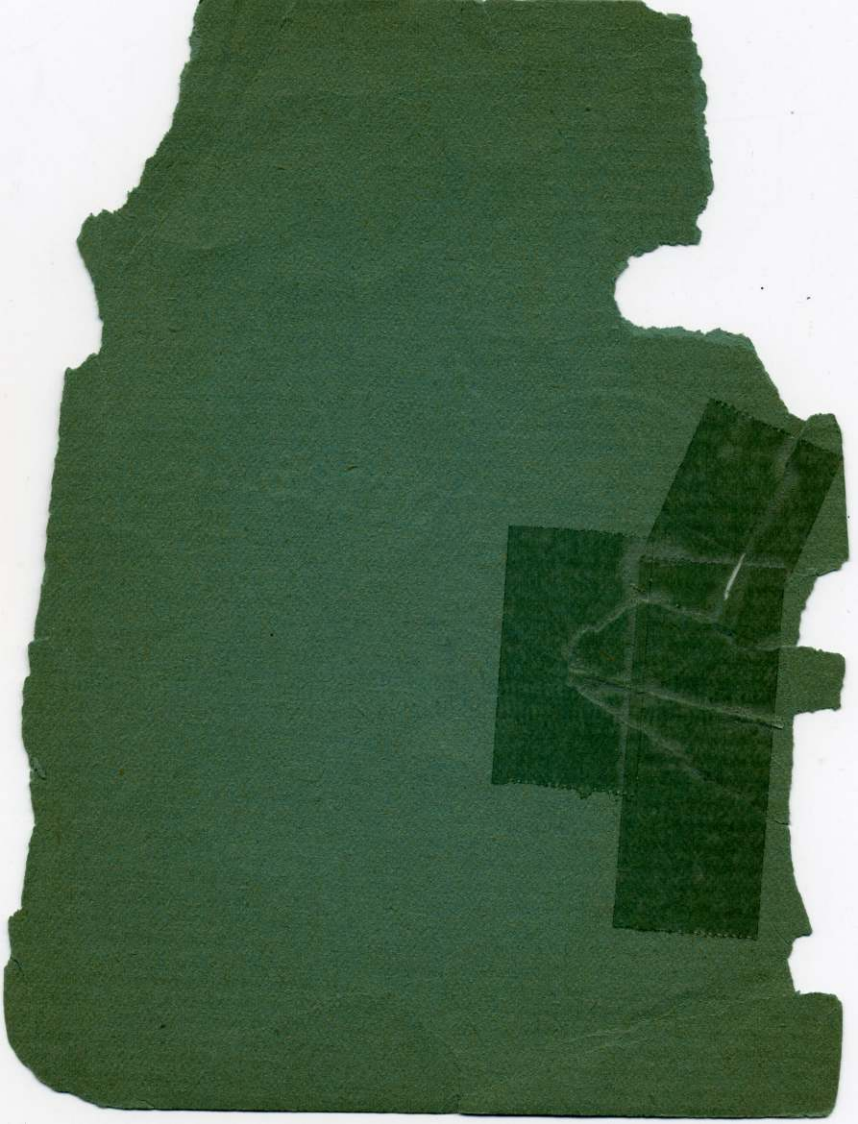
Memories...



Some Memories

OF

The First Pastorate

OF

The Second Presbyterian Church

OF

Wheeling, Virginia.

From 1848 to 1857.

BY

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PREFACE.

THE SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH of Wheeling, Virginia, in the Presbytery of Washington, and Synod of Wheeling, was organized February 18th, 1848, with fifteen members, including the two Elders, Messrs. Samuel Ott and William B. Quarrier, dismissed for the purpose from the First Church.

At the same time the Rev. Cyrus Dickson, who had already been preaching to them, was called to be their Pastor; and he was installed May 12th, 1848, and the pastoral relation continued until Ocotber 22d, 1856, when it was dissolved by the Presbytery, that he might accept a call to Baltimore, Maryland.

The following paper was read at the semi-centennial celebration of the Church, May 12th, 1898; when, by the changes of national and ecclesiastical boundaries, it was now in Wheeling, *West* Virginia, Presbytery of Washington, and Synod of Pennsylvania.

MEMORIES.

WHEN one attempts to recall the early years of the Second Church there arise dim visions of a Wheeling very unlike the present. Then no railroad had reached the city, and the view from the massive parapet of the old stone bridge to the wooded shore of the Island was unimpeded by any structure crossing the Creek, whose southern or left bank all above this one bridge was almost everywhere in a state of nature, while on the north bank, above the bridge, were some cotton factories and a saw mill, and below, at the point where the Creek entered the river, there was an iron mill whose lofty chimney was the pride of the city, and which really was as graceful as many a monument erected for less utilitarian purposes. Where the church edifice now stands and the lots extending to the alley parallel with Market street and for some distance

to the south were all the grounds of the residence of Mr. William Chapline, a spacious old mansion standing high above the present grade of the street on which the church fronts (then called Webster street), with the two-storied portico, so often seen in Virginia homes of an early era, facing the north. Chapline's Hill and the high semi-circle of hills which defined the "*Wheeling*" course of the Creek were covered with beautiful forest trees, and were like ramparts defending from the attacks of easterly winds.

