

Chapter XVIII

1857 - 1858

Expulsion of the Graves Faction

Organization of the schism; a committee appointed by the church; its labors with the recusants; its report; charges preferred against the recusants; their trial, and expulsion; action of the church regarding their claim to its name, and property; state of religion in the church.

The meeting of the church held on the 12th day of October 1857, for the trial of Mr. Graves, was detained in the discussion of preliminaries until midnight. It had then fairly reached the case, and was ready to proceed, and the session adjourned until the next evening seven o'clock. After the usual prayer and benediction, the members retired. Mr. Graves elected this hour to call together his partisans, who assembled around him, twenty three in number, with probably a hundred of his advocates from abroad. They appointed a Mr. R. G. Kimbrough from Maury county as their Moderator, and then Mr. Dayton read a paper which they called their Declaration, before referred to, but the substance of which may be repeated as follows:

(Schism in
(the church.)

"Majority of the body with which we are connected, known as the First Baptist Church in Nashville, has in its recent action," "repudiated the law; cast aside the word of God as its rule of action; and placed itself in open rebellion against the commands of the great Head of the church. We, "therefore,"

withdraw ourselves from that majority, which has thus departed from the law of Christ." "And we declare ourselves the regular, and scriptural church of our Lord Jesus, worshiping in this place, and in his name claim for ourselves, as his true, and proper church, all the rights, privileges, and authority, which are by his word conferred upon his church."

The church met the next evening (the 13th) according to appointment. Before proceeding to the regular order, the doings of some of its members on the previous night, was announced, and a committee was appointed to labor with them and to bring them if possible, to a better mind. That committee was C. K. Winston, the Moderator, as Chairman, S. M. Scott, and A. Nelson. They did their duty faithfully, partly by personal interviews, and partly by correspondence. The church committee addressed them a note of which the following are extracts:

"Dear Brethren: The undersigned committee, appointed by the First Baptist Church in this city, to remonstrate with you on the course of action which you have recently taken in our church difficulties, have learned with deep regret, that some twenty or more members, composing a small minority, did after a meeting of the church on Tuesday night last, organized a meeting and dissent from the action of the church proper, and resolve that you, the minority, were the First Baptist Church in Nashville.

Our sorrow is increased when we remember that such a course is contrary to the gospel which we in common profess to love; and that such opposition to the majority is factious, and revelutionary in its character, which in your calmer moments, we think you yourselves will be ready to admit."

"We therefore beg of you not to be too hasty in your action," "remembering that the church itself, is the sole judge in all cases."

In view of these facts we earnestly beseech you to reconsider your course. We are forced to believe that you must have acted precipitately, under the influence of strong excitement. We have labored with you for years in the good work of extending the gospel, and we grieve to think that at this late day, you desire to separate from the church under such circumstances."

To this note the committee received a voluminous response signed by H. G. Scovel, Geo. C. Creighton, A. B. Shankland, W. P. Marks, Aaron Wright, E. F. Pool, and J. B. Shankland, and published the same week in the Tennessee Baptist. Some extracts are inserted containing its substance:

"We beg to call your attention to the written Declaration which we adopted at the meeting on Tuesday night." "If you suppose" "that we determined upon our course without due deliberation, and under the influence of temporary excitement, you have, as regards some of us at least, greatly misapprehended the facts." "We have long anticipated the

results to which you came on Tuesday night." "You tell us that our course is contrary to the gospel, but you give us [no] proof from the gospel to show us our fault." "So far therefore, are we from being convinced by your remonstrance that we ought to retrace our steps, we feel impelled earnestly to exhort you to retrace your steps and rescind your unscriptural proceedings."

The committee found these reculant wholly in corrigible. They failed to obtain, as their design, possession of the house of worship, to which they had set up claims in their Declaration. They therefore rented a Fireman's Hall, where they met the next Lord's day, as the First Baptist Church in Nashville, elected Mr. J. R. Graves as their pastor, and thence forward proceeded as if they had really been the church. This claim they reiterated weekly in their paper, coupled with the most outrageous denunciations of the church itself, and of its pastor, and all its leading members by name. They evidently intended to make a return to the church impracticable.

(Claims of
the schis-
matics.)

"The Committee reported at the next meeting of the church, that they had utterly failed of success, and they were instructed to prepare and submit charges against them. They did so. The charges were entertained by the church; a copy was placed by order of the church, in the hands of each one; and they were summoned to appear and answer before its bar. On the day appointed for their trial, none of them appeared. The church assumed that they were absent intentionally, determined to proceed with their trial. The charges reported by

the Committee were as follows:

"Your Committee having done all in their power to reclaim them, and having wholly failed, now present for your final action, the cases of A. C. Dayton, H. G. Scovel, George C. Creighton, A. B. Shankland, W. P. Marks, Aaron Wright, E. F. P. Peole, and I. B. Rutland, members of this church and subject to its disciplines; A. C. Dayton being an ordained minister, and H. G. Scovel, A. B. Shankland, and Aaron Wright, as guilty of the following, among other open and public sins against Christ, his church, and his people; -

They are guilty of the sin of schisms; they are disorderly persons; they have banded themselves together against this church; they refuse to hear the church; they are defamers of its character; they have conspired to break down, and destroy its discipline; and they have thus placed themselves without the pale of its Christian fellowship.

