationed in London for a number of years in order that he might work for the government and continue his literary pursuits. As a result of his protracted stay in London, William Williams asked Bunting:

"What to your opinion of the increase of demi-local men in London? Do they not ... at least partially separate themselves from the interest of the itinerant preachers?"<sup>45</sup>

Clarke's long stay in one circuit was resented among a growing number of ministers. In 1814, for health reasons, Clarke intended to leave London, but feelings were such that even this move was suspect. J. Beaumont wrote to Isaac Keeling saying:

"... I have heard but a little news since you were here, except that Dr. Clarke is told by the Dr.'s in London, that if he stays in town he will not live many years. This has turned his thoughts upon the country, and it seems he has planned on a spot in the neighbourhood of Liverpool. There he intends as I am told to build a new house, and one man

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<sup>44</sup> MCA MSS. Joseph Entwisle to J.B., Rochester, April 29, 1808.

<sup>45</sup> MCA MSS. William Williams to J.B.

has either given or promised to give him £500 towards building it. When men become either thick or great they usually become poorly: this I have observed for many years".<sup>46</sup>

The Ministry resented Clarke's outside pursuits, and considered them detrimental to Connexional affairs. When asked to become more active in the Connexion by giving up a portion of his outside work, Clarke answered by giving up only one of his external positions.

Jabez Bunting wrote to Richard Reece on the subject.

"It seems it is only the Surrey Librarianship Dr. Clarke has resolved to abandon, not his employment under the Record Commissioners. It appears that he cannot be disentangled from the latter engagement for a year or two to come, but his friends think it quite compatible with his appointment as a preacher to the London West Circuit. Only it seems to me that some other person should have the Superintendency of the circuit; as it will be very improbable that he can mind that and his Record Hunting duties as well".<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> MCA MSS. J Beaumont to Isaac Keeling, Lancaster, April 17, 1809.

<sup>47</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to Richard Reece, Sheffield, March 17, 1809.

Clarke's insistence that he be kept on the active preacher's role added to the bad feeling and caused factions to develop.

Edward Hare wrote to Bunting to tell him:

"Mr. McNichol our Comilion (sic) is becoming a Clarkite. He now sees the propriety of the Dr.'s abiding in London".<sup>48</sup>

On the same subject Bunting wrote to a Mr. Edwards:

"Will Dr. Clarke become a professional superumerary next Conference; or will the genius of the London Friends invent some new expedient to retain him on the list of their regular preachers..."<sup>49</sup>

Clarke's position became more controversial, as a result of his close relationship with the government, when he gave his support to a government bill which many saw as a direct attack on the itineracy. Lord Sidmouth, sponsor of the bill, asked if he would try to diminish the force of Ministerial resistance. In complying with Sidmouth's request Clarke incurred further criticism for his apparent support of an anti-Methodist bill.

Dr. Clarke continued to busy himself with his scholastic work and as a result was really never looked to by the Ministry for leadership. In 1831 the ill feelings caused by his

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<sup>48</sup> MCA MSS. Edward Hare to J.B.

<sup>49</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to Mr. Edwards, Halifax, November 20, 1811.

disinterest in Connexional affairs came to a head when his friends, for sentimental reasons, wished his election to the Presidency for a fourth term. In a letter to Edmund Grindrod, Bunting expressed what can be believed to be the major criticism against a fourth term for Dr. Clarke.

"He is not fairly in the ranks of an itinerant; he has very objectionable peculiarities of opinion, which might embarrass him in his official duties, and make his election for a fourth time a virtual encouragement of what we deem heterodoxy; he has certainly favoured the last attempt to promote faction and rebellion against the Conference not perhaps intentionally; but still his triumph would be in some degree that of the party who do not best have Methodism as it is; and he has for many years stood so much aloof from us, and known so little either of circuit or Conference affairs, that he really seems incompetent to these duties of the Presidency which belong to the intervals of our actual session. In Conference he could not go very far wrong: but afterwards he could not possibly do justice to his situation, especially living where he does, in a perfect corner, where he could

seldom consult the brethren in difficult cases, and where no letter could reach him till many hours after his arrival in London..."<sup>50</sup>

The failure of Dr. Clarke's election to a fourth presidency was the culmination of what seemed to be a widespread prejudice against his lack of interest in Connexional matters. Unlike Coke and Benson, Dr. Clarke eliminated himself from becoming John Wesley's successor.

Without a strong focal point of authority Methodism floundered through the 1790's. The Wesleyan Tradition of "inspired innovation" was unworkable under the collective leadership of the Legal Hundred. By the turn of the century the Connexion was rife with agitation and factions which could not be controlled by Conference. In 1795 Adam Clarke wrote to George Marsden, discussing the lack of government within Methodism.

"... I have no objection to tell you my mind in the fullest manner you proposed. The confusion which has taken place among us is principally owing to our total want of government. We are like a rope of sand from Conference to Conference and as we are, nothing but more power of God exerted in superordinary way could hold us together. My opinion relative

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<sup>50</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to Edmund Grindrod, Liverpool, March 2, 1831.



to the mode of government is just the same now (as) it was when I spoke to you when at Liverpool. A government we must have some kind or other; but I care little what kind it is providing it be effectual.

The High Church party are going to great lengths indeed. I look upon them as the vilest persecutors. I have long predicted that trusteeism would ruin Methodism if not powerfully opposed, and the recent (ste) ps the trustees and their party have taken have tended to confirm their judgement". <sup>51</sup>

As conditions within the Connexion worsened the Ministry must have seen the need for an alternative to the weak central authority, which had thus far failed to prevent the continual disturbances.<sup>52</sup> Those individuals most capable of leading the Conference had been denied the opportunity, thus leaving the position available to the rising star of Jabez Bunting. As his talents became known, and as he was acceptable to a majority of the Ministry, he was raised, by popular opinion, to fill the void left by Wesley. The position he assumed enabled him to introduce what he considered to be cures for the Connexion's ills: a stricter

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<sup>51</sup> MCA MSS. Adam Clarke to George Marsden, Manchester, January 8, 1795.

<sup>52</sup> During the 1790's "The wonder is not that there was secession but that the Connexion did not break up in confusion". John Bowmer, op. cit., p. 13.

application of the Pastoral authority; an alliance with the more stable elements of the Connexion against the less stable; and an alliance with the Establishment as a safeguard against government action. The very fact that Bunting and his policies were given a chance must show that the ministry recognised a need, and that in Bunting/<sup>they</sup>saw the man capable of strengthening the central authority of Conference. The preceding decade had shown the Ministry that for Methodism to survive a change was necessary; "Jabez Bunting became the manager, thrown up by the need for management".<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Chadwick, op. cit., p. 374

## CHAPTER II

1799 - 1812

"Beware of the first blunder, for the first blunder is very apt to commit you to all the rest of the unhappy series."<sup>1</sup>

Although Jabez Bunting entered the Methodist Ministry in 1799 his attitudes towards Methodism had already been developed as a result of his close observations of the movement's difficulties during the preceding decade. In the words of his biographer, Bunting

"watched with growing intelligence.. Noted every phase and change of the controversies... he acquired a thorough insight into their nature and meaning; he became familiar with their essential principles, and he laid up a store of facts, precedents, and opinions which were of great and lasting service to him during the whole of his subsequent course".<sup>2</sup>

From his observations of the tumultuous 1790's, Bunting had become aware of the policies which would be necessary to restore order to the Connexion. Bunting saw that the Ministerial definition of the President's office left the Connexion virtually leaderless, and felt the job of President must be a full time endeavour. In

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<sup>1</sup> Currie, op. cit., p. 52

<sup>2</sup> Bunting, op. cit. p. 71

1828 he spoke out about the lack of Connexional order and attributed it to an absence of effective leadership.

"... in those days of jealousy and of inexperience this power was limited... but I find that future years found government in our family necessary as in 1797 and other years of Radicalism. We must not therefore look to the law of 1791 but to the deed and the question is whether the President is to be able to act after Conference".<sup>3</sup>

In the face of the growing republicanism of the people, Bunting realized that a full-time President could only keep order if the Ministry and the people were awakened to "the true place and right value of Godly ecclesiastical order...".<sup>4</sup> He recognized that the disruptions which were becoming more frequent during the first years of the nineteenth century, would be more easily controlled if certain members of the laity would exert pressure and influence for the maintenance of peace at local level. Bunting therefore sought to achieve and maintain an alliance between the Ministry and those members of the Connexion who stood to lose most from the republicanism of the people. As the agitation increased, the Ministry became aware of the necessity of

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<sup>3</sup> MCA, Proceedings of Conference 1828.

<sup>4</sup> Bunting, op. cit., p. 77.

Bunting's innovatory policy. Unfortunately for the Ministry, their dependence on the wealthy laity was to cause serious problems when this lay-ministerial alliance was weakened in the late 1820's .

The government was equally disturbed by the dissatisfaction of the people, and Bunting knew that the growing Methodist Church had much to fear from the government's repressive reactionary attempts at keeping the peace during those times of popular ferment.

Though the year 1800 saw the defeat of Taylor's Bill, Bunting realised that this bill would be only the beginning if the government were to consider Methodism as a hot-bed of radicalism. For this reason, throughout his career, Bunting strove for an alliance with the government, which, as it transpired, was strictly one-sided.

The lessons of the 1790's and the continued disruption of the Connexion during the first decade of the nineteenth century, opened the eyes of the Ministry to the need for change. The policies which Bunting strove to implement, and successfully achieved, were basically new to the Connexion but were such that they could be adapted within the framework of the:

"Long tradition, which bred in Ministers and people an accepted knowledge of how they should behave toward one another." <sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Kent, op. cit., p. 84.

The Ministry was not in search of a new order, but was in need of one. Bunting's innovations, both expedient and necessary in the light of the times, were so subtle that the Ministry not only adopted them, but accepted them as coming from Wesley.<sup>6</sup>

From the discussions on Coke, Benson, and Clarke it is apparent that Bunting's voice would never have been heeded if he had not acquired the confidence of his fellow Ministers. In his first decade as Minister he established himself as an energetic and intelligent innovator and thus paved the road to his future prominence.

Initially Bunting's reputation was based on his preaching ability and his extensive knowledge of Connexional affairs, which he acquired through three channels: the development of an extensive correspondence; the instigation of weekly circuit meetings; and through discussions with the leading Ministers of the Connexion.

Bunting first came into the public eye as a result of his preaching ability.

"The pulpit received his first attention not so much because its claims were instant and almost daily as because he knew that the secrets of Ministerial influence lies chiefly there." <sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 76. Bunting was to say in 1837, "Ours is, and must be to all eternity Wesleyanism". Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>7</sup> Bunting, op. cit., pp. 126-27.

Of Bunting's preaching ability Dr. Halley wrote:

"He seems to possess every qualification of a great preacher. I cannot think of any in which he was deficient. I know not any preacher who, to the same extent, excelled in all the qualifications of a good preacher".<sup>8</sup>

Dr. Leifchild wrote:

"Never before had I heard such preaching. Other preachers, indeed, excelled him in some points; but none that I have ever heard equalled him as a whole, they were powerful in argument and appeal..."<sup>9</sup>

In 1801 Joseph Entwisle was stationed in the same District as Bunting. To Jonathan Edmundson he wrote:

"My colleagues are good and agreeable men. Mr. Bunting of course outshines us all in the pulpit".<sup>10</sup>

The Ministry saw in Bunting's powerful delivery a strength which the Conference had lacked since the days of John Wesley. More important, the Ministry recognized in his strength an element for which the Connexion was in dire need.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

<sup>10</sup> William Entwisle, Memoir of the Rev. Joseph Entwisle..., p. 234.

Bunting began his extensive correspondence at almost the same time he began his ministerial career. During the first years of his Ministry he wrote to, and received letters and information from, every strata of the Connexion.<sup>11</sup> In a letter to a "young friend", Bunting wrote in 1801:

"I thank you for the information your letter offered me concerning the circuits, etc. Such intelligence cannot but be interesting to me as a Methodist preacher, and may be useful. Your hints about the talents of several of your neighbours in the Ministry are also acceptable. I wish to become as generally and accurately acquainted as I can with the preachers and circuits in our Connexion".<sup>12</sup>

From 1799 to 1812 the correspondence contains examples of letters answering Bunting's requests for Connexional information. In 1801 there are letters from Gaulter discussing Conference policies,<sup>13</sup> and requests from Bunting to George Marsden for information concerning the separation of Buxton from Macclesfield.<sup>14</sup> Not all of Bunting's requests were answered. In 1807 Robert Lomas wrote to apologize for forgetting to send him a copy of the book committee minutes.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Bunting, op. cit., pp. 118-19.

<sup>12</sup> Bunting, op. cit., p. 120.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>14</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to George Marsden, London, June 24, 1805.

<sup>15</sup> MCA MSS. R. Lomas to J.B. (Liverpool) August 12, 1807.



In addition to acquiring a great deal of Connexional information, Bunting's correspondence was a vehicle for the dissemination of his innovations and opinions. In 1805 Bunting wrote that he felt Methodism made little use of the press.

"That powerful engine, for promoting its tenets, and advancing its interests".<sup>16</sup>

In the same year he wrote to Marsden showing that he was in agreement with Dr. Adam Clarke on the need to educate the Ministry,<sup>17</sup> as well as to provide some sort of systematic training for approved Ministerial candidates.<sup>18</sup> These opinions and others were spread throughout the Ministry by word of mouth and by many of his correspondents.<sup>19</sup>

Equally important to his rise in Conference were Bunting's personal contacts. Early in his career he introduced into his circuits the practice of holding weekly meetings for the discussion of Connexional politics as well as for the discussion of religious matters. Bunting's intentions were for the Ministers to:

"Converse freely together...  
about topics ... appropriate  
to their vocation".<sup>20</sup>

These meetings were attended by many of the most influential members

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<sup>16</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to Theophilus Lessey, Liverpool, May 31, 1811.

<sup>17</sup> MCA MSS. Adam Clarke to Joseph Butterworth June 14, 1806.

<sup>18</sup> MCA MSS. T.Hutton to J.B. Congleton, May 15, 1810.

<sup>19</sup> Bunting, op. cit., p. 266.

<sup>20</sup> Bunting, op. cit., p. 266.

of the Ministry who could not but have been impressed with the eagerness, zeal and intelligence of the young Bunting. Joseph Entwisle wrote to Bunting praising his innovation:

"I am delighted with your new plan  
 (of ministerial conversations) and  
 long for an opportunity of enjoying  
 the benefit of it. A wonder it has  
 not been thought of and indeed  
 become general before this time.  
 Conversations on our most important  
 doctrines and discipline etc. will  
 keep alive in the minds of the  
 preachers a sense of their importance..." <sup>21</sup>

The friendships that developed out of the correspondence and the circuit meetings were lasting and important. As early as 1802 Bunting wrote to James Wood asking him to:

"without fail see Mr. Gaulter  
 and inform him of my intentions  
 to see him though I will be  
 forced by circumstances to be  
 a day late. I want to see him  
 on several not unimportant  
 accounts".<sup>22</sup>

As Bunting's talents became recognized, this process was reversed and it was the Ministry who sought out Bunting for advice and aid.

For the first time since 1791 a Minister began to play an active role in curing the ills of the Connexion. From the

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<sup>21</sup> MCA MSS. Joseph Entwisle to J.B. February 9, 1807.

<sup>22</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to James Wood Macclesfield January 30, 1802.

correspondence it can be seen that Bunting was very much preoccupied with the inter-related problems of discipline and organization. For improving the London District, Bunting wrote:

"The number of travelling preachers should be increased from six to nine and the superintendency, which is a mere name at present, should be divided between two or three persons and there should be a separate week-day plan for the preachers appointed to each district branch of the circuit. Till something of this kind be adopted there can be none of that ministerial pastorship and oversight of the flock which the new testament enjoins as universally necessary. A division of the circuit into two or three branches, e.g. London, Westminster and Southwark. In order to meet the prejudices of some respectable friends against this measure (which is, in the opinion of Mr. Taylor and myself, as well as of Mr. Benson, and other preachers who talked of it last year, absolutely essential to the due administration of discipline.), the Sunday plan might still be general for all town Chaples".<sup>23</sup>

The disciplinary measures Bunting proposed were not innovations but strikingly similar to those of Wesley. In 1803, Bunting had written to Richard Reece a letter which attested to

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<sup>23</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to George Marsden London October 13, 1803.

this fact. In this letter Bunting stated the wish that:

"our preachers would take the opportunity of returning to the spirit and discipline and with that resolve to stand or fall".<sup>24</sup>

In the same letter Bunting stated that, if owing to lack of discipline, there arose:

"... divisions from the Church, though awful, are perhaps after all less to be dreaded than divisions in the Church".<sup>25</sup>

In 1806, during the Broadhurst schism, Bunting wrote:

"It is a painful occurrence, but will I doubt not, be best upon the whole; as a schism from the body will be less evil than a schism in it".<sup>26</sup>

To Dr. Leifchild who had obviously strayed from what Bunting considered to be the path of Wesleyanism, he wrote:

"From some of your sentiments and modes of expression I judge you will be more happy in another Connexion than ours..."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to Richard Reece Macclesfield July 15, 1803.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Bunting, op. cit., p. 248.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

The power of Bunting's preaching must have convinced the Ministry of his ability to deal firmly with Ministerial dissidents. The awareness of Bunting's abilities<sup>28</sup> and extensive knowledge gave the Ministry the confidence to entrust him with the monumental task of putting the Methodist house in order.

Methodism of the early nineteenth century had inherited the difficulties caused by the lack of effective leadership through the 1790's. The increasing threat from the populace, caused by the nationwide economic troubles, reinforced Bunting's notion that Methodism must seek an alliance with the government. For that reason Bunting, while improving the administrative organization, spoke out against what he called "Ranterism", or what was also known as revivalism.

Methodism could no longer afford to coexist with the spirit of revivalism, particularly with the fears of the French Revolution still strong in the mind of the government. However, Bunting's

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<sup>28</sup> From the journal of Joseph Entwisle, October 24, 1800

"Rode over the dreary mountains to  
Oldham and dined there with Mr. Rogers.  
There I met with Mr. Jabez  
Bunting, a townsman of mine.  
He left great prospects in the  
world, in the medical profession,  
to become a travelling preacher.  
He is going on his second year,  
is about twenty-one, is eminent  
for good sense, piety and  
ministerial gifts, and promises  
great usefulness. Glory be to God!"

Ibid., p. 113.

attempt to secure Methodism from government attack<sup>29</sup> opened the door to renewed attacks on the Conference from their traditional rivals, the lay trustees. The increasing anti-revival line of Conference, coupled with the knowledge that it lacked the leadership to control Connexional disorder, inspired the Trustees to lead the people against Conference.

To answer this threat, Bunting sought an alliance with the more stable elements of the Connexion, in the hope of offsetting any misuse of trustee power at local level. Bunting's alliance was to ensure that his doctrine of rigid discipline and order would extend to the lowest elements of the Connexion. Of prime importance, to Bunting, was the keeping of all responsibility for innovation and interpretation of doctrine and law in the hands of Conference. Bunting's strict order was considered repressive by the enemies of Conference, but he could justify the lack of democracy within the Connexion by saying that God himself had:

"... placed the local Methodist congregations in the charge of the pastor... Since Methodism was Connexional, the Ministers were found to meet together for

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<sup>29</sup> In 1803 Bunting remarked that Methodism was under attack for practicing 'ranterism'. After visiting St. Paul's he remarked,

"The clergy of the Establishment have no right to throw stones at us for tolerating Ranterism, whilst such things are practiced by themselves in their own cathedrals".

their mutual advantage; and when they did so, their authority was the same kind as that of the individual, but could be applied on a wider scale. Thus the annual Ministerial Conference had the same kind of responsibility for and oversight of the whole Connexion as the individual minister exercised in the local societies".<sup>30</sup>

In Conference, Bunting continued to emphasise that whatever authority the lay trustees professed to have, it was no more than being the legal guardians of property and:

"They ought to deal with it with the exclusive reference and in constant subordination, to the welfare of the particular society, and to the whole body of Methodism of which it is a part".<sup>31</sup>

Bunting's policy was to increase the central authority of Conference by making the Ministry as independent as possible from the undue influence of the trustees. He felt that the trustees were attempting to encroach on what he considered to be the rightful authority of the Pastorate. From an early date Bunting had shown his belief that the

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<sup>30</sup> Kent, op. cit., p. 53

<sup>31</sup> Benjamin Gregory, Sidelights on the Conflicts of Methodism, p. 82.

Ministry must be separated from the laity. In 1799 he refused to be examined by members of the laity, which invoked the comment from an elder minister that:

"A good old rule that day had  
been set aside to please that  
proud son of Adam Jabez  
Bunting".<sup>32</sup>

Again, in 1804, Bunting refused to be examined by anyone but a fellow Minister.

Their vocal opposition to the Ministerial denunciation of revivals forced Bunting to take a stand against the Lay Trustees. The ensuing unrest, inspired by the Trustees, spread throughout the Connexion, and influenced members of the Ministry as well as the people. Since the turn of the century the Connexion had been rocked by numerous disruptions. Groups in Macclesfield and Manchester had gone out, as well as a group in Leeds, known as the "Kirkgate Screammers". In 1806 the Rev. Joseph Cooke instigated a further disruption; to restore order and discipline Bunting saw that the Ministry must come down heavily on such dissidents. Before the Conference of 1806, Bunting led his District Meeting in a censure of Cooke's actions.<sup>33</sup> At the Conference itself Bunting was heard to speak out against the wish of the President, urging Cooke's dismissal.<sup>34</sup> When Cooke was expelled Bunting wrote to James Wood

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<sup>32</sup> Bunting, op. cit., p. 95.

<sup>33</sup> MCA MSS. Joseph Entwisle to J.B. London, June 4, 1806.

<sup>34</sup> MCA MSS. Joseph Entwisle to J.B. June 4, 1806

"I am sorry to hear of the publication by J.Cooke  
which your District Committee has censured".  
Bunting, op. cit., p. 57.



concerning what he considered to be the successful conclusion of the case:

"Joseph Cooke's case was finally decided... He cannot be considered as a member of this body".<sup>35</sup>

To ensure the Connexion understood the position of the Ministry, Bunting preached a sermon at 'Littlebro' on the same day that Cooke was there to open a Chapel.<sup>36</sup> Later, Bunting delivered his famous sermon on 'Justification by Faith', outlining the doctrinal justification of the Conference action against Cooke.

Bunting's greatest and most protracted struggle was with the lay trustees. In 1809 Bunting wrote to George Marsden concerning the Trustees in Sheffield.

