

Baptist

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SOME REFLECTIONS AND THOUGHTS
CONNECTED WITH THE BAPTIST CHURCH IN
BOWLING GREEN, KENTUCKY

BY

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Some reflections and thoughts connected with the labors of Baptist ministers in Warren and adjoining counties in Kentucky, in connection with the organization of a Baptist Church in the town of Bowling Green (now known as Main Street Church) together with the names of several Baptist ministers, whose visits were occasionally here.

--To wit, Elder William Warder from Glasgow, and Isaac Hodgins (from what is known now as Larue County) were in the habit of making visits together, at least annually, having their appointments ahead, from, from the counties of Green, Barren, Warren, Logan, and Todd, at the several county-towns and intermediate points. The time running back (as the writer recollects) to 1818. The organization of the Bowling Green Church was consummated in the year 1818 with the following brethren and sisters, to wit, Daniel Smith and wife, James Owens and wife, (son-in-law and wife), Thomas McNeal, Mother, sister, and Brethren Moody, Grub, and wife, John Moorman and wife, John Thompson and wife, Burge and wife, old Bro. Keel (a superannuated minister) and wife and (some others not recollected),--when Bro. Wm. Warder was chosen pastor (for monthly preaching), who continued to serve the church until August, 1836, when he was called by death, from his earthly labors. No Brother was more beloved than Bro. Wm. Warder, As pastor he was beloved, for efficiency he was not surpassed, as a Gospel preacher he was in the first rank, as a good man, unequalled.

Connected with the visits of Brethren Warder and Hodgins during the years, 1818 and 19 God was with them and blessed their labors. As the result, large ingatherings were received into the churches in Warren, Logan, and Todd counties----Of the fruit gathered the writer will be pardoned for mentioning the name of Elder Philip S. Fall who was and is (for he is still living) a native of England, a young man of extraordinary accomplishments as to education and scholarship.

This young man some 20 years old, professed to be converted and was baptized in 1818 or 19 by Elder Isaac Hodgins, and very soon commenced preaching (and was called the boy preacher). The writer recollects to have heard him preach several times in the year 1820 in Bowling Green. His youthful appearance (21 years old), his ability to preach was attracting large crowds to hear him. Some years afterwards, Elder P. S. Fall connected his membership with the current reformation, with Alexander Campbell as a leader.-----

Among the laborers with Brethren Warder and Hodgins, were Elder John S. Wilson, Wm. Warfield, Rueben Ross and others. Continuous gatherings from 1818, were regular, not in great numbers, but many valuable members that were from the families of Smith, Neal, Burch, Burge, Johnson, Baker, Vanmeter, Maxeys, Stockton, Neeves, Jackson (on Gasper River) and others. In the year 1821 a prominent member Bro. James Owens died of what was called Conjestive fever, but in any of the cities of the South, would have been pronounced yellow fever. Several other citizens died of the same disease.

Elder Jeremiah Vardeman well known in Kentucky as a Revivalist, made several trips through Southern Kentucky of like character as those of Warder and Hodgins. In the year 1820 when Elder Vardeman was expected, there being no house of worship (the weather being warm), a bush arbor was made on what is known as the Tom Barnett lot where the people by hundreds, assembled to hear the Great Revivalist, Vardeman (great in more ways than one, whose stature and weight was 275 to 300 pounds). During one of his visits, he baptized the wife of Dr. R. B. Stockton, and while the name of Stockton is being mentioned the writer is reminded of a meeting held by the Baptist Church in the Court House in 1820, when he (the writer) accompanied his Mother to church. --After sermon by the Pastor when an opportunity was afforded