The old United States Hotel at the steamboat landing, a cotton factory near the Creek bridge, and possibly some other buildings, each manufactured illuminating gas for its own use, but there were no public gas works, and lanterns were very desirable when one would go about after dark. The part of the city just below the Creek was for some years called South Wheeling, and later Centre Wheeling, when the former name was given to Ritchietown. A German Methodist and an American Methodist Church had the only church edifices then in the bounds of this region, those of the Episcopalian, Unitarian (bought later by the Lutheran), Disciples and Roman Catholic congregations being built within the succeeding nine

years. The streets had brick sidewalks and some had been macadamized, but most of the roadways in this part of the city were quite unpaved, but supplied here and there with high stepping stones for crossing the deep clay mud in wet weather, which would otherwise have seemed almost as impassable as Bunyan's Slough of Despond. There is still a vivid recollection of the rubber shoe being drawn off from the foot by this tenacious mud, and left swamped in the middle of a street one thawing day.

On the north side of the Creek there have also been many changes. Then the principal burying ground was a short distance north of the Creek, where afterwards a railroad built its terminus. Next to the First Presbyterian Church was the old round-towered Lancasterian Academy endowed by Mr. Lindsley, and next to it the large, severely plain "Fourth-Street Methodist Church." The Court House, St. Matthew's Church, and the Merchants' and Mechanics' Bank, with their classic pillars, stucco walls, and surrounding shrubbery, impressed a child's taste as deeply as have, in later life, far finer specimens of architecture. The suspension bridge to the Island, at that time the glory of the town, was just erected and said to be

the longest span then known. When the opening of the Baltimore and Ohio railway was celebrated a lamp was hung at every foot of the one thousand and ten between its towers, and there still lingers the memory of the beauty of that inverted arch of light as seen from the pastor's home in Centre Wheeling. On the river front south of the Creek there were few or no manufactories, so that it was a pleasant place for residence and a favorite walk, where the great steamboats—the chief means of travel and transportation in those days—passing up and down the beautiful river gave constant life to the landscape presented by the far-off Ohio hills, clothed, like the nearer Island, with thick woods and verdure.

The first recollections of church services are connected with the third-story room over the hardware store of Messrs. Ott and Greer, to which we climbed by steep stairs from Market street, and where the summer sun struck the southern windows. But I was too young to remember very distinctly until the place of worship had been changed. The back part of the Chapline residence was made into one large, airy room by the removal of partitions and of the floor dividing the first and second stories, and a flight of wooden steps was

built on the north end, west of the present church, while the front part of the mansion was torn down and the grounds were graded to make place for a building for the new congregation. During the year and a half in which services were held in that room more than one hundred members were added to the church, a large proportion of whom came by examination. The new edifice—now almost half-a-century old—was surmounted by a a belfry and high spire beautifully proportioned. When the first spire had just been raised by ropes and tackling to its place, late in October, 1849, it lost its balance by the breaking of a guy rope and fell to the street below, fatally injuring a man who had just come along asking for work and had been set turning the windlass. It was soon replaced, and for many years its "heavenward pointing" summit was a landmark seen from far. The bell was bought in Cincinnati by Mr. Edgar Woods and Mr. Henry Crangle (I think,) and was deep-toned and solemn compared with its neighbor on the little engine house soon afterwards built near the rear of the church, which rang out the notice of fire with a clattering alarum at all hours of day and night. The mention of bells brings back the awe-inspiring tone of the hand-bell rung

by the city bell-man, as he slowly rode on his horse through the streets announcing that a child was lost or some other tidings demanding immediate attention. When that sound came in the evening twilight what visions of distress it awakened! The large audience room of the church was lighted by lard oil lamps, and the great chandelier in the centre and the two tall candelabra on either side of the pulpit, made by the famous firm of Cornelius in Philadelphia, were objects of great admiration. There was a gallery across the north end of the room and its middle was occupied by the choir. The pulpit was at the south end, and was a long white desk with a crimson velvet cushion on which lay the Bible given (I think) by some one in the city, and a large, handsomely bound copy of "Psalms and Hymns," presented by Mrs. William A. Herron, of Pittsburgh. On the rear of the platform, against the wall, was a mahogany sofa covered with hair cloth, and supplied with a large gray feather fan. There were two brass collection boxes attached to long wooden handles which were carried by the Elders down the middle and up the side aisles and passed into each pew to receive the offerings, which were usually of coin, as in those days no bank notes of a less value than five dollars

were allowed in Virginia. There was no table, but on Communion Sabbaths the Superintendent's table was brought from the Sabbath School room and its place there supplied by a little round stand borrowed from the home of the pastor.

