

Chapter X.

Progress of the Church

Its harmony, ~~and activity~~; its statistics; organization from its membership of churches in Murfreesborough, and in South Nashville; formation and support of a Colored Mission; zeal in educating the ministry.

The First Baptist Church in Nashville was much less seriously affected internally by the agitations and divisions of the country, than might have been supposed. Several considerations operated to produce this result. The schism that occurred under Mr. Lowe, embraced no one whose influence was much felt either for good or evil. Sorrow for the delusions of simple brethren, who were easy to be deceived, was the only feeling entertained towards them, ~~on~~ *or an* regard to them; therefore no unpleasant or injurious excitement prevailed. The controversy that so agitated the land, and which formed the staple of almost every sermon in the country, was very seldom brought into the pulpit in the city. When the pastor thought it necessary to preach on the subject, which was about once a year, when he received from the church and congregation, the missionary collections, he prepared himself carefully, and thoroughly discussed the entire question. At other times it was seldom ever alluded to among his people, either in public, or in private. "Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness, but to them that are called both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and

the wisdom of God," was his invariable theme; and upon his ministrations the blessing of God was rich, and continuous. The meetings of the church were always harmonious; the Sabbath School was vigorous and prosperous; the pecuniary contributions were liberal; numerous, and valuable accessions were made to the membership of the church; and they all cordially labored together in "every good word and work." These facts may perhaps be evinced more readily than in any other way, by presenting the statistics of the church in one or two particulars during ten consecutive years, beginning with the commencement of his pastorship. In 1835, nineteen members were received into the church; in 1836, twenty three were received; in 1837, twenty-seven; in 1838, seventy three; in 1839, twenty one; in 1840, fifty four; in 1841, a hundred and forty; in 1842, seventeen; in 1843, nineteen; in 1844, thirty four; and in 1845, thirty six; making an aggregate of four hundred and sixty three members. The activity pecuniarily of the church will be seen in the facts that during these years it met all its expenses; contributed liberally to every benevolent object; supported several young ministers who were pursuing their studies at Nashville University; built and paid for its meeting house at a cost of about twenty seven thousand dollars; constituted two other churches from members of its own body, reference to which will presently be made more particularly; and organized and sustained in the city, a large, and prosperous colored mission.

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The labors of the pastor, to which he devoted himself unremittingly, were exceedingly intense. They would have been so, if no other duties

than those of the pastorship, which he never neglected, had devolved upon him. But besides this he edited his paper successfully, which now had a very large circulation, and great influence, embracing among its readers, not only people of Tennessee, but also of Kentucky, Missouri, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas, and Louisiana. He was also one of the Assistant Editors of the Baptist Advocate, a monthly magazine, published in Cincinnati, under the immediate direction of John Stevens, Esq., and to which he contributed numerous and elaborate articles. Nor was this all. During these years he wrote, and published several books, which have since been very widely circulated, having each passed through many editions. Among these, not counting several pamphlets, to which reference has before been made, may be named "Terms of Communion;" "The Deaconship;" and "The Way of Salvation." He was accustomed in his intercourse with the families of his charge, to give them books on the various subjects in relation to which he desired that they should be especially instructed. On these, and some other topics, he could find none suited to his purposes. He therefore determined, to as great an extent as practicable, to write himself, such books as he wanted. In this way originated nearly all the works that he has ever written. Nor did he ever expect pecuniary advantage from any of his literary labors. His paper paid its expenses, and continued to do so up to the time that he made it a donation to the General Association. When it left his hands, it was indebted not a cent to any man; but it yielded him no compensation. For his ar-

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ticles published in the Advocate, and other periodicals, he received nothing. He did not labor for temporal reward. The hope of doing good was the consideration that moved him, and that in this way, he did accomplish much for the cause of Christ, no one familiar with the results of his labors ever doubted.

That Dr. Howell should have been very greatly interested in his field of labor is very natural. No inducements of higher position, or a better support could tempt him for the time, to leave it, nor until he had accomplished what he conceived to be his mission in Nashville. Twice he was elected to the Presidency of the Nashville Female Academy; twice he was called to the Presidency of Georgetown College, Kentucky; he was called to the Presidency of Jefferson University, Louisiana; and to presidencies, and professorships in various other colleges, universities, and schools. He was called to the pastorate, at different times, of various large and flourishing churches in other cities. The salaries offered were in every instance, much larger than that which he received in Nashville, and in most cases more than twice as much. He unhesitatingly declined every invitation, assuring his anxious people that he came to Nashville to build up, God blessing him, the cause of Christ here, and that he never would voluntarily leave it; until he saw this church upon a footing equal in every respect, to any other in this city. He told them that he sought not honor, emolument, ease, or any other earthly advantage; that he looked alone to the glory of God, the conversion of men and the prevalence and triumphs of the

Gospel truth; that in the accomplishment of this great work he was not alarmed at the prospects of toil, suffering, and poverty; and that he was ready, and willing in all things generally, and as to his family particularly, to trust in the kind providence of him "who feeds the young ravens when they cry."

