

Rev. John Dixon Long (1817-1894), whose 1857 book, *Pictures of Slavery in Church and State*, created a firestorm, and led to his facing disciplinary charges at the 1858 Philadelphia Conference session.

Abolitionist On Trial: Rev. John D. Long and the 1858 Philadelphia Conference

by Hannah Adair Bonner (2008)

Editor's Note: Hannah Bonner is a senior at Duke Divinity School and a candidate for ordained ministry in the Eastern Pennsylvania Conference. This article is based on a paper originally entitled "Awaking the Giant," which was awarded the 2007 Ness Prize for the best student paper in the nation on United Methodist history by the General Commission on Archives and History.

Meanwhile, THE BOOK which no Philadelphian dare publish, and which the Tract officers would not sell, is getting out all over the land. The first edition is gone, and the second in press. So the wrath of man shall praise God.¹

While many works have been given the honor of "Best Seller" or "Classic," the honor (or dishonor) of being referred to simply as "The Book" of a certain time and place is a privilege held by few. To hold such a title, a book must be capable of stirring up passions of many kinds, sparking such controversy that none can be unaware of *The Book*. Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* was such a volume, one that permanently altered the landscape of academic and religious dialog. On a more local scale was John Dixon Long's *Pictures of Slavery*. The unassuming tome was not an impressive piece of literature, yet was capable of working the people of Philadelphia into a frothing frenzy, and causing the slumbering Philadelphia Conference to rear up like a horse feeling the bite of the whip. In 1858, some viewed Long as a savior, some as a devil, but none viewed him with indifference.

¹"Omens," undated and unattributed newspaper clipping found among the papers of J. D. Long, in the archives at Old St. George's Church, Philadelphia. The article's source is unknown because Long did not salvage the citation, but merely cut the article out and pasted it onto page 7 of his first journal. Throughout this paper, whenever a clipping is without full citation, the same statement applies.

This all came to a dramatic climax at the 1858 session of the Philadelphia Conference, where Long faced disciplinary charges of slander against the Methodist Episcopal Church, filed by fellow preacher Thomas J. Quigley. The uproar created by *Pictures of Slavery* cannot be understood without examining the complex context of the “Border Conference” in the year 1858. This paper will attempt to illuminate the complicated and unique circumstances which led to the compromising of the Philadelphia Conference on the issue of slavery, as well as the personal circumstances that led Long to bear the burden of exposing the painful situation.

PHILADELPHIA AS A BORDER CONFERENCE

J. D. Long’s relationship to areas of the Philadelphia Conference below the Mason-Dixon line was a complex one. Long was a child of Maryland as well as a child of a slaveowner, and says as much on the very first page of his book. However, on the same page he speaks of his mother, Sally Laws Henderson, from whose “lips I received my first antislavery lesson.” Henderson was a devout Methodist of the old tradition, and as such, “Could she have had her way, no slave would ever have been held by any member of her family.”² Thus Long himself was born into a house divided, much like the divided denomination he later would serve. The Methodist Episcopal Church of his mother’s day that had once been radically anti-slavery, had become a denomination struggling between those who still allied themselves with the old teachings of Asbury and Wesley, and those who promoted a more “progressive” and conciliatory attitude towards slaveholders.³

This division among Methodists led to an official split at the General Conference of 1844 – fourteen years before Long’s trial, and nearly twenty years before the start of the Civil War – as the Methodist

²Rev. John D. Long. *Pictures of Slavery in Church and State; including Personal Reminiscences, Biographical Sketches, Anecdotes, etc. etc.* (Philadelphia: Published by the Author, 1857), 7.

³In the 1850s, many Methodists claimed to be anti-slavery, but not abolitionist, against slavery in principle as a moral evil, but also opposing abolitionism, which was thought too radical and likely only to result in schism and violence. Thus, Philadelphia Conference member Adam Wallace later wrote of his opposition to Long, “I voted in the interest, as I thought, of harmony, and to obviate an outbreak of unreasoning hostility...” See Joseph F. DiPaolo, *My Business was to Fight the Devil: Recollections of Rev. Adam Wallace, Peninsula Circuit Rider 1847-1865* (Acton: Tapestry Press, 1998), 180, 304-307.

Episcopal Church, South officially seceded from the ME Church over the issue of slavery. As one witness to the conference wrote:

The primitive antislavery sentiment of Methodism, too long dormant, now quickened by earnest discussion, had concentrated at a single point. The General Conference of 1844, under the control of this sentiment, had said to the slaveholding Methodists, who were constantly advancing their claims to toleration and endorsement, Thus far ye shall go, and no farther. It did not antagonize all slaveholding, nor explicitly condemn slavery generally, but it did say, There shall be no extension of the sphere of slavery; into the territory of the episcopacy slavery shall not go.⁴

In response to the anti-slavery action of the General Conference, the secession of the southern territories created the context out of which *Pictures of Slavery* would grow. Long's birth state was put in a precarious position when a committee, formed at the conference to deal with the details of the schism, presented a plan that "indicated a boundary line [and] provided for border Conferences, [with] stations and societies choosing their position..."⁵ This action placed the conferences of Baltimore, Philadelphia and Ohio into a compromised position. While they had been historically anti-slavery, they now had jurisdiction over territories that were in slaveholding states. "These conferences had territory located in slaveholding Virginia and Maryland, and difficulty was inevitable... [In 1847] an attempt was made to draw off, not only Baltimore Conference entire and unite it with the southern Church, but also the Virginia section of Philadelphia Conference."⁶ Thus, it is under-

⁴Lucius C. Matlack, *The Antislavery Struggle and Triumph in the Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York: Phillip & Hunt, 1881), 173. The spark for the division of the ME Church in 1844 was the disclosure that Bishop James O. Andrew had come into possession of slaves through inheritance and marriage, whom he claimed he could not legally emancipate. In an era when bishops were not stationed with a particular conference, but itinerated throughout the connection to preside over annual conferences, his continued service in the episcopacy was considered unacceptable by conferences in the north.

