

Chapter IV.

A. D. 1830 - 1834

Reorganization of the Church

Meeting of the brethren; their proceedings; spirit of the members; call to the pastorship of Peter S. Gayle; place of worship; public feeling; administration of Mr. Gayle; his labors and successes; his resignation; survey of the condition of the cause in Nashville, and Middle Tennessee, at the time of Mr. Gayle's removal from the city.

A dark black night had settled down upon the Baptist church in Nashville. Its prospects seemed to an ordinary observer, to be hopeless. There were these however who, fully conscious that their cause was the cause of Christ, and exercising strong faith in the assurance that he would, in his own way win and defend it, did not despair. In the record traced in the preceding chapter, two facts are constantly before us. One is, that there was always present in the church, a respectable minority persistently opposing every innovation that was sought to be introduced. The other is that the members <sup>of</sup> this minority, refused either to be silent, or to receive when offered their letters of dismissal, or letters of withdrawal from the church. We may refer briefly to the motives by which in these respects their conduct was influenced. They acted not without mature judgment. The majority of the church having, as we have seen, publicly and formally

renounced their Baptist name, and character; rescinded its Constitution and Rules of Order, which pledged it to the doctrine and polity received by Baptists as taught in the word of God; and having under the plea of rejecting "men-made creeds," and being "governed by the word of God alone," introduced another doctrine and polity; the minority determined to maintain such a position as might enable them at a proper time, to save the church from utter extinction. They for the present, therefore, regularly filled their seats in all the meetings of the "congregation," and scrupulously avoided every act which according to the recognized rules, might subject them to the least censure of any kind.

~~Mr. Cartwell and one or two others obtained letters of withdrawal after the reorganization of the church.~~

The time, in the estimation of the brethren, for a decisive movement had arrived. A notice was published, requesting all those members of the church who adhered to their original principles and desired still to maintain them, to meet for consultation at the Court House, on the 10th day of October. At the time and place designated the brethren assembled. Appropriate religious services were conducted by Mr. Whitsitt. Of their proceedings the following record is found in the books of the church:

"Pursuant to notice given, we whose names are hereunto subscribed, met at the Court House in Nashville, on the second Lord's day in October 1830 (being the tenth day of the month) and denying Campbellism, did with the advice of our beloved brother, James Whitsitt,

agree to assume the character and constitution of the original Baptist church in Nashville."

The original Constitution with its Amendment" and the Rules of Decorum before rescinded by the majority, were once again adopted and together with these proceedings, signed ~~but~~ by five members only! Why the number of subscribers was so very small, needs some explanation, and which must here be offered. ~~Many~~ others besides these still adhered most firmly to their original Baptist principles and sincerely desired to maintain them. This is proved conclusively by the fact that at various <sup>times</sup> and within three or four years more than fifty came forward, and enrolled their names as members. The reasons that held them back at the time, some of which were influential with one class and some with another, were numerous. A few of them may be briefly mentioned:

1. Many entertain <sup>ed</sup> strong hopes that the original faith and order would yet be restored in the church which had repudiated them, <sup>while</sup> not a few professedly remained in it that they might be in a position to bring about this result; and in case of their success a reorganization would be unnecessary.
2. That church had a very handsome and pleasant house of worship, of which they were all proud, and which should they go with their brethren, they would be obliged to abandon, and worship in an unsightly hovel.
3. Not a few were held back by social and family influences which were brought to bear upon them with great power.
4. A still larger number believed that the property measure,

if attempted, would prove an abortion, since many of the most liberal and wealthy among them were satisfied to remain where they were. How could a handful of members, comparatively poor, without a house of worship, or the means to build one; without a minister, or the ability to sustain him if they had; support themselves as a church? They saw no prospect of success.

5. Others, were down and utterly disgusted with the endless agitations, controversies, and maneuverings; they had witnessed, had ceased to attend the services of the church, and had attached themselves permanently to Pedobaptist congregations. For their return to the fold no one now hoped.

