

A HISTORY
OF
The McCormick Theological Seminary
OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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HON. CYRUS H. McCORMICK.

for new members who had hitherto taken no part and had felt no sympathy with the Seminary as organized by the Assembly of 1859. The purpose was avowed of bringing the management of the institution more into harmony with the prevailing sentiments of the times on the great disturbing questions created by the war and the reconstruction measures following it. This had already changed the complexion of the Board of Directors as to party politics, taken the direct control out of the hands of those who had been the chief supporters of the Seminary, and given to its new friends and allies what was called "a good working majority," that is of republicans.

Mr. McCormick was present at St. Louis during the sessions of the Assembly, and was in daily consultation with many of its leading members. He was strongly opposed to the proposed transfer of Dr. Lord to the chair which bore his name, not only because of the position of direct antagonism in which Dr. Lord stood towards himself and his own opinions, but because he did not regard Dr. Lord as eminently qualified to fill the chair of Didactic and Polemic Theology. He was satisfied that Dr. Lord should retain the chair of History, to which he had been elected by the Assembly of 1859, but he did not believe that it was for the best interests of the Seminary that Dr. Lord should be placed in the other chair. In this opinion many of the oldest and wisest friends of the institution concurred. Mr. McCormick had already paid into the treasury of the Seminary too large a sum not to feel a deep interest in all its movements, and he stood ready to pay over the remainder of his endowment the moment that it was made certain that the institution would not be diverted from the control of those friends and supporters who had originally endowed and sustained it. He was accordingly present at the Assembly of 1866, an interested spectator of all its proceedings, even as he had been at the Assembly of 1859.

The following paper, written by him at the time, and afterwards published, deserves a place in this history, as illustrating the state of affairs in 1866, and as showing the exact attitude in which he stood at the time, both to the Assembly and to the Seminary. It is entitled "An Address, prepared by Mr. C. H.

McCormick, at St. Louis, to be delivered to the General Assembly, then in session, in 1866, and placed in the hands of Henry Day, Esq., of New York, elder in Dr. Rice's church, to be presented to the Assembly, but who failed to get a suitable opportunity to do so," and is as follows :

"To the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, St. Louis :

"In view of the course proposed to be taken in this Assembly in relation to the Theological Seminary of the Northwest, I had intended to explain to your committee on seminaries, prior to its final action, the views of the friends and supporters of this Seminary as to the said proposed course of action, but was deprived of the opportunity to do so by the assurances of an active member of the Assembly that no immediate action on the subject would be taken by the committee, that there would be ample time, and that from the conversation between him and myself, which he seemed properly to appreciate, he thought it better not to send a paper to the committee until something further could be ascertained, which he promised to do and to report to me. Next day, however, the committee made its report to the Assembly.

"It is with much reluctance, Mr. Moderator, that I can consent to trespass upon the indulgence of the Assembly in consuming a moment of its time. Nothing but a sense of duty impels me to it, with a desire that my own position, and that of the friends of this Seminary, may be known to the Assembly, and that whatever shall be done by the Assembly in the matter shall be with a knowledge of the facts in the case ; that the responsibility may then rest where it properly belongs.

"Now, sir, as it has been openly avowed (for a supposed good purpose) by the member of this body referred to, a director in the Seminary (Mr. Jesse L. Williams), that the changes proposed to be made in the Board of Directors of the Seminary, as well as the election of a professor to the Cyrus H. McCormick professorship of Didactic and Polemic Theology, are to be made on political or party grounds and from party considerations ; as you, sir, in the presence of this Assembly, have kindly and in flattering terms, though in a different connection,

referred to my political position before the country, you will allow me one word for myself and friends in that connection.

“My political principles, while not in harmony with the majority on this floor, are now the same as when I proposed to endow the professorships; the same as when, in 1864, I was in nomination for Congress, when, yielding to no one as a union man, I was alike opposed to connecting politics with religion, or with the social or business relations of life. But, while myself believing democratic principles in the government of the country as essential as ever to its prosperity, I can see no justification whatever for the proscription now proposed in the management of the Seminary. Heretofore no such tests have been applied or thought of; while now, in the language of Mr. Jesse L. Williams in the conversation referred to, with about three-fourths of the whole number of directors republican, further changes are to be made for a ‘good working majority.’