⁵*Ibid.*, 175.

⁶Charles Baumer Swaney, *Episcopal Methodism and Slavery: With Sidelights on Ecclesiastical Politics* (Boston: The Gorham Press, 1926), 161. See also DiPaolo, 304: "After the Methodist Episcopal Church split north and south over slavery in 1844-1845, the Peninsula became one of the hotly contested "border territories" over which both branches of Methodism claimed jurisdiction. Individual members and entire congregations seceded from the Philadelphia Conference to unite with the ME Church, South. Bitter feelings and even incidents of mob violence marked church life in the years before the Civil War."

standable that the Philadelphia Conference felt that it must tread softly at this time. On the one hand, it risked appearing to the abolitionists to promote slavery, and on the other hand it risked losing more of its jurisdiction to secessionist tendencies. The Philadelphia Conference, this center of border controversy, was a complicated conference to work within.

The dilemma faced by conference leaders was nothing, however, compared to the very real danger that their traveling preachers encountered on the peninsula of Maryland and Virginia. Many devout anti-slavery preachers were traveling the circuits in these slaveholding territories. Some were younger, but many were older men who had been preaching there since the time when Freeborn Garrettson was more than just a memory. John D. Long had traveled those circuits and formed friendships among the men who itinerated in those territories. Although Long had moved his family to Philadelphia, to keep his sons from being influenced by the slaveholders of the South,⁷ he still kept close with some of the men who preached there. The disputes that existed between the ME Church and the ME Church, South put his own friends into very real danger. In 1847, Rev. James A. Brindle, for instance, “was appointed preacher in charge of the Northampton Circuit, and was forced to leave the area late that summer for his own safety. Rev. William Spry (1806-1847) was preacher in charge of the dangerous Accomac Circuit that year until his death in November.”⁸ Both Brindle and Spry appear in Long’s personal correspondence during that fateful year. On June 7, 1847, Spry wrote to Long from Modest Town, Virginia. His bold words read:

On Saturday, the 29th of April, weak and feeble, I arrived at Onancock. On Sunday morning, I preached at that place. And in the afternoon at Sluitkill. At the latter place the mob met me. They raged and swore beastily. They prohibited my preaching at that place, and made awful threats. But your old white-headed friend was not to be intimidated. He did preach, and met class too.⁹

⁷Long, *Pictures of Slavery*, 7.

⁸DiPaolo, 16.

⁹The letter from Spry was found by the author tucked in between the pages of Long’s second journal. It is a testimony to the friendship that Long had with Spry that he kept the letter among his personal records. The churches mentioned on Virginia’s Eastern Shore are the ancestors of today’s Cokesbury United Methodist Church in Onancock, and Andrew Chapel UM Church (once known as Bogg’s Chapel) in Sluitkill Neck.



During the years before the Civil War, the Philadelphia Conference included both slave and free territory within its bounds.

Whether Long heard from Spry again is not known, but Long did save a letter from another friend, John S. Hazzard, who wrote to Long later in the summer to keep him abreast of the status of Spry, as well as Rev. Brindle. When Hazzard wrote from Denton, Maryland on August 12th, 1847, he declared that Long's friends were fleeing for their lives and that he was soon to join them himself. He wrote,

I have a letter from Br[other] Spry dated the 26th of July, great trouble in Virginia. Br[other] Brindle has had to fly for his life. Br[other] Spry is making arrangements to leave. He wrote to me to try and get him a house. I have written him that one can be had in this place, but whether he will come here or not, I can not tell.¹⁰

The pastors of the Philadelphia Conference were thus in a difficult position. They had the choice of preaching their consciences and perhaps fleeing on the one hand, or of striving to please their slave-holding hosts on the other. The very young Adam Wallace provides an example of this second option in his journals from the period. Rev. Wallace writes that rather than preaching against slavery as his forerunners had done he befriended the masters of the Methodist slaves:

I visited their "ole Mistas," who was not a Christian, and gained a good deal of her confidence. I held a conference with the slaves in a thicket one Saturday night, when some of them were meditating flight. I succeeded in dissuading the restless, and urged all to live as near to God as possible, pray for the salvation of their owner, and hold on a while to see what God might bring about.¹¹

Conference leaders were not clear about how to deal with the border territories; thus, each preacher judged by his own conscience what was of greatest importance. It must have been difficult for Long to hear of the danger his friends were in. It also must have been intimidating to publish a book that might surely mean he would no longer receive a warm welcome when going home.¹² The correspondence

¹⁰This letter from Hazzard was also found among Long's papers.

¹¹DiPaolo, 146.

¹²Long himself said, "A conviction that I ought to bear my testimony against the system by writing, now took possession of my mind. But difficulties loomed up before me - I should lose my friends, and would doubtless have to encounter persecution... My design was not to array the poor against the rich, or the colored against the white; but to array all classes against slavery as it existed in the Southern States of this Union." J. S. Lame, "Rev. John Dixon Long" in *The Philadelphia Methodist*, July 28, 1894 (See page 26).