for any person desiring to confer with the church to do so. When to the astonishment of all, Dr. R. B. Stockton (who the writer presumes was 40 or 45 years of age) came forward and addressed the Moderator and Brethren as follows, --That he was baptized at the age of 13 or 14 years old (his venerable father being a Baptist minister). The Doctor then stated, that his opinion of the administration of baptism was alone to and for the Believer, that his opinion then was that he was not a believer when baptized but now was a believer. Therefore, he desired baptism by the pastor with the consent of the church. The question being taken, it was unanimously decided to comply with the request. And was done by the pastor on the next day, being the Lords day. (The writer witnessing the administration of the ordinance.) This was to the writer unmistakable evidence of the "Faith in believers baptism." In the winter of 1829-30, was a notable occasion of revival interest, when the truth preached by Brethren Warder, Wilson, and Warfield, was wonderfully blessed, during which time Brethren John Atkinson and wife, James Maxey (known favorably as Uncle Jeff) and many others received by baptism. "The revival interest extended to the Methodist Church" with the labor of the presiding Elder Jonathan Stamper, with the stationed preacher from Russellville. Now Bishop Cavanaugh, when the revival interest had passed, a sermon on the Baptismal question (as is often the case) was preached by Rev. Mr. Cavanaugh. His friends were very much elated with the power of their pastor (and he was and is yet a fine pulpit orator). The impression of his friends was "That his sermon could not successfully be replied to.

On the next Lords day was the meeting of the Baptist church, when the pastor was in attendance, Bro. Warfield also being present

--an appeal was made to the pastor, that Bro. Warfield must reply to the sermon of Mr. Cavanaugh. Not until 10 o'clock p.m. on Saturday night was permission granted by the pastor. -- Whatever preparation was needed had then to be made. On the next day the court house being filled to its utmost capacity, the pastor and speaker were present. It will be remembered that several individuals were present, prepared to take notes of the references and quotations made, when the speaker arose. He said that he would wait on those gentlemen who wished to take notes and which promise he adhered to strictly. Bro. Warfield seemed to be perfectly at home so far as meeting the argument of the distinguished gentleman was concerned. The result with the masses was that Mr. Cavanaugh was second best in the controversy.

To say the least, quiet was restored for more than 20 years when a general discussion pervaded the community, more or less for several years.

In the year 1833 a revival interest sprang up in this town more solid and permanent, than at any period in the last sixty (60) years. The result being quite an Ingathering into the Baptist Church, as well as other churches of the town. Of the ingatherings of this meeting in 1833 the writer is the only male member, now living and yet a member of and Sister Briggs membership (now dead) but was the oldest Baptist as to age and membership at her death that there was in the church. It will be remembered that the additions of 1829-30, the most prominent of which were Brethren Maxcy and Atkinson. To speak or write of them and their usefulness and efficiency requires more capacity than the writer has. The greatest calamity that seemed to threaten this church was in store, when in March 1834 the families of Brethren James Maxcy, 5 in

number, Bro. Atkinson, 2 in number, Bro. Foley Vaughan and wife, and Bro. Walton and wife (in all 11 members), it was to the writer like sundering the churches best hopes. It will be remembered that most of those that remained (the writer means male members) lived in the country. There were quite a number still in town but were of late additions, therefore, not efficient, hence the struggle. During a part of the years 1835 and 6 in less than 12 months of those two years, so far as death can seem to present a calamity to the cause of our Zion, Brethren Walter Walder, John S. Wilson, William Warder, and William Warfield, four of our equal, if not first preachers in the state, were cut down by death and taken from the ranks of our under shepherds. In a short time Elder Silas Noel of Lexington, Kentucky, died during the session of the Baptist State Convention in his own city in 1835.

Elder Wm. Warder (our beloved pastor) died in August 1836. In November 1835 before the pastor's death, Rev. Thomas J. Fisher held a meeting of considerable interest, as a pulpit orator he was unequalled. The attraction of the multitude was general, other denominations were in attendance, especially the Methodists, who gathered quite a number of the converts; (L.L. Cooke, being one of them). In November, 1836, Elder J. M. Pendleton having been invited to visit us (with a view of a call) preached on Saturday, church meeting day, when an adjournment to 3 o'clock p.m. Quite a number of the members present, Brother Daniel Smith (the oldest male member of the church) was called to the chair as Moderator, who opened by prayer, after which he stated the object of the meeting was to call a pastor. There were several aged members present, Brethren Smith, Blakey, and others. Silence seemed to prevail for a time, when a young member rose and read a