“I approached Mr. Williams as the leading opposition member, who at the last meeting of the Board of Directors of the Seminary proposed and carried by a majority of eleven (twelve) to nine a motion to transfer Dr. Lord to the chair of Theology and to elect a fourth professor. I desired to know of him the reason for desiring a man in the chair of Theology of known hostility to myself and friends, the only chair of the four endowed by me that bore my name, and while we had to the present time not only endowed the professorships but procured nearly all the property and funds in and for the Seminary. This he admitted, and added that the object of himself and friends was, by placing their man in the chair of Theology, to so interest their friends generally, who had heretofore stood aloof and done next to nothing, that they would now come forward and take the responsibility of providing the requisite funds for the completion of the buildings undertaken, supplementing the endowment of professorships, etc., which would require in the aggregate at least three hundred thousand dollars. While we had done our part well, they had, he said, ample means for accomplishing the work and should now do their part; and to that end they thought it best to have a good working majority of directors.

"I replied I supposed there must be some such money calculation, as they could hardly, by such a course, expect from me the unpaid installment for that chair. I also stated that I understood from one of Dr. Rice's friends that if he (Rice) were wanted in that chair again, further funds could be raised among his friends in New York to increase the endowment of it for him, which would be a permanent help to the Seminary. I further inquired of Mr. Williams if the possession of that particular chair was necessary to interest his friends in the Seminary; and if, indeed, while admitting that we had done so well, they could not, 'now that slavery was dead,' come forward and co-operate with us in the great work of carrying forward this institution.

"He remarked that he was glad I had introduced the conversation, regretted it had not taken place sooner, would see whether anything further could be done, there was still sufficient time to see, as nothing would be done by the committee for some days, would let me know, but thought Dr. Rice need hardly be thought of further, while Dr. MacMaster, who would probably be preferred to Dr. Lord, would also be supported by endowment if elected. Next day he remarked, on meeting me, that Dr. MacMaster would be elected, and the same day the committee reported. The nine directors referred to opposed the election of a fourth professor at this time. They were old directors, representing the views of those who had sustained the Seminary. They opposed the election on the ground that there was still a material deficiency of funds for its support."

Though this paper of Mr. McCormick did not go before the Assembly or its committee on seminaries, still his views were well known to the leading members on both sides, with whom he was in daily communication, and unquestionably had weight in shaping the conclusion finally reached by the body. Mr. McCormick had not undertaken to endow the Seminary alone. He had made a good beginning. But what he desired and expected, as expressed in this candid paper, was co-operation and united work on the part of the whole Church, and of all parties interested in the Seminary. There can be no doubt

of Mr. McCormick's continued interest in the Seminary, and that, if the General Assembly had felt disposed at that time to recall Dr. Rice to the vacant chair, Mr. McCormick would have paid at once his last installment of the endowment.

While these influences were at work in the Assembly, there was another independent proposition, which had been much discussed among the members of the body, and was rapidly gaining ground every day. It was the proposal to place Dr. MacMaster in the vacant chair of Theology. Some of his former pupils, and many of his warm personal friends, were influential members of the Assembly, as Dr. R. L. Stanton, its moderator, Dr. J. G. Monfort, Dr. T. E. Thomas, Dr. R. C. Matthews, Dr. J. P. Safford, and elders James Blake, J. H. McCampbell and Jesse L. Williams. On the Assembly's committee on theological seminaries was Rev. John Crozier, of Olney, Illinois, one of Dr. MacMaster's early pupils and most attached personal friends, who was with him in the Assembly of 1859, when he was displaced from the chair of Theology, and who had never lost hope of seeing the day when it would be restored to him. Mr. Crozier and other brethren, during the autumn preceding this Assembly, had held some conferences and correspondence in regard to the policy of proposing Dr. MacMaster for this chair of Theology, for which they knew him to be so eminently fitted. They felt that there had come a great revolution in public sentiment on the subject of slavery, as regarded both the nation and the Church. Slavery was dead, and with it, they thought, all the old issues and controversies growing out of it should be buried. There could then be no reason why so able a man as Dr. MacMaster should be kept from serving the Church in the one great work for which he was so fully prepared.

It was known to these brethren that Dr. MacMaster, while preaching as opportunity offered, had been invited to accept prominent positions in other communions, if he would leave the Presbyterian Church, but that he had declined such overtures out of a loyal preference for his own church. It was also now certain that on the one question on account of which he had been ostracised and ousted from his fitting employment of