Left: Rev. James A. Brindle was driven from his circuit on the eastern shore of Virginia in 1847. Right: Rev. Adam Wallace chose a more accommodating approach to slaveholders.

between Long and his friends reveals that the author of *Pictures of Slavery* was in no way detached from the situation about which he wrote, nor was he ignorant of the danger that he placed himself in by publishing the book. Long was a man deeply embroiled in the situation on the Peninsula who had no choice but to speak his conscience.

PHILADELPHIA AS A CENTER OF ABOLITIONIST EFFORTS

Although the situation on the Peninsula was difficult, it seemed that Philadelphia should have provided Long a safe haven in which to present his findings. The city of Philadelphia had been the birthplace of radical Quaker abolitionist efforts in colonial times. In 1776, the Society of Friends decided to make the freeing of one's slaves a condition for continued membership. They did not stop there, however, but insisted on paying their former slaves for the services they had rendered over the years, and on providing them with education and spiritual nurture. This kindness made it possible for there to remain a "close personal relation-

ship between Quaker masters and their one-time slaves, an interest which carried over with Friends of later generations into Negro education [and] Underground Railroad activity.”¹³

This posture had more difficult consequences for Quakers who lived in the areas of Maryland discussed above; “the price of such philanthropy for most of the Quakers of southern Maryland at least was emigration from their old homes.”¹⁴ For Quakers who had given up dozens of slaves, it was impossible to survive economically in an area that thrived on slave labor. When faced with a choice between continuing to own slaves and losing their plantations, they chose to lose their plantations. The ardor of such uncompromising determination greatly influenced John Wesley during those years as he carried on a correspondence with Anthony Benezet, leader of the Philadelphia abolitionists. In fact, Wesley’s pamphlet *Thoughts on Slavery* was “derived almost verbatim from one of Benezet’s tracts.”¹⁵ The effect of the Philadelphia Quakers upon Wesley can be seen in his writings against the arguments of some slaveholders that their actions were necessary:

Here also the slaveholder fixes his foot: Here he rests the strength of his cause. “If it is not quite right, yet it must be so: There is an absolute necessity for it. It is necessary we should procure slaves: And when we have procured them, it is necessary to use them with severity, considering their stupidity, stubbornness and wickedness.” I answer, You stumble at the threshold: I deny that villainy is ever necessary. It is impossible that it should ever be necessary, for any reasonable creature to violate all the laws of justice, mercy and truth. No circumstances can make it necessary for a man to burst in sunder all the ties of humanity.¹⁶

As the years continued, some Quakers became more temperate in their abolitionist efforts, while others remained at the very forefront of radical abolitionism. Lucretia Mott was one of these leaders. In 1838, twenty years before Long’s trial, Mott and other abolitionists in Philadelphia raised \$40,000 to build Pennsylvania Hall “to house the offices of the Pennsylvania State Anti-Slavery Society and to provide a

¹³Thomas E. Drake, *Quakers and Slavery in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), 78.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 82.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 91.

¹⁶John Wesley, *Thoughts upon Slavery* (Philadelphia: Joseph Crukshank, 1773), 38.

lecture room for abolitionist and other reform speakers.” Yet three days after the contributors had gathered for its dedication, an angry mob burnt the expensive edifice to the ground and continued along in their fury and “set fire to the Shelter for Colored Orphans, a Quaker philanthropy; raided a Negro church; and threatened individual Quakers and their houses.”¹⁷ The events of that night in 1838 reveal the side of Philadelphia that would react with hostility to J. D. Long’s book, *Pictures of Slavery*, when it was released twenty years later.

Despite such hostility, and due in part to the philanthropy of the Quakers, the freed slave population in Philadelphia was unique for many reasons. According to Lapsansky, “its size, wealth, stability, and access to resources in the white community were older and more pronounced than in other cities, and that it had a number of wealthy blacks as well as access to wealthy whites.”¹⁸ Not only was Philadelphia’s community of freed slaves the largest in the nation, it was also the most well-off, as an 1845 survey revealed, when it reported that “six Afro-Americans [were] among the city’s several dozen wealthiest people.”¹⁹ Long exhibited his own respect for the African-American community in Philadelphia when he wrote of their difference from the slave community,

Every candid man in the South will say so; if he will come to this city, and visit their eighteen or twenty churches; their splendid new Masonic Hall; their classical high school, with its colored professors from New England and Jamaica – a school such as I have never seen on the Eastern Shore of Maryland; their private day-schools, and their two beautiful cemeteries. Let him listen to their orators and lecturers, and then say, if he can, that these men are worse off than Southern slaves.²⁰

The visibility of the community and its many famous members caused tension and fury among Philadelphians that led to repeated violence between 1834 and 1849. Mob violence escalated from beatings to burnings and destruction. Any edifice that smelled of success or interracial mingling became targets for violence.²¹

¹⁷Drake, 156-157.

¹⁸Emma J. Lapsansky, “‘Since They Got Those Separate Churches’: Afro-Americans and Racism in Jacksonian Philadelphia,” in *American Quarterly* 32 (Spring, 1980), 60.

¹⁹Ibid., 57.

²⁰Long, *Pictures of Slavery*, 301.

²¹Lapsansky, 75.