resolution, the purport of which was, that Brother J. M. Pendleton be called as permanent pastor to this church, at a salary of \$400.00 per annum. A damper seemed to prevail, the amount being beyond the reach of the church, as stated by the moderator. At length the question was taken by rising. When the pledge of the Brethren and sisters was equal to the task, a committee was appointed to present the desires of the church to Bro. Pendleton who very soon accepted, and entered upon the duties of pastor on the first day of January, 1837, and labored faithfully and zealously, with this church 20 years, (except a part of the year 1851 while at Russelville). In November, 1851, he was again called to the care as pastor and remained to the first day of January, 1857, when he located at Murfreesboro, Tennessee. During the stay of Bro. Pendleton with the Bowling Green Church, there was several very interesting meetings which the writer will make some allusion to. To wit, in the month of March and April, 1840, Elder John L. Burrows and Alford Taylor, came to B. Green (stopped at the home of the writer) and Bro. Burrows did all the preaching, and Bro. Taylor with the pastor did the mixing, visiting and instruction. Bro. Burrows labors in the pulpit was owned and blessed of God. The result being on the second week at the close, 26 were added by Baptism, on the 3rd Lords day 26 more were received by baptism. Many others professed conversion. This was a meeting never to be forgotten by the members. Of those who were of the fruits of this meeting, of 52 baptisms, there are only two male members in the church now, to wit, Brethren A. D. Webb and I. L. Millican. In the year 1843, a meeting was held by the pastor, assisted by Brother Moses Akin whose labors were blessed, eight or ten valuable additions were added, Dr. W. D. Helm, Miss Lucy Thornton and others were of the number.

In 1844 or '5 Rev. T. J. Fisher again visited this church. His zeal and pulpit oratory were blessed and many additions were received. Several of the writers children of the number.

There was a meeting held with this church in February or March, 1851 (after the resignation of Elder J. M. Pendleton). The preachers in attendance were S. L. Helm of Kentucky and Rev. John W. Bowen of Smith County, Tennessee. Elder Helm by virtue of industry and management was first in attendance and preached two or three times before Rev. Mr. Bowen arrived, (the writer was absent in the country) and stopped at the writers house where he was taken care of. Bro. Bowen was accompanied to the meeting house, when he was invited to preach the first night after getting here, which he did with so much pleasure to the firends that he was invited to preach the second night, which he did with like satisfaction. (In the meantime the writer was at home) and was gratified that his Tennessee friend was so acceptable. The meeting went on, Elder Helm leading, preaching alternately (as the writers recollection is). Some interest was indicated, and an invitation was given to such as desired the prayers and instruction to come forward and occupy certain pews (or benches). When several came forward, Brother Bowen (as was the habit of Baptist and Pedo-Baptists) drew near to those bowed down, and commenced talking or instructing some of the anxious. In a few minutes Elder Helm came and took hold of Mr. Bowen by the arm and said "get up and then said I do not allow any person to instruct the anxious at my meeting". *See J. W. Bowens letter bearing dates July 11th and 20th which corroborates the statement here made. The of the events detailed further on the alone is responsible for their having occurred with by the brethren mentioned. Bowen arose as

he said mortified and confused. In a short time the meeting was dismissed. Upon arriving at the home of the writer, Brother Bowen invited him (the writer) to go to his room with him as he wanted to talk with him (the writer). When Bro. Bowen rehearsed what had occurred and the action had by Elder Helm, the writers advice was that he, Brother Bowen, should be quiet for 2 or 3 days, being satisfied that an effort would be made and was then under way, as the near future would develop, to remove him (Bowen). This was as the writer believes on Wednesday night after getting home from church. The next day passed away, not much being said. On Friday morning (snow being on the ground) as the writer was on his way to his business house, at the front gate of his yard fence, he met Brethren J. L. Wilkins and Dr. W. D. Helm, when the writer was addressed by one of the Brethren, he thinks Wilkins. In substance the following language, calling the writer by name said that we (being the sentiment of both of the Brethren) desire that you (the writer) send away Bro. Bowen, as we cannot do anything while he remains. All the remarks made were sanctioned by the silent one. The writer than inquired what was the matter, what has Bro. Bowen done, that makes it necessary that he be sent away? Tell me, the remark was further made by urging the first demand, to which the writer remarked that he would not send Bro. Bowen away, but would protect him as long as he was worthy of protection. It will be remembered that on Saturday morning after the attack at the anxious seat ~~th~~ and after the conference of Wilkins and Helm at the front gate, on assembling at the church before services commenced, that an interview was had in front of the house by S. L. Helm and J. W. Bowen (in view of the writer) the result of which, as Bro. Bowen detailed and stated to the writer, and was as follows, to