A small Baptist church had existed in Murfreesborough, Rutherford County, for many years. This church at the beginning of the Missionary Controversy, was under the pastorate of Dr. John M. Watson, of whom mention has been so often made in the preceding chapters. This body promptly adopted all the non-fellowshipping, and denunciatory resolutions common with that party. It had consequently ceased to be regarded by the intelligent people of that place, and its neighborhood, with any respect. Several families resident in Nashville for some years for the benefit of the schools, and who had here united with the church, returned to their farms near that place. Other families, and individuals, had in pursuit of their business, gone there to reside. They of course, could have nothing to do with Dr. Watson's church. They still looked to their pastor in Nashville, for spiritual guidance, and instruction. He visited them as frequently as possible, and always took those occasions to preach to the people, which he did sometimes in private houses, and sometimes in the Court House. The Lord graciously blessed his labors, and several persons of wealth, and influence were converted, and baptized. On consultation, the brethren there determined that it was desirable to

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constitute a Baptist church in Murfreesborough, for the support, and conduct of which, they felt willing, relying upon the divine blessing, to undertake the responsibility. The proposition was laid before the church in Nashville, and approved. About twenty members for that purpose received letters of dismission, and commendation. ^{On the 23rd} The day of ^{May} 1843 was appointed as the day of meeting for the organization. R. B. C. Howell, and Thomas B. Ripley, of the church in Nashville, attended as Presbyters; B. Kimbrough, Pastor of Mulberry Church, Lincoln County, being incidentally present, was invited, and took part with them in the services. An appropriate discourse was preached by Dr. Howell; the Presbytery was then regularly formed to whom the letters were presented, and the Constitution, Declaration of Faith, and Covenant of the church in Nashville, as embodying the principles upon which they wished to be united. These were all approved, and after prayer by Mr. Kimbrough, the brethren, and sisters named, were in the usual form, recognized as an independent Baptist church of Christ. A solemn charge was then delivered to the church by Dr. Ripley, and the services closed.

Immediately after its organization the church held a Conference, and unanimously elected Joseph H. Eaton, a Licentiate of the church in Nashville, and one of its constituent members, and afterwards President of Union University, as its pastor, and asked of the Presbytery that to qualify him for that office he might be at once ordained. The Presbytery assembled in the afternoon, examined Dr. Eaton in the usual manner, and reported to the church

in the evening, that it was satisfied with his Christian experience, doctrinal principles, and call of God to the ministry, and therefore approved, and recommended his ordination. By request of the church it immediately proceeded with that service. A sermon was preached by Mr. Ripley; the prayer of Ordination was offered by Mr. Kimbrough; and a charge was delivered by Dr. Howell. Dr. Eaton then accepted that pastorate, and was welcomed to its duties and responsibilities by all ^{were} present. These proceedings ~~were~~ duly reported to the church in Nashville and cordially approved. That day was an impressive one in Murfreesborough, and its influence was felt for years afterwards among the people.

The administration of Dr. Eaton as pastor of the church in Murfreesborough was eminently successful. As a divine, a scholar, and a preacher, he was undoubtedly one among the ablest men our country ever produced. His manner, style, and eloquence, were not polished, but all this was at once thrown out of sight by his extraordinary grasp of mind, his immense knowledge, and his imposing personal presence. He was as humble as he was great, never appearing at all conscious of the wonderful powers with which he was endowed. He was also an earnest, laborious, self-sacrificing man of God. He continued his pastorate until he was elected President of the University, when the duties of both offices, becoming too burdensome to be faithfully discharged by one man, he resigned. He was succeeded by Mr. M. Hillsman, also one of our ablest men, and he by Professor Wm. Shelton, another of the