GROWING COMPLACENCY

Officially, the Methodists of Philadelphia did far less than the Quakers to aid the persecuted communities of freed slaves. Philadelphia Methodists once had been at the forefront of anti-slavery activity and preaching, but had grown complacent. Two schisms had shaken the conference to its core. First, the split between the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Methodist Episcopal Church, South had placed Philadelphia Methodists in a precarious position. They treaded softly on the issue of slavery now, rather than boldly as they had in the past, because they feared losing more of their flock to the ME Church, South. The threat of further secessions was always on their collective mind.

In addition, an earlier split had complicated the relationship between white Methodists and slavery. In 1786, Richard Allen came to Philadelphia to aid the ministry at St. George's ME Church. Allen was a former slave who had been freed by the preaching of Freeborn Garrettson,²² and was a well-known preacher in his own right. Yet, Allen discovered that the experience of community he had found with Garrettson and Asbury was not mirrored in Philadelphia. A gallery was built in St. George's and the "colored people" were told to worship there. As Allen described the scene after they were interrupted at prayer, "We all went out of the church in a body... and they were no more plagued with us in the church."²³ Thus, in 1787, the African Methodist Episcopal Church was founded by the self-excluded members of St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church. This tragic split that occurred in Philadelphia did not go unnoticed by the rest of the ME Church. Richard

²²Garrettson, a Maryland native, recalled his repudiation of slavery just after his 1775 conversion: "As I stood with a book in my hand, in the act of giving out a hymn, this thought powerfully struck my mind, 'It is not right for you to keep your fellow creatures in bondage; you must let the oppressed go free.' ...till then I had never suspected that the practice of slave-keeping was wrong; I had not read a book on the subject, nor been told so by any - I paused a minute, and then replied, 'Lord, the oppressed shall go free.' And I was as clear of them in my mind as if I had never owned one. I told them they did not belong to me." Robert D. Simpson, *American Methodist Pioneer: the Life and Journal of The Rev. Freeborn Garrettson* (Rutland, Vermont: Academy, 1984), 48. It was Garrettson who convinced Richard Allen's owner "that at judgment day slaveholders would be 'weighed in the balance' and found wanting;" Gary B. Nash, "New Light on Richard Allen: The Early Years of Freedom," in *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., 46 (April, 1989), 336.

²³Will Gravely, "You Must Not Kneel Here," in *Christian History*, 18 (1999), 34. See also Alfred T. Day III, "Creaking Timbers and Conflicting Traditions: Richard Allen and the St. George's Walkout," in *Annals of Eastern Pennsylvania*, #4 (2007), 3-11.

Allen's friend, Bishop Francis Asbury, perhaps attempting to control the damage but certainly acting to validate Allen's leadership, arrived in Philadelphia to preach the dedicatory sermon for Allen's new church on June 29, 1794.²⁴ The Methodist hierarchy was aware that the Philadelphia Conference was not excelling in promoting racial unity.

Although the pulpit of St. George's in Philadelphia had once held anti-slavery leaders like Freeborn Garrettson and Richard Allen, it held them no longer. Instead, it held within its walls the shame and guilt of the wedge driven between white and black Methodists of Philadelphia, and the fear of driving another wedge within their conference if they lost the congregations in Maryland and Virginia to the growing ranks of the ME Church, South. The Philadelphia Conference had lost enough of its flock, and held tightly to what it had left, rather than taking any action that would risk damaging the fragile but positive relations. As the *Northern Independent* described the church at the time,

The [ME] Church, South does a wholesale business in human slavery; the North, a retail business in this abomination. On the score of consistency, the South has decidedly the advantage. It says that slavery is a divine institution and consequently takes it to its bosom. The Church North says, 'It is the vilest thing that ever saw the sun,' and yet refuses to thrust it out of its communion.²⁵

While these accusations of complacency were something that the Methodist Episcopal Church could tolerate – for their complacency was not a hidden sin but a public one – what they could not tolerate was the unearthing of more secret shames. The word was being passed around that there were actually pastors and preachers of the Philadelphia Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church who owned slaves. While the conference had made it a policy to tolerate slaveholding by laity in its southern territories, slaveholding by ordained clergy went against its official stance. Such rumors were being vehemently denied when J. D. Long's *Pictures of Slavery* was published in 1857. The book not only stated that southern preachers owned slaves, but that Philadelphia preachers, residing in the state of Pennsylvania, actually had connections to slavery as well. The book also described the

²⁴Elmer S. Clark, ed., *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, 3 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1958), II:18.

²⁵Swaney, 241.

conditions of slaves as something less than the pleasant Christian slaveholding that many touted. Long had been exposed to many atrocities while traveling the circuit, and wrote notes about them in his journal to be used later in the book. One such note reads,

A gentleman had iron collars made for his colored men and chains for the feet so that when they walked while at their daily labour, they could only step a certain distance, and could not run away. In the winter time he took a valuable negro woman and confined her in the poultry house (she had no clothing except her usual thin garments) without clothing for weeks and the only way she kept from being frozen to death was by catching the poultry and holding them to her feet and body.²⁶

Many northern Methodists had been wont to defend their southern slaveholding brethren, and perhaps themselves as well, by describing the slaveholding as “benevolent” Christian slaveholding and wholly unlike the type of slaveholding of the deeper south. However, this could no longer be done easily. Although the Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia refused to publish Long’s book, it was being published all over the North and being read not only by Methodists, but by secularists and Quakers. While the Methodists struggled to maintain some control over what their own flock read, they could not hope to maintain any control over what others read and how matters were presented through the press. J. D. Long saved many of the articles that mentioned his book and his trial and they numbered into the hundreds.²⁷

Articles about the situation appeared in Richmond’s *Christian Advocate*, whose editors wrote in protest that they thought “the Philadelphia Conference has a by-law against the admission of an abolitionist to its body.”²⁸ On the other side of the argument, authors praised the actions of Long, making of him almost a saint, or at least a martyr. Katy Carlisle wrote a poem published in the *Northern Independent* that described Long thus: “Thy name a target for Slavery’s darts, But Freedom’s proudest boast.”²⁹ Many in the conference came to the conclusion that something had to be done.