wit, that Elder Helm said to Bro. Bowen that he Helm desired to occupy the pulpit Saturday night and Sunday at 11 oclck A.M. and Sunday night and Monday night. (Four sermons in succession), that if he, Helm, could not do anything, he would take the packet boat and go home. As an evidence that this conversation was had, as stated by Bowen, Helm did occupy the pulpit the 4 times stated and Helm did leave on Tuesday morning.

There were some circumstances connected with this meeting, not very pleasant to think about, but trust that all is peace. The writer will say no more (he could not have said less.)

Then a meeting long to be remembered (in several respects) was held by Elder J. R. Graves in April, 1852, cooperating with the pastor Rev. J. M. Pendleton. As a preacher Rev. J. R. Graves was at that time rarely equaled, he could hold a congregation spell bound for two hours and a half, a ~~no~~ number were added to the church during this meeting. Meetings were held by the pastor of considerable interest, and as an evidence that his labors in the cause of Christ were highly appreciated, in his first and second call and his stay with church 20 years, leaving in January, 1857.

The next pastor called to the care of this church was Elder Thomas M. Vaughan (now of Danville, Ky.) a valuable brother beloved. The late war intervened, when the body was left as sheep without a Shepherd. After Bro. Vaughan's absence, 2 years or more Bro. George Hunt was called, I think in 1864, who labored with this church 2 or 3 years, when Elder Storts in connection with his school preached for the church one year--when our estimable and beloved Bro. Ray was called in part the year 1865-6, whose memory is in the hearts of all the members. To know him was to love him, many outsiders loved him.

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Bro. Ray had many devoted friends not connected with the church who held him in the highest esteem. His labors were but for a few months, yet his work was honored with Gods blessing, not to be forgotten while the present membership lives. Peace to his ashes.

Brother J. M. Bent was called in 1870 to labor with this church as pastor, some 3 or 4 years. His worth is known to the Brethren. Then was Brother C. E. W. Dobbs called and labored as pastor with much efficiency, ability and faithfulness for seven years. He is known to us all as an able expounder of the New Testament and worthy of respect of the great denomination to which he belongs. For the past 12 months, Brother Hardwick has supplied and filled the Pulpit as pastor of this church. We therefore trust that his labors will not be in "vain in the Lord". So mote it be.

A few thoughts in connection with erection of the house of worship, on the corner of Green and Main Streets in Bowling Green, Kentucky, by the members and friends of the Baptist church after the close of the religious interest during the winter 1829-30, the ingatherings being quite a number (for those times) and valuable members they were. In the Spring of 1830 a large number of the members residing in the country got with those living in town. The effort was made and the house on Green and Main Streets were was built and services were commenced early in the Fall following. The Bell that is now used (on Main Street House) was then presented by Dr. R. B. Stockton (a valuable member) as an evidence of his regard and the wants of the church.

The House now occupied on Main Street was commenced during the continuance of the second meeting by Elder J. R. Graves held in connection with the pastor, April or May 1833, at the close of

which the question of erecting a new and more convenient and suitable house in which to worship. Subscriptions were circulated and plans drafted and with effort and zeal of the church that labored to accomplish it, the building was erected and completed in 1854, at least so far as the services were held in the basement during the winter, 1854-5 and from that time to the present May, 1882 (except such time during the late war when it was used by the power and force of the Military.-----

I believe that the foregoing contains a faithful statement, so far as recollected and given.

Respectfully,

John Burnam