

FIRST
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
NASHVILLE

One Hundred Years of Service

The Centenary⁴
OF
The First Presbyterian Church
OF
Nashville, Tennessee



THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE.
The Corner Stone Was Laid April 28, 1849, and the Building Dedicated on
Easter Sunday, April 20, 1851.

THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE

The Addresses Delivered in Connection
with the Observance of the
One Hundredth Anniversary,
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CHAPTER I.

A CENTURY OLD CHURCH.

By THE REV. JAMES I. VANCE, D.D.

TEXT.—“As my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out, and to come in.”—Joshua 14:11.

We have come today to honor our mother—our spiritual mother—to pay a tribute to the old church that has been our home, and the home of our fathers, for a hundred years. Here on this bit of ground where the church stands for a century God's name has been honored, and the rights of religion administered, in accordance with the faith and order of the Presbyterian Church. Here hymns have been sung and prayers offered and sermons preached. Here marriage vows have been taken. From here the dead have been buried. Here a great company of immortal souls have made public their acknowledgment of Christ as Redeemer. And here, through the long years, the faithful have gathered at the Holy Supper to keep tryst with Christ.

A century ago this church was organized. It is a long time as men count time. During this period in some of the families on our roll six successive generations have registered themselves in our communion. But a century is not long, as God counts time. A thousand years in His sight are but as yesterday when it is past. The great thing with God is, not how long, but how well—not how many years, but how much service—not how many members, but what is the quality of their piety, the measure of their sacrifice, the stature of their faith. In celebrating the church's centennial let us be mindful of the way God counts time.

Nevertheless, a century of the modern world is a great

era, and one hundred years of the activities of a great church in the modern world should merit some attention. We are living in times when things happen quickly, when nations spring up in a day, and thrones crumble between two suns, when everything is speeded up, when the world's furniture has been so changed that a modern century is packed with bigger events than an old-time millennium. We are living in a day when Christian effort may swing around the earth and find something great to do for God and humanity at every stage of its world tour. A century nowadays is tremendous. Its possibilities and opportunities for the Christian church are limitless.

Therefore, the day we celebrate is notable, and we should find in the annals of this century-old church some chapters worth recalling and some achievements worth reciting. Let us keep the day, not in any spirit of boastfulness or vainglory, as though importance could attach to us by reason of what