²⁶Handwritten note by J. D. Long on page 17 of his first journal.

²⁷The many articles that Long saved can be found pasted into his journals in the archives of Old St. George’s, Philadelphia.

²⁸Newspaper clipping, pasted into page 23 of Long’s first journal.

²⁹Newspaper clipping, pasted into page 5 of Long’s first journal.

OFFICIAL ACTIONS OF THE PHILADELPHIA CONFERENCE

When Quigley brought his charges against Long at the annual conference of 1858, it was to a body already tense over the question of how the book might affect relations with the ME Church, South. The conference had, as the *Richmond Christian Advocate* suggested, made it a policy not to aggravate its southern neighbors by accepting abolitionists. Word had reached Philadelphia in 1847 that Methodists in the Maryland and Virginia districts of the Philadelphia Conference were expressing concerns about the abolition activities in Philadelphia. Thus, on April 7, 1847, just a few months before Long's friends Hazzard and Spry had written to him about their flights from the circuit, the Philadelphia Conference sent a "Pastoral Address" to its societies in the Northampton and Accomack Circuits. The statement read in part:

We would ask you, brethren, whether the conduct of our ministry among you for sixty years ought not to be sufficient to protect us from this charge – whether the question we have been accustomed, for a few years past, to put to candidates for admission among us, namely: Are you an abolitionist? And without each one answered in the negative he was not received, ought not to protect us from the charge... we are not, and do not desire to be, abolitionists? ...[we are] as much as ever convinced of the great evil of slavery; but at the same time we know our calling too well to interfere with matters not properly belonging to the Christian ministry.³⁰

That was exactly the question upon which Long differed with the leadership of the conference; namely, what matters belonged to Christian ministry. For Long and many other preachers, the obligation to speak out against slavery could not be separated from the obligation to preach the Gospel, but was intertwined with it. The question of what pertained to Christian ministry was communicated by the conference through its criteria governing acceptance of preachers into conference membership. For years, applicants for ordination had to answer that they were not involved in slavery, but now the more pressing matter was whether or not they were abolitionists.

The second area where the conference's unspoken priorities towards slavery could be seen was in the books it chose to publish

³⁰J. Mayland McCarter, *Border Methodism and Border Slavery*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Collins, 1858), 17.

during this time. Controversy over antislavery materials was not new; in previous years, the publication of anti-slavery Methodist writings had officially ceased in the Methodist Episcopal Church. However, in 1856 the General Conference shifted this trend when it decreed that once again anti-slavery literature could be produced. The move towards this decision had started earlier that year when the Tract Secretary, Rev. Abel Stevens, began publishing Wesley's *Thoughts Upon Slavery* and Dr. Elliot's *Arguments On the Sinfulness of Slavery* without authorization, because "the circumstances of the case and the condition of the country required it."³¹ Many Methodists were beginning to realize that they could no longer ignore the distance that separated them from the teachings of their founders concerning slavery. At that time, the distribution of anti-slavery publications from the earlier years of the ministry seemed the most efficient remedy to the situation. Thus, when *Pictures of Slavery* was published the next year, it might seem to be coming off the presses at an opportune time.

However, the case in Philadelphia was not the same as that of New York, where Stevens' publishing business resided, and where the local Methodist bookstore was indeed selling Long's book on their shelves. Philadelphians did not have the freedom to publish whatever they desired. Unlike the conferences of Boston and New York, the Philadelphia Conference had slave owners within its membership, and avowedly supported their right to continue holding slaves. Thus, while Philadelphia Conference leaders refused to publish Long's book or allow it to be sold on their bookshelves, they were selling on their bookshelves in 1857 the controversial book by Tennessee author William G. Brownlow, *The Great Iron Wheel Examined*. Brownlow's book was a response to J. R. Graves' *The Great Iron Wheel*, a critique of Methodism, but also was unapologetically pro-slavery and was thought by some to even encourage violence against those who preached against slavery. For instance, Brownlow was furious that the Methodist Episcopal Church had split because one of the southern bishops "had selected a lady [as his wife] who owned a few slaves!"³² Further, Brownlow suggested that the author of *The Great Iron Wheel*, because of his anti-slavery rhetoric, should

³¹Matlack, 295-296.

³²William G. Brownlow, *The Great Iron Wheel Examined; or, Its False Spokes Extracted, and An Exhibition of Elder Graves, Its Builder In a Series of Chapters* (Nashville, 1856), 313.