"I spent there the first Sunday in March, and had a curious specimen of Trustee Authority, in opposition to Mr. Morley and the leaders meeting of which you have doubtless heard. The whole scene was highly disgraceful".<sup>37</sup>

Later at Braford Chapel, a dispute arose between the Superintendent and the Society as to the mode in which the Deed of Settlement should be framed. Bunting had been asked to speak at the Chapel during

<sup>35</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to James Wood

<sup>36</sup> MCA MSS. Edward Hare to J.B. Rochdale, December 15, 1806

<sup>37</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to George Marsden Sheffield, March 28, 1809.

the course of the difficulties but, lest it should appear he was condoning the activities of the society, he declined the invitation.<sup>38</sup> Again in 1812 he was involved in a similar dispute when members of the Ministry supported rebellious Trustees against Conference<sup>39</sup> by challenging the authority of the Ministry.

The local authorities attempted to challenge the Ministry and the Conference wherever and whenever they could. As the central administration of Conference became stronger, due to Bunting's efforts, the conflicts became larger and more protracted. It was during Bunting's first decade in the Ministry that the dispute with the most far reaching effects began.

In 1806 there developed, between the Ministry and local authorities, a dispute concerning the teaching of the art of writing in Methodist Sunday Schools. For strictly theological reasons, Bunting disapproved of the practice<sup>40</sup>. Before long the dispute evolved into what Bunting considered to be a direct challenge to the Authority of Conference, and what the local Authorities felt to be a ministerial encroachment on their right of self-determination. In the face of this conflict Bunting led his circuit in the fight to maintain the supremacy of Conference.

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<sup>38</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to Fawcett Liverpool, April 10, 1811.

<sup>39</sup> MCA MSS. J. Barber to J.B. London, December 1, 1812.

<sup>40</sup> Jabez Bunting,

"Outline of the Argument against  
Teaching the Art of Writing on the  
Lord's Day."

Bunting was stationed in Sheffield, and in keeping with his attitudes for the maintenance of order, he at first felt it best to allow the agitators to leave the Connexion. But when certain circuit Ministers joined forces with the laity to defy Conference, Bunting could no longer stand idly by.

As Superintendent of the circuit, Bunting was recognized by the opposition as the major stumbling block to their goals, and he therefore incurred a number of verbal insults from the leaders of the opposition.

Under Bunting's leadership a full meeting of Methodists preachers and leaders in Sheffield met on July 11th 1809 and informed the leader of the opposition group that he must comply with the requisitions which had been laid down by the district meeting. As long as Bunting stayed in Sheffield the situation remained in hand. He prevented any further trouble by forcing the leaders of the agitation to remain inactive, as long as they refused to comply with the resolutions passed by the District meeting<sup>41</sup>. Bunting felt his position was proper for the maintenance of order and discipline.

"I am more than ever convinced  
that Sunday School writing is  
unlawful; that I am confirmed  
in this opinion by the  
judgement of such men as Benson,  
Moore, Wood, Taylor, Griffith,  
Lomas and almost all the leading  
seniors in our own Connexion..." <sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> MCA MSS. J.B.; Sheffield correspondence 1809.

<sup>42</sup> Bunting, op.cit., p.322., J.B. to Edward Hare, December 23, 1809.

Unfortunately his successor was not able to prevent the return of the suspended Ministers and, with their return, came the breakdown of Bunting's peace and order.<sup>43</sup>

Bunting's first major attempt at opposing a challenge to Ministerial authority had only been partially successful. Edward Hare, who succeeded him in Sheffield, wrote for advice, but Bunting's efforts had taken much from him. In 1810 he wrote to James Wood saying he was:

"... tired of warfare and mean to be as quiet as duty will let me. If I do commence polemic it will be, I think, on the Sunday School question. But strongly as I feel the abominations which are done in the midst of us in that way, I am at present more disposed though with doubting conscience, to sigh and cry for them in private, than to attack them in public until imperiously necessitated so to do".<sup>44</sup>

The Sunday School problem was not solved, although it had abated, enabling Bunting to become involved in a number of small but equally important matters of Connexional discipline. In 1809 he took part in an inquiry concerning a preacher who had been accused of swindling and forgery.<sup>45</sup> In 1810 he became embroiled in the controversy

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<sup>43</sup> MCA MSS. Edward Hare to J.B. September 5, 1809 and December 25, 1809.

<sup>44</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to James Wood Liverpool February 23, 1810.

<sup>45</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to ? Sheffield January 12, 1809.

over Dr. Magee's book, The Atonement,<sup>46</sup> and in 1812 Zachariah Taft wrote to Bunting for advice concerning a Mr. Richardson who had been grinding grain on the Sabbath. The obvious significance of this incident is that as early as 1812 members of the Ministry were already considering Bunting an individual worthy of being asked for advice.<sup>47</sup> In the face of so many disturbances Bunting could not but have rejoiced when the courts restored the Brighthouse Chapel to Conference. Bunting most surely agreed with Hare when he wrote:

"We shall not need now  
to be so much afraid  
of Trustees as we have  
been".<sup>48</sup>

Lack of discipline was but one of the Connexion's major difficulties. Expansion caused another:<sup>49</sup> though the Connexion increased in size the administrative organization had not been enlarged since Wesley's death. Until Bunting took an interest in expanding its capacity the Connexion was forced to flounder ahead with little or no central administration.

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<sup>46</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to Walter Griffith Liverpool March 10, 1810 and April 2, 1810.

<sup>47</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to Zachariah Taft Halifax November 11, 1812.

<sup>48</sup> MCA MSS. Edward Hare to Bunting Sheffield, March 27, 1810

<sup>49</sup> In 1809 Joseph Entwisle wrote:

"... I know not what to think  
about our Conference. Should we  
continue to increase as we  
have done of late years, something  
must be done." MCA MSS. Joseph  
Entwisle to J.B. (Sheffield)  
April 7, 1809.

During Bunting's first fourteen years in the Ministry he became increasingly engaged in the labours and responsibilities attending the public business of the Connexion.<sup>50</sup> At each of his circuits he busied himself

"With every part of the finance and general business of the circuit in order that he might master all questions affecting the Connexion as a whole".<sup>51</sup>

As early as 1803 his fame and immense knowledge of Connexional affairs made it possible for him to take an active role in sorting out the organizational problems of the Connexion which had resulted from bad management, and were compounded by the rapid expansion.<sup>52</sup>

By 1803 the central administrative committees began to break up. The several Connexional funds which had been established by Wesley had been used as occasion required to help each other, and even the record of Book-Room money, and the accounts of the foreign missionary society, were so inextricably mixed and confused that an immediate and determined effort had to be made to provide a remedy.

The first of the funds to be sorted out were those of the Book Room. Bunting had recognised the need for reform in the Book Room

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<sup>50</sup> Bunting, op. cit., p. 236.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 127

<sup>52</sup> Kent, op. cit., p. 80., and MCA MSS. Joseph Entwisle to J.B. April 7, 1809.

from an early date, as can be seen in a letter from Entwisle to Bunting in 1803.

"I believe what you say respecting our press. But does it prove anything more than that we should have an alternation or as you say a revolution?"<sup>53</sup>

Instead of a revolution, Robert Lomas was called to the rescue, but as he was away from London, Bunting made a vigorous attempt to reduce things to order before Lomas' arrival.<sup>54</sup>

Following his return to London, Lomas continued to seek Bunting's help and counsel. Lomas wrote that in one year Bunting had to:

"Write acres of figures before they could see their accounts separated and in good order".<sup>55</sup>

When their work was completed the various funds of the Connexion were "started on a career of usefulness which has proved a great blessing to Methodism".<sup>56</sup>

The year 1803-4 saw the mission accounts, under Coke's control, reach a state of almost unintelligible entanglement. Coke was in America, and in view of Bunting's talents, the twenty-four year old preacher was called upon to straighten them out.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> MCA MSS. Joseph Entwisle to J.B. Macclesfield December 19, 1803

<sup>54</sup> Bunting, op. cit., p. 205.

<sup>55</sup> MCA Notes on the Life of Jabez Bunting.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Robert Currie, Methodism Divided, p. 32.

Dr. Coke had been responsible for the foreign Missions since before the death of Wesley. Because his efforts and personal contributions had done so much to create and maintain the missionary movement, his Superintendency had been confirmed, year after year. Coke had himself contributed, or begged, all the money for the support of the Missions, and had been left to expend these moneys as he chose. 1794 was the last year in which Coke had rendered an account of his stewardship. Between 1794 and 1803 no statement had been published. Everyone knew the extent to which Coke had lent his personal funds but many began to worry that at the same time he might have become a 'defaulting debtor'. Coke spent the years 1803-4 in America and the financial affairs of the Missions were left in the hands of the Book Steward. The Book Steward was unable to keep the various accounts in order, which, if taken individually, were certainly in a muddled state, but when dealt with altogether were in a state of almost unintelligible entanglement.<sup>58</sup> Bunting successfully reorganized the financial affairs of the Missions. He also attempted to introduce measures related to his thoughts concerning permanent locations for Ministers who had previously been actively engaged in the itinerancy.<sup>59</sup>

Bunting realized it was necessary to recruit individuals with business experience if the various Connexional committees were to be handled efficiently. For this reason he attempted to introduce

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<sup>58</sup> Bunting, op. cit., p. 205.

<sup>59</sup> Bunting, op. cit., p. 283.



members of the laity to help with the handling of the Mission accounts. Prominent laymen were included in a standing committee of 'finance and advice'. This seems to have been created by Bunting on the premise that since it was necessary to obtain money, and it was the job of the laity to provide it, surely it was for them to participate in the decision on expenditure.<sup>60</sup> Bunting asked George Marsden:

"What think you of our steps with respect to the Missions? They were perhaps bold but certainly necessary".<sup>61</sup>

To Richard Reece, Bunting wrote:

"What think you of the steps we have taken with respect to the Missions? They were certainly unauthorized but as certainly necessary. Many bills were nearly due, and Mr. W. had no money to meet them; and our own lay friends positively refused to come forward unless a new system were adopted, now, the fund is in a prosperous state".<sup>62</sup>

In 1804 Bunting received the following interesting letter from Edward Hare.

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<sup>60</sup> Bunting, op. cit., p. 205

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 201

<sup>62</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to Richard Reece London March 28, 1804.

"So you have put a collar on the General Superintendent of the Missions. Surely you will be able to now tie him and keep him down at least within bounds. I am afraid, however, that you have neglected to have a throat-band affixed to it. If so he will be slipping his halter, and take his full range in the field." <sup>63</sup>

When Coke returned he did 'slip his halter' and the committee of 'finance and advice' was dissolved.

In 1808 Bunting and Lomas attempted to improve the efficiency of the Book Room by similarly introducing members of the laity, familiar with the way of business, onto the Book Committee. Lomas wrote to Bunting to inform him of his proposed plan for the introduction of the lay element to the Book Room.

"Providence has lately opened our way to a Mr. Jones of Dublin as Superintendent of our printing office etc. He is willing to come and the Committee have agreed to have him only with the acceptance or rejection by mutual consent, left with Conference... I cannot see any sufficient reason why we should have any preacher in the

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<sup>63</sup> MCA MSS. Edward Hare to J.B. Stockport December 1, 1804.

Book Room. If Conference should see things in the same light and as we shall be able to say 'here is the man'." <sup>64</sup>

This move towards streamlining the administration was also defeated, as were Bunting's attempts at financial reform in 1809. <sup>65</sup>

Bunting's correspondence documents his attempts to reorganize the 'Legal Fund' and the 'Merciful Fund'. During the fight over the Merciful Fund, he argued that the people had a right to know how and where surplus should be expended, <sup>66</sup> but he also argued that in keeping with the position of the Ministry, certain accounts should not be opened to lay scrutiny when they fell within the realm of Ministerial business. <sup>67</sup>

Bunting's views on discipline, and his attempts at restoring order to the chaotic administration, won him the praise of his fellow Ministers. As early as 1803 Bunting had been recognised for his efforts. Robert Lomas admonished Bunting not to work so hard.

"I have some fear that your good nature will lead you to do more than your constitution will be able to bear. You seem to be engaged in many friendly offices..

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<sup>64</sup> MCA MSS. Robert Lomas to J.B. (Sheffield) February 16, 1808.

<sup>65</sup> MCA MSS. Robert Lomas to J.B. Bristol May 3, 1810.

<sup>66</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to George Marsden Liverpool April 13, 1810.

<sup>67</sup> MCA MSS. Joseph Entwisle to J.B. Manchester May 3, 1810.

To do good indeed we should not forget but there is a degree in every man's gifts, so there should be a measure in his exercise. There is a manifestation to every man to profit withal, but should you destroy yourself? Doubtless it is good to be zealously affected in a good thing; and it was said of our Lord that the zeal of God's house had eaten him up".<sup>68</sup>

In 1810 Bunting was told by Edward Hare that:

"You have done well in many things at your district meeting, but especially concerning the funds".<sup>69</sup>

With the pressure of business becoming greater, Bunting seems to have had thoughts of an easier life, but was told by T. Hutton that:

"I very much commend you for wishing for a small retired circuit. I believe them by far the happiest but I think the greater Circuits prevail as to you, and will not let you go to Prescott".<sup>70</sup>

Joshua Bancroft wrote a letter which gives testimony to Bunting's role in Conference.

"You will be adding to the score of obligations, in continuing

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<sup>68</sup> MCA MSS. Robert Lomas to J.B. Bolton November 23, 1803.

<sup>69</sup> MCA MSS. Edward Hare to J.B. Sheffield July 7, 1810.

<sup>70</sup> MCA MSS. T. Hutton to J.B. Stourport June 3, 1811.

to have your eye on the interests  
and wishes of this society".<sup>71</sup>

Much of the turmoil of this period was caused by the lack of leadership dating from 1791. The Ministry attempted to cope with the Connexion's troubles but lacked the effective leadership and the necessary organization. By the turn of the century Bunting was aware that the tradition of inspired innovation of Wesley must be replaced with a stricter order, stemming from a powerful central authority within Conference, and backed by the most influential members of the Connexion, the propertied laity, and in close alliance with the Establishment.

By the early years of the nineteenth century the Ministry began to realize the necessity of Bunting's attempted innovations. The power of the people was becoming an increasing danger, and the Revivals laid the movement open to attack from the government. The Ministry was forced to endure continued schism stemming from "Ranterism" in Leeds, in Macclesfield and in Manchester. As these movements were an acute embarrassment to the Ministry, so were they also a danger, for the government was in no mood to tolerate anything which aroused the people.

Bunting's growing position of authority was not achieved without a struggle; there is evidence to show that Bunting and his supporters were opposed by the older governing members of

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<sup>71</sup> MCA MSS. Joshua Bancroft to J.B. (Liverpool) August 6, 1810.

the Conference. Bunting attempted three times to modernize the Connexion but was defeated on each occasion, presumably by the negative influence of certain elder Ministers. Entwisle wrote to Bunting on the subject of the elder Ministers:

"Who endeavour to influence the juniors and secure their votes on all occasions and one said he knew that in the neighbourhood of his seat last Conference, two senior brethren had almost 40 young men to vote".<sup>72</sup>

This opposition from within the ranks of the elder Ministers can be traced to fear of losing their authority in the face of increasing Conference attendance by the younger, and, to their minds, radical elements.<sup>73</sup> In the light of the evidence there can be no other explanation for Bunting's proposed provincial conferences than an attempt to decrease the political influence of the elder Ministers. Theophilus Lessey wrote to Bunting calling for a united front against them.

"... If we could all unite it would be for our benefit, if provincial Conferences were instituted soon".<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> MCA MSS. Joseph Entwisle to J.B. June 2, 1809.

<sup>73</sup> Smith, op. cit., p. 305.

<sup>74</sup> MCA MSS. Theophilus Lessey to J.B. Liverpool June 7, 1809

This struggle was to continue until 1814, when Bunting's strength and vigour, coupled with the support of a majority of the Ministry, was able constitutionally to change the structure of the Legal Hundred.

## CHAPTER III

1812 - 1820

"Surely the madness of the people must  
subside ere long".<sup>1</sup>

In the face of the growing post-war economic distress the Methodist Ministry was forced to tighten its control over the Connexion. By the second decade of the 19th century the 'tradition of inspired innovation', left by John Wesley, had totally broken down, and Bunting sought to replace it with a more strict definition of the Pastoral Oversight, stemming from the central office of Conference. For the first time the Ministry attempted to anticipate possible trouble and, where possible, prevent its occurrence. These attempts to maintain order within the Connexion engendered complaints from certain ministers that their innovations were subverting the original constitution and aim of Methodism, and investing in its offices a greater amount of power than was consistent with peace and prosperity.<sup>2</sup>

Bunting's definition of order and discipline was a curious mixture of Wesleyanisms and Buntingisms. It has been discussed how Bunting's theories on Connexional order were fostered by the turmoil of the 1790's and early 1800's, and how he saw popular movements as a potential threat to the position and authority of...

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<sup>1</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to James Wood. December 23, 1820.....

<sup>2</sup> Edmund Grindrod, A Compendium of Laws and Regulations of Methodism, p. 40.



the Ministry. In addition he felt that unless the Conference could extend its authority over the Methodist Pastorate there would soon be reason to fear repressive action from the government. This situation was exacerbated by the opposition of certain members of the legal hundred who refused to admit the necessity for change. Bunting's solutions to these potential problems were his own, although they were contained within the framework of the Wesleyan legacy.

To secure the position of the Ministry Bunting felt it was necessary to modernise the organization and administration of the Connexion and to redefine the authority of the Ministry over the Laity. For the first time they began to make claims of being a regular Ministry, claims which by 1818 took the form of the acceptance of the title Reverend and by 1820 included preliminary discussions on the subject of ordination in Conference.

The gradual ministerial movement away from the laity was greatly speeded up by the economic crisis which prevailed during this period. The unrest amongst the population created fear within the Ministry. In 1812 Joseph Butterworth asked Bunting to send him an account of "the actual state of trade, and of the price, and scarcity of provisions in your neighbourhood".<sup>3</sup> Bunting wrote to Marsden concerning the number of "... removals on account of the stagnation in the Sheffield trade..."<sup>4</sup> In 1820

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<sup>3</sup> MCA MSS. Joseph Butterworth to J.B. London, May 23, 1812.

<sup>4</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to George Marsden Sheffield March 28, 1809.

William Scholfield wrote to Bunting saying that:(the)

"... Number of the circuit is 405, half of whom I am informed are in debt, in consequence of the lead mines in this county not being very productive..."<sup>5</sup>

During these years the

"... affairs of the Connexion required very delicate handling. The wretched poverty of the working class and the derangement of trade, caused almost universal dissatisfaction, and, in many cases, political disaffection, amongst all classes. The Methodists, who consist so largely of the working and middle class, of course shared largely the miseries of their fellow countrymen..."<sup>6</sup>

In the atmosphere of poverty and want, the people became easily excited and prone to violence. For the preservation of peace and order it became necessary to "restrain these turbulent and fractious men".<sup>7</sup>

The Ministry became engaged in a fight to maintain its recently-won position. The Pastoral Oversight became the bulwark against the people, who saw the Ministry, in concert with the propertied laity, becoming a force of oppression. The pressure of

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<sup>5</sup> MCA MSS. Wm. Scholfield to J.B. Wolsingham, July 25, 1820.

<sup>6</sup> Smith, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 526.

<sup>7</sup> Grindrod, op. cit. p. vi.

events between 1791 and 1820 caused Methodism to reach a plateau of conservatism which was to last until 1849.

The first of the serious civil upheavals occurred in the years preceding Waterloo. With the number of unemployed rising in the North-East, dissatisfaction grew and culminated in serious rioting. Bunting "... bore down upon 'the agitators' with all the weight of his eloquence and authority"<sup>8</sup> and he "boldly denounced all violations of law".<sup>9</sup> Bunting wrote to Grindrod that:

"In most of the country places we are very low. There is but little of Methodist discipline; and every attempt to revive it produces painful and vexatious opposition".<sup>10</sup>

In 1813 Bunting wrote to Marsden questioning whether the revolts in the North had been effectively checked.<sup>11</sup>

The Ministry as well as the government was reminded by every minor riot of the excesses of the French Revolution<sup>12</sup>. Therefore the Ministry, out of fear for their position and of government action, attempted to prevent the membership of any of the local societies from participating in any civil disturbances. The Ministry, almost unanimously, decided to take action to promote

<sup>8</sup> Smith, op. cit., Vol. II, p.520.

<sup>9</sup> Bunting, op. cit., p. 371.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 393.

<sup>11</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to George Marsden, Halifax, January 28, 1813.

<sup>12</sup> Sir Llewellyn Woodward, Age of Reform, p. 20.

the spirit of loyalty and peace within the Church.<sup>13</sup> Bunting wrote in 1817:

"There is certainly much distress in the country and I fear some ill men secretly taking advantage of those distresses in order to stir up mischief".<sup>14</sup>

For the good of Methodism, Bunting felt it was the duty of the Christian Pastorate to denounce all rebellion against the government.<sup>15</sup> In 1817, when one of the arrested leaders of the Pentridge Rising, Isaac Ludlam, was publicly called a 'Methodist preacher', Bunting wrote to the minister in Derby instructing him to make it publicly clear that in the case of Ludlam's treason no one involved was Methodist.<sup>16</sup> In compliance with Bunting's desires, William Leech wrote to the "Leeds Mercury" which thereupon published a denial that Ludlam was a Methodist preacher.<sup>17</sup>

As the years progressed towards 1820, matters became worse. In 1819 Robert Pilter wrote to Bunting telling him:

"On Monday the 1st inst. a meeting of Reformers was held at Newcastle for the purpose of expressing their opinion on the Manchester murders, as they call them. 50,000 to 60,000 people attended

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<sup>13</sup> Bunting, op. cit., p. 472.

<sup>14</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to his father 1817.

<sup>15</sup> Bunting, op. cit., p. 472.

<sup>16</sup> MCA MSS. William Leech to J.B. Derby, November 5, 1817.

<sup>17</sup> Leeds Mercury, October 30, 1817.

amongst whom were a great number of  
our people".<sup>18</sup>

A meeting was held in Newcastle addressed by a local preacher named Stephenson, for the purpose of condemning the conduct of the Manchester magistrates. When forced with a demand from the Methodist Minister, Pilter, to give up his radical associations, Stephenson refused. He then warned Pilter that if Conference tried to coerce him they would not succeed, intimating that three-quarters of the Methodists in Newcastle were "Radical Reformers".<sup>19</sup> It would seem that Bunting's fears were well founded and the need for increased discipline was becoming acute.

