

THE WESTERN BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE.

A quarrel among members of the same church changed the course of the history of Covington and gave to its development a direction wholly different from that which it might otherwise have taken.

In the year 1833, a Convention of the Western Baptists was held in the city of Cincinnati. One of the subjects brought up for consideration was the founding, in the valley of the Mississippi, of an institution of learning for the education of young men for the ministry.

The question was referred to a committee who reported favorably at the Convention held in the following year at the same place. Thereupon a Society, called "The Western Baptist Education Society", was formed and placed in charge of the matter. The great country lying between the Allegheny mountains and the Mississippi river was before the Society from which to select a site for the proposed institution, but its Executive Committee found no place so suitable as that lying just south of what were then the corporate limits of the little city of Covington.

It was central and easily accessible by river and by the turnpikes which had been completed and were in course of construction.

It was opposite the Metropolis of the West, which, at that early day, was already the abode of a refined and cultivated society.

It was healthful and free from the fevers and miasmatic diseases then so prevalent in other parts of the West.

Its natural beauties were great. Plowed lands, meadows, orchards and groves of great forest trees of every description gave cheerful variety to the landscape, the beauty of which was enhanced by ~~the~~ high, well wooded, encircling hills.

While convenient of access, it was sufficiently remote from the noise and bustle of the outside world to afford that academic quiet and seclusion which have been considered most conducive to literary pursuits.

The Society, having selected the site, proceeded to purchase about four hundred acres of land, which may be roughly described as bounded on the north by Saratoga alley from Banklick street to Greenup street, and extending southwardly between the two last named streets to Southgate's line near Sixteenth street. A portion of the land extended east of Greenup street, while another large body of it was situated west of Banklick street.

In 1840 the Society procured the incorporation by the Legislature of Kentucky of the Western Baptist Theological Institute and conveyed to it the land which it had acquired for educational purposes.

The Institute immediately began the work for which it was incorporated. The tract of land bounded by Tenth and Eleventh streets,

which were then imaginary ways, by Madison Avenue, then a dirt road, on the east, and by what is now Russell street on the west, was chosen, because it was central and elevated, as the proper location for the college buildings and campus and the professors' houses.

The plain looking but commodious structure, now and for many years occupied by St. Elizabeth's Hospital, was then erected, the object, as shown by its construction, evidently being to devote it, at some time, to dormitory purposes, when the funds of the Institute should permit the erection of suitable buildings for lectures and recitations.

Upon the west side, fronting on Russell street, was the comfortable looking, cottage-built brick residence assigned for the use of the President of the Institute, which, in more recent years, has been converted into a two-story dwelling house with mansard-roof, without however adding to its architectural beauty.

Somewhat later the house, now standing at the north-east corner of Eleventh and Russell streets, was built for one of the professors.

The college grounds embraced about ten acres, were inclosed by a neat and substantial fence, were well turfed, laid out in an attractive manner and ornamented with trees which grew rapidly and gave a park-like appearance to the place.

The educational departments first established were a classical

and a theological school.

The former was under the charge of the Rev. Asa Drury, an accomplished Greek and Latin scholar, who understood thoroughly the art of teaching and who was always successful in acquiring and retaining the affectionate regard and esteem of the young men committed to his care.

The classical school, if not the theological, soon came to be known as one of a high order, and its pupils were not only from Covington, Cincinnati and the surrounding country, but from distant places.

The plans of the trustees of the Institute contemplated the establishment of a collegiate department as soon as the resources of the Institute would enable them to do so. The wisdom of the trustees was shown in the subdivision which they made of the land surrounding the college premises. The lots as laid out were of generous dimensions, being forty-seven and a half feet in front by one hundred and ninety feet in depth.

The beauty of the situation, its rural appearance and its freedom from anything that was offensive, attracted homeseekers, and many comfortable houses were erected in the vicinity of and looking down upon the College Square.

A long career of usefulness seemed to lie before this young institution, which had its birth under circumstances much more

favorable than those which attended the beginnings of Harvard and of Yale Universities. But the question which, a few years later, was to array one section of the United States in arms against the other, was already beginning to divide churches as well as parties, and it now obtruded itself into the meetings of the trustees of the Institute.