“be interrogated, and forced to define his position at once, or leave the South in hot haste!”³³

The fact that Methodists were selling Brownlow’s book and not Long’s came to the attention of the secular press. John D. Long saved an article from *The Philadelphia Morning Times* of Thursday, July 16, 1857, entitled “A Piece of Gross Methodist Doughfaceism,” criticizing, in particular, the distribution of a book that seemed to celebrate the caning of Graves.³⁴ The secular press could not understand why the Methodists were distributing a book that encouraged violence against preachers who spoke against slavery, when their own pastors, men like Spry and Brindle, were in just such danger themselves. As the editor of *The Philadelphia Morning Times* wrote:

...this book – this vile, obscene, rowdy book – this book that justifies slavery and ruffianism, is sold and spread by the very gentry who are too squeamish to allow the sale of Mr. Long’s book! Messrs. Manship, Longacre, Heiskell & Co., are you not ashamed of yourselves? Is it thus that you diffuse morality and religion? Out upon your miserable dough-facery, which is so craven that it trembles at the bare apprehension of your Southern masters’ frown! Shame on ye! Glorious, brave, heroic, old John Wesley – he who hated slavery as the “sum of all villainies” – would refuse to own ye as followers! Sainted shades of Asbury, Coke, Abbot, Emory, Watson, and Fletcher – who were in your days such brave denouncers of all sin, slavery included – have your successors come to be such cowards that they dare not denounce a hellish wrong for fear of persecution or temporal loss? We intend no disrespect to Methodism... But it is for the members and ministry of the Philadelphia Conference to say, whether they will tamely submit to have a book of one of their ministers ostracized by the Pro-Slavery fanaticism or the unmanly cowardice of a few managers of their Tract Society.³⁵

The stage was now set for the Philadelphia Conference session of 1858. With the secular press, abolitionist papers and religious journals of the north writing to condemn the Philadelphia Conference,³⁶ and

³³Brownlow, 313.

³⁴Brownlow, 263 describes a scene in which Graves is beaten by a man in the street with the words “he served him right!” Page 262 contains a picture of a man celebrating and looking on with a smile as Graves is caned.

³⁵Newspaper clipping, pasted onto page 44 and 45 of Long’s first journal.

³⁶Long pasted onto page 41 of his first journal an article from *The Philadelphia Morning Times* in support of him: “And yet many of the Methodist ministers here in Philadelphia

William G. Brownlow (1805-1877) was a Methodist preacher, newspaper publisher and political activist from Tennessee. His pro-slavery book was being sold in Philadelphia's Methodist book-store, even while Long's *Pictures of Slavery* was not. In 1858, Brownlow was in Philadelphia for a debate with abolitionist Abram Prynne; it was later published as *Ought American Slavery to be Perpetuated?* Despite his views on slavery, Brownlow was fiercely pro-Union, and was forced to flee the South during the Civil War. He later served as governor of Tennessee during Reconstruction, and a US Senator.



churches in the slaveholding territories furious over the publication of the book, the conference had no simple solution. It had become common knowledge that the preacher and author, Rev. J. D. Long was going to have charges pressed against him at the conference. The charges had been published by Rev. Quigley, and all who were concerned about the slavery issue were interested in the outcome of the 1858 session.

The border territories of the ME Church had become the focal point at which tensions between slaveholders and abolitionists had no other option but to clash dramatically. The Philadelphia Conference was being singled out and analyzed because it seemed that their decision

and in the Conference give Mr. Long the cold shoulder, and frown upon him – because he has uttered his manly protest against a hideous crime, which they confess to be a crime, but are *afraid* to denounce. Courage, Mr. Long! What if many of your ministerial brethren do desert, oppose, or persecute you? Bishops and Doctors of Divinity are often blind to what humble men can easily perceive.” An adjoining clipping from *Zion's Herald*, a Methodist abolitionist paper, states quite boldly in opposition to the conference and in praise of the secular press' support of Long, “If the church will sell itself to slavery, we rejoice in an independent press to lash it. It certainly is not a very flattering indication to the Church that the moral sentiment of political papers is higher than its own.”

would have great bearing upon the direction that the Methodist Episcopal Church would take on the topic of slavery. As the editors of *The Richmond Christian Advocate* wrote, “the trial will define the status of the Philadelphia Conference on the subject of slavery; and, as one at least of its results, according to the finding, multiply the embarrassments of the slavery question in the next General Conference.”³⁷ It may not have been fair, but it was undeniable that the pressure of the entire denomination’s stance on slavery was being placed, by some, upon the shoulders of the Philadelphia Conference.

THE 1858 CONFERENCE SESSION

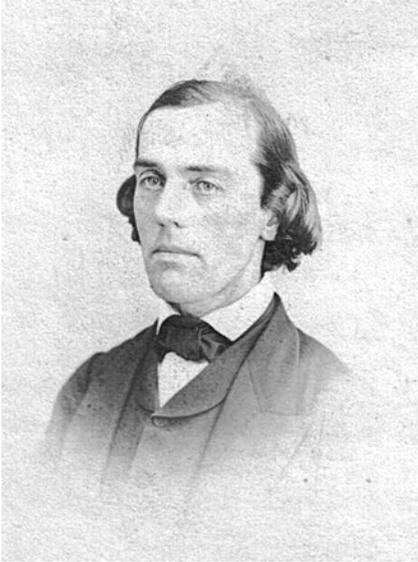
A great deal of attention and expectation were focused on the conference when it began on March 24, 1858 in Easton, Pennsylvania. The issue of J. D. Long’s *Pictures of Slavery* may not have been the first issue on the docket, but it was the first issue in everyone’s mind. Rev. James M. McCarter, one of Long’s supporters, gives a detailed account of the conference in his book *Border Methodism and Border Slavery*. It became increasingly clear to the members of the conference that while they refused to support J. D. Long’s book, they could not easily condemn it either. Throughout the conference session, the issue of slavery and the clergy’s connection to it arose repeatedly. The most notable case in the back of many of the members’ minds, according to McCarter, was that of the Reverend John Bayne, over a decade earlier. The case still held a great deal of weight in people’s memories because it was emblematic of the ability of Methodist ministers to conceal their sins. It was notable for the reason that when Bayne died, he left to his wife seven slaves in his will. The problem was that Bayne had kept his connections with the slaves so private that his wife had been shocked to learn that they existed.³⁸