In 1819 Wawn, a leading Methodist, wrote to Bunting from Newcastle:

"I know how tenderly you feel on the subject of our local preachers mixing in popular riots... Two of our local preachers (from North Shields) have attended the tremendous Radical Reform Meeting just held here and one of them spoke at some length and quite in the spirit of the assembly. Our Preachers are somewhat divided as to the procedure that should be had on occurrence, some thinking suspension or removal absolutely needful; others that either of these would be unnecessarily

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<sup>18</sup> MCA MSS. Robert Pilter to J.B. North Shields, October 23, 1819.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

harsh. Pray, what is your view on the subject?"<sup>20</sup>

Hoping to counter the growing sympathy among many Methodists for the cause of Radicalism the Committee of Privileges issued a circular on November 19, 1819 which contained the plea for Methodists to:

"Unite with their fellow subjects in every proper and lawful demonstration of attachment to our free Constitution, and of loyalty to our venerable Sovereign; to uphold the authority of the law; and to discountenance all infamous and blasphemous publications, as well as all tumultuous, inflammatory, or seditious proceedings. The members of Methodist Societies are exhorted conscientiously to abstain from public meeting. The Ministers are recommended to warn their people against private associations illegally organized; and that any found not complying to the above shall be forthwith expelled from the Society, according to our established rules".<sup>21</sup>

Concerning the circular, J.B. Holroyd wrote to Bunting and told of his growing anxiety over the conditions of his local circuit.

"I cannot refrain from acknowledging the gratitude I feel for the timely encouragement

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<sup>20</sup> Bunting, op. cit., pp.526-27, Wawn to J.B., Newcastle, 1819.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 327.

offered by the address from the Committee for guarding our Privileges. The state of the public mind in these parts exceeds all description. The country for a few miles round here may with propriety be called a hot-bed of Radicalism. I believe I shall be within compass in saying that two thirds of the population in this circuit are reformers, every man seems as if left to do that which is right in his own eyes. We have had them parading the streets almost every night by 200 or 300 together singing... At the houses of the Radicals they stop and salute them with three cheers, and at the houses of the marked ones, who are to be killed the day the orders come for them to break out. The church ministers and myself are of the number".<sup>22</sup>

As the government came down harder on the Radicals, the latter were forced underground. With the Ministry also taking a stand against them the Radical members of the Local Societies joined the newly formed secret clubs and societies. From his own experience in the North, Bunting had learned to dread secret plotting more than open disorder.<sup>23</sup> Consequently Bunting's correspondence for 1820 contains a number of condemnations of an organization called the 'Odd Fellows'.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> MCA MSS. J.B.Holroyd to J.B. Haslingham, December 23, 1819.

<sup>23</sup> Bunting, op. cit., p. 526.

<sup>24</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to William Bird, London, December 12, 1820.

When a radical club attempted to petition the crown in the name of the 'Methodist Benefit Society' Bunting informed the local Minister, Joseph Griffith, how to dissociate Wesleyan Methodism from this radical petition.<sup>25</sup>

The Ministry, with Bunting as their spokesman, was successfully managing to give the impression that they were in close alliance with the Establishment. To insure that, "unofficial and unauthorised individuals must not compromise the reputation and interests of the body",<sup>26</sup> the Conference tightened discipline to the extent that many felt the church to be abandoning the cause of Protestantism. Revivals came under attack.<sup>27</sup> In 1820 A. Stanley

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<sup>25</sup> MCA MSS. Joseph Griffiths to J.B. Bury St. Edmonds, November 24, 1820.

<sup>26</sup> MCA MSS. George Douglass to J.B. (Stamford) October 26, 1820.

<sup>27</sup> "Local agitation for reform accompanied the revival of 1813-14. A revival in the London West Circuit in 1816-17 lead to conflicts between laymen and ministers... Suppression of an irregular order of 'community preachers' in the London East Circuit in 1820 caused considerable ill feeling". Currie, op.cit.p.61

MCA MSS. J.B. to George Marsden, Halifax, January 28, 1813.

"The thing most talked of at present, in these parts, is the recent execution of the Luddites at York. I have not heard since of any particular depredations; and am willing to hope that the spirit of insubordination and rebellion has received an effectual check... None of the persons committed were members of our body but 6 of 17 hanged were sons of Methodists. However solicitations to make best of this, it is after all an awful fact; and confirms me in my fixed opinions, that the progress of Methodism in the West Riding of Yorkshire has been more swift than solid; more extensive than deep; more in the diffusion of that kind of piety, which shines as brightly and operates as visibly at home, as in the prayer meeting and crowded lovefeast".



said:

"Ranters should neither be blessed nor cursed at all by us, many of them are persons of bad character, some of their local preachers have been expelled from our societies..."<sup>28</sup>

The increasing political agitation in the country gave rise to internal difficulties within the Ministry. Dissension among the people was bad enough, but when the agitation spread to the ministry, Bunting felt that discipline must be firm and swift. Fear of the government was an added incentive for the Ministry to keep its own house in order. Edward Hare wrote to Bunting saying:

"I fear ... there is danger that the nakedness (if so I may call it) of Methodism will be exposed before her enemies".<sup>29</sup>

William Leach wrote to Bunting saying his circuit was in turmoil.

"Preachers and people in the society have been repeatedly at loggerheads with one-another and making each others cases known to worldly men".<sup>30</sup>

Hence forward the Ministry intended to deal harshly with those ministers who published against the doctrine of Conference.

In 1816 Daniel Isaac wrote a book containing attacks on the Church of England. By so publishing he made manifest his

<sup>28</sup> MCA MSS. Methodist Conference Journal, 1820, p. 9.

<sup>29</sup> MCA MSS. Edward Hare to J.B. Sheffield, February 23, 1810.

<sup>30</sup> MCA MSS. Wm. Leach to J.B. Blackburn, October 23, 1807.

opposition to Bunting's policies for the maintenance of a close relationship, however tenuous, with the Established Church. On the basis of a speech delivered by Bunting in Conference, Isaac's book was officially condemned as being harmful to the good of the Connexion. However, instead of ending the controversy the condemnation created a greater problem. A heated correspondence between Bunting and Isaac resulted.

Isaac accused Bunting of presenting his book unfavourably to Conference.<sup>31</sup> Bunting answered that before he spoke in Conference, the Book Room had already declined to give official facilities to the circulation of the book. Bunting also reminded Isaac that he was not the principal speaker, nor did he move or second the motion of condemnation. Isaac, having received no satisfaction from Bunting, carried his case to the Circuits. He sent a circular to the Superintendents of a number of circuits but without success, and his censure stood.<sup>32</sup>

Here two interesting points should be noted. Though it has been generally thought that the controversy over Isaac's book had been settled by the Conference of 1816 evidence shows that this was not so. The Conference Minutes of 1817 gives no indication that the question of Danial Isaac was brought before it, but the manuscript diary of Charles Atmore indicates that indeed the case was not closed.

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<sup>31</sup> MCA MSS. D. Isaac to J.B. Lincoln, October 21, 1816.

<sup>32</sup> MCA D.Isaac's circular to the Superintendents of Circuits.

"... Mr. Isaac's case came and Mr. Bunting made an admirable defence of his conduct to Mr. Isaac. The subject was renewed after dinner. The Conference expressed their approbation of the conduct of P. and Secy. of the last Conference and their disapprobation of Mr. Isaac's letter".<sup>33</sup>

Isaac, it seems, was censured twice.

In spite of what could be construed as legitimate reasons for antipathy toward Bunting, Isaac refused to be prejudiced against him. Unlike Bunting's later critics, Isaac was able to maintain an open mind. He decried the belief that Conference was enslaved by Bunting and the other principal preachers, and refuted the claim that those who opposed them were exiled to poor country circuits.

"Nearly all the principal men were opposed to me, and certainly I did not spare them; but instead of their transporting me to the worst circuits for fourteen years, I have during that period, had a run of several of the best circuits in the Connexion".<sup>34</sup>

Isaac never spoke ill of Bunting though they disagreed on numerous occasions. None would have had better cause to make personal

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<sup>33</sup> 'Proceedings of the Wesleyan Historical Society', June 1968, p.159.

<sup>34</sup> Bunting, op. cit., p. 466-67.

attacks on Bunting's character. It can be construed as a reflection on Bunting's true abilities that Isaac not only refused to make accusations against him but occasionally praised him, even when in opposition. The following typifies the relationship between Bunting and Isaac.

"A circumstance occurred in the London Conference of 1822 when a debate, never exceeded for Historic Talent on Ecclesiastical Matters at Oxford or Cambridge, occupied our attention for nearly two days on ordination by imposition of hands. Dr. Clarke was President. The resolution was moved by Mr. Moore and such men as Walter Griffith, Reece, etc. had spoken at considerable length for, an equal number against, of whom Reynolds was Chief, a thorough Student in Church History; at length Dr. Clarke called on Mr. Isaac when the following conversation took place.

Isaac. You have my name sir?

Clarke. I certainly have, on the paper before me.

Isaac. Then you know how you got it, I Never gave it to you.

Clarke. Then do you not intend to speak on this subject?

Isaac. If I hear anything worth a reply I shall - not having done that yet - at present I decline.

Clarke. Then Mr. Bunting will address the  
Conference

For nearly two hours your father rivetted our attention, fully exhausted the argument on that side and immediately he finished, Mr. Isaac said, 'Mr. President now please put my name on your paper.' Mr. Watson said, 'And mine also' - we went to dinner - Mr. Isaac on our way used to me the strongest epithets of admiration of the research - the genius - the force of argument - the eloquence of that speech. 'Had I but' said he, 'his genius and eloquence of language with truth on my side what should I not do'. " <sup>35</sup>

Throughout this period Bunting's activities were centered on tightening the discipline and streamlining the administrative organization. Bunting said, that, "Living by the law ... is necessary for good discipline",<sup>36</sup> and that men must not set up their "individual will and judgement against those of their brethren and Superintendent".<sup>37</sup> To William Griffith, Bunting admonished:

"If a local preacher persists after due affect, advice, admonn. and expastn. to sanction a party avowedly opposed to us, which has inpoint calumniated us, and who is trying to divide our people, he offends against the

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<sup>35</sup> MCA MSS. J.P.Haswell to T.P.Bunting, South Shields, September 7, 1868.

<sup>36</sup> Bunting, op. cit., p. 427.

<sup>37</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to William Griffith, December 20, 1820.

whole spirit of substance of our rule, against the scriptural authority of those who are over him in the Lord, and against any plain passages of scriptures, e.g. follow peace. He should be therefore put down. Even if no direct rule were broken by such conduct, still discipline is so violated in its essence, that it deserves the severest censure".<sup>38</sup>

Bunting respected the original Constitution of Methodism, but according to his own interpretation of it. In more trivial cases which did not threaten the authority of Conference, Bunting showed his respect for due process. To a minister who felt he had been wronged, Bunting sympathised, but thought it would have:

"... been better to have submitted to injustice and left his protest in the hands of the Superintendent whose duty it will be to prevent a repetition of such procedure".<sup>39</sup>

In 1820 Bunting made his famous plea for unity and discipline. The plea was contained in what came to be known as the 'Liverpool Minutes'. In these Minutes, Bunting pointed out what the correspondence confirms. There was a call for the revival of discipline which would prevent weakness and therefore decline. He called for the Ministry, lay officers, and pastorate to unite in

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<sup>38</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to William Griffith, December 20, 1820.

<sup>39</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to Richard Tobraham, August 13, 1820.

the true spirit of Christianity in acceptance of the authority of Conference. The Liverpool Minutes were well received by the Ministry, and Conference ordered that they should be read in every district meeting during the following year. It is possible to construe from the ministerial acceptance of the Liverpool Minutes a testimonial of their approval for Bunting's new definition of Methodism both in spirit and fact.

Together with the everpresent problems of discipline Bunting was still faced with the problems of streamlining the Methodist administration. The extreme scarcities created disciplinary problems which greatly affected the administration, primarily in the field of financial organisation. The improvements made and implemented between 1812 and 1820 were primarily under the direction of Bunting, Watson, and a few of the more able ministers.<sup>40</sup>

The first of Bunting's financial improvements consisted of the creation of a general chapel fund<sup>41</sup> in 1814. This was followed by the formation of the Children's fund resulting from Bunting's:

"frequent friendly discussions in the wide circle of his friends, both ministerial and lay".<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Smith, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 643.

<sup>41</sup> Bunting, op. cit., p. 441.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p. 512.

In 1818 Bunting helped to organize a general fund for the relief of distressed chapels and was finally able to introduce the lay element into a Conference committee.

George Smith said of Bunting's contributions to the financial administrations of the Connexion.

"They exhibited a marked improvement in the internal economy of the Methodist Societies, the result of causes which had been in silent but effective operation for some years. They were chiefly originated by the active mind and enlightened judgement of Jabez Bunting and their beginning dated from the time of his accession to Connexional influence".<sup>43</sup>

The period of Bunting's "accession to Connexional influence" must date from 1813. In that year his efforts were rewarded with his election to the position of Secretary of Conference. It was from this position that he was able to cope with what many considered to be the major obstacle to Connexional improvement, the obstinate and obsolete policies of the elder ministers, who governed the Connexion from their positions as Members of the Legal Hundred.

During the last years of the war the Connexion had been virtually inundated by young preachers.<sup>44</sup> Those elder ministers who remembered the days of Wesley were in a decreasing minority.

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<sup>43</sup> Smith, op. cit., Vol.II, p. 33.

<sup>44</sup> MCA MSS. Thomas Golland to J.B., Louth, May 17, 1819.



The Methodist Conference Journal for 1820 stated that one of the greatest difficulties of the period was:

"the superabundant number of preachers that we have now employed in the work.." <sup>45</sup>

"As the number of Ministers rose, the legal Hundred dwindled as a proportion of the whole, and as the Deed of Settlement and its list of names became more and more remote, the Hundred became the hundred oldest Ministers unleavened by ability or youth". <sup>46</sup>

By 1814 it was apparent that enough ministers were in favour of altering the Composition of the Legal Hundred for Bunting to propose a scheme enabling every fourth vacancy to be filled by a preacher of only 14 years standing. In view of the contemptuous feelings held by many towards the members of the Legal Hundred <sup>47</sup> the change in Constitution cannot have been a surprise. Though it did prompt one minister to exclaim:

"We are coming under the government of  
such men who think more of the young  
than the old preachers". <sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> MCA MSS. Methodist Conference Journal 1820, p. 27.

<sup>46</sup> Currie, op. cit., pp. 32-33.

<sup>47</sup> MCA MSS. Methodist Conference Journal, 1820, p. 5.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

Bunting became the first of the new young ministers voted into the Legal Hundred.<sup>49</sup>

Perhaps the greatest of Bunting's additions to the Methodist Constitution was in the field of the Missionary Work. Bunting was in the favourable position of being familiar with the problems of the Mission Society and had always been greatly interested in the success of the missions:

"The lively interest which you take in the Missionary cause is now well known and read of... I am much pleased to find that there is a prospect of your soon occupying a situation which will give you a more intimate concern in our Missions and perhaps I may add a preponderent influence in their management".<sup>50</sup>

Bunting's role in the formation of the Missionary Society is well known

"He seems to have written to almost every friend he had in the neighbourhood (Leeds), entreating attendance and aid, and the adoption of a similar course in their respective circuits".<sup>51</sup>

Bunting was the prime instigator of the Missionary Meeting at Leeds, but chose to speak thirty-first out of thirty-nine speakers.

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<sup>49</sup> Currie, op. cit., pp. 32-33.

<sup>50</sup> MCA MSS. J. Ward to J.B. Durham, June 29, 1813.

<sup>51</sup> Bunting, op. cit., p. 408.

Not until there was the possibility of a misunderstanding concerning finances did Bunting appear in the forefront to make a powerful and convincing speech.<sup>52</sup>

The Ministry readily recognised the source of the inspiration behind the creation of the Missionary Society. Dr. Coke wrote to thank Bunting in 1813.

"My dear Friend - The generality of our committee rejoice in the steps you have taken on behalf of the missions. It is the Lord who has put it into your heart thus to step forth. There is nothing which you have done which I do not most fully approve of".<sup>53</sup>

Along with Dr. Coke, Benson sent his approval of Bunting's actions. Benson wrote to Bunting saying:

"... I have wished for an opportunity to inform you how very much I approve of the steps you have been taking in the Leeds district in favour of the Missions .... You have maintained great judgement as well as zeal, in forming and carrying into execution the plan of which you have kindly favoured us with a written account".<sup>54</sup>

The new Missionary Society was to be governed by an Executive committee which was to include "nine respectable members

<sup>52</sup> Bunting, op. cit., pp. 410-11-12.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 413.

<sup>54</sup> Bunting, op. cit., p. 415.

of the society not being itinerant preachers".<sup>55</sup> Additional members of the laity were to form committees whose duty was to raise money and remit it to the general committee of preachers in London. The ministerial fear of the laity soon rose to the surface. Grindrod wrote to Bunting explaining what many felt to be the consequences of the introduction of the laity into Conference Committees.

"Some of the brethren disapprove of the plan altogether and anticipate alarming consequences from the establishment of lay committees whom they say may by degrees take the missions out of our hands and even control all our affairs".<sup>56</sup>

Bunting campaigned for the formation of Missionary Societies in every District. In a letter to T.S.Swale, Bunting explained how best to form a Mission Society.

"One thing I beg leave to suggest to you, and Mr. Atmore. If you have not already done it, I think it would be well immediately to select at least ten persons of whose attendance you are sure, and engage them, by letter, to be prepared to speak at the public meeting. One half of them should be if possible, laymen; and should be chosen from different parts of the district... Be .....

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<sup>55</sup> Bunting, op. cit., p.416-17.

<sup>56</sup> MCA MSS. Edmung Grindrod to J.B. Altringham, November 9, 1813.

careful to have none but men of respectability in the public estimation as movers and seconders. Mr. Atmore and yourself will excuse these hints. I mean not to dictate, but I am anxious that your meeting should go off with a degree of eclat..."<sup>57</sup>

In 1817 Conference directed every District to form a Mission Society, or at least to appoint a District treasurer to handle money for the Missions, and to be the medium of communication between the general treasurer and the various circuits. Following the procurement of premises for a Missionary House the Conference approved an outline of a 'plan of a General Wesleyan Methodist Mission Society'. In 1818 Bunting and Watson drew up the Constitution for the newly created society.<sup>58</sup>

Bunting's efforts from 1812 to 1820 were a continuation of his policy of curing the imperfections of Wesleyan government and expanding its organization and doctrine to face the increasing pressures of the period.

Bunting shrank from no difficulty and applied himself with great ability and zeal. His doctrine of the Ministry and of Ministerial powers "obtained for the Methodist Preachers the full status and character of Christian Ministers".<sup>59</sup> Bunting's work

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<sup>57</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to T.S. Swale, Leeds, November 5, 1813.

<sup>58</sup> Smith, *op. cit.*, Vol III, p. 31.

<sup>59</sup> Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 33., and Bunting *op. cit.*, p. 516.

in improving the Connexion gave the Ministry something to fight for.

The period 1812 to 1820 saw the further development of the Ministerial alliance with the propertied laity, a situation which by 1827 became one of over-dependence. But during those eight years Bunting was able to make alterations in the financial administration of the Connexion which were to prove invaluable.

By 1820 it is clear that a 'party' of ministers had acknowledged Bunting as their leader and spokesman. It is equally obvious that the party chose Bunting rather than Bunting forming a party. / Though perhaps a moot point, it is nevertheless important to demonstrate that it was Bunting's innovations, strength of opinions and great abilities that generated the gradual development of a 'party', as opposed to the process as indicated by Robert Currie.

By 1820 Bunting had gained the respect of sufficient numbers of the Ministry for him to be voted to the position of supreme responsibility. In 1820 he became the first President of Conference not to have known Wesley personally.<sup>60</sup> In keeping with Bunting's views on central authority, he had become the needed focal point for Connexional order and discipline.

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<sup>60</sup> MCA MSS. Methodist Conference Journal, 1820.

## CHAPTER IV

1820 - 1828

"Adapt your principles to your exigences" <sup>1</sup>

The year 1820 saw the triumph of Jabez Bunting's definition of Methodism. The troubles of the preceding twenty years had convinced the majority of the Ministry that the conservative conception of Bunting's Methodism was necessary to protect their newly acquired status, and their newly developed institutions, from destruction by the radical elements of the population.

Bunting's popularity grew through the period of his first Presidential year and beyond. He continued to receive letters attesting to the Ministry's trust in him, and in his policies.

"I must say that considering you as a man, a Christian, and a Minister of Jesus Christ, I esteem you, I admire your talents and decision of character, and have said that your services to the Connexion could not be estimated".<sup>2</sup>

Joshua Marsden wrote to Bunting in a similar vein.

"As I have the highest opinion both of your wisdom and prudence, I wish

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<sup>1</sup> Gregory, op. cit., p. 338.

<sup>2</sup> MCA MSS. A. Floyd to J.B., Canterbury, June 27, 1828.

to lay before you a few difficulties on which my mind wants light, and on which my opinion has been called for at a leaders' meeting. You, Sir, are our Secretary of State, an Oracle and an authority in all that concerns our Discipline and Economy, hence I consult you rather than the President..."<sup>3</sup>

Joseph Fowler wrote in 1824: (the)

"... usual difficulties attending ye work of stationing are felt, and were it not for ye unrivalled genius of Mr. Bunting I know not how ye business would be settled in any reasonable time..."<sup>4</sup>

Fowler was not the only Minister who thought Bunting the only man capable of "taking the management of our helm".<sup>5</sup> On the death of Benson, Entwisle wrote to George Marsden concerning the editorship of the Wesleyan Magazine.

"... We shall feel the loss of him (Benson). If Mr. Bunting can find his mind free to consent to it, he is the man. The only objection is the locating him so early..."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> MCA MSS. Joshua Marsden to J.B., Worcester, January 22, 1828.

<sup>4</sup> MCA MSS. Joseph Fowler to Mr. Ashworth, Manchester, August 7, 1824.

<sup>5</sup> MCA MSS. W. Vevers to J.B., York, March 16, 1829.

<sup>6</sup> MCA MSS. Joseph Entwisle to George Marsden, Bradford, February 13, 1821.



By his first presidential year Bunting was considered one of the principal leaders of the Connexion, a fact which at times proved to be an embarrassment. He continually received letters for advice which he was forced to answer in the following manner:

"I wish you had written to the President. He is the proper person to give advice on such matters of public business, as affects the interests of the Connexion".<sup>7</sup>

The result of Bunting's achievements was his election as the Connexion's youngest President, which incidentally made him the first minister, not personally acquainted with John Wesley, to hold that position.

Following his election Bunting actively worked to protect his developing doctrine of Methodism. He and his supporters stood for a conservative policy based on a close alliance with propertied members of the laity, the Established Church and the government, against the feared republicanism of the people. Bunting's prime concern for the next thirty years seems to have been the preservation of these alliances, though in the case of the Establishment, the alliance seems to be one sided. This policy became more apparent when the agitations of 1827, 1835 and 1849 are closely examined.