sons of the Nashville church, whose learning and talents, would adorn any position. ~~During all this period the church~~ in Nashville regarded her daughter in Murfreesborough with the laudable pride of a fond mother. By the procurement of Mr. J. R. Graves who had then obtained influence in the State, Mr. James M. Pendleton, an abolitionist of Kentucky, and author of the Landmark theory, but whose character was carefully concealed, was elected pastor of the church, and professor of Theology in the University. Of him more will be said hereafter. Up to this time it was distinguished for its members, talents, piety, wealth, and liberality. Now commenced its calamities. It is sufficient here to say that before the war commenced, the church was so effectually broken down that it barely maintained a precarious existence. When the Federal army reached Murfreesborough he welcomed it warmly, and became fully identified with our invaders; and when the place was retaken by the Confederates, he fled with the Abolitionists to the State of Ohio. Mr. Pendleton nearly destroyed the church in Murfreesborough. What injuries he inflicted upon the young ministers who were for several years under his instructions the ~~future will determine.~~

The city of Nashville began, previous to 1840, rapidly to extend itself in a Southern direction. Soon a considerable number of Baptists were found residing on that side of Broad Street. These were at an inconvenient distance from the place of worship. For this reason, and also because it was deemed important to oc-

copy more fully that part of the city, it was thought desirable to organize a church in South Nashville. These views were at a regular meeting laid before the First Baptist Church by its pastor. Resolutions expressing its conviction of the desirableness of this work, and offering letters of dismission to such brethren and sisters as felt disposed to engage in it, were unanimously adopted. Most of the members residing in that suburb asked, and received the necessary letters and two of its ministers, the Pastor, and Thomas W. Haynes, were requested to attend, on a specified day, and perform the requisite service. The meeting was held on the day of 1844, at the residence of John Corbit, Esq. An appropriate sermon was preached by Mr. Haynes. The letters, and other proceedings, together with the Constitution, Declaration of Faith, and Covenant of the First Baptist Church in Nashville, were presented, unanimously adopted, and the brethren, and sisters were duly organized as the Second Baptist Church in Nashville. The prayer of constitution was offered by Mr. Haunes; Dr. Howell then delivered a solemn charge to the church; and the formalities closed in the usual manner.

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Immediately after the organization a Conference was held by the church, and T. W. Haynes was elected pastor. He accepted the charge, and pastor, and people, entered together, immediately, upon the great work before them. The First Church purchased and paid for a lot in an eligible position on Cherry Street, near the University, and erected upon it a spacious wooden structure, for the new organization. The body, afterwards assumed the name of

the Cherry Street Baptist Church, and its house was replaced by the large and handsome brick building now occupying its site.

The ~~Cherry Street Church~~ commenced its ~~career~~ under very promising auspices, but it has not prospered. It has been unfortunate in its Deacons. Both classes were generally, mentally, and morally, incapacitated for the duties they assumed. Mr. J. R. Graves, Mr. Haile, Mr. Benson, Mr. Green, and others rapidly succeeded each other, and accomplished nothing. Nor had they been qualified for the work, is it supposed that they could have been successful, speaking after the manner of man, with Deacons, who sat upon them like an incubus, and paralyzed all their exertions. In 1857, Reuben Ford of Virginia, previously pastor of the Leigh Street Church in Richmond, was called to the charge of Cherry Street. He accepted the call; arrived with his family; and commenced his labors in July of that year. Under his ministry the whole aspect of things changed in a short time. His congregations became large; numerous and valuable additions ^{were} ~~made~~ made to the membership of the church; the Sabbath School especially, was exceedingly prosperous. He soon overcame every impediment but one, the inefficiency of the Deaconship, which seemed irremediable. They managed the finances in the most miserable manner, or rather did not manage them at all, but left the support of the pastor, and the expenses of the church, wholly unprovided. Earnest efforts were made to remedy this evil, but without success. Additional Deacons were appointed, but they did no better than their predecessors. Mr. Ford endeavored to sup-

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ply by his own energetic exertions, this lack of service on their part, and succeeded even better than was expected. Thus matters continued until May 1857. With the other pastors of the city, Mr. Ford was arrested by Governor Johnson, and imprisoned in this city; was sent thence to the Penitentiary in Indiana, then to the common jail in Louisville, and finally to Camp Chase in Ohio, of all which more will be said hereafter. Soon after, Mr. Ford's removal the Federal officers seized his meeting house for a "Post Chapel"; then they turned it into a hospital, and now so occupy it, having dispersed and entirely broken up his congregation, his church, and his Sunday school. Mr. Ford has now returned home on parole, but is wholly unable to reorganize any of the interest which he has labored so earnestly to advance. In consequence of the abolitionists prevailing among them, utter desolation covers like a pall the Baptist Church in Cherry Street, from which whether it will ever recover God only knows.