At the Easton conference session, however, the first connection to slavery to be discussed was the case of the Reverend William Quinn, who had sold a boy slave to a trader. The act of selling a slave was more condemnable to many than the act of owning one, because if you sold a slave to a trader you didn’t know what kind of owner they would be taken to, and it could be one who did not hold his slaves in a Christian manner.³⁹ The second case of a clergyman connected to slavery was that

³⁷Newspaper clipping, pasted onto page 43 of Long’s first journal.

³⁸McCarter, 32-33.

³⁹Ibid., 46-47.



Left: Rev. William Warner was one of several ministers discovered to own slaves at the 1858 Philadelphia Conference session. Right: Rev. J. M. McCarter was a supporter of Long, and published an account of the proceedings. During the Civil War, McCarter served as a chaplain, and later a commissioned officer, of Pennsylvania troops.

of Rev. William Warner who owned several slaves, but had recorded a deed of manumission stating that his male slaves would be freed at the age of twenty-eight and his female slaves at the age of twenty-five. In addition, Warner had stated that he did not intend to dump their children out into the dangerous world, but intended to care for them by maintaining them as his slaves as well until the ages when their parents had received their freedom.⁴⁰ The final case to be brought up before the conference was that of the Reverend J. R. Merrill who was holding a male slave for life. Merrill defended himself by stating that the slave had a reputation as a drunkard, and so it was in his best interests to be kept in slavery. At this point, J. D. Long spoke up and stated, “Perhaps his state is the explanation of his crime. Seeing himself held in perpetual slavery by his owner – a Methodist preacher – he may have been driven to despair by his condition.” Despite Long’s protests, however, in all of

⁴⁰McCarter, 52-53.

these cases, the character of the men passed inspection and they were freed from suspicion. In addition, the conference voted that Rev. Merrill should be required to manumit his slaves, but this brought little relief to the abolitionists in the room, for “so it was in Mr. Quinn’s sixteen years ago; and in Bro. Bayne’s fifteen years ago.”⁴¹

The manumission of slaves meant very little in reality. It did not mean that the slaves were set free, but rather that the owners filled out documents stating that the slaves would be free when they were capable of caring for themselves, as in the case of Rev. Warner. In that case, for example, the slaves were freed at an age that was “four years past the average lifetime of a generation of unconstrained laborers.” Thus, while these pastors were escaping disciplinary action and the potential loss of their ministerial standing in the church by “freeing” their slaves, they were in fact doing no such thing. Rather, they were promising to free their slaves at an age when they were not likely to be alive, and not only this, but they would keep the children and the children’s children as well. Despite the fact that the General Rules of the ME Church prohibited “The buying or selling of men, women and children, with an intention to enslave them,” the conference voted to allow their clergy to keep their slaves until they were no longer of any use to them. Rather than freeing their slaves, the clergy were permitted to make a meaningless promise that neither changed the slaves’ current condition nor interrupted the continuation of their descendants’ enslavement.

The examination of J. D. Long’s character came up on the third day of the conference, in the very midst of these discussions about connections to slavery and manumission, and preceding the examination of Quinn, Warner and Merrill. The whole conference had been awaiting the opening of this topic because, according to McCarter, “Mr. Long’s book broke the silence which had so long reigned in the church upon two questions, often asked in all portions of the church above the border. Those questions were: ‘What is the character of the slave holding in the Methodist Episcopal Church,’ and ‘what is the degree of its prevalence?’”⁴² Rev. Quigley stood up and presented his charges that J. D. Long had misrepresented the conference, the clergy and the slaves of Maryland and Virginia. However, the intense anticipation that had accompanied the introduction of the topic fell far short of the excitement that had been promised. Rather than a heated debate, many

⁴¹McCarter, 57-58.

⁴²Ibid., 36.

members of the conference had prepared papers suggesting that the topic be dropped for lack of evidence. Rev. James Cunningham presented a proposal to the bishop that, “[t]he charges preferred by Rev. T. J. Quigley against Rev. J. D. Long, be not entertained.”⁴³ The statement was voted on, Rev. J. D. Long’s character was passed and, furthermore, the attempts of Dr. I. T. Cooper to create a committee to investigate Long and bring new charges was voted down. There would be no further investigation of J. D. Long and no further discussion of the topic. The conference was ready to put the issue to bed.