On these, and other similar accounts, five persons only were found of sufficient faith and courage, to undertake the apparently desperate enterprise of reviving the church in Nashville. These with their families and a few friends, <sup>met</sup> ~~met~~ for worship at the regular hour to which they had been accustomed, for a while at the Court House, after that in the City School House, on High Street, between Spring and Broad Streets, and then in a commodious room in the Masonic Hall on Spring Street, between Cherry and ~~Summer~~<sup>W</sup> Streets. When practicable they procured the services of ministers to preach for them, and when that could not be done, the time was occupied with devotionaleercises conducted by the members themselves. Mr. Whitsitt, as he had done ten years before, again gave them, as much pastoral attention as his other engagements would permit, and especially administered the ordinances among them. Thus, in feeble-

(The place of wor-ship.)

ness, but animated by strong hope, did the First Baptist Church in Nashville emerge from the clouds in which for several years it had been involved. The trial was one of great severity, but it was only the first of several of like character, through which it has since passed and all of which it has triumphantly sustained.

The house of worship belonged justly, without doubt, to the "United Baptist Church," according to the terms of the deed, and not to the church of "the Reformation," which now held it in possession. Unfortunately however, "the United Baptist Church in Nashville, which held the deed for the property, was a body unknown to the law. It was neither a person, nor a corporation, and therefore incapable of holding property. If by a legal process the then occupants, would have been ~~dispossessed~~, it would have reverted to the original owners. These were with the "Reformation." They would not, it was well known, have given it to the Baptists. The legal resort to obtain it which had been talked of, was therefore abandoned. It was supposed probably, however, that their sense of justice might induce them to grant to the church, at least time priority, a joint use of the house of worship. At a meeting February 2, 1831, a paper was therefore adopted, which not having been recorded, is now lost, but the purport of which may be learned by the answer, which we find in the books of the church, dated the 10th of the same month, as follows:

"The brethren appointed to present the proposition agreed

upon ~~and~~<sup>in</sup> last meeting, reported that they had presented it on the 16th instant; and after the Moderator had read it, it was determined by a vote, to return it, on the ground, that we had (they said) addressed them by a wrong name." "The brethren declined taking the paper back."

A similar paper, also not of record, and consequently now lost, was adopted in November of the same year, a report in reference to which we have, under date of November 30, 1831, in the following words:

"Brother Norvell reported that he had waited on the present occupants of the Meeting House, as directed at the last meeting, and that they had appointed two of their members to attend us with a written answer to our proposition. They accordingly came, and presented an answer proposing that we should unite with them, as one body, and so obtain common use of the house; or lest we should think their proposition an evasion, they proceeded to give certain reasons why they could not accede conscientiously to our proposition. Whereupon the church determined that we cannot conscientiously agree to their proposition of meeting with them, and that the reasons they offer for denying what we asked, would not be satisfactory, even if we had no claim to the house."

All further negotiations were now abandoned and no subsequent efforts to obtain the house itself, or a joint occupancy of it were made. These movements in themselves comparatively unimportant, are herein introduced, for a special

purpose. They prove incontestably that the church individually, and collectively, was regarded by the Reformed party, as orthodox in the Baptist sense, and that not only had they no charges against their morals, but looked upon them in that respect as unapproachable. It must have been so since they proposed that it should return in a body and unite with them as members of their church.

As in the origin of the church, so in the acquisition of its third pastor, the event seemed to be peculiarly providential. About the time of the reorganization, Peter S. Gayle, a young minister of Virginia, then residing in Charlotte County in that state, resolved to seek a home and a field of usefulness in the West. He disposed of his affairs, and with his little family, set out, having no place especially in view. He continued his journey until he arrived in the valley of Mill Creek, near the city. In this beautiful region he decided to rest for a season, and look around him. He preached frequently in the neighboring churches. Mr. Whitsitt was much pleased with him; took him by <sup>the</sup> hand; and introduced him to the brethren in Nashville. Here also he preached often, and feeling deeply interested for the prosperity and advancement of the little church soon won its confidence and affection. At a meeting held July 11, 1831, a little less than a year after its reorganization, he was unanimously elected its pastor. He at once accepted the charge, and entered upon the performance of its duties.

(Call of  
a pastor.)