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<sup>7</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to William Dalby (Newark), February 12, 1822.

The correspondence for the period shows Bunting's reasons for the aforementioned alliances. The continued cry from the Ministry was against faction, Republicanism, and dissent. Ministers wrote to Bunting for advice in the face of expected agitation.<sup>8</sup> The correspondence shows the Ministerial concern in the face of the continued unrest, attributed to "the radical feeling amongst the lower class..."<sup>9</sup> In 1825 Bunting advised the Ministry that it must be more conscientious... "on the account of the unsettled state of the working part of this kingdom".<sup>10</sup> At the same time Bunting was informed that "Methodism stands high among the respectable people".<sup>11</sup>

This fear of the people influenced Bunting and his followers to change certain religious practices within the Connexion. The revivals were no longer compatible with the position the Ministry chose to take as far as the Establishment, is concerned.

Though successful, the revivals became feared by not only the government but by the Ministry as well. With the events of 1811 and 1819 still clearly etched on their minds, the Ministry and the government feared the gathering of large numbers of the working class. The government was especially fearful of large groups when whipped to a frenzy, religious or not. In 1824 Bunting received a letter from 'A Lover of Justice and a Church Woman'. According to

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<sup>8</sup> MCA MSS. Hugh Carter to J.B., Coventry, October 5, 1825.

<sup>9</sup> MCA MSS. Thomas Jackson to J.B., Manchester, March 26, 1821.

<sup>10</sup> MCA MSS. Joseph Agar to J.B., York, July 12, 1825.

<sup>11</sup> MCA MSS. John Stephens to J.B., Manchester, February 1, 1821.

the letter a girl in Cornwall (the most successful revival area) had killed her brother. The importance of the case was that the Justice told the Grand Jury that the girl was "of the Wesleyan Church and was being influenced by some religious fanaticism..." He went on to say that:

"If such crimes take place, amongst any religious sects, under an excitement whether produced by the address of their teachers, or arising from their own overwrought feelings, they ought to be repressed; I hope this case will be made public throughout this county in which I understand Methodism greatly prevails".<sup>12</sup>

The Revivals had to cease, but by regulating against the revival Bunting and Conference came under attack, accused of preventing expansion, and denying the local Districts and Circuits their rightful autonomy. It became necessary for Conference to discipline firmly those members who threatened disruption by refusing to comply with Ministerial policy. Fearing public disorder, Bunting wrote to Samuel Webb,

"We must respect and uphold what is done in due course of law and by the operation of established

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<sup>12</sup> MCA MSS. A Lover of Justice and a Church Woman to J.B., April 7, 1824.

rules, even when it goes against our private judgement as well as when it accords with our views".<sup>13</sup>

A Minister wrote to Bunting fearing the "advance and influence of Democracy and Republicanism".<sup>14</sup> To William Beal, Bunting wrote:

"As to Takg. the sense of the people in classes or otherwise except in Q. Mgs., it is unmethodistical, obserd., and mischievious. Our system is not democracy. The interest of the people it substantially provides for, but not by a plan of universal suffrage, than which nothing could be more fatal to real liberty, whether in Church or State. The leader who allows such discussions in his class, forgets one of his principal duties".<sup>15</sup>

Ministerial fear of the laity was becoming more apparent.

Bunting wrote to Entwisle that:

"The more I see and hear and think and pray, the more decided I am against increasing the power or multiplying the administrative functions of leaders' Meetings".<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> MCA MSS. Samuel Webb to J B., Stafford, April, 30, 1822.

<sup>14</sup> MCA MSS. Edmund Grindrod to J.B., Glasgow, January 12, 1824.

<sup>15</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to William Beal, May 10, 1821.

<sup>16</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to Joseph Entwisle, Salford, October 24, 1828.

This Ministerial attitude was becoming apparent to the representatives of the people. A significant letter was written to Bunting in 1824 from members of the laity in Hull.

"We think also that there is a growing love of power in the preachers, which is shown in the enactments of Conference, which will tend to increase the power of the travelling preachers and to lessen that of the local preachers".<sup>17</sup>

It was not enough to discipline the Connexion. The special relationship between Methodism and the Church had to be maintained. For that reason the following letter was written by Bunting during the uneasy period of Brougham's Education bill.

"We cannot as a body unite with the Dissenters on that subject, for their objections to the bill are made on principles in which we as a body cannot concur or possibly go to their length-principles of systematic objection to Establishment Religion".<sup>18</sup>

As if to assure Bunting that all was well, a minister wrote concerning his circuit: "one prominent feature in all our Societies is dutiful - attachment to their king, their country and its laws..."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> MCA MSS. R. Johnson, John Doncaster, D.McNichol; J. Lancaster, W. Entwisle to J.B., Hull, February 19, 1824.

<sup>18</sup> MCA MSS. William Hinson to J.B. (London) March 26, 1821.

<sup>19</sup> MCA MSS. J. Sanders to J.B. (London) May 13, 1822.

By the 1820's the Ministry had generally accepted Bunting's view of Methodism. Thomas Bersey wrote to Bunting expressing the growing belief that Methodism was unique and apart from the dissenting Churches.<sup>20</sup> Bunting himself wrote that "Methodism is an invaluable auxiliary to the National Establishment".<sup>21</sup>

Bunting summed up his doctrine of Methodism in answer to Mark Robinson's publication, in 1824. Bunting claimed that Methodism of his day was firmly based on the Plan of Pacification. He believed that in 1797 the "dissatisfied seceded, the satisfied mutually covenanted with each other to abide together on that plan; and it became, as to its substantial principles, our Constitution". Bunting went on to say what he was to reiterate on a number of occasions; that "Methodism is calculated to be an auxiliary to a National Establishment". He showed his distrust of the people when he said "... in no settled government of any Church can things be safely or scripturally left to popular clamour, to the discussion of demagogues, the only men who would long attend such meetings, or to the numerical majorities". Bunting went on to discuss his views on discipline. "If in his view (the view of a dissenting individual) it be wrong (a rule or law), let him withdraw from the body, and then he is at perfect liberty as an Englishman to do what, while a Methodist he ought not do..."<sup>22</sup> The evolution and

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<sup>20</sup> MCA MSS. Thomas Bersey to J.B., March 20, 1821.

<sup>21</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to H. Sandwich, Manchester, February 10, 1825.

<sup>22</sup> MCA MSS. J.B.'s notes on Mark Robinson's pamphlet.

acceptance of Bunting's doctrine of Methodism was still to undergo its first test. When the test did come it was in fact as a result of the break down of one of Bunting's first principles, the dependence on the wealthy members of circuits for local order.

The severe post-war economic conditions, coupled with a number of serious depressions, undermined what Connexional stability there was, and can be considered a prime factor behind the three serious agitations which racked the Connexion during the nineteenth century. An indirect result of the Connexion's tremendous expansion<sup>23</sup> was not only the Ministry's increased dependence on the propertied class,<sup>24</sup> but also its increasing dependence upon a handful of financially sound circuits.

As the finances of the Connexion became more complex the power of the purse grew. The ministerial dependence on these few sound circuits grew proportionally, as did their reliance on those members of the laity who collected the supplies and by their presence maintained order within the circuits. By 1826 it was becoming evident that the pastoral office, as Bunting conceived it, could not sustain itself without the influence of the powerful laymen.

The post-war financial crisis inspired members of the Ministry to investigate the financial system of the Connexion. In his pamphlet on Methodist finances, Johathan Crowther pointed out the astounding fact that, while the Connexion was in deep financial

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<sup>23</sup> Jonathan Crowther, Thoughts on the Finances or, of the Temporal Affairs of the Methodist Connexion, p. 25.

<sup>24</sup> Crowther, op. cit., p. 6.

trouble, it would have been in far worse difficulties if it had not been for the Manchester, Leeds, Liverpool and Halifax Districts. Those Districts contained,

"Nearly one quarter of all the Methodists in England... Each of these Districts, not only pay their own expenses, but, spare part of their yearly collection and give up the whole of the book trade, to aid and assist the other Districts".<sup>25</sup>

It therefore became of paramount importance to the financial stability of the Connexion that order and discipline be maintained in those circuits. For that reason when there were signs of disruption, the Conference attempted to solve the problem by dividing them. In the cases of Leeds, Liverpool and Manchester this was done between 1824-1826.

With the return of economic difficulties in the latter half of the 1820's there was the renewal of agitation within the Connexion over the Sunday School issue of 1806. Though the polemics concerning the teaching of the art of writing on the Sabbath had quieted down by the 1820's, there were still a number of Sunday Schools which continued to defy the will of the Conference; significant enough for Bunting to mention the continued "profanations of the Lord's Day",<sup>26</sup> and for the

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<sup>25</sup> Crowther, op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>26</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to John Wilks (jr.), London, February 28, 1822.



Conference to take official action against them. In 1826 the Liverpool Conference legislated against writing on the Sabbath. This took the form of a document entitled 'Rules and Regulations for Methodist Sunday Schools throughout the Connexion', drawn up chiefly by Bunting<sup>27</sup>. From the title of the document it can be seen that it covered only Methodist Sunday Schools, thus leaving a large number of undenominational Schools, not owned by the Methodist Church (which were used for Sunday School purposes), outside the realm of Methodist law. The result of this loophole was that many of these Sunday Schools continued to teach writing on Sundays. To cope, the Conference of 1827 decided to bring pressure to bear on the unruly Sunday Schools by threatening to cut off their supplies. Warren and Stephens noted the minute of Conference:

"... And it is hoped that those schools already existing which claim a relation to Methodism and are supported in part by collections made in our Chapels will be induced, as speedily as possible to adopt the same leading principles and to walk by the same general rules".<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Smith, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 103.

<sup>28</sup> MCA Samuel Warren and John Stephens: Chronicles of Wesleyanism, p. 400.

The resulting dissatisfaction within the larger and more important circuits made the Conference determined to restore peace and order by dividing them, but the divisions weakened the ministerial hold on the circuits, and opened the door to more serious agitation.

In 1824 the first of the major circuits, Manchester, was divided. Due to the wretched poverty of much of the working class and the derangement of trade, there was much dissatisfaction amongst the Manchester people. There was<sup>a</sup> growing fear within Conference that the great size of the circuit was making it unwieldy, and thus difficult to discipline should political agitation become serious. Owing to the Connexion's financial dependence on Manchester the scheme for partition was thought to be absolutely necessary. Between 1824 and 1827 the Manchester Circuit was divided into three. Directing these efforts was Jabez Bunting who was stationed in Manchester during those important years. Instead of strengthening the Manchester Circuits it weakened them. In 1826 T. Preston wrote to Bunting, fearing that circumstances would result in, "some loss to our society".<sup>29</sup>

Throughout the period of the Manchester division Bunting was engaged in enforcing the Sunday School's compliance with the Conference regulations of 1826 and the minutes of 1827. It is

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<sup>29</sup> MCA MSS. T. Preston to J.B. (Manchester), Bolton, October 6, 1826.

recorded that on one occasion, while in Manchester, Bunting spoke for three hours on the subject of Sunday Schools. The result of Bunting's efforts was that for want of money they were forced to submit to the rules of Conference.<sup>30</sup> The issue was not entirely resolved. The friction which developed between the District Sunday School Committee and the Ministry created an unsettled state which was to last until 1835.

The division of Manchester weakened the Ministry's hold on the Circuit and hindered the Ministry's ability to keep order when trouble developed. An example of how the division weakened Manchester, and was to weaken Leeds and Liverpool is seen in a letter to Bunting from William Leach concerning the division of Sheffield.

"The division of this circuit as it is proposed to be done will be natural and geographical; but not equitable. All the distant places to which a horse will be necessary will fall to us and with a mass of very poor people. The other will be the Metropolitan circuit suited to the state of some venerable father".<sup>31</sup>

When the agitations in Leeds, Manchester, and Liverpool are compared, it becomes apparent that the lack of effective control by the

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<sup>30</sup> MCA MSS. scrapbook of James Everett, September 20, 1826.

<sup>31</sup> MCA MSS. William Leach to J.B., Bristol, July 17, 1829.

Ministry, following the division of these Districts, is responsible for their seriousness. That the divisions were carried out along the same lines as at Sheffield must be the case, for in each of the major Circuits the serious agitation came from within the newly created poorer Circuits which were devoid of responsible lay members.

Bunting's efforts at imposing the complete "Wesleyan Religion" and discipline in Manchester were paralleled in Liverpool, and, as in Manchester, laid the ground work for future trouble.

The division of the Liverpool Circuit came about as a result of the findings of a committee which had been appointed by Conference at the request of the Liverpool circuit.<sup>32</sup> The Committee was requested to investigate the suspension of a Leader and Local Preacher named M'Clintock by the Superintendent of the Liverpool Circuit, Thomas Wood. Following its investigation the Committee, composed of the Conference President, with Joseph Entwisle, the Conference Secretary Jabez Bunting, and Robert Newton, recommended the division of the City into two separate circuits and the splitting of the leaders' meeting into four sections.

"The former decision may have had to

do with the problem of the circuits.....

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<sup>32</sup> Ian Sellers, Liverpool Nonconformity, p. 158.

being too large, the latter was clearly intended to isolate pockets of discontent so that they could be more easily discovered and suppressed".<sup>33</sup>

The division of the Liverpool Circuit, as in Sheffield, was not equitable. It created one socially homogenous circuit (the south) and in the north sowed the seeds for later agitation by putting the primarily middle class Brunswick Chapel in the same Circuit as the predominantly working class-populated Leeds Street Chapel.<sup>34</sup>

To ensure the division of the leaders' meeting, Bunting met with J. Riles, the pastor of the Liverpool Methodist Society, on the 19th of August to discuss the problems involved. On the 11th of October, Riles wrote to Bunting the following letter relating to the particulars of dividing the leaders' meeting.

"I stand here as the accredited pastor of the Liverpool Methodist Society, by the appointment of the Conference, and as such, I divided the Friday evenings Leaders' Meeting held at Mount Pleasant Chappel vestry into six divisions, to meet at Mount Pleasant on Tuesday evening, Brunswick, on Thursday evening; Leeds Street, Thursday; Pitt St. and the Pottery on Monday evening; .....

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<sup>33</sup> Ian Sellers, Liverpool Nonconformity, p. 158

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 154.

and Beams Garden one evening in  
the week to be fixed upon".<sup>35</sup>

Dissatisfaction was instant; no sooner had Riles concluded his announcement, than the leaders began to cry out against the tyranny of Conference.

"As soon as I concluded the sentence a man from the other side of the room vociferated, with apparent bad feeling, 'What did we come here for, if we have no voice in the business?' to which I replied 'To hear what I have to say, and do what I bid you, as your pastor'." <sup>36</sup>

Hence forward the Liverpool Circuit was ripe for revolt. It is interesting to note that during the Leeds Organ Crisis the North Circuit condemned the actions of Conference. On the other hand the South Circuit had retained enough important laymen not only to prevent that circuit from siding with the radicals in Leeds, but to send a loyal memorial to Conference, congratulating them on their decision at Leeds.

The third of the three major Circuits, Leeds, was the scene of the Connexion's first major schism of the 19th Century. The agitation at Leeds has been, perhaps wrongly, called the Leeds Organ Crisis: . . . For the organ in the Brunswick Chapel was only . . . . .

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<sup>35</sup> MCA MSS. J. Riles to J.B., Liverpool, October 11, 1825.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

the pretext which brought the agitation to a head. The real battle concerned the controversial Sunday School issue.

In the year 1826 the Leeds Circuit was divided, ostensibly for the usual reasons, but on close investigation it became apparent that the real reason concerned the Sunday Schools. The independently owned schools, which the Leeds Circuit utilized, were devoted to engagements contrary to Methodist rule, and "their general conduct could not be regarded as satisfactory to any religious community".<sup>37</sup> Once jointly administered for all the Nonconformists, the schools, by 1826 were considered to be strictly Methodist.<sup>38</sup> In spite of this, those Ministers, members of the Sunday School Committee, saw the Sunday Schools as "nurseries of independent thought",<sup>39</sup> and continued to use the broad character of the schools original constitution as reasons for their independent actions. The only positive cure that the Buntingites saw for the Leeds Sunday School question was an enforcement of the rules of 1826-27 and a tightening of Ministerial supervision of the Sunday Schools.<sup>40</sup>

To facilitate the ministerial take-over of the Sunday Schools, Conference decided to divide the Leeds circuit, in 1826, into two, East and West. This division succeeded in splitting the

<sup>37</sup> Smith, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 112.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> 'The Watchman's Lantern', March 11, 1835.

<sup>40</sup> Smith, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 113.

Sunday School but as in Manchester and Liverpool, cleared the ground for a major conflict. Isaac Turton wrote to Bunton saying:

"I expect you will receive a letter by post from Mr. Grindrod respecting the disturbed state of the societies in Leeds".<sup>41</sup>

Shortly after, Bunting wrote to Thomas Galland on the need for reform in Leeds.

"I hope the opportunity will be seized to bring them under complete discipline and reduce them to their proper level".<sup>42</sup>

The Sunday School issue is clearly seen the 'Extracts and Memoranda from the Leaders Minutes Book of the Leeds West Circuit' March 2, 1827.

"Early in the month of March 1827 a correspondence was carried on between the Leaders Meeting of the West Circuit and the Committee of the Sunday Schools in the East Circuit in which the former contended that the Schools situated within the limits of the Leeds West Circuit ought to have been connected with that circuit as soon as it had separate existence, and claimed

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<sup>41</sup> MCA MSS. Isaac Turton to J.B., Albion St. Leeds, October 4, 1827.

<sup>42</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to Thomas Galland, Leeds, 1827.



the management of the said School should be forthwith ceded to the West Circuit. The Committee in the East Circuit replied that after the most patient investigation of the question relative to the immediate division of the Circuits it was resolved on the second of February, that the schools shall remain as they are during the current year; and that nothing could have wavered to come to this resolution, but a conviction that the step was necessary in order to preserve the schools from internal division, and in union with Methodism, they therefore requested that the authorities in the West Circuit would wave their claim to the school till the close of that year, and co-operate with them during that period".<sup>43</sup>

Though ostensibly the Leeds agitation was over the introduction of an organ into the Brunswick Chapel, it can be seen to have actually resulted from the Sunday School conflict and the ensuing division of the Circuit. The agitation of 1827 stemmed from the frustration of the people in the East Circuit, and their inability to stand up to Conference, and most certainly was complicated by the fact that 1826 was a year of great economic hardship in the North.<sup>44</sup> In 1828, Isaac Keeling gives further

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<sup>43</sup>MCA MSS. Extracts and Memoranda from the Leaders Minute Book of the Leeds West Circuit, pp. 85-87.

<sup>44</sup> Gayer, Rostow, Schwartz, op. cit., pp. 174-210.

evidence as to the real cause of the Leeds trouble.

"It is with reluctance that I speak on this occasion, we have been frequently told by several preachers that have travelled there before (Leeds), they have seen elements of a furtive convulsion. In 1826 many in public meeting objected to the division of the circuit, but would not mention their reason. In the next Sunday School Meeting Mr. Ward was hissed".<sup>45</sup>

Earlier in the same year, Thomas Galland wrote that when he was appointed to replace the weakened Grindrod as superintendent of the Leeds Circuit, an objection was raised in the Sunday School Committee.<sup>46</sup> In January of 1828 Galland wrote to Bunting explaining what was being done in Leeds.

"We are still engaged in our Sunday School contest, but our prospects here I am happy to say brighten. A subcommittee including the preachers in both circuits is now appointed, to modify the existing regulations of the school, and bring them more efficiently under Methodistical control. Of course we shall keep

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<sup>45</sup> MCA Proceedings of Conference, July 30, 1828.

<sup>46</sup> MCA MSS. Thomas Galland to J.B. Leeds, January 4, 1828.

in view the excellent platform  
contained in the minutes".<sup>47</sup>

The local authorities found themselves fighting the full authority of Conference, whose views had been reinforced in 1828 by a government arbiter, who made a legal judgement in favour of the Superintendent's position.<sup>48</sup> In the same year Bunting received for his perusal a letter containing a further discussion on the state of the Leeds Sunday Schools.<sup>49</sup> The threat to the peace and order in Leeds prompted by this dispute most certainly was the cause for the division of that Circuit. The Ministry recognised their financial dependance upon the Leeds Circuit and therefore it was certainly in their best interest to preserve that Circuit's prosperity. That the careless division weakened the ministerial hold on Leeds is clear. William Dawson and Benjamin Stock wrote to Bunting the following letter.

"The loss of 700 members must  
have made a serious impression  
upon our financial concerns,  
as well as upon our congregations  
in the East circuit. The Old  
Chapel congregation has suffered  
materially, also Albion Street

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<sup>47</sup> MCA MSS. Thomas Galland to J.B., Leeds, January 18, 1828.

<sup>48</sup> MCA MSS. Thomas Galland to J.B. (Salford) January 25, 1828.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

and Wesley have experienced some  
diminution by secession..."<sup>50</sup>

It is clear that the largest number of losses came from the Old Chapel, located in a depressed area of Leeds. The Old Chapel took a leading part in the Sunday School dispute; a fact which could be attributed to the loss of the more stable members, as a result of the division.

It is not necessary to discuss the Organ Crisis per se as it is so well known, but there are a number of interesting points which should be noted.

In disciplinary cases where the District Superintendent can no longer handle the situation, he is permitted by Methodist law to call a special District Meeting, and is allowed to request the attendance of the president and "three of the nearest Superintendents".<sup>51</sup> Therefore Bunting's presence in Leeds cannot, strictly speaking, be considered illegal, as he was stationed at Salford. Though Grindrod was perhaps stretching the point of the "nearest Superintendent" he nevertheless was still acting within the bounds of law. It is significant that Bunting's critics ignore the fact that Bunting was indeed Superintendent of one of the nearest circuits, and seem to dwell on the point that he had been appointed

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<sup>50</sup> MCA MSS. Wm. Dawson and Benjamin Stock to J.B., Leeds, March 31.  
1829.

<sup>51</sup> Grindrod, op. cit., p. 106 (1842 ed.).

'special advisor' by the president. Perhaps the distress caused by Bunting's presence would have been less had the President not felt obliged to designate him his 'special advisor', a title Bunting never claimed for himself.<sup>52</sup>

The ministers' inability to control the Manchester, Liverpool and Leeds Circuits following their division lends credence to the argument that Conference had, by 1828, become too dependant upon certain members of the laity for keeping order at the local level. Not only was Bunting's policy of middle-class Methodism shaken, but so was the financial stability of the Connexion as a whole. The fact that the Ministry recognized the seriousness of the Leeds agitation must explain the reason for the supreme Conference effort to reduce the Circuits to order.