Thus, the conference was not able to satisfy either the pro-slavery parties, or the abolitionists. It did not vote to support J. D. Long or his book officially, but neither did it condemn his character and remove him from the conference. Thus, the southern portions of the conference still may have griped about the outcome, but the conference had managed to avoid giving them cause for secession.⁴⁴ Likewise, the abolitionists had not been supported, but neither had their worst fears been fulfilled concerning the “sacrifice of Br[other] Long” and the crushing out of “the growing anti-slavery sentiment.”⁴⁵ The Philadelphia Conference had sidestepped the issue and found a way to deny the burden of deciding. They had found a compromise, a skill that they had perfected through much practice. *The Christian Advocate* described the conference’s decision by writing that it was not motivated by

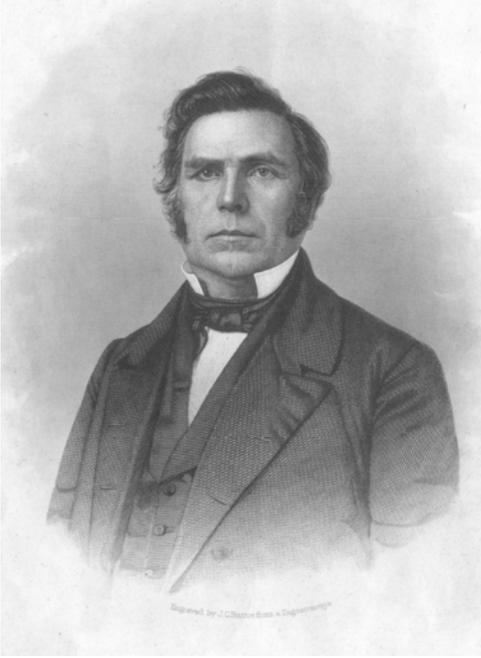
...any peculiar sympathy with, or affection for Mr. Long’s book on the part of the majority, but because it was the lifting up of a cloud, heavy and dark, whose gathering had been unwisely provided for; a cloud which had hung long enough over the body to make all see the lightnings girdling it, and hear those thunders from within its waving folds which nearly all believed portended, every hour it was permitted to hang there, no common disaster to our conference and Church. Ninety-nine hundredths of the body breathed freer when it swung away through the then brightening heavens.⁴⁶

⁴³McCarter, 39.

⁴⁴As Rev. Adam Wallace recalled, “With my knowledge of the temper of the times in Maryland and Virginia, I knew the discussion would embarrass our work, or possibly drive us from our churches; and I, therefore, deplored agitation at that particular juncture. I remember writing several communications to papers in Delaware and on the eastern shore, with the view to allay excitement; but they were of little avail, for we met it hot and heavy when the conference adjourned.” DiPaolo, 180.

⁴⁵Newspaper clipping, pasted onto page 6 of Long’s first journal.

⁴⁶Newspaper clipping, July 1858, pasted onto page 38 of Long’s second journal.



Bishop Edward R. Ames (1806-1879) presided over the March 1858 session of the Philadelphia Conference held in Easton, Pennsylvania. Remembered as an adroit parliamentarian, Ames managed to adjourn the body without any disciplinary charges sticking either to John D. Long or to the several clergy members whose complicity in slavery was revealed.

Thus the trial was over before it had begun. The fight that abolitionists and pro-slavery representatives had been preparing for was never fought. As one witness put it, "The bill of charges presented by Dr. Quigley against Rev. J. D. Long was one of the most miserable abortions that ever dropped, living or dead, from the pen of a sensible man."⁴⁷ All of the fears and expectations that had swirled around the name of J. D. Long for the past year seemed to amount to nothing. However, such an assessment would be incorrect, because it was the very act of anticipation, and the articles and opinions that were expressed during that time, that truly made the impact, not the trial of 1858.

J. D. Long's *Pictures of Slavery* became The Book of its time and place because of the unique position of the Philadelphia Conference, and the charges that were made by and against its author. During a time when the Philadelphia Conference had been compromised, the voice of J. D. Long spoke out, and his brave action became the catalyst to awaken the conference from its complacency and spur it into discussion of its secret sins. The book and the attention it received caused the topic of slavery to be discussed in a new way; slaveholding among Methodist

⁴⁷McCarter, 37-38.

ministers was no longer a rumor spoken in whispers, but was brought to the light and judged by the community of Philadelphia to be a sin. It was judged in the arena of the press and public opinion. By compromising in order to keep their slaveholders in communion with them, conference members had gone so far that they themselves had become the slaveholders, rather than merely their ministers. While Long's book did not solve their problems, it did move their problems out of the darkness and into the light of day so that others might aid them in judging rightly.

The controversy over Rev. J. D. Long's *Pictures of Slavery* bears witness to the power of the clergy, even if it be only one or two clergy members, to speak the truth to a conference that has ceased to honestly carry out the work of God. While the Methodists of the Philadelphia Conference turned a blind eye to the morally reprehensible actions of those in their midst, one voice speaking the truth was able to force them to look upon what they had done by revealing its shame to the world.

This was not an easy task; Long himself expressed his apprehension to divulge the "painful conviction that the fathers of the Philadelphia Conference have been too silent in their testimony against slavery."⁴⁸ At a time when conference clergy ought to have been leading their city and their connected territories towards justice, they were instead corrupted by the pressures of the slaveholders they served. Instead of being a beacon of truth to the secular city surrounding them, it was the secular press that called the conference to account and took up the cause of the Rev. John Dixon Long, who spoke the truth when the conference failed to do so. The Methodists of Philadelphia had shut their ears to the "cry of the needy"⁴⁹ but they were forced to hear it once again through John Dixon Long's *Pictures of Slavery*.

⁴⁸Long, *Pictures of Slavery*, 37.

⁴⁹Taken from line 8 of the Prayer of Confession and Pardon in "A Service of Word and Table II" in *The United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), 12.