Mr. Gayle was a native of Halifax County, Virginia, where in early life he united with the church, and a few years afterwards was ordained as a minister. He was a man of eminent piety, a preacher of superior abilities, and a faithful, kind, and laborious pastor. He had not the advantages of the schools. In literature and science his attainments were very limited. He was, however, industrious, studious, and endowed with power of mind of a high order. He had read much, and with careful thought. His knowledge of the word of God was profound, comprehensive and accurate. His doctrinal principles were eminently sound. In style, or elocution, Mr. Gayle pretended to no polish or elegance. Yet in his discourses, his deficiencies did not prominently appear. In the pulpit he was calm, self-possessed, and a ready and graceful speaker. In every benevolent enterprise he felt a strong interest, especially in missions and education, in which he was peculiarly active. It was during his pastorship here that the Baptist State Convention for missionary purposes was organized, in which he took a leading part, and of which we shall see more hereafter.

(Conflict  
in doctrine)

Mr. Gayle had in Nashville a very hard field to cultivate. As in the city so in the country, multitudes were running wild with various controversies, chiefly, but not <sup>ex</sup>clusively, that regarding Mr. Campbell's theory. Theological Knights Errant were daily tilting at the corners of the streets, and traversing the country in search of adventures. Tennessee Baptists have,

from peculiar circumstances, ever been remarkable for their belligerent propensities. The causes of this characteristic are found in the diverse doctrines held by the original Baptist immigrants to this state; their consequent internal conflicts; and the frequent inroads which various errors have made upon the churches. Let us refer to these facts with more particularity:

The original Baptist settlers here, were not united in doctrinal principles. They were mostly from Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia. As in those states so here, they were of two classes, Predestinarians and Arminians. This was alike true both of ministers and laymen. Upon their arrival, however, in these Western Wilds, they all joined the same churches, that class generally preponderating whose views were favored by the pastor. The commencement of the present century, was characterized by an extraordinary revival of religion, which pervaded all denominations, and the influence of which was long felt in the country. During this period these churches proceeded quietly, and enjoyed much prosperity. Ultimately, however, discussions as to the Divine Sovereignty arose, and with them heart burnings, and agitations, and conflicts. For years Predestination and Arminianism formed the staple of almost every discourse. Gradually, and at last irremediably, the contestants were thrown asunder. They were first cooled in their feelings towards each other; then alienated, then em-

bittered. ~~These controversies found their way, as usual,~~ into the associations. There they were inflamed, and rendered immeasurably malignant. Compromise upon the basis of those previously arranged in the Virginia churches, were adopted, and observed by ~~neither party~~. A division of the churches, throughout the whole country resulted, attended by all its concomitant evils. The Predestinarian churches were subsequently known as United Baptists, and the Arminian churches as Separate Baptists, and who felt for each other probably less charity than they did for their neighbors of the Pedobaptist churches.

Our of this condition of things arose that peculiar, and strange doctrine known as Parkerism, which threw into the (Parkerism. Predestinarian churches a new element of discord.

Both the Predestinarian, and Arminian parties, were naturally driven by each other, into extremes, and in seeking to get as far apart as possible, overstepped the boundaries of common sense, and reason, to say nothing of the principles of the word of God. Mr. Parker's design seems to have been to demonstrate the truth of predestinations perfectly certain, plain, and simple. Its leading propositions only need be stated. They were as follows:

He taught that Cain was literally, body and soul, an offspring of the Devil, and that in the commerce which led to his birth consisted the sin of Eve; that Abel was literally, body and soul, an offspring of Adam, and that Adam's sin consisted in commerce with Eve after her dishonor by the Devil; that Cain,

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and Abel, were the fathers of two races of men, all the former of whom were children of the Devil, and all the latter of whom were the children of God, that these two races remained separate during several centuries, but when at length, "the sons of God," of the family of Abel, "saw the daughters of men," of the family of Cain, "that they were fair, and took them wives of whomsoever they would," these two races became amalgamated, the result of which was the excessive wickedness of the world, which led to its destruction by a flood of waters, that since that time the children of God, and the children of the Devil, have been mingled together indiscriminately, and hence in the same families are found the good, and the bad; that to this fact the Saviour referred when he said to the unbelieving Jews; "If ye were the children of Abraham ye would do the works of Abraham, but ye are of your father the Devil, and his works ye will do;" that Christ in his redemption, had no reference to the children of the Devil, all of whom necessarily share the destiny of the Devil, and are irremediably damned; that Christ died for the children of God, all of whom will infallibly be saved; and that the whole design of preaching the gospel, is "to manifest the children of God," and to comfort, and sustain them, by assurances of their salvation, according to the declaration of Jesus," In this are manifested the children of God, and the children of the Devil."