For several weeks before the Lord's Supper notice was given of it, and frequent meetings of the Session were held to receive the letters of those coming by certificate and to examine those wishing to profess their faith. No one was admitted by examination until after at least two interviews with the Session, and sometimes remaining under its care several months. There were seldom "special services" except the week preceding the sacrament, when preparation for the communion was usually the theme. On the Sabbath morning, after the sermon, the list of those received by the Session was read, and those by profession came in front of the pulpit and gave assent to the questions by which they declared their belief in doctrine and their promise to attempt the duties of a Christian life; and those who had not previously been baptized then received that initiatory seal. Then, after reading the Scripture authority and inviting "all members of sister churches, in good standing "in their own, to unite with us in this Supper of

"our common Lord," the request was made that no one would leave the house, but all remain till the close of the service; and, while the hymn was sung which begins

> "According to Thy gracious word,
> "In meek humility,
> "This will I do, my dying Lord,
> "I will remember Thee,"

the separation of the congregation took place: the communicants occupying the middle pews, and others withdrawing to the side or gallery. The solemn impressions produced by those changes were too deep to be erased, and were—in many instances—the means of awakening souls. None of the thirty-four communion seasons under the first pastorate passed without additions to the membership. The Session kept watchful oversight of the flock, and a degree of discipline was maintained which would seem very rigid in these days.

The Wednesday night service was a lecture or sermon by the pastor, often on the Larger Catechism, that wonderfully comprehensive summary of Bible teaching. For some time, on Sabbath afternoons, he met with the young men of the Church in a prayer-meeting, where many first learned to hear their own voices leading the devo-

tions of others. In order to help those who could not give day time to study, he established week-night classes in the Lecture room, taught gratuitously by himself and other qualified gentlemen of the Church, some of whom also taught in the day in the Academy and other schools of the city. Some of the pupils were from other congregations; some afterward became ministers; and the culture gained by those who went no farther was by no means lost.

On Friday nights there were "Family prayer-"meetings" conducted by the pastor, or sometimes by an elder, in the homes of the members, so as to reach in succession various neighborhoods. When held at the pastor's home the children of the household delighted in being sent to invite all the people in the vicinity, and, as a consequence, there was always a large attendance there, filling often the parlor, study, and hall, and sometimes the stairs. There were never at these or any other services—so far as memory can recall—voluntary prayers or remarks, but those who "took part" did so in response to a request of the leader.

The music in these meetings, in the Sabbath-School and on Wednesday nights was entirely vocal, the only instrument in use being a small

"melodeon"—probably the ancestress of the modern "baby organ"—which aided the choir on the Sabbath. But in these other services the singing was well led, usually by Mr. Berryhill, and although there were no notes in the hymn books there was hearty following the tune set by the leader. With the volume of Psalms and Hymns, then used in all our Presbyterian churches, were bound up the Shorter Catechism, Form of Government, and Directory for Worship, so that from childhood we became familiar with the distinctive characteristics of the faith and polity of our own denomination.

The Sabbath School was, from the first, an important part of the organization, although it was never intended to be the so-called "Children's "Church" in taking the place of their attendance on the preaching of the Word, but rather as enabling them to give more intelligent attention to the regular services of the sanctuary. There are dim recollections of Mr. Redick McKee and of Mr. Samuel Ott as superintendents, but more distinct of Mr. Robert Crangle, who for thirty-three years worthily filled the office. It was probably he who introduced the methodical arrangements by which the classes, scholars, and books were numbered and recorded, and which

conduced so greatly to the admired order and efficiency of the school. The Library was on the platform at the south end of the room, with a wooden settee and red moreen cushion where the librarians sat during the opening and closing exercises. The superintendent's table was in front, the girls' classes on the east side of the room and the boys on the west, occupying unpainted wooden benches, which, I think, had been used in the church services in the Chapline house; and the teachers had chairs. At that time the small rooms had only doors opening to the lobby, and were used for the young men's prayer-meetings, Session meetings, etc.