When Grindrod told the president of Conference, Stephens, his choice for the membership of the Special District Meeting, the president said, 'I approve of the men and the measure'.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, Dr. Warren said, 'I think a better selection of men could not be made for the occasion...'<sup>54</sup>

When Bunting arrived in Leeds for the Special District Meeting, it is apparent that he realized that the cause of the

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<sup>52</sup> MCA Proceedings of Conference, 1828.

<sup>53</sup> MCA MSS. Edmund Grindrod to J.B., Leeds, November 28, 1827.

<sup>54</sup> MCA Proceedings of Conference, 1828.

trouble was not the organ. In a letter to Entwisle dated December, 1827, Bunting claimed that, (the)

"Organ is a mere pretext among the heads of schism... There was radical faction there, whose meeting had assumed all the fearful character of a Methodistical Luddism (secret vows or bonds etc.) and of whom it was indispensable to the permanent peace of the society that it should be forthwith purged".<sup>55</sup>

The deliberations in Conference which followed the Leeds crisis were stormy. Bunting insisted, "that whatever straining of the Constitution and stretching, or even overpassing of the law had been resorted to, was justified by 'the emergency'".<sup>56</sup> With one of the financial pillars of Methodism at stake it is easy to understand why Bunting could say that the actions of Conference were "Constitutional in extraordinary circumstances"<sup>57</sup> and that "our firmness was a very great blessing to the Connexion".<sup>58</sup>

It is apparent that Bunting had guided the deliberations and decisions of the Special District Meeting.<sup>59</sup> In the words of the official Methodist History he was the "ruling spirit by which that course of action was divided and directed".<sup>60</sup> It is

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<sup>55</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to Joseph Entwisle, Salford, December 22, 1827.

<sup>56</sup> Gregory, op. cit., p. 59.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., pp. 64-65.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>59</sup> Bunting, op. cit., p. 600.

<sup>60</sup> Smith, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 130.

equally apparent that the decisions of the Special District Meeting were approved by Conference.<sup>61</sup> In spite of the debates in the Conference of 1828, only senior ministers voted against adopting the conclusions of the Special District Meeting. The following notice was adopted by Conference. "... it is the judgement of the Conference that the Special District Meeting held in Leeds was both indispensably necessary, and in the most extraordinary emergency constitutional also".<sup>62</sup> It should be noted that the division between the elder preachers of Wesley's day and the new majority of Bunting's were still split on the issue of order and discipline, for "not one of the speakers who had been in the Ministry during Wesley's life time approved of the way in which the Leeds dissensions had been dealt with".<sup>63</sup>

The conflict at Leeds left a temporary mark on Bunting, as did his first attempt at discipline in 1807. In 1828 he wrote to a friend saying:

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<sup>61</sup> MCA MSS. Bunting correspondence 1828-1830.

MCA Proceedings of Conference, 1828.

"Dr. Warren said, There is a tendency toward democracy. I regret it. I think all has been ceded in 95 and 97 that can be ceded with safety... I feel grateful for all the parties engaged in that business and that they could not come to a better resolution..."

<sup>62</sup> Gregory, op. cit., p. 59.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

"I hope good will come out of this evil. For myself I abhor public life, and if I once saw myself clear to an entire abandonment of it, should hail with joy the day of retirement... I have no sort of remaining ambition for a prominent station in our body, or for public office of any kind..."<sup>64</sup>

To another friend he wrote:

"I feel deeply their assertions that, but for me the dissensions would have been healed, and that I chiefly, or you and I, are the cause of the division". He goes on to say that his present illness

"may be sent to prevent me from attending Conference at all, and to keep me safe, happy, and quiet at home".<sup>65</sup>

Bunting had become sensitive to the accusations of his opponents. In a letter to Grindrod concerning the circulation of a pamphlet dealing with the Leeds question, Bunting warned:

"Too much honour is.. paid to me.  
When you refer to measures which  
I have certainly had a principal

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<sup>64</sup> Bunting, op. cit., p. 602.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.



share in recommending or advocating  
 I am mentioned much too individually.  
 Some clause, recognizing the  
 equally influential and valuable  
 service on those occasions of  
 Brethren who have thought and  
 acted with me, is due to truth  
 and justice and my own sense of  
 obligation to my public friends  
 and coadjutors. Many would not  
 bear such an eulogium on me". <sup>66</sup>

To John McLean, Bunting shows the same timidity. McLean's mother  
 was ill and he wished to be posted near her. Bunting wrote:

"I will do my very best for you,  
 and for the Salford Circuit.  
 But in light of the tumultuous  
 times this removal must be your  
 act and deed, and that you must  
 tell our stewards and friends,  
 that it is yours, acting from  
 a principle of official  
 obedience towards an aged and  
 afflicted mother". <sup>67</sup>

Unfortunately for Bunting he was unable to retire to the background.  
 In 1820 Bunting had been called upon to restore order and  
 discipline following a period of great economic stress and radical

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<sup>66</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to Edmund Grindrod, Salford, May 10, 1828.

<sup>67</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to John McLean, London, August 2, 1828.

faction. Again in 1828 the Ministry, still favouring his policy of middle class conservative Methodism, elected him president of Conference for a second time. Bunting was thought by many to be "the embodiment of Conference",<sup>68</sup> and for that reason he was not allowed to retire, for trouble was brewing in both London and Liverpool which was to demand his energies anew.

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<sup>68</sup> Gregory, *op.cit.*, p. 86.

## CHAPTER V

1830 - 1835

"I had rather have a soldier than a doctor for a governor"<sup>1</sup>

By 1830 Wesleyan Methodism had evolved into a highly-developed organization for the pastoral oversight of the laity.<sup>2</sup> In spite of this, the agitation continued, not only in the three major districts already discussed, but spread throughout the Connexion. It was becoming increasingly clear that the continuing series of disputes were not isolated episodes but part of a general pattern of unrest. It was also becoming clear that Bunting's policies were beginning to cause more trouble than they cured: e.g. their apparent inability to prevent or cope with the disturbances of the late 1820's.

From the conclusion of the Leeds crisis to 1835, the Connexion was rocked by a series of further agitations both large and small. While the Leeds case was still being decided, William Henshaw wrote to Bunting from London concerning the growing unrest in his circuit.

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<sup>1</sup> Gregory, op. cit., p. 338.

<sup>2</sup> Kent, op. cit. p. 80.

"The spirit of faction is ever restless and the Resolutions of the London South Circuit were plentifully distributed and the letters of the London North Secretary sold and given away in abundance and several Subscriptions to our Schools were withheld according to the system of starving the preachers into submission..."<sup>3</sup>

By October of 1828 conditions in the London Circuit had not improved. J. Mason wrote to Bunting that:

"The disturbers of the peace in the South made a resolute attempt at the Quarterly Meeting to cause a division".<sup>4</sup>

In January, 1829, Bunting was informed that the London South Circuit was in a "sad state of rebellion".<sup>5</sup> In 1830 the Ministry looked to Bunting to restore calm to London.

"... your reasons in favour of Liverpool are certainly weighty and ought if possible be gratefied, - on the other hand in reference to Hind St., it is of great importance to the Connexion and particularly to London in its present state that you should be there. I think with you if we could get rid of the factious parties in the town but in every other place it would be a great blessing".<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> MCA MSS. William Henshaw to J.B., Sheffield, January 9, 1828.

<sup>4</sup> MCA MSS. J. Mason to J.B., London, October 1, 1828.

<sup>5</sup> MCA MSS. J. Mason to J.B., London, January 1, 1829.

<sup>6</sup> MCA MSS. T. Buckley to J.B., Carmarthen, April 21, 1830.

Fortunately for the Connexion the leaders of the London agitation were only able to convince five members to go out.<sup>7</sup>

Not all the agitation following the Leeds case was caused by failure to adhere to Methodist discipline.<sup>8</sup> In Derby the schism of 1832 was over Bunting's redefinition of Methodist practices. To Edmund Grindrod Bunting wrote:

"You have heard doubtless of the serious division at Derby. About 300 have left and formed themselves into a new sect, called 'Arminian Methodists'. The leaders of the party are factious enthusiasts".<sup>9</sup>

The phrase 'factious enthusiasts' was one Bunting used to describe Revivalists. Bunting had earlier showed that Revivalism could have no place within his conception of Methodism and its alliance with the government.

"The Derby case proves, like that at Leeds how much mischief may be done by allowing factious and fanatical men to proceed too long and too far, without timely restraint. It proves also the wisdom and importance of the special District Meetings".<sup>10</sup>

Bunting's involvement in the distresses of the preceding period have been discussed but it should be mentioned that the causes

<sup>7</sup> Gregory, op. cit., pp. 87-8.

<sup>8</sup> MCA MSS. J.W.Thomas to J.B., Tenterden, July 24, 1833.

<sup>9</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to Edmund Grindrod, Liverpool, March 3, 1832.

<sup>10</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to Edmund Grindrod, Liverpool, May 1, 1832.

for much of the agitation of the 1830 to 1835 period are to be found in the preceding decade. Bunting, as the prime innovator of the Connexional changes during the period must be held responsible for a major portion of the ensuing unrest.

Even following the troubles in Manchester, Liverpool and Leeds, Bunting attempted to solve the Connexional difficulties with the old methods which had to date not proved very successful. Joseph Entwisle wrote to Bunting, possibly with Manchester, Liverpool and Leeds in mind.

"It is not practicable to divide the Bristol Circuit till 1829, though its finances have been put to right and preparations for divisions are being made".<sup>11</sup>

While the Connexion was faced with the difficulties of the Leeds crisis the Conference was forced to deal with an external matter of great importance, Catholic Emancipation. Consistent with his desire not to cross swords with the Government, Bunting took a position which amounted to supporting the Bill.

Conference attempted to steer a middle of the road policy which would maintain Methodism's position of complete neutrality. In the words of Bunting, he wished Methodism to remain:

"Not one inch nearer to, nor one inch further from the Church than we are now".<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> MCA MSS. Joseph Entwisle to J.B., Bristol, January 4, 1828.

<sup>12</sup> Gregory, op. cit., pp. 87-8.

The measure Conference adopted was as follows.

"That with respect to the Bill for the relief of his Majesty's Roman Catholic subjects, now before the House of Commons, the Committee of Privileges do not think it their duty to take any proceedings in their collective capacity; but every member of the Methodist Society will, of course pursue such steps in his individual capacity on this occasion as he may think right".<sup>13</sup>

Those members of the Connexion who disagreed with Bunting's alliance with the Establishment thought this to be a sign of a change in Conference policy. Their interpretation was wrong.

In 1834 Joseph Rayner Stephens, son of the ex-president, John Stephens, became involved in an attack on the Church of England. In 1834, while stationed at Ashton-under-Lyne, he attended a public meeting for the inauguration of a society for the separation of Church and State. He delivered a long and impassioned speech after which he introduced a declaration bearing the signatures of more than one hundred office bearers and leading members of the Wesleyan Methodist Society in Ashton. Stephens, contrary to Methodist rule, approved the declaration's title which included the words "of the Wesleyan Methodists". At a subsequent

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<sup>13</sup> Smith, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 134.

meeting, Stephens accepted an office as one of the secretaries of the newly formed Church Separation Society. He then broadcast Church Separation Society petitions and news of C.S.S. public meetings from Wesleyan pulpits.

Stephens soon discovered that Conference had not changed its attitudes toward its relationship with the Established Church. Bunting had written a letter to James Kendall showing that he still favoured close ties with the Church of England.

"I do not think it probable that we can ever formally unite with the Church of England, so that we can be amalgamated in one body. The present discipline of that Church must exclude, in a sense all separatists. But I think we are bound by every principle of consistency, expediency, and duty to maintain the most friendly feelings towards the Church and to discontinue as far as we can without making ourselves partizans, that bitter and unchristian hostility towards our two venerable national establishments which is not so much in fashion".<sup>14</sup>

For his actions, Stephens was eventually suspended from Conference. It is interesting to note the extent to which Conference supported Bunting's policy for a close Methodist-Anglican relationship. Bunting's speech in Conference, in support of his

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<sup>14</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to James Kendall, London, April 24, 1834.



policy, was, in the words of P.C.Turner:(a)

"... glorious speech, which continued perhaps threequarters of an hour when the time for breaking up came he was declared to be in possession of the floor".<sup>15</sup>

When time was called Joseph Fowler recorded:

"... such an outburst of assent resounded through John Wesley's Chapel as no previous Conference had ever heard".<sup>16</sup>

Following Stephens' suspension, Bunting delivered a powerful closing speech in which he reiterated his own and Conference's stand on the Church issue, and approved of the decisions in the Stephens' case. The diary of Joseph Fowler gives a significant indication of Bunting's following within Conference, for this speech was followed by an outburst of applause on which

Mr. James Wood remarked:

"This is the 54th Conference I have attended, but I never heard clapping before, and I beg that it may be discontinued".<sup>17</sup>

It is apparent that the Conference had no sympathy with the violent attacks made on the Established Church. The Conference of

<sup>15</sup> MCA MSS. P.C.Turner to T.P.Bunting, London, London, August 5, 1834.

<sup>16</sup> Gregory, op. cit., p. 155.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 160.

1834 had condemned the conduct of Stephens and was determined not to allow Ministers exhibiting similar conduct to remain in the Ministry.<sup>18</sup>

The avowed 'dissenters and ultra-liberals' who had been, and were still, actively engaged against the Established Church, were incensed by the actions of Conference toward Stephens. With the propaganda of the 'Christian Advocate' as a guide the members of the Methodist Society in the neighbourhood of Ashton became increasingly discontented and rebellious. In Ashton, speeches were made, and following the example of Conference in Leeds, the cry was raised to pressure Conference by 'stopping the supplies'. With Conference ripe for serious agitation the unrest spread first to Birmingham and then as far north as Perth. The effect was most keenly felt in the Ashton Circuit where approximately eight hundred members separated from the Connexion.

Serious as the Ashton agitation was, it was only a foretaste of what was to come. The unrest in Manchester and Liverpool of the late twenties was still seething below the surface. The conclusion of the Leeds dispute failed to ease the unrest in Liverpool or Manchester. With the ensuing period of general economic distress, the Connexion was again ripe for agitation. Those two major circuits once again became areas of concern to Bunting and his colleagues.

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<sup>18</sup> Smith, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 211.

The basis of the continued unrest in Liverpool was still the dissatisfaction caused by the division of the circuit and the ensuing Sunday School issue. Failing to get satisfaction from Conference during the late twenties, certain members in Liverpool sought a platform on which to renew the struggle with Conference. In 1830 an anonymous monthly publication called the 'Circular' appeared which was attributed to some "disappointed and vindictive men"<sup>19</sup> who attempted to cast a disparaging light on the whole body of Methodist Preachers.<sup>20</sup> The 'Circular' claimed that it spoke for those individuals who saw Conference as undermining the Methodist Constitution and gradually encroaching on the power of the Trustees, which the 'Circular' claimed had been granted by the rules of 1795 and 1797. The followers of the 'Circular's' line were obviously revolutionaries and opponents to Bunting. During the Reform Bill crisis these 'traditionalists', as they called themselves, demanded that the 'true spirit of reform' must be introduced into Conference in the form of lay representation and the ballot.<sup>21</sup>

The divisions of the Liverpool Circuit gave the 'Circular' an additional target for its attacks, based on what the editor claimed

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<sup>19</sup> Ian Sellers, Liverpool Nonconformity, p. 159.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 159.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

to be the undue powers of the wealthier members of the Circuit. It accused the wealthy Liverpool Wesleyans of developing a powerful plutocracy which dominated the local power structure, particularly in the Brunswick and Wesley Chapels. The 'Circular' went so far as to invent the term 'Brunswickers' to describe the members of the wealthy faction. It was turning its voice against the 'grass roots' of Bunting's authority.

In 1835 Bunting mentioned that Leeds Street Chapel contained 'a bad, radical faction, ever on the alert to seize any occasion to annoy us'.<sup>22</sup> By 1837 he was speaking of a 'small faction'<sup>23</sup> within the Leeds Street Chapel, which, because of its membership, was ripe for revolt. The Leeds Street Local Preachers Meetings became the focal point for much of the discontent. At the leaders meeting agitators could appeal to those members of the Leeds Street Society who were too unlettered and ignorant to be admitted to the Brunswick or Wesley pulpits, which would only accept the services of a minister.<sup>24</sup> In addition to the Leaders Meetings the Liverpool agitators voiced their complaints inside the Sunday Schools, which by this period had become the 'natural refuge of a rebellious laity'.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to Edmund Grindrod, March 2, 1835.

<sup>23</sup> Bunting, op. cit., p. 631.

<sup>24</sup> Sellers, op. cit., p. 161.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

The rebels of the Liverpool Circuit who opposed Bunting and Conference seemed to have been nothing more than "social and psychological misfits".<sup>26</sup> They had much in common with their counterparts in the other circuits. They were young, had republican ideas, received the vote in 1832, practiced a rather liberal theory, and generally came from the poorer circuits which were no longer controlled by the more responsible members of the laity.

By 1834 the unrest in Liverpool was such that it only needed a minor spark to set off active anti-Conference agitation. The case of Dr. Warren became the cause for which the Liverpool radicals were waiting.

Under the leadership of Richard Watson and Jabez Bunting the Manchester Circuit was able to weather the storm of 1828, but the preventive measures created a situation which in actual fact caused the eruption of trouble in 1834-5. J. Scott wrote to Bunting concerning his peace-keeping effort.

"I cannot feel indifferent to the fact that your character, talents, and usefulness have commanded a vote so nearly unanimous in a circuit where lately we had a large party marshalled in the very front of radicalism, and

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<sup>26</sup> Sellers, op. cit., p. 161.

have imposed upon the very leaders of  
the faction a reluctant silence".<sup>27</sup>

The division of the Manchester Circuit caused the abandonment of the Oldham Street Chapel by the more prosperous members in favour of the Grosverner Street Chapel, thus giving this one chapel the majority of wealth and influence. This shift in population is important for a true understanding of the secession of 1835.

As in Liverpool strong feelings of resentment and jealousy developed not only toward those individuals who as a result of their wealth could move out of the city and create such a fashionable urban Chapel, but towards the Ministry who were obviously in the pocket of the wealthy laity. As in Liverpool, and earlier in Leeds, the result of the ensuing jealousies and the loss of responsible supporters within the remaining poor circuits meant that when trouble came it would be serious and difficult to control. It is significant to note that when the disruption of 1834-35 hit Manchester the most affected Chapels (as in Leeds and Liverpool) were those whose membership contained the lower social groupings - Oldham Street and Oldham Road.

As early as 1806 Bunting had thought of the necessity for an Institute for the education of the Ministry. In 1829 he received a letter dealing with the subject of an institute for the training of Ministerial Candidates.

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<sup>27</sup> MCA MSS. J. Scott to J.B. Liverpool, January 1, 1830.

"I take the liberty of addressing you, Sir on this subject, hoping as indeed thousands do, that something will be done during the present session of Conference. All the friends of the measure are looking to you, desparing of accomplishing their wishes but by your instrumentality. Oh, Sir! do, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, for the sake of Methodism and of perishing souls make an effort to do something this Conference.<sup>28</sup>

In 1831 Entwisle wrote to Bunting expressing a similar belief.

"I am aware there are great difficulties connected with any plan for the improvement of our young preachers. Something must be done. Unless the improvement of our young preachers keep pace with the general improvement of society our Ministry will not be supported".<sup>29</sup>

In 1831 Bunting together with seventeen<sup>30</sup> prominent Ministers, was charged with the duty of investigating the feasibility of the creation of a college for Methodist Ministers.

In 1833 another committee<sup>31</sup> was appointed to continue the . . .

<sup>28</sup> Bunting, op. cit., p.620.

<sup>29</sup> MCA MSS. Joseph Entwisle to J.B., Bath, June 23, 1831.

<sup>30</sup> Smith, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 157.

<sup>31</sup> The Committee of 1833 included: The President, Treffry, the Secretary, Grindrod, Newton, Bunting, Gaulter, Entwisle, Reece, Taylor, Dr. Warren, Naylor, Stanley, Lessey, T.Jackson, Beecham, Hannah, Galland, Alder, Waugh, Ward and Walton.

efforts of the committee of 1831, and Bunting was again a member. This committee unanimously agreed to submit a report suggesting the creation of a Methodist College.<sup>32</sup> It was then faced with the task of getting the approval of the Ministry for the implementation of their report. Following Ministerial sanctioning Bunting wrote to John Beecham and informed him how the approval was won.

"We had a full meeting this forenoon, and a delightful one. Then as they had not been consulted before, and we knew not their minds even as the principle, we thought right to allow discussion on that. Entwisle, Gaulter, Cribbitt, Taylor, Naylor, etc. made very telling speeches. Hoby and Elliot were at once quite hearty. Haslope, who at first said, but kindly, that he only came to hear, seemed convinced, and thought we ought to try the experiment, though afraid of the evil of congregating young men in one place. Jenkins took much the same ground at last Elliott moved, and Haslope seconded a resolution, expressive of their approval of the principle of an Institute and their readiness to become a provisional committee for carrying it into effect..."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> 'Proposals for the Formation of a Literary and Theological Institution with a Design to Promote the Improvement of the Junior Preachers in the Methodist Connexion.'

<sup>33</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to John Beecham (Dublin), June 26, 1834.



In July 1834 Beecham wrote to Bunting:

"I was fully prepared to expect that the result of the discussion at the City Road Quarterly Meeting would be unfavourable. I find from conversing with the president he has had information from London about the meeting and I expect these who are unfriendly to the institution will print it abroad as much as possible. The president tells me he has also been informed that some of the preachers in London are unfavourable to the Institution and among the number is Farrar".<sup>34</sup>

Hoping to ensure a favourable decision from Conference Bunting wrote to Beecham to enlist the aid of the Irish Conference.

"There are great tolls of opposition from certain preachers, but surely the Conference will not now disgrace itself by a retreat. I wish a vote of the Irish Conference in favour of an Institution House etc. could be obtained. If tolerably unanimous it would tell well".<sup>35</sup>

Beecham acknowledged the receipt of Bunting's request and informed him that he had written to Newton and:

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<sup>34</sup> MCA MSS. John Beecham to J.B., Dublin, July 1, 1834.

<sup>35</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to John Beecham (Dublin) London, July 3, 1834.

"Told him my plan to engage  
some strength for our cause  
from the Irish Conference".<sup>36</sup>

Shortly over a month later Bunting was notified of the results of Beecham's efforts by Thomas Waugh.