The author of this theory was, as is supposed, a native of Tennessee; most of his youth was spent among the Indians, probably a captive; beyond the bare ability to read and write; he was utterly

illiterate; his manners were repulsively rude, and unpolished; he was offensively bold, and self important; but he possessed with extraordinary mental energies; singular wit and indomitable perseverance. His doctrine found among the ultra predestinarians, friends, and advocates, and had for many years much popularity. He published several pamphlets in its explanation and defence, none of which can now be found. He has however, long since ceased to be spoken of, and his theory is effectually forgotten. But during the pastership of Mr. Gayle it was still rife in not a few of the country churches. The condition of the churches was at this period further deteriorated by another circumstance. A new race of ministers had risen up in the country, who were in no way equal to the old pioneer fathers. They were greatly inferior to them in learning, in piety, in humility, and in zeal for the cause of Christ. They were also infected with an ambition for place and popularity, and a suspicion of their clerical brethren, to an extent most painful, and injurious. With such of these gentlemen as remained in connection with the Baptist churches, we shall have occasion in the future pages of this Memorial to become more intimately acquainted.

When therefore the doctrines of ~~the~~ Mr. Campbell first began to be proclaimed in Tennessee, the Baptist churches of all classes were fearfully demoralized; a cloud of public opprobrium, deep and sombre, rested upon them; and it was not difficult to carry many of the people and of the ministers, into any theory that had the semblance of plausability. Of all these circumstances the preachers of the

Reformation, fully availed themselves. They were all well drilled, and skilfully marshalled. Nashville was in this region, the Headquarters of the Reformation. Here resided the ablest exponents, in Tennessee, and the influence they exerted, both in the city, and throughout the country, was of immense magnitude. There was a peculiarity characterising all their converts, which added greatly to the impetus of the movement. Everyone of them became at once an enthusiastic advocate, and defender of the new system, which they called "The Ancient Gospel." Multitudes of Baptist churches were effectually broken up. Here and there was found a church with an able, and faithful pastor, which stood with comparative firmness, among the majority of them, but destruction reigned supreme. Very large numbers embraced the Reformation. Out of the ruins of our churches theirs sprung up everywhere, ~~like mushrooms of a summer's night.~~ (Results

From these events arose two permanent results, necessary here to be mentioned.

One of these was an irremediable love of strife. Our ministers especially, and to a great extent our people, became theological combatants. It is to be hoped that they cultivated spirituality, brotherly love, and humility, but these were not the qualities most highly esteemed. The panoplied warrior, ever ready to meet an enemy, and strike him down, had the most of their admiration. Thus were sown the Dragon's teeth that have since sprung up, grown to melancholy maturity, and produced of late, among us, a full crop of evil, and destruction.

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The other result was equally to be deprecated. A deep withering reproach settled down upon our cause. The very name of Baptist became odious. We ceased in consequence, to a great extent, to have access to the public ear. Men not originally of Baptist principles, would hear nothing however reasonable, which was considered peculiarly Baptist! Nor did the injury stop here. Many of our own more cultivated families, were entirely alienated from our churches, ceased to attend them, and became attached to Pedobaptist congregations.

Deep and terrible evils, were thus inflicted upon our cause everywhere, and from which there is no present likelihood that it will ever recover.

Amidst of all these, and many other discouragements, Mr. Gayle did his duty as the pastor of the church, well, and faithfully. His ministry was popular; his congregations were good; and the church prospered beyond the most sanguine hopes of its friends. Many of those who then united with it by letter, by baptism, and by application, proved in its subsequent progress to be eminently devoted, and useful members. At the close of his pastorate, which continued three years, the church numbered more than fifty members.

(Resignation  
of Mr. Gayle

Having received a call to the pastorate of the church in Brownsville, a town in the western part of this state, Mr. Gayle considered it his duty to accept it. He therefore resigned his charge in Nashville, and removed to his new field of labor. Subsequently, he was pastor of one of the churches

in Memphis, and afterwards of a church in Mississippi. He died in Clinton, Mississippi, the 8th day of June, 1853. By his friends, and brethren, in Virginia, in Tennessee, and in Mississippi, where he was best known, his memory is cherished with the warmest affection.