The membership, and congregation of the First church were so numerous that it was found impracticable to accommodate them, and the colored people both, in the same house of worship. No building in the city, however spacious would have been large enough for that purpose. It became necessary therefore to provide for the colored people a separate place of meeting. But irrespect^{ve} of this fact, it is very well known by all who are familiar with the subject, that colored people require special teaching. Their minds are of a peculiar caste; their temptations, and trials, are unlike those of others; they are generally dull of apprehension; they are for the most part, strongly inclined to fanaticism; and as church members

they are litigious, and difficult to govern. A sermon which to a cultivated white congregation, would be highly instructive and useful, is of very little worth to the colored people present, not that the language, and style, are not perfectly simple, and well understood by them, but especially because the amount of thought is more than they can grasp, and the train of ideas not in a familiar direction. No instance, in any city or village, (Colored Mission of the First Church can now be recollected, in which the colored part of the church, when taught exclusively in the same assembly with the white, was prosperous, or if they were, in which the white part of the church did not dwindle and come to nothing. The two classes require different forms of instruction. They can never both prosper together. When however instructed appropriately, and in congregations by themselves, religion is eminently effective among the negroes of our country. From the first therefore, Dr. Howell adopted the practice of meeting once on a Sunday, and on one night in each week, with the colored part of his charge by itself. When met, after appropriate devotions, he presented to them some topic in religion, or an exposition of some portion of scripture, and then proceeded to question them upon it, after the manner of examining a class in an ordinary High School, eliciting from them such answers as they felt disposed to give. By this process they were induced to think, and an opportunity was afforded him of explaining more fully, any matter that they had failed to understand. When he could not be present, Anderson, or Brentz, two colored brethren licensed by the church for the purpose, preached a

regular sermon. God blessed these means, and the colored part of this church was eminently prosperous. Those labors in addition to all his other duties, were too much for the pastor, and not enough for that part of his charge. Upon his recommendation therefore, the church determined to organize them into a mission, procured for them a separate place of worship, and a superintendent, a white man, whose time should be wholly devoted to their interests. The City School House on High Street, the same occupied by the church itself some years before, was obtained, and Samuel A. Davidson, a licentiate, previously of Lynchburg, Virginia, was appointed to the church, who to qualify him for his duties, was by request of the church regularly ordained to the ministry. The Colored Mission was authorized to hold conferences; to receive, baptize, dismiss, and expel members; and to do anything else that pertained to its own affairs; but was required to report quarterly, all its proceedings to the church. If it disapproved them they were of no force; but if it approved them they were established, and received as if done by itself. This organization was made about 1845.

Mr. Davidson after a few years, resigned, and emigrated to California. He was succeeded by Thomas B. Ripley, who after some years relinquished the charge, and returned to Portland, Maine, the place of his former residence. The present incumbent, Nelson G. Merry, a free colored man, was then inducted, who is perhaps the ablest, the most judicious, and certainly the most successful of the three. A lot was purchased several years since, on Martin Street, West of the Capitol, for the Mission, on which was erected a handsome brick

house of worship. This building becoming too small for the congregation, has been greatly enlarged, and is provided with a basement story for its Sunday school which averages generally about a hundred and fifty pupils, a baptistry, and all the other conveniences common to the best house of worship. The Mission has from the first, been eminently successful. It numbers about three hundred communicants. Its congregations are always large, orderly, and attentive.

It ought to be stated before this chapter is closed that the First Baptist Church has ever been remarkable for its zeal, and activity, in the education of young ministers. Generally it had under its care five or six, residing, commonly gratuitously, in the families of brethren, and attending various schools, commonly the University of Nashville, and this continued up to the time when Union University at Murfreesborough, was inaugurated, when they were removed to that place. In those days an extraordinary galaxy of young ministers were members of this church, such as L. H. Miliken, late pastor of the church in Jackson; Joseph H. Eaton, afterwards LL.D., and President, of ^{Union University} and Cyrus Smith, Professor of Union University; President Wm. Shelton of Brownsville, Tennessee; Rufus C. Burleson, President, and Richard B. Burleson, Professor, of Baylor University, Texas; Thomas G. Keen, Pastor of the First Baptist Church in Petersburg, Virginia, and many others, who have distinguished themselves in the pulpit, and out of it, as among the ablest men this, or any other country has ever produced.

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