"... the affair was brought under the notice of our Conference, that our proceedings had their fullest approval - that a deep and unanimous anxiety prevails to see the Institution commenced... The resolution passed on the occasion I shall be prepared to present to your Conference..."<sup>37</sup>

Once Bunting seemed assured of support from the Irish Conference, he wrote to the President of Conference, Joseph Taylor, including the proposed resolutions for the Institute. In October, 1834, Taylor acknowledged receipt of Bunting's letter.

"The proposed plan of the Institute was read, by the Conference with thankfulness".<sup>38</sup>

Bunting received a large number of letters applauding his efforts. An example is one from Myles Dixon who thanked Bunting for his work on behalf of a "Methodist Seminary".<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> MCA MSS. John Beecham to J.B., Dublin, July 5, 1834.

<sup>37</sup> MCA MSS. Thomas Waugh to J.B., Dublin, July 5, 1834.

<sup>38</sup> MCA MSS. Joseph Taylor to J.B., J.Beecham, R. Alder, Manchester, October 27, 1834.

<sup>39</sup> MCA MSS. Myles C. Dixon to J.B., Barnard Castle, July 24, 1834.

While Bunting was thus engaged in laying the foundation for the Institute, the committee had come to the stage of nominating tutors. During Bunting's absence from the Committee he was nominated to be president of the newly formed Methodist College. In spite of Crowther writing that the nomination was; "Without his knowledge and also without any previous consent",<sup>40</sup> it is impossible to believe that at the least, he had no indication he was to be chosen. Bunting, at once objected to his nomination but was overruled by (the)

"Unanimous solicitations of the committee, in which Dr. Warren personally and actively concurred".<sup>41</sup>

Bunting's nomination was considered by the malcontents in various circuits, to be a major injustice. Their protests created the second of the three major disruptions of the nineteenth century.

Following Bunting's acceptance of the Presidency of the Institute, the Committee turned to the nomination of tutors.<sup>42</sup> Dr. Warren suggested Mr. Burdsall and Mr. Crowther, but as both of those Ministers opposed the creation of an institute, the committee thought other Ministers to be more suitable. According to

<sup>40</sup> Smith, op. cit., Vol. II , p. 232.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> "Bunting's duties as president of the Institute were in the form of general oversight. The office was abolished on his death." David Gowland, Methodist Secessions and Social Conflict in South Lancashire, 1830-1857, p. 827.

Valentine Ward, Dr. Warren uttered not one word of objection when the committee failed to accept his candidates.<sup>43</sup> On the 17th October, 1834, when the Committee, supplemented by several laymen, met to complete the plans for the Institute, Dr. Warren, for the first time, publicly objected to the creation of the Institute.<sup>44</sup> Why he changed his mind toward the institute will never be known. What is clear is that the case of Dr. Warren became the focal point for a radical outburst and the cause for which the dissatisfied among the laity and Ministry could defy Conference. It did nothing more than fan the flames of discontent which had been smouldering since 1826-1828. The radicals who had protested against what they thought to be the continuing loss of local authority eagerly used the case of Dr. Warren in their attempts to weaken the authority of Conference and to attack the individual who stood for all they detested,

<sup>43</sup> Smith, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 234.

<sup>44</sup> Dr. Warren claimed "That the rejection of his nominees and the recommendation of members of the committee to fill the other offices together 'with the astounding proposal, that Mr. Bunting should not only be the president of the institute, but also a Theological Tutor, and at the same time obtain the responsibility and influential office of senior secretary of our foreign missions, developed the sinister designs of the parties, and led him at once openly to express' to Mr. Bunting himself 'That such an extraordinary assumption of power I would never give my consent'." Bunting, op. cit., Vol. II, p. 233.

Jabez Bunting.<sup>45</sup>

Bunting prepared to defend not only himself but the Conference as well. To his son, Percy, he sent the following letter which to caution him that he did not wish to get involved in the Warren crisis through the early publication of a pamphlet by Percy.

"... it contains direct accusations against Mr. Bromley of a very serious character. Now I ought to be for many reasons no party to the advertising of such charges. I wish, if possible, to take no part either against Warren or Bromley at present, by any overt act of direct, or indirect hostility, in order that I may not be gagged or interrupted at the next Conference, on the pretence that I have been already an accuser and a party personally concerned and ought not to be allowed to sit or speak as one of the judges in the court of ultimate appeal. You will see the weight of this consultation".<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> This is seen in the charges drawn up in Leeds in 1834 by Beaumont, Bromley, Everett and Warren. "To deliberate upon and mature a plan for the purpose of curtailing the power of the dominant party in Methodism, whose arbitrary and crooked policy was becoming more and more apparent, by the manner in which they were forcing upon the people and the Funds an expensive Theological Institution". MCA MSS. James Everett, Vol. III, May 14, 1834. Also see Gowland, op. cit., p. 28.

<sup>46</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to T.P. Bunting, London, November 4, 1834.

Beecham wrote to Bunting saying:

"We have gone fully into the subject of the present emergency of the Connexion".

He went on to say that he agreed with Percy as to the need for pamphleteering. Beecham told Bunting that it had been decided that the pamphlets would be,

"Distributed gratis among those who most needed them, and who will not perhaps be disposed to buying on our side of the question".<sup>47</sup>

In 1834 Bunting wrote to Grindrod showing that he was well aware that the case of Dr. Warren was only the pretext for radicals to disrupt the Connexion.

"Great and highly criminal as is Dr. Warren's offence against our discipline, in publicly impugning and endeavouring to defeat, a measure which the Conference has so deliberately sanctioned, yet I think that suspension, however, merited, would be inexpedient. It would give the factious part of the men of this circuit a pretext, if not a right, of interference, so as .....

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<sup>47</sup> MCA MSS John Beecham to J.B., London, November 24, 1834.

to let them in as parties in the controversy, for they would expect to have reasons assigned for inflicting on them the deprivation for so large a portion of the year, of their Superintendent services".<sup>48</sup>

Bunting went on to give his opinion as to what action Conference should take:

"Official inquiry and cognizance of the offence, and immediate verdict of censure and condemnation as to the pamphlet, admonition to the offender, and solemn warning as to the sin and peril of opposing himself in future by any overt acts, to the execution of the Conference's decision - these would be very proper; and then the whole case might be referred to Conference for sentence".<sup>49</sup>

The unrest over the Institute and the Warren case was just what the Associationists in Liverpool had longed for. On October 17th, 1834, twentyseven laymen of the two Liverpool Circuits sent a letter to Dr. Warren stating that they had suffered under the accumulated load of grievances from Conference and that they would never again submit to irresponsible authority.<sup>50</sup> Following this letter (to

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<sup>48</sup> MCA MSS JB. to E.Grindrod, London, September 27, 1834.

<sup>49</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to E. Grindrod, London, September 27, 1834.

<sup>50</sup> Sellers, op. cit., p. 162.

Dr. Warren) all were expelled, by Samuel Jackson, the Superintendent of the North Circuit, and by George Marsden, Superintendent of the South Circuit. Those expelled, all laymen, at once formed the Liverpool Wesleyan Methodist Association, which then joined forces with the Manchester Wesleyan Methodist Association, forming the Grand Central Association.

The Liverpool malcontents proceeded to disrupt the district in such a fashion that para-military tactics were used on both sides, in order to strengthen their respective positions.<sup>51</sup>

By December 1834 over 120 individuals had been expelled, the majority from those chapels which had been weakened by the division of 1826;<sup>52</sup> a fact supported by close examination of the platform for which the malcontents stood. Apart from their support for Dr. Clarke during his 'ill handling' by Conference, the Associationists stood for five major points. The first was the Ministry's violation of the articles of 1795 and 1797, and the second the decision of Conference concerning the Leeds and Brunswick (Liverpool) organ cases. They claimed that special district meetings were unconstitutional when used for making accusations against local preachers. The fourth was the prohibition by superintendent Ministers, of discussions of local

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<sup>51</sup> Sellers, op. cit., p. 163.

<sup>52</sup> The vast majority from Leeds Street Chapel and a few from Pitt Street and Mount Pleasant Chapels. Sellers, op. cit., p. 163.



matters at quarterly meetings. Lastly they resented the 'grandiloquently trumpeted' friendly leaning (on the part of Conference) towards the Church of England.<sup>53</sup> Clearly the lack of influential laity within the two Major Circuits was the major contributory factor towards the seriousness of the agitation. Warren's actions against Conference were not sufficient to cause the bitter controversy which ensued. That the agitation was made more serious due to the economic and social troubles is also clear. Ian Sellers in his thesis, Liverpool Nonconformity, clearly states that:

"Underlying all these charges and counter charges however there rumbles through this Liverpool controversy the voice of social unrest which was never far from the surface even when the most delicate points of faith and order were under debate".<sup>54</sup>

The expelled leaders bitterly decried the Brunswick Chapel as

"Typifying that wealthy respectability and influence of Wesleyanism which the Conference party vaunted so highly, and which they particularly abhorred".<sup>55</sup>

Since 1830 the Oldham Street Circuit (which had earlier been abandoned by the more prosperous Wesleyans), had been the scene of

<sup>53</sup> Sellers, op. cit., p. 165.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

a number of serious incidents, the worst of which resulted from Conference's condemnation of the Revivalist Minister Robert Aitken, who had, through his Revivals, opened the door of Methodism to individuals who did not understand the "particulars of Wesleyan Discipline" and who were easily swayed by the rebellious factions into opposition to Conference.<sup>56</sup>

In addition to the increase in the membership of the factious elements of the Manchester Circuit, the Ministry was also contributing to the likelihood of trouble. The desire for order and discipline which had prompted the original circuit division in 1826 was maintained and manifested in the persons of three of the most enthusiastic of Bunting's supporters. Robert Newton, Superintendent of Manchester's third Circuit, was known for his rigid disciplinary measures, the fact that he was a member of the committee which had recommended the division of Liverpool, and for being a member of the special district meeting at Leeds, in 1828. Edmund Grindrod was now Superintendent of the Manchester second Circuit, but was best known for being Superintendent of the Leeds Circuit, during the Organ Crisis. The third Minister of importance in Manchester was Charles Prest, a known protégé of Bunting. In the name of Wesleyanism, as it evolved under the leadership of Bunting, these three Ministers took an inflexible stand against all opposition.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Gowland, op. cit., p. 33.

<sup>57</sup> Gowland, op. cit., p. 39.

Warren's suspension was the start of renewed trouble. In November, 1834, the Manchester Quarterly Meeting met "to form a lay association, to obtain the vote by ballot, and to introduce the laity into Conference".<sup>58</sup> This event was followed by a revolt in the Oldham Street Circuit. Without the influential nucleus of loyal laity, Conference was unable to prevent Benjamin Stock from leading forty leaders into the newly created Manchester Association.<sup>59</sup>

Bunting attempted to counter the dissatisfaction by meeting with a group of influential laymen who agreed to finance a publication for the defence of Wesleyanism. This publication was called the 'Watchman' and became the mouth-piece of Conference. The 'Watchman' showed the radicals that redress of their grievances would not be forthcoming, and must have done much to make them more determined in their stand against Conference. The 'Watchman' did, however, consolidate the ranks of the loyal Ministers and laity by showing that the Ministry was giving the radicals the choice of submission or withdrawal.<sup>60</sup>

As in Leeds in 1828, most of the serious unrest in Manchester was centered in the poorer Wesleyan Chapels. The focal point of the disturbances was in the working-class Chapels of Oldham Street

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<sup>58</sup> Gowland, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

and Oldham Road. The members of these Chapels were also upset by Conference's attitude toward trade unionism and felt that the actions of Conference since Peterloo had done nothing to foster working-class sympathy for Wesleyanism as it was being practiced. They felt Wesleyanism had ceased to be the religion of the poor. It should be noted that:

"... Outside the Oldham Street and Irwell Street Circuits, the agitation did not reach fever pitch. In the Grosvenor Street Circuit only two members were expelled".<sup>61</sup>

By 1835 the unrest had become serious enough<sup>62</sup> to warrant Bunting's proposal for a meeting of the principal methodist lay officials with the President to discuss the spreading agitation.<sup>63</sup>

"The objects I presume, of such persons invited to attend are prepared conscientiously and cordially to support us, in abiding substantially by our present constitutions, and in maintaining it against the organized conspiracy which aims at subverting

<sup>61</sup> Gowland, op. cit., p. 48.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 49. Losses from the agitation of 1834-35 by circuit.

	1834	1835
Oldham Street	2,120	650
Irwell Street	1,775	1,435
Grosvenor Street	2,150	1,530
Great Brigwater Street	1,410	1,200

<sup>63</sup> MCA MSS. Wm. H. Clarkson to J.B. Sunderland, July 16, 1836.

"Sunderland has lost 6 or 7 hundred members by the late secession".

"it. To learn from them whether they have any feelings of dissatisfaction, or any minor point of the system, with explanation and argument, or if they can show cause for it, some minor alterations in administration, (not affecting our fundamental position) may remove, so as to secure their hearty and decided alliance, in resistance to revolutionary measures; and to ask and obtain their friendly advice and counsel (not as an official and organized body, but as individuals whom the President and preachers acting with him, are desiring to consult, for the better guidance of their own subsequent conduct) respecting the most discreet and efficient means of serving those great ends, which we presume, we are alike anxious to promote. This is the best general statement I can give in reference to the meeting. If any whom we have counted on as really with us are not indeed decided, or if they in their hearts prefer a system mor Kilhamitish and Allinish, it is well that we should know it in time, and prepare for the worst".<sup>64</sup>

To the assembled members of the laity Bunting sent the following address:

"The claims for lay-delegation could not be conceded without violating the rule of fidelity. ... Those who did not like Methodism were quite at liberty

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<sup>64</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to T.P. Bunting, London, July 9, 1835.

"to leave it; but he maintained, that as the preachers who then constituted the Conference had not created Methodism but received the system from Wesley as a sacred Trust, they were bound in common honesty to preserve it entire. So in respect of the claims for giving the whole power of dealing with cases of discipline to the laity, he believed that they could not concede it without infringing on the rule of purity".<sup>65</sup>

It is clear from the results of this meeting that Bunting had convinced the attending laity that their efforts would be in defence of the 'long established principles of original Methodism'.<sup>66</sup> At the conclusion of the meeting a series of resolutions were adopted which were signed by the eighty-one men present, decrying lay representation. Later one hundred and twenty additional members of the laity added their signature to the resolution.<sup>67</sup>

At the Conference of 1835 Bunting entered a further protest against lay delegation,

"I would meet the object in another way. Let our funds be placed completely under the management of lay friends. Have we not done this without solicitation? Our good deeds are forgotten; our bad ones printed in fifty editions. No object is relieved unless friends will assist in

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<sup>65</sup> Smith, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 304.

<sup>66</sup> Declaration of Laymen (Octavo "Minutes" vol. viii, p. 563).

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

"collecting and distribution. I would have lay friends to assist in asking about the yearly collection. They will put a double lock on our fingers if they think we are what we ought not be. We are the true reformers and do the liberalising in the true sense of the word, taking care, however, of the rule of peace".<sup>68</sup>

The question of lay representation for the moment appeared to be dead. The question of Dr. Warren was brought to an end with the court of Chancery finding in favour of Conference. With the end of the agitation in sight Bunting wrote to his lawyer son, Percy, the following letter.

"Is there no legal possibility of Warren's dragging us into Chancery again, if the Conference expel him? Did not the vice Chancellor intimate that an allegation of 'fraudulent' expulsion would be a matter of which they could take cognizance? If so, should not great care be taken to do everything in the most technical and proper way? And would it be well to have a case drawn, and council's opinion previously obtained, on that point? Would Pigott's opinion, as he

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<sup>68</sup> Gregory, op. cit., p. 191

knows the subject be best, or that of Rolf, or some still more established legal authority?" <sup>69</sup>

It is apparent that once Bunting saw victory in sight he intended to rid the Connexion of the focal point of unrest. From the support Bunting received from the Ministry it is obvious he was still considered to be the leader of Conference. George Jackson wrote to Bunting saying:

"... may (God) save us from the follies of those who believe that radicalism and dissent will save the nation and the world". <sup>70</sup>

Though the Connexion suffered losses from the 1830-35 agitations, Bunting's position within the Conference remained unaltered. Francis Heeley wrote to Bunting saying:

"I have felt a great sympathy with you under the cruel and unmerited persecution you have met with, your triumph will be glorious as your sufferings have been great". <sup>71</sup>

From Ministers throughout the Connexion, Bunting received letters of support, rejoicing at the 'termination of the Warren affair'. <sup>72</sup>

<sup>69</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to T.P. Bunting, July 9, 1935.

<sup>70</sup> MCA MSS. George Jackson to J.B. Canterbury, March 30, 1835.

<sup>71</sup> MCA MSS. Francis Heeley to J.B., Birmingham, March 31, 1835.

<sup>72</sup> MCA MSS. correspondence for 1835 (e.g. Thomas Dowty to J.B., Kingswood Hill, March 21, 1835).



Bunting himself wrote to his son, Percy, hoping, 'our victory will be enjoyed with humility, moderation and charity'.<sup>73</sup>

The battle had been won but the war was not over. The cause for unrest in Manchester and Liverpool had not been cured, only suppressed. When the last major flair up in Bunting's career came in 1849 it was again centred in Manchester and Liverpool. Bunting was never more wrong than in 1835 when he said, 'lay delegation is dead and buried'.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup>MCA MSS. J.B. to T.P. Bunting, London, March 25, 1835.

<sup>74</sup> Kent, op. cit., p. 67.

## CHAPTER VI

1835 - 1849

"Behold what a good and pleasant thing  
it is for brethren to dwell in Unity".<sup>1</sup>  
Jabez Bunting.

The Connexional disturbances of 1830-35 strengthened Bunting's position of leadership and influence rather than unseating him as the recognised leader of Conference. As long as the Ministry continued to see the necessity for his style of order and discipline, Bunting was to remain in the position of ultimate influence. What Bunting considered to be the foundation of his position can be seen in the correspondence of 1835-40.

"...I am free to avow my conviction,  
that the plan of pacification, as  
far as relates to Government of the  
Societies, is already too liberal,  
taking the word liberal in the  
licentious import which Democracy,  
both political and religious of the  
present day often gives it".<sup>2</sup>

The name Jabez Bunting symbolized authority and order, security and continuity, and as in 1820 and again 1828, Bunting was elected in 1836 to the highest office in the Connexion in reaction to the

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<sup>1</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to James Wood, Macclesfield, June 30, 1802.

<sup>2</sup> MCA MSS. J.Bucknell to J.B., Hull, March 2, 1835.

lawlessness of the preceding years.<sup>3</sup>

Bunting's election was "by a most remarkable majority, two hundred and four voting for him out of two hundred and twenty-three who were entitled to vote".<sup>4</sup> From his fellow Ministers Bunting received the usual congratulatory letters. P.C. Turner sent felicitations on his honourable majority.<sup>5</sup> J. Armitage wrote that he was pleased to hear of Bunting's election:

"...by such an overwhelming majority which must indeed almost overpower you... you do indeed still live in the affections of your fathers and brethren not withstanding all the calumn to which you have been exposed..."<sup>6</sup>

During the years following Bunting's election, the Ministry continued to send him respectful letters, applauding his efforts. In 1837 W. Constable wrote to voice his support for the decisions of Bunting and Conference as regarded:

"... certain questions in the Leeds case, the expulsion of Dr. Warren, the Theological Institute etc. I do most

<sup>3</sup> Gregory, op. cit., p. 215.

<sup>4</sup> Smith, op. cit., p. 324, Vol. III.

<sup>5</sup> MCA MSS. P.C. Turner to J.B., London, August 4, 1836.

<sup>6</sup> MCA MSS J. Armitage to J.B., Hebden Bridge, August 5, 1836

"cordially approve of the steps  
the Conference has taken, against  
radicalism and democratic  
Movements".<sup>7</sup>

William Leach told Bunting that:

"I have always thought that God  
made your pen at <sup>the</sup> Sheffield  
Conference, the instrument of  
saving the Connexion".<sup>8</sup>

In 1837 John MacLean wrote to express his confidence in  
Methodism's future because he was:

"Assured of your [Bunting's] concern  
for the purity of our faith as well  
as for the preservation of our  
discipline".<sup>9</sup>

By 1835 the disruptions of the late 1820's had faded into  
history. The malcontents who had been born out of the disruptions  
of 1826-28 and 1834-35, found themselves without a single unifying  
factor on which they could unite to challenge the authority of  
Conference. Following the events of 1835 the radical position  
was confused, and only on rare occasions did the dissenters act in  
concert on a common issue. By 1837, unable to weaken the authority

<sup>7</sup> MCA MSS. W. Constable to J.B., London, January 10, 1837.

<sup>8</sup> MCA MSS. William Leach to J.B., Bradford, January 8, 1839.

<sup>9</sup> MCA MSS. John McLean to J.B., Sheffield, May 18, 1837.

of Conference, the malcontents vented their frustration on the individual, whom they saw as being responsible for all their reverses, Jabez Bunting.

The key word to the cause of further trouble must be frustration: frustration caused by the fluctuating economic conditions, frustration at being unable to defeat Conference and Bunting on any major issue, frustration from feeling that Wesleyan expansion was coming to a standstill caused by the anti-revival stand of Conference, frustration at not being able to organise a successful schism without Ministerial aid,<sup>10</sup> frustration caused by the serious economic difficulties, and frustration caused when Conference appeared to reverse its policy toward the government, and then reverted to its old position of alliance.

The Connexional troubles of the 1840's were preceded by grave economic conditions, the depression of 1837-42 being the worst economic crisis to date. R. Alder wrote to Bunting describing the laying of the foundation stone of the Royal Exchange by Prince Albert.

"It was a poor affair. The reception of his Royal Highness, judging from what I saw, was cold. There was no hissing certainly; but there was little

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<sup>10</sup> Professor W.R. Ward.

"cheering. I was much gratified on finding that no troops were in attendance; nor any display of civil force further than was necessary for the preservation of order amongst the lieges..."<sup>11</sup>

Similarly John Nelson wrote to Bunting in 1842.

"Infidel principles, low views of moral responsibility, and even of social and civil rights, and disaffection to government, prevail widely among the people. A good vigorous, and effective appointment is therefore very desirable for this circuit".<sup>12</sup>

Conditions seemed to worsen steadily. Thomas Harris brought to Bunting's attention the troubles in Leeds in 1843.

"... the distress of the times and the extreme poverty of the great majority of our members in this circuit makes it desirable that every effort should be made in aid of our trust funds..."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> MCA MSS R. Alder to J.B., London, January 17, 1842.

<sup>12</sup> MCA MSS. John Nelson to J.B., Huddersfield, July 12, 1842.