A large majority of the trustees were from the North, which had contributed the funds for the endowment of the Institute, and the object of its founders was to promote the education of Baptists in the Western states.

The home of the Institute however was in Kentucky, and the Southern members of the Board of Trustees were of the opinion that they should dictate and control the doctrines to be taught.

The original charter of the Institute declared that any future Legislature might alter, amend or repeal the act of incorporation whenever they might deem it right and proper to do so.

In 1848 the Kentucky members of the Board of Trustees sought and obtained from the Legislature an amendment to the charter, increasing the number of trustees to sixteen above the number then in office, and appointing, by name, the persons who should constitute the sixteen additional members of the board.

At the next meeting of the Board of Trustees after the passage of the amendment, the majority of the old Board of Trustees refused

to accept the Amendatory Act, declined to acknowledge the sixteen claimants as trustees, and adjourned.

The sixteen claimants with four members of the old board, who were on their side, then met, organized themselves into a board, and, according to a cotemporary account, conducted themselves in such a riotous manner that Rev. O. N. Sage, general agent of the Board of Trustees, carried away all the books and papers of the Institute for safe-keeping. The new trustees demanded the books and papers of Sage, who refused to return them, and thereupon they brought suit against him for their recovery.

The case, as all cases in Kentucky ultimately do, went to the Court of Appeals, which reversed the judgment of the lower court, and decided in favor of Sage, holding that the Legislature had no power to add to the number of trustees without their consent, and that the newly appointed trustees and a minority of those in office had no right to assume the control of the institution.

The case in the Court of Appeals was noteworthy from the questions involved, which were novel, at that time, in Kentucky, and from the eminent standing of the counsel who were consulted and who appeared in the argument of the case. Opinions were sought and obtained, during the progress of the case, from Henry Clay, John J. Crittenden and Simon Greenleaf.

In the Court of Appeals the case was argued orally and by

brief, on behalf of Sage, by Benton and Kinkead and Hon. Charles S. Morehead, afterwards Governor of Kentucky. Hon. George R. Sage, United States District Judge for the Southern District of Ohio, a son of Rev. O. N. Sage, who had just completed his legal studies, was examined and admitted to the bar by the Court of Appeals that he might take part in the argument on behalf of his father.

The lawyers who represented the new trustees in the Court of Appeals were James Harlan, father of Justice Harlan of the U.S. Supreme Court, Hon. John W. Stevenson and Ex-Gov. James T. Morehead.

The quarrel and the ensuing law suit sealed the fate of the Western Baptist Theological Institute, the doors of which were closed for educational purposes.

Under an award made by Justice John McLean, of the United States Supreme Court, sitting as an arbitrator, the property and funds of the institution were divided between the Baptist College at Georgetown, Ky., and Faimount Theological Seminary back of Cincinnati.

It is an interesting matter of speculation as to what might have been the future of Covington but for the unfortunate quarrel.

The lands once owned by the Western Baptist Theological Institute now constitute the most valuable portion of the city of Covington and are worth today from \$4,000,000.00 to \$5,000,000.00. If the wisdom shown in the selection and purchase of the lands had

been exercised in their management and sale and in the investment of the proceeds of sale, with harmonious action, the Western Baptist Theological Institute would ^{now} ~~not~~ be one of the few richly endowed institutions of learning in the United States.

Its growth and prosperity would have procured for it contributions and donations from other sources, for it is the prosperous institutions which attract those who give large sums for educational purposes.

The little college in Georgetown would have been absorbed by the large one in Covington. The Theological Seminary that existed in Columbia, South Carolina, instead of going to Louisville, would have come to Covington.

Under the fostering influence of a University of large proportions, with its many departments devoted to the languages, literature, the arts and sciences, Covington, instead of a manufacturing city, would have become a literary centre, the home of scholarly men drawn hither by the many advantages afforded for cultivation and self improvement. The hills themselves surrounding the city would be crowned with the residences of persons desirous of forming part of a refined and cultivated society.

And yet, so soon is the past forgotten and obliterated, most of the citizens of Covington know as little of this institution, which had in it the potentiality of so much that was good, as the

Italian peasants, who for centuries cultivated their vines and mulberry trees over the site of the buried city of Pompeii, knew of the remains of the ancient civilization lying beneath their feet.