In those days the International system of uniform lessons had not been inaugurated, and each class studied the portion of Scripture selected according to its teacher's judgment, but "learning "by heart" Bible passages was expected of all, and the old class books of those years record hundreds of verses thus recited. The Shorter Catechism was also thus committed by all, and when a scholar could answer accurately all of its one hundred and seven questions a book with a certificate to that effect, written and signed on its fly-leaf by the superintendent, was presented publicly to the

happy recipient. This was the only prize given by the school: sometimes, but rarely, a teacher offered a reward for some Bible memorizing. Some classes used question books, but the committing Scripture, Catechism, and hymns was the chief employment. The singing was from a little book then issued by the Presbyterian Board of Publication for the use of Sabbath Schools, and the tunes, for the most part, were those used in all the other services, so that the children were ready to join with their parents in praise in the church. These tunes were learned orally, so to speak, as the hymn books had no notes; once, it is remembered, for a few weeks those who could come on Saturdays were exercised in singing by a gentleman named Stone, who brought his violin and played the tunes first, so that—in the language of the time—they might be "caught" more easily. The tune "Evan" to this day always brings to mind one of those bright Saturdays, and the hymn,

> "And now another hour is past
> "Of kind instruction given,"

which was so often used in closing the Sabbath-School. In the little "Hymns for Youth," as well as in the "Psalms and Hymns," there were several

pages of Doxologies, and whatever was the metre of the last hymn used in any service, there was a doxology of the same metre sung in conclusion; long, common, short, hallelujah, 7's, 7's and 6's, 8's, 8's and 7's, 8's, 7's and 4's, 11's and 8's, 11's, peculiar, etc., always excepting "From Greenland's "Icy Mountains," that special favorite of the pastor and all his people, whose inspiriting tune would not fit the doxology in 7's and 6's given in both books.

Missionary enthusiasm was one of the distinguishing features of the school, and was a natural consequence of the interest of the whole congregation in the conversion of this land and all the world. From the first the Monthly Concert was a regular service, held on Sabbath afternoons and attended by young and old and by people from other churches in the city. There were no Bands or other organizations, and there were no methods of raising money but simple, conscientious giving—sometimes, it is true, by means of self-denial or laborious earning—yet seven heathen children were supported in our Presbyterian missions in India, China, and among the American Indians, by the Second Church Sabbath-School. These far-away protégés bore the English names

chosen by the school: Cyrus Dickson, Delia M. Dickson, Edgar Woods, Robert Crangle, James McKelly, Louisa Stillwell, and James C. Orr. How eagerly were the annual reports of the schools, then given in the "Foreign Missionary" magazine, read to learn the welfare and progress of these children; how gladly were letters received from their teachers; and how delighted all were when a missionary from China came and told how our two boys in his school, named Cyrus Dickson and Edgar Woods, were devoted friends, just as those for whom they were called were in America!

There were never any so-called "entertain-" ments" either *for* the school or *by* the school. The one only occasion that could at all be classed as such was the presentation, at the annual meeting, January, 1856, of Bibles to Mr. Crangle and Mr. Quarrier, the Superintendent and Vice-Superintendent, "in token of the regard in which they "were held by the Librarians, Teachers, and "Scholars." Mr. John C. Hervey spoke for the teachers and James Rhodes for the scholars.

At times the pastor met the children on a Sabbath afternoon to examine them in the Catechism and to explain it to them. He always came into the school before going to the morning ser-

vice, and brought with him any visiting minister. He knew almost every child personally, and there were probably few or none, old or young, to whom he did not at some time speak of eternal interests

The last Thursday of February, for so many years set apart by the General Assembly as the Day of Prayer for the Young, was always observed by special meetings, and parents were exhorted to have their children excused from the schools, that they might bring them to the services, and as a testimony of their appreciation of the importance of the subject.

In those times the general government did not, as now, recommend a national thanksgiving day, and the old State of Virginia, in its dread of commingling the affairs of Church and State, also abstained from all such appointments; but there are remembered days set apart by the City Council, when the cholera prevailed as an epidemic, that "the removal of the pestilence might be im-
"plored of Almighty God, with fasting, humilia-
"tion and prayer," and when solemn services were held in the churches.

So far all is impersonal. How many once-familiar faces appear when one lives over those first years of the Second Church! Not least dis-

tinct is that of poor George Gaunt, the sexton, who, because the laws of Virginia prohibited any free colored person from living within the State, had his home in Bridgeport, whence he came in Summer's heat and Winter's cold to serve in this house of the Lord. Perhaps it is not strange that his work was not always satisfactory to his employers. As punctual in attendance is seen Mr. Quarrier, beloved of all, in his arm chair before the pulpit, listening with eye as well as with ear, and full of courtesy to every one. But time would not suffice to tell of all who are remembered among the dear people who in those early years worshipped together here, and who have been scattered all over this continent from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Many, no doubt, are to-day with the pastor who loved them, in the Paradise of God. May every name on the old rolls of the Church and Sabbath-School be found written in the Lamb's Book of Life in lines of mercy!