<sup>13</sup> MCA MSS. Thomas Harris to J.B., Leeds, March 7, 1843.

In 1844 trouble in Sheffield was attributed to, "... the depression of commerce, want of employment and deep poverty",<sup>14</sup> and Sunderland was troubled by, "depression of commerce, and the privations of large masses of people...".<sup>15</sup> As in most previous disturbances the agitators of the late 1830's and 1840's came from within the ranks of those most affected by the economic troubles of the period. In 1839 Bunting was informed from Hull that:

"With one or two exceptions, chiefly of Leaders in humble circumstances in life or junior Local Preachers, the influential men of this circuit were almost all in the majority".<sup>16</sup>

As in the past, Bunting and many of the Ministers seemed to be relieved when radicals left the Connexion. In 1838 P.C.Turner told Bunting:

"The loss of the radicals has been of incalculable benefit to the Circuit".<sup>17</sup>

As economic conditions worsened, Bunting received letters with suggestions for preventing disruptions. From Leeds, Bunting was . . . .

<sup>14</sup> MCA MSS. Alexander Bell to J.B., Sheffield, East, February 20, 1844.

<sup>15</sup> MCA MSS. W.D.Gay to J.B., Sunderland, January 28, 1845.

<sup>16</sup> MCA MSS. P. Duncan to J.B., Hull, July 10, 1839.

<sup>17</sup> MCA MSS. P.C.Turner to J.B., Devonport, June 13, 1838.

informed that, "a more vigilant Pastoral Oversight of our people is needed. Everywhere it seems to be a growing opinion that without greater attention to pastoral visitation, we shall lose ground as a community in the country".<sup>18</sup> From the correspondence it is apparent that the Ministry continued to see the old cures as being the panacea for Connexional troubles. It is equally apparent that the Ministry continued to follow the Bunting line. In 1841 a Minister wrote:

"The Circuit is ruined for want of more conservative feelings".<sup>19</sup>

In reference to his Circuit, W. Vevers equated the "sober minded" as being "orthodox", and went on to say that they were not "addicted to lawless proceedings".<sup>20</sup>

In the face of this continued disorder<sup>21</sup> Bunting seems to have offered more cautious solutions than would seem in character.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18</sup> MCA MSS. R. Newstead to J.B., Leeds, August 31, 1844.

<sup>19</sup> MCA MSS. Abraham E. Farrar to J.B., Bristol, April 5, 1841.

<sup>20</sup> MCA MSS. W. Vevers to J.B., London, December 14, 1844.

<sup>21</sup> MCA MSS. Samuel Dunn to J.B., London, September 14, 1844.  
"That in 1842, I left Dudley Circuit, 1775;  
members. There are now 1521. Decrease - 254".

<sup>22</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to Abel Dernaly (Appleby) Lond, October 29, 1836.

Regarding a legal problem Bunting wrote:

"Unless I was on the spot, or familiar with all Local circumstances, I can form no very decided opinion on cases, where the question sometimes involves points of legal nicety, and always enquiry, not merely what is right and just, but what is expedient. It is not every legal right that is worth while to depend by legal rights".



To William Binning he wrote:

"Advise firmness, faithfull testimony,  
a little patient delay, warning,  
private reasoning with the members,  
gradual introducing of sound leaders:-  
If these fail, invite the Chairman  
or obtain a deputation from the  
District Meeting to meet the  
leaders, and strengthen his hands".<sup>23</sup>

Binning continued to have trouble with his leaders. In March 1845

Bunting wrote advising him:

"I have no power to decide officially.  
Before a judicial decision, I must hear  
both sides. If a decision must be had  
the regular methods must first be adopted.  
Put the leading delinquents on their trial  
and the leaders meeting (and if Trustees,  
the other Trustees must be summoned) then  
according to the min. of 1835. But, if  
possible, avoid this crisis for a time,  
and take the direction of the district Mg.  
in May, who might appoint a Deputation to  
Lynn. If delay cannot now be suffered, invite  
two or three senior Preachers with your  
Chairman to pay a friendly visit to Lynn, or  
come to London and take council here etc. etc." <sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to William Binning, February 14, 1845.

<sup>24</sup> MCA MSS. William Binning to J.B. Lynn, March 8, 1845.

It has been noted that the Ministry obviously continued to support Bunting for in their letters they expressed similar theories for discipline and Connexional order. In 1846 James Kendall wrote the following letter to Bunting.

"I love prosperity but do not love the practical resignation of pastoral authority. If the next Conference should refuse to do something decisive to make every man keep his proper place, sad work will follow. It seems dangerous to meddle with old ways of doing things when one sees good done, and equally dangerous to see order, subordination, and wholesome ecclesiastical discipline set at utter defiance".<sup>25</sup>

The year 1840 saw a temporary improvement in economic conditions, especially in Manchester.<sup>26</sup> The resulting relaxation of tension within the Connexion was caused not only by the improvement of trade but by what many Methodists saw to be a major change in Conference policy toward the Establishment.

This relaxation was partially brought about by the Conference stand on the major education bills of the period. In 1832 the

<sup>25</sup> MCA MSS. James Kendall to J.B., Chesterfield, January 5, 1846.

<sup>26</sup> MCA MSS. R. Alder to J.B., Manchester, February 20, 1840.

government attempted to introduce a Bill into Parliament for the improvement of the Irish Education System. Faced with the problem of Catholic vs. Protestant the government attempted a compromise. It was ~~through~~<sup>thought</sup> that religious instruction could be maintained in the integrated schools if passages from the Bible were carefully selected and showed no influence of "any particular view of Christianity, doctrinal or practical".<sup>27</sup> The opponents of the Irish scheme were able to reduce their objections to the level of a debate over the propriety of setting up schools from which the Bible was excluded. During the parliamentary session of 1832 petitions poured into Westminster in opposition to the Bill.

As in the cases of the two previous education controversies, Bunting carefully weighed the subtle implications of the bill and came out against the government. Bunting argued:

"In a very able speech against the opinion of those who would have treated this as a mere political question with which the Conference ought not to intermuddle. He pointed out how the proposed scheme must work to strengthen Popery, which would thereby receive an implied public sanction; and he exposed and denounced what he called the essential latitudinarianism of the plan".<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Smith, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 396

<sup>28</sup> Bunting, op. cit., p. 637.

To Edmund Grindrod Bunting expressed his personal views on the scheme.

"I know not how you view the new Irish Education scheme. The Irish Preachers and people are, almost to a man, strongly hostile to it, and so, after much, and careful examination, so am I. It seems to me well intentioned perhaps, but bad in principle, utterly mistaken as a measure of policy, founded on assumptions instead of facts, and in its practical bearing both on strict Catholics, on Protestants and on the half-enlightened and inquiring class of nominal Popists, who now send their children in large numbers to Bible schools, inconceivably mischievous ".<sup>29</sup>

Bunting's position on the Irish Education system was vastly different from his stand on Brougham's Education Bill of 1821.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to Edmund Grindrod, Liverpool, May 1, 1832.

<sup>30</sup> MCA MSS. James King and Others to J.B., Carlisle, March 9, 1821.

"Our comtee of Priv. does not view the bill in so alarming a light. Party interests and petty considerations shd. not hinder so great an object. Particular clauses it is desirable to have omitted or modified; to this the com. will attend in due time. But as to opposing the Bill in toto and limine, this wd. on our part be unbecoming and improper".

Those individuals who opposed Bunting's continued efforts to maintain his 'special relationship' with the Establishment saw in Bunting's position of 1832 the possibility of a turnabout in Conference policy.

In 1839 the government attempted the introduction of another education bill. Lord John Russell, through a minute in Council, introduced what has become known as the National Elementary Education Scheme. The intention of the government was to extend the work of the 1834 Parliamentary Act by granting an additional £10,000 for educational purposes. Included in the government's bill was a clause that, though the Bible was to be used, it was to be from a version <sup>Not</sup> objectionable to Protestant community.

For a second time Bunting and the Conference came out against the government. The Ministry realized that in order to prevent passage of the bill an alternate plan must be prepared. John W. Gabriel wrote to Bunting proposing an alternate scheme.

"... Last evening I had a considerable conversation with Mr. Dunn the Sec. of the Borough Road School during which he deplored the want of union amongst the religious societies. He especially pointed out the great advantage that would result if united upon principles of

"obtaining aid from government for the establishment and support of schools leaving the mode of religious instruction and the regulation and control of the school entirely in the hands of those religious societies who would appoint responsible committees of their own for this purpose.

Being devoted to the cause of the religious education of the young I have consented to this if possibly I may in the very smallest degree, be instrumental in averting a state national education system and be auxiliary in promoting means by which the extension of Methodistical education may speedily be effected throughout the land...." <sup>31</sup>

Bunting's efforts against Russell's bill were greatly aided by Lord Ashley who sent Bunting a copy of the Government plan.

"I have sent you the new plan of Education - it is well worthy of attention. You will see the paragraph marked 1. gives powers for the distribution of public money in support of Popish schools founded on the principles of the central school society.

By paragraph 2. the committee retain a power of inspecting and .....

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<sup>31</sup> MCA MSS. John W. Gabriel to J.B., London, March 4, 1839.

"so in fact controlling the schools which may have received a grant from the national funds. I don't know what the Wesleyan body may think of such conditions; I hope the Church of England will reject them".<sup>32</sup>

Again in the same month, Ashley wrote a confidential letter to Bunting.

"Notwithstanding Mr. Gibson's speech and principles, he will be returned to Parliament, I fear, by the vote of Wesleyans. I have sent you Mr. Fitzroy Kelly's letter, which describes the state of things. It's a terrible affair: I know full well and appreciate your difficulties".<sup>33</sup>

Ashley's fears were well-founded. Bunting had received, in March, a letter which inferred the apparent ignorance of the Methodist voters:

"I find great ignorance prevailing amongst our people upon the subject; whilst some are even beginning to regret that they signed our late petitions to Parliament against the late Ministry and Liberals (so called)

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<sup>32</sup> MCA MSS. Lord Ashley to J.B., June 7, 1839.

<sup>33</sup> MCA MSS. Lord Ashley to J.B. confidential, July 1839.

"to wish for a plan of National  
Education which shall exclude all  
religious tuition".<sup>34</sup>

Unfortunately for Methodism and the Protestant cause their efforts were unrewarded. In spite of his failure, Bunting's stand probably eased the tension within the Connexion, by appearing to confirm the break up of the special relationship between Conference and the Establishment. In the Conference of 1841 Bunting publicly stated that:

"Unless the Church of England will protest against Puseyism in some intelligible form it will be the duty of the Methodists to protest against the Church of England".<sup>35</sup>

Bunting's anti-Establishment stand invoked letters applauding his work:

"... we are delighted with the truly Wesleyan part you are taking on behalf of our insulted Protestantism..."<sup>36</sup>

Bunting remained consistent in his stand against the educational schemes of the Government. Again in 1843 he led

<sup>34</sup> MCA MSS. Robert Maxwell MacBain to J.B., Newark, March 7, 1840.

<sup>35</sup> Gregory, op. cit., p. 317.

<sup>36</sup> MCA MSS. John McLean to J.B., Sheffield, June 25, 1839.



Methodism, in an alliance with the rest of English Nonconformity, against the Government Bill, for "Regulating the Employment of Children and young persons in Factories and for the Better Education of Children in Factory Districts". It was felt that the Bill would in fact hand over the elementary education of children, in certain districts, to the clergy of the Established Church. Abraham E. Farrer in a letter dated 1843, wrote that he felt the interests of Methodism were being compromised.

"The Bishop of London acts only in consistency with his avowed sentiments, in attempts to gain for the Church exclusive influence and the whole cannot securely be regarded as less than designed to upset our institutions in the most populous districts of the nation, and to strike a blow as fatal (yet more insidious) as the Bill of Lord Sidmouth.. The whole party publicly hold and avow, that everything is to be discarded which cannot be brought within the pale of the Established Church and that all our efforts put forth during nearly a century in raising congregations and societies, building expensive places of worship, collecting thousands of children in Sunday Schools, desiring only to share the lot of the Socialism and Chartism of the day - and ought to be swept aside to make an open

"platform for the full operation of the Oxford Tractarians. Now 'an evil tree cannot bring forth good fruit', and tho' it may seem presumptuous, to seem even remotely to suspect that you will not give the subject in your committees the most mature consideration or that you can by any possibility be wrapped in your judgements by the insidious mode in which the measure is put before the Senate, you will grant me credit for at least being anxious that nothing should be permitted, so far as we can prevent it, that may impinge . . . up our Protestant Liberties and Wesleyan Principles".<sup>37</sup>

Feeling was high amongst the Methodists; E. Exley told Bunting that:

"A meeting had been held in the large Subscription Rooms (to discuss the Education Bill now pending in Parliament) which were crowded to suffocation...."<sup>38</sup>

In the face of this Government threat the Wesleyan Methodists rose to the occasion and sent 5,332 petitions to the Government containing 519,628 signatures.<sup>39</sup> Their tremendous

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<sup>37</sup> MCA MSS. Abraham E. Farrer to J.B., Liverpool, March 31, 1843.

<sup>38</sup> MCA MSS. E. Oxley to J.B., Exeter, April 29, 1843.

<sup>39</sup> Smith, op. cit., Vol. III, p. 437.

efforts were successful and the Methodist-Nonconformist alliance, was able to force the most powerful English Government since 1832 to withdraw the Bill.

The year 1845 saw yet another Government attempt to subsidise education, this time in the form of an increased grant to Maynooth College in Ireland. Bunting threw all his energy against the proposed Government endowment but with little success.<sup>40</sup> Bunting wrote in 1845

"I now see no objection to an anti-Maynooth petition to the Lords from Didsbury. The business is hopeless unless Providence signally interposes. But it is important, that the protest against the abandonment of what is left of our national Protestantism should be as marked and extensive as possible. This will make the sin in some sense, perhaps, rather less national".<sup>41</sup>

Bunting's efforts failed and the Government scheme, though in a watered down form, passed through Parliament.

By 1845 Bunting had developed a seven-year tradition of anti-Government actions. Though it cannot be said with any

<sup>40</sup> Bunting, op. cit., p. 687.

<sup>41</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to George Osborn (Manchester) London, May 28, 1845.

certainty how much, if any, respect Bunting gained for this, he must have at least eased the minds of many Connexional malcontents. Dr. Dixon proposed the following motion at the Conference of 1845 which showed a general satisfaction with Bunting's policy.

"I rise to propose in addition to the vote, especial thanks for his faithful defence of Protestant principles in opposing the Maynooth grant".<sup>42</sup>

The motion was carried unanimously.<sup>43</sup>

To the opposition within Conference it must have seemed that Bunting's new policy towards the Government was to be permanent, especially when he began to take such an overt interest in national Protestantism, by becoming a member of the Evangelical Alliance in 1846.<sup>44</sup> It was therefore naturally thought that when Lord John Russell proposed his educational bill of 1847 Bunting would lead the Conference in active opposition to it. E. Baines wrote to Bunting to inform him of Russell's Bill.

"You will probably have seen, from the London papers that Lord John Russell announced last night his intention to 'persever' with the minutes of Council,

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<sup>42</sup> Gregory, op. cit., p. 382.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>44</sup> MCA MSS. Alfred Barrett to J.B., Liverpool, 1845.

"and to bring forward the vote for education on the 19th April.

A little month, then and an Educational Dictatorship is to be established in England. A measure is to be sanctioned, which will inflict a deeper wound on civil liberty and voluntary religion than any measure of modern times. Education is to be enslaved. The electors and working class are to be corrupted; and an important and irretrievable step is to be taken towards the state endowment of all religions in this country.

May I take the liberty of entreating that, if you see this measure in the same alarming light as myself, you will from this moment, devote your whole energies to every lawful and constitutional form of opposition to the Government proceeding; and that you will not remit your exertions till either the measure is sanctioned by Parliament, or Ministers are compelled to bow before an overwhelming expression of public opinion?

It is possible to defeat the measure, but not without efforts altogether extraordinary, and such as can only be inspired by an ardent love of liberty, and a strong sense of Christian duty ... Pardon this

"intrusion and exhortation from one who is absorbed in a sense of the danger that threatens the Country".<sup>45</sup>

As in the case of Russell's first Bill of 1839, Lord Ashley sent a confidential letter to Bunting with instructions how to best present Methodism's objections before the Privy Council.<sup>46</sup> But instead of denouncing Russell's bill, Bunting supported the decision of the Committee of Privileges, who did nothing more than point out what it thought to be defects in the scheme. The Government Committee in Council corresponded with the Wesleyan Committee of Privileges and:

"... Thus many fears were dispelled and in some important particulars, the plan was modified at their suggestion... The United Methodist Committee consented not to oppose the minutes, while they reserved to themselves the Liberty of acting as they might find necessary in case of any future change in regard to the assurance now given".<sup>47</sup>

Bunting, in agreement with the Committee of Privileges, found others who had similar thoughts.

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<sup>45</sup> MCA MSS. E. Baines to J.B. Private Leeds, March 23, 1847.

<sup>46</sup> MCA MSS. Lord Ashley to J.B., private and confidential, April 3, 1847.

<sup>47</sup> Bunting, op. cit., p. 698.

"I trust there will be no pandering in this instance to the anti-Church and state, alias purely dissenting objects of the party who are decrying the Government New Scheme. I myself can see, that its main principles are sound, and such as if generally... understood and adopted will prevent in future years the possible introduction of a purely secular, alias semi infidel movement".<sup>48</sup>

The Conference stand on Russell's bill contributed to shattering the uneasy peace of the Connexion. In the eyes of the opponents to Conference Bunting had sold out to the Government. After being constantly against the Government Educational Schemes, Bunting was seen to have returned Conference<sup>49</sup> to its old policy, a policy abhorrent to the malcontents. To many, Conference was seen to be without principle, and therefore not to be respected or trusted. By 1849 Conference was faced not only with the inherent problems in Manchester and Liverpool, compounded by the Everett and Beaumont storms, but with the additional problems caused by the

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<sup>48</sup> MCA MSS. Thomas Cutting to J.B., Bramley, March 13, 1847.

<sup>49</sup> MCA MSS. Edward Baines to J.B.jr., Leeds Mercury office, June 14, 1839.

"Dr. Bunting's eminence as the acknowledged head (by influence and talent) of the Wesleyan body..."

This letter was in reference to an article printed by Baines in the Leeds Mercury.

slumping economy and the bad feeling created by the Conference policy in respect to education.

Following the Associationist crisis, the Liverpool and Manchester Circuits were once again restored to order but failed to regain their lost prosperity. The damage to Methodism seemed to be worst in Liverpool. The Leeds Street Chapel suffered such considerable losses that in 1837 it was pulled down and the stones used in the construction of a new Chapel in Great Homer Street. When completed, this Chapel became the most select of all the Liverpool Chapels, rivaling even Brunswick Chapel.<sup>50</sup>

In the South Circuit efforts were made to replace the lost numbers, and these were successful enough to instigate the foundation of two new societies, and for the erection of four new Chapels. But in the crowded centre of Liverpool the Wesleyan Movement was beginning to fail. Attempts to increase numbers ceased, and the class system was no longer working.<sup>51</sup>

The troubles in Liverpool were caused not only by the disruption of 1835 but also by the growing indebtedness of both the North and South Circuits. In the Conference of 1845, Dr. Beaumont said:

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<sup>50</sup> Sellers, op. cit., p. 168.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.



"These debts are the scotching of our wheels. We are so bothered with making both ends meet that we are weakened morally and damaged evangelically".<sup>52</sup>

The problem of money was an equally important factor in Manchester as well as in the rest of the Connexion. Joseph Fowler attributed much of the unrest to the fact that, "we are building enormous Chapels with enormous debts".<sup>53</sup>

The leader of the Anti-Conference party in Liverpool was the Rev. Dr. Beaumont, who had become a personal foe of Bunting during the debate in Conference over the 'Wesleyan Takings' in 1841.<sup>54</sup> During the Conference of that year, Bunting read a minute from the London District Meeting which referred to the 'Wesleyan Takings'. The minute included the names of individuals suspected of writing the pamphlet. Dr. Beaumont's name was read aloud by Bunting before Conference.

In the face of the accusation Dr. Beaumont stepped into the dock and said:

"I have never written a word to which I was ashamed to put by name. But I do not think it for the honour of the body to prosecute this inquiry in this fashion; I object to it".

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<sup>52</sup> Gregory, op. cit., p. 385.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 301.

<sup>54</sup> Sellers, op. cit., p. 169.

Bunting answered:

"The book is a distinct attack upon Conference".

Beaumont:

"If we press this question any further we shall invest an ephemeral matter with an enduring interest and excite a ferment which it will be hard to settle or suppress".

Bunting:

"I complain of the personality of Dr. Beaumont's speech".

Beaumont:

"I complain of my name having been called in a question in my absence, in a District which had no jurisdiction over me, whatever, and on no evidence but that of a report continued in the very preface the truthfulness of which is at the same time denied. It is below the dignity of the Conference to notice such books/<sup>as</sup> the "Wesleyan Takings". I move the order of the day".<sup>55</sup>

At the end of the debate Bunting exclaimed:

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<sup>55</sup> Gregory, op. cit., p. 308.

"If Mr. Everett and Mr. Burdsall  
are censured, so ought Dr.  
Beaumont be".

Beaumont:

"I complain that the Conference  
should return upon its track  
to brand a name which has been  
passed ten days ago".<sup>56</sup>

In spite of all his efforts the brand was put on Dr. Beaumont's  
name. Needless to say, he was filled with bitter feelings of  
injustice.

"I leave the Conference with a  
new brand upon my brow which  
fools may mistake for a laurel".<sup>57</sup>

From this time forward Dr. Beaumont began a "deliberate policy of  
frustrating"<sup>58</sup> Bunting at every turn. Beaumont was able to  
exploit the unrest in the Liverpool Circuit; in 1842 William  
Vevers wrote to inform Bunting that:

"Our cause is very low in this important  
town. Our prospects were so very  
disheartening, I signified to our  
Stewards my intention to leave next  
Conference".<sup>59</sup>

Beaumont exploited this situation by inviting the touring American

<sup>56</sup> Gregory, op. cit., p. 310.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 314.

<sup>58</sup> Sellers, op. cit., p. 169.

<sup>59</sup> MCA MSS. William Vevers to J.B., Liverpool, May 20, 1842.

Minister, Caughey, to preach in his Chapels<sup>60</sup> and then opened cordial relations with the Associationists. Support was given to the Liverpool non-denominational Mission and Beaumont led Wesleyan participation in Temperance affairs. Beaumont's intention was to destroy the 'Church Methodist' character of the Liverpool Wesleyans. To the end he was greatly aided by the disturbed state of the Liverpool Circuit and the Connexion as a whole; especially when the Conference stand on Lord John Russell's bill of 1847 became known.