1. They are guilty of the sin of schism, in that for many months previous to the 12th day of last October, they did, as they confess, meditate discord and division in this church; and in that on the night of the same day instigated by J. R. Graves, in violation of the express command of our Lord Jesus Christ, and (Impeach- his apostles, by tumultuous measures, did succeed in dividing of the the church, and in carrying off with them a party from its (Schis- union and fellowship. matics.

2. These members are guilty of the sin of disorder, in that they acted in this division, in violation of the divine law, and of the principles of Christian fellowship; in that they

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have (for now more than four months) absented themselves wholly from all assemblages of this church and from the ordinances of Christ here administered; and in that they have refused to perform any of their covenanted duties, as members of this church.

3. These members are guilty of the sin of banding themselves against this church, in that they have set up an opposition place of meeting, when they assemble; that they have unlawfully assumed its corporate name, and vested right.

4. These members are guilty of the sin of refusing to hear the church, in that they pertinaciously resist the entreaties and exhortations of brethren who were appointed to labor with them, and seek to sustain themselves in their errors by sophistical reasoning, upon what they should know are false premises, the church having laid before them, plainly, the facts in the case.

5. These members are guilty of the sin of defaming the church, in that they have misrepresented its proceedings, its motives and its purposes; in that they have declared, and with the proof before their eyes to the contrary, that it has repudiated the law of Christ, acted in violation of his law, cast aside the word of God, as its rule and action, and placed itself in open rebellion against the command of the Great Head of the church; and in that they undertake to degrade it by calling it "a disorderly faction, trampling on the law of Christ," the "Howell Society," and other like offensive appellations, which have been published in the newspapers.

6. They are guilty of the sin of conspiracy to break down and destroy the discipline of the church; in that they have publicly denounced said discipline as unscriptural, dishonoring to Christ, and as repudiating the divine law, in that to prevent its practical results, they affect to be themselves the church, and to reverse its decisions, that they by false representations, induced the General Association, a body restricted by its constitution to missionary action, to erect itself into a Court of Appeals, and do condemn and expel it; in that they have banded themselves under a leader, J. R. Graves, as their pastor for the time, a man lately expelled from this church, who is degraded from the ministry, and not now a member of any church; and in that they assemble weekly, with the said excommunicant, Graves, whom Christ has ~~commanded them~~ to regard as "a heathen man and a publican;" and receive from his hands what they profess to look upon as the ordinances of the gospel.

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7. They are guilty of sin of placing themselves without the pale of Christian fellowship; in that they are then guilty of schism, in that they are guilty of disorder, in that they are guilty of banding themselves against the church; in that the are guilty of defaming the church, and in that they are guilty of a conspiracy to break down and destroy the discipline of the church.

These trials were all conducted with the utmost carefulness and patience. They were each of them unanimously expelled. And on the 25th day of February, fifteen others were also expelled, mostly women, boys and girls, members of their families.

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Thus the whole of this faction was separated from the church. The elements of discord which had agitated it for so many years were removed; and again the church progressed with its former harmony and vigor.

Still claiming to be the First Baptist Church in Nashville, which claim they published weekly in their newspapers and through other media, the church at a regular meeting, held on Wednesday evening, January 5, 1857, adopted the following preamble and resolutions, a copy of which was sent to the party, and also published in the city papers:

Whereas, The First Baptist Church of the city of Nashville, was incorporated by an act of the Legislature of the State of Tennessee, passed on the second day of March 1858, and

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Whereas, Said act of Incorporation was duly accepted by the members composing the First Baptist Church at a regular meeting of the church on the 13th day of April, 1858, and in pursuance of said Act, trustees were appointed to hold the property belonging to the First Baptist Church, and,

Whereas, It is understood that certain disorderly persons are holding meetings at a place called Fireman's Hall, and claiming to be the First Baptist Church of the city of Nashville, thereby inducing the false impression that the First Baptist Church, legally incorporated as aforesaid, has surrendered its chartered privileges - Therefore,

Resolved, That there is but one First Baptist Church in the city of Nashville (now under the pastoral charge of Elder

R. B. C. Howell) and all other organizations claiming to be the First Baptist Church, are fraudulent, and illegal organizations, and subjects all parties concerned in such illegal organizations to prosecution for violation of chartered rights vested in the First Baptist Church.

Resolved, That all parties engaged in such combinations, and claiming to be the First Baptist Church of the city of Nashville are hereby notified and forewarned against using in any manner, the corporate name of the church aforesaid,

Resolved, That a copy of the foregoing preamble and resolution be placed upon record, and published in the newspapers of the city.

The faction now ceased to call themselves the First Baptist Church, and assumed the name of "the Spring Street Church, or what was the Orderly Portion of the First Baptist Church in Nashville."