The Conference of 1847 was held in Liverpool and for the first time Bunting found himself faced with an opposition led by a Minister who was able to compete with him for support from the wealthy, propertied members of the laity. Beaumont and his followers denounced the actions of Conference regarding the 'fly sheet' controversy and cried out against the expulsion of Dunn, Everett, and Griffith. In addition Beaumont and his followers took up the Associationist cry for lay representation in Conference, and decried the Conference's new policy of co-operating

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<sup>60</sup> MCA MSS. William Atherton to J.B., November 13, 1846.

Atherton, the president of Conference, wrote to inform Bunting that, "James Caughey is still causing a 'difference of opinion among the Ministers in the Midland and Northern districts..." Atherton went on to request Bunting to, "prepare something in your own clear guarded manner for the purpose. If we have time we may converse on the matter Monday morning".

with the state in educational matters'.<sup>61</sup>

The recovery in Manchester was along the same lines as it was in Liverpool.<sup>62</sup> As in Liverpool the Manchester Circuits expanded in the suburbs, but in the crowded and depressed city centres discontent prevailed as a result of the changed social structure of the Chapels and the economic distresses. The realm of finance was the first area hit by the change in the structure of the congregations. The Chapels in the working-class areas were:

"Poorly attended.... suffered from the mobility of population and lack of strong leadership and adequate financial resources".<sup>63</sup>

The result of the economic troubles meant:

"Consideration, prayer, and penitence are at a low ebb... The factory system is unfavourable to habits of economy; and when distress comes, it is like an 'armed man', Turbulence is ready to trouble the people whenever want presses. The weak as well as others are misled..."<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Sellers, op. cit., p. 171

<sup>62</sup> Gowland, op. cit., p. 75.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>64</sup> Gowland, op. cit., p. 77.

Indeed finances seemed to be the root of the troubles during the 1840's. A prosperous Manchester layman wrote to Bunting refusing to contribute to the Connexional fund due to the economic distress saying:

"The cloud is still thick upon us...  
I really must also be excused  
giving you the names of friends  
to apply to. These times one  
scarcely knows the position of  
ones nearest and dearest relations  
and friends..."<sup>65</sup>

The economic depression brought a halt to the post-Associationist expansion. And again, as in Liverpool, the Chapels in the midst of the working class populations, shackled with burdensome debts suffered most. The result of these hard times was that the Manchester dissidents became as active as any in the Connexion.

Manchester was the city chosen to host the Conference of 1849, and for Methodism a worse choice could not have been made. Manchester was the symbol of the reformist mood, and was ripe for revolution. The Conference of 1849 was faced with the greatest reformist controversy in the History of Wesleyanism.<sup>66</sup>

The mouthpiece of the reform movement was the anonymous publication known as the 'Fly Sheets' which for five years had been

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<sup>65</sup> Gowland, op. cit., p. 78.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

attacking the Conference and in particular Bunting. The 'Fly Sheets' were not unsuccessful and gradually eroded some of Bunting's support by drawing attention to the Conference's failure to relieve trustees of the heavy burdens of debt, an issue not without supporters throughout the Connexion.<sup>67</sup> The attacks on Bunting centred on what many considered to be the great accumulation of power, and the centralization of Wesleyan Government. They found many listeners among the members of the laity. Neither of the arguments were new. As early as 1840 Thomas Fletcher wrote to Bunting on the topic of central Government.

"Our District Meeting at Birmingham considered the London letter, and after some objections agreed to an examining committee appointed by Conference. I hope something will be done to that effect. Some of the preachers appeared to be rather jealous of too much power being concentrated in the Metropolis".<sup>68</sup>

The Wesleyan reformers attacked the centralized Government of the Connexion, the very core of Bunting's influence.

"The Connexion is governed - not by Conference but by London; London by

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<sup>67</sup> Gowland, op. cit., p. 79.

<sup>68</sup> MCA MSS. Thomas Fletcher to J.B., Evesham, June 5, 1840.

"Dr. Bunting; and Dr. Bunting by the  
lay lords".<sup>69</sup>

In the past the reform movements had been handicapped by their local nature; but the disturbed economic conditions existing throughout the Connexion, the national propaganda of the reformers, and the influential Ministerial Leaders within the reform movement were to mean that the troubles of 1849 were to be the most serious Methodism had ever experienced. Manchester was greatly affected by the 1849 reformers for three reasons: it was the seat of Conference for that year; Everett was very popular in Manchester; and, like many other cities in the Connexion, it was suffering from the economic distresses of the period.<sup>70</sup>

The Manchester Conference voted to expell Everett 'with but two dissentients'.<sup>71</sup> Griffith and Dunn were expelled when they failed to comply with the recommendations of the disciplinary committee.<sup>72</sup> Everett was never proved to be the editor of the 'Fly Sheets' though it was strongly suspected that he was.<sup>73</sup> Preceding the Conference, Bunting received the following letter.

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<sup>69</sup> 'Fly Sheets' 3,, p. 56.

<sup>70</sup> MCA MSS. T. Peet to J.B., Southwell, April 10, 1845.

<sup>71</sup> Gregory, p. 456.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 458

<sup>73</sup> Gowland, p. 94.



"A gentleman informed me a few days since that Smith of London has stated that he is the actual printer of the 'Fly Sheets', and that he printed them for Everett. The person who gave me this information had it off the individual to whom Smith himself made the statement.

I do not imagine that either of them would attend a court of law to give evidence, or consent to have their names mentioned in connection with it; But it has occurred to me that if you are not in possession of this fact, it may suggest some clue that might possibly drag the deed out of its darkness and be of service in these stormy days".<sup>74</sup>

Previous to the Conference of 1849 Dunn was involved in the disruption of a London Circuit.

"... They have had an awful Quarterly Meeting at Hinde Street. Samuel Dunn

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<sup>74</sup> MCA MSS. James Grose to J.B., Exeter, August 21, 1849.

"was proposed in opposition to Hardcastle, and carried amidst a storm of 'stamping', shouting, yelling such as is rarely witnessed. Only three had either the disposition or heart to vote against. Abraham E. Farrar excited and distressed. He and the stewards appear to have been taken wholly by surprise. But it is evident that there must have been secret plotting. I have had a long private talk with Thomas Jackson, who grows more confident than ever that decisive measures must be adopted, and he is rather pleased with the Hinde Street affair thinking it will hasten the crisis".<sup>75</sup>

The results of the expulsions are seen in the letter from William H. Clarkson to Bunting:

"I will endeavour to lay before you the present state of the Derby Circuits... 30 or 40 lay preachers had given up their plans because my predecessor, Mr. Stevenson, had altered the heading of the plan but he being advised by some of the Fathers of the Connexion to resume the former heading the lay preachers

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<sup>75</sup> MCA MSS. John Beecham to J.B., London, April 27, 1849.

"also resumed their labours. Yet this made them feel that they were of great importance and led them to conclude that they weilded a great power. The local preachers have kept to law and rule, and given me no trouble.

But no sooner did they learn that Messrs. Everett, Dunn and Griffith were expelled from connexion with the Conference, than they called a public meeting at which resolutions simply expressive of sympathy for them were moved, but the movers and seconders of the resolutions made remarks condemnatory of the proceedings of Conference...".<sup>76</sup>

The nature of the crisis following the expulsion of Everett, Dunn and Griffith was similar to that following the Brunswick organ crisis. For on both occasions the overt cause was only the rallying cry for the redress of deeper grievances. The agitation which followed was wide spread and the defections many. Buntings prediction that the 'next struggle would be with the local preachers'<sup>77</sup> had been borne out.

The disruption spread far and wide. Robert Macbriar wrote

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<sup>76</sup> MCA MSS. William H. Clarkson to J.B., Derby, September 13, 1849.

<sup>77</sup> MCA MSS. Joseph Sutcliffe to J.B., Bayswater, June 17, 1850.

to Bunting from Nottingham saying that he had been accused by the radicals of being a 'Conference man',<sup>78</sup> and James Allen wrote from Yarmouth to say that:

"We are now in the midst of a great battle in this town for a constitutional principle and for religious order".<sup>79</sup>

In Langton the "Radical Members have found a loophole in the law. (Rule of 1797, vol. 1, p. 376)",<sup>80</sup> and Watmough, the preacher, was in need of Bunting's advice. Peter McOwan described the radicals as being of low character,<sup>81</sup> and from William Bacon, Bunting received a brief description of those supporting Conference.

"Most of our pious supporters and respectable people are with us in mind and heart, they have stood by us nobly in our Conflict with the radicals".<sup>82</sup>

As the agitation became more intense, some of the Ministers thought that "concession should be made to popular opinions".<sup>83</sup> But in spite of those isolated feelings the majority of opinion

<sup>78</sup> MCA MSS. Robert Maxwell Macbriar to J.B., Nottingham, July 5, 1850.

<sup>79</sup> MCA MSS. James Allen to J.B., Yarmouth, December 23, 1850.

<sup>80</sup> MCA MSS. A. Watmough to J.B., Longton, October 11, 1850.

<sup>81</sup> MCA MSS. Peter McOwan to J.B., Liverpool, January 11, 1850.

<sup>82</sup> MCA MSS. William Bacon to J.B., Lincoln, March 8, 1851.

<sup>83</sup> MCA MSS. Joseph Sutcliffe to J.B. 1850.

seemed to be for the maintenance of the traditional hard line. Bunting considered the reformers to be attempting to 'set the authority of the Conference at defiance'<sup>84</sup>. George Greenwood wrote against any innovation, especially in the form of lay representation.

"Admit laymen into the Conference and we destroy the foundation of Methodism the whole ecclesiastical superstruction will fall into ruins, and our present economy cease forever".<sup>85</sup>

Unfortunately Bunting was not his old self and was physically unable to withstand the rigors of a protracted struggle. Earlier he had written that he could no longer exert himself as he had done during the 'Warrenite days',<sup>86</sup> having been weakened by repeated illnesses throughout much of the 1840's.<sup>87</sup>

In spite of the seriousness of the reform agitation, Bunting's reputation as Conference leader suffered little among the regular Ministry, which included many younger Ministers.<sup>88</sup> During the period of the Connexion's gravest trouble, there are only two personal attacks found among the correspondence.

<sup>84</sup> Richard Chew, Life of the Rev. James Everett, p. 400.

<sup>85</sup> MCA MSS. George Greenwood to J.B., Bingly, January 4, 1850.

<sup>86</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to W. Gawtress Esq. Date unknown.

<sup>87</sup> MCA MSS. Bunting correspondence 1840-1843.

<sup>88</sup> Gowland, p. 94.

"Before you descend to the grave which if you had done so the day you entered the Ministry would have been a blessing to thousands, I wish to appeal to you, (if there is any grace left in you), to retire from the priesthood. Many daily pray to God to take you hence, many curse your name and memory as a character who has made more infidels than all the deistical writers put together. Your system through life has been the aggrandisement of yourself and family. Nearly all, with whom I converse, look upon you as a thorough heartless villain, hoping you will repent and cry for mercy, that mercy you never yet bestow on any one".

I am respectfully your friend

Henry J. Davis<sup>89</sup>

Letters like this were rare, and it was more common for Bunting to receive letters such as the one from Charles Cornell.

"I believe from my heart that out of the many thousands of our Israel, you are by God's Providence the only man that could at this awful juncture turn the adverse stream into its right direction and produce peace in our distracted Church".<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup>MCA MSS. Henry J. Davis to J.B., Birmingham, July 22, 1850.

<sup>90</sup> MCA MSS. Charles Cornell to J.B., Rochester, July 15, 1850.

Joseph Sutcliffe's prognostication of a "war of republican fury" was nearly right. One third of the Wesleyan membership seceded from the parent Church. It is not entirely wrong to place much of the blame on the shoulders of Bunting, for in the conflict of 1849 his policies were felt by many to be as obsolete as those of the elder ministers he criticised in 1814. After his election to the Legal Hundred, his policies remained unchanged as the conflicts of 1827, 1835 and 1849 bear out.

Without an understanding of the two previous agitations, the reform period of 1849 cannot be fully understood, for as Chew said in his Life of James Everett:

"The transactions of 1849 were not accidental occurrences, but links in long chain, they were in fact the outgrowth from what had preceeded".<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Chew, op. cit., p. 400.

## CHAPTER VII

The storm of reform which broke upon the Connexion in 1849 resulted in a loss to Methodism of 100,469 members out of a total membership of 358,277.<sup>1</sup> This sever loss has overshadowed the fact that the Ministry, during the same period, did not lose a corresponding percentage of its membership. Indeed, by 1853, the Ministry had suffered but a 10% decrease, a figure which includes aged and infirmed Ministers as well. The reform agitation had weakened the Connexion, but it is apparent that it had not weakened Bunting's seat of authority for the membership of Conference was virtually undisturbed. With a unanimous base of support it is conceivable that Bunting and his Ministers, in all sincerity, could not envisage the severe repercussions caused by their ability to thwart the reformers. It is also clear that lack of Pastoral Oversight must have weakened the Ministerial position, for the ratio of preachers to members fell from 1 : 281 in 1845 to 1 : 358 in 1850.<sup>2</sup> It is clear that the Constitutional

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<sup>1</sup> Gregory, op. cit., p. 494.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Hall, Circuits and Ministers....

Bunting's dependence on Ministerial support can be seen in Hall. In the years preceding the events of 1849 the ratio of Ministers to members fell significantly following 1845.

1845 - 1 : 281	1846 - 1 : 348
1847 - 1 : 342	1848 - 1 : 339
1849 - 1 : 348	1850 - 1 : 358

The ratio for the year 1845 is computed using figures obtained from:

MCA MSS. John P. Haswell to J.B., Exeter, March 3, 1846.



Authority of Jabez Bunting over Wesleyan Methodism was firmly based on the acquisition of the Ministry's support of his policies. Without that support his position would have been untenable.

Bunting's rapid rise within the Ministry has been discussed. It has been shown that he was "endowed by nature with a mighty voice of which he had perfect mastery".<sup>3</sup>

"His preaching power had marked him out for London, and his distinguished colleagues soon discovered in him other gifts of inestimable value to the Church".<sup>4</sup>

In London his natural abilities<sup>5</sup> were at once applied to the problems confronting the Connexion. Over the years:

"Bunting's statesmanship was to solidify and to consolidate the whole economy of Methodism, and to give to our economy homogeneity, cohesion vigour, and effectiveness".<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Gregory, op. cit., p. 517.

<sup>4</sup> Gregory, op. cit., pp. 517-518.

<sup>5</sup> Bunting, op. cit., p. 98. J.B. to Edward Percival, April 18, 1800. "You are perfectly right in supposing that Oldham is not the birth place of genius".

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 505.

Jabez Bunting was chosen by a leaderless Ministry to lead.

"He never sought office; it was office that sought him".<sup>7</sup>

While it was said, perhaps truthfully, "the whole Methodist Conference is buttoned up in a single pair of breeches", it must also be said that the Ministry not only tailored the breeches but perhaps buttoned them also. Bunting's position in the Conference is well known but it cannot be emphasised enough that his position was, "... earned and generally conceded to him by the Wesleyan Ministry".<sup>8</sup>

The position of ultimate authority is rarely one of universal popularity, but certain characteristics of Bunting's personality did nothing to enhance his reputation. Joseph Fowler claimed that he had the

"... unfortunate habit of  
saying bitter things and side  
taking in the Chair".<sup>9</sup>

At the Leeds Conference of 1828, when Burdsall was of the opinion that the first statement of the Leeds Non-Cons should be introduced to Conference, Bunting was heard to cry from the Chair, "It shall not be read!"<sup>10</sup> In 1831 in an outburst against Dr. Beaumont, Bunting cried:

<sup>7</sup> Gregory, p. 518.

<sup>8</sup> Smith, op. cit., p. 455.

<sup>9</sup> Gregory, op. cit., p. 75.

<sup>10</sup> MCA MSS. Minutes of the Leeds Conference 1828.

"He has no right to be here, and therefore no right to be heard. There must be something wrong with his head and heart".<sup>11</sup>

In 1835 during the debates over the Institute, Bunting, in a moment of passion, told Dr. Warren that, "this is the most unprincipled opposition I ever knew; and I speak advisedly".<sup>12</sup> Such outbursts did not entreat the opposition to treat him kindly. Bunting was certainly truthful when he wrote "... I have not yet attained the patience of Job".<sup>13</sup>

It is also apparent that, for the sake of expediency, Bunting had few compunctions about breaking rules.<sup>14</sup> Though these breaches of regular practice precipitated cries of ridicule from his enemies they were not without precedent.<sup>15</sup> In 1813 many

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<sup>11</sup> Gregory, op. cit., p. 108.

<sup>12</sup> Bunting, op. cit., p. 654-55.

<sup>13</sup> MCA MSS. J.B. to George Marsden, Sheffield, March 28, 1809.

<sup>14</sup> Currie, op. cit., p. 36.

<sup>15</sup> Etheridge, J.W., op. cit., p. 209.

"In the Conference of 1790 he (John Wesley) declared that preachers should no longer (for health reasons) preach 3 times a day. There was opposition to this idea but Wesley passed it. At this point in the argument the objectors ceased to press him; but as Dr. Clarke declares, 'they deceived him after all, by altering the Minute thus, when it went to the press:- no preacher shall any more preach three times in the same day, to the same congregation'".

thought the formation of the Missionary Society to be beyond the bounds of a Methodist Preacher. On the formation of the Sheffield District Missionary Society, Thomas Jackson wrote:

"Mr. Bunting and Mr. Watson were deputed from the zealous band of innovators, who had ventured in the provinces, to project, and to advocate, from town to town before it had obtained metropolitan sanction, the comprehensive plan of supplying funds for the support and extension of Wesleyan Missionary labours..."<sup>16</sup>

In 1815 Bunting made the unfortunate mistake of leading the way for Everett to break a Conference rule. In that year Everett and his Superintendent wanted to attend Conference but Conference rules forbade them both leaving the Circuit. In the words of Everett:

"The district committee, anxious to gratify both Mr. Naylor and myself found the rule in the way. What was to be done? Mr. Bunting relieved the brethren by stating that we might be allowed to attend, provided .....

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<sup>16</sup> Jackson, op. cit., p. 148.

"on reaching Manchester, we asked the President to be permitted to stay. The trick took. We acted accordingly, and were thus taught by this artifice, at once to keep and break the rule, as advised by Mr. Bunting and sanctioned by Mr. Barber, the President' ".<sup>17</sup>

With knowledge of cases such as the above Bunting's enemies were reinforced in their conviction as to his lack of principles.

Lastly, but perhaps the most damaging quirk of Bunting's personality was his "abnormal strength of will".<sup>18</sup> In the case of most of the serious agitations Bunting seems to have considered them as personal affronts, and as such, fought to the last breath in defence of his principles.<sup>19</sup> Gregory wrote, "What the poet said of Alexander was just and true of Dr. Bunting: 'He will not another man should cross his will' ".

With the evolution of Party Politics being inevitable in most large organisations, Methodism was not spared. In spite

<sup>17</sup> Chew, op. cit., p. 115.

<sup>18</sup> Gregory, op. cit., p. 540.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., op. cit., p. 518.

Gregory notes that Bunting had "prodigious staying power. It was apparently exhaustless".

of the flaws in his personality, Bunting found himself the nominal head of the largest party within the Methodist Church; a party which, for over 40 years, had as its base, the almost unanimous support of the Methodist Ministry.<sup>20</sup> It is therefore wrong to claim that there was any secret formula to Bunting's authority.<sup>21</sup> It is certainly true that Bunting's supporters held a predominant number of Connexional positions,<sup>22</sup> but as his supporters formed such a large percentage of the Ministry that it is difficult to see the Conference standing for anyone holding dissimilar opinions.

The majority of the Ministry first elevated Bunting to the position of ultimate authority and then contentedly (with the exception of those few in opposition) submitted to his policies. For four decades Bunting's 'party' was the major portion of the Methodist Pastorate. The Ministry had become so dependent on Bunting that not only did Edmund Grindrod write that "one master hand for the last generation has framed the great majority of the acts of our Conference",<sup>23</sup> but by the 1830's the Ministry could no longer function without the presence of Jabez Bunting in

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<sup>20</sup> It has been shown that the Ministry consistently supported Bunting with votes of confidence and of thanks.

<sup>21</sup> As Robert Currie does, p. 33.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. "In 1844 ten leading Buntingites held 89 committee seats..."

<sup>23</sup> Gregory, op. cit., p. 540.

Conference.<sup>24</sup> Joseph Fowler relates that at the Conference of 1837:

"At the morning session of the last Monday of Conference, Dr. Bunting not being present, only small miscellaneous matters were attended to. At last the President proposed the adjournment of the Conference, a very proper suggestion, as in Dr. Bunting's absence it appeared that nothing could be done. On the reassembling of the Conference, Dr. Bunting having returned, business was resumed".<sup>25</sup>

On the Conference of 1838 Fowler wrote, "The absence of Dr. Bunting occasioned considerable delay in business".<sup>26</sup>

The Conference's wilful over-dependence on Bunting is enough to denote satisfaction with his policies. In 1847 Dr. Beaumont recognised the Ministerial complacency and said to Conference:

"That's your error; that's your  
misfortune; that's the

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<sup>24</sup> Currie, op. cit., p. 33 and Gregory, op. cit., p. 375.

"For about thirty years the policy of Methodism had been shaped, and its policy determined, almost wholly by one master mind, who had taken alike the initiative, the elaboration, and the completion of its most important measures - had been its oracle, and the director of its movements".

<sup>25</sup> Gregory, op. cit., p. 250

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 259.

"misfortune of Methodism,  
that you are always moving  
special votes of thanks  
to Dr. Bunting".<sup>27</sup>

Surely when discussing the problems of the Wesleyan Methodist Connexion during the first half of the 19th Century one cannot single out Jabez Bunting as being entirely responsible for their cause. As George Smith points out, the wisdom of some of Bunting's policies can now be questioned, but it must not be forgotten that what ever was done in the name of Wesleyan Methodism was done with the sanction of the majority of the "wisest and best men in the Connexion". As the correspondence contains no hint of evidence that Ministerial support was given under duress of any kind the Conference must therefore accept a larger portion of criticism for the events during the first fifty years of the nineteenth century.

The Ministry granted Jabez Bunting the unvoted Masterhood of Methodism, "... a position no one but the founder himself has ever been allowed to wield".<sup>28</sup> Such was their support at the end of his career that he could say in 1857,

"Tell the Conference I regard  
my policy to have been right".<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Gregory, op. cit., p. 429.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 518.

<sup>29</sup> Gregory, op. cit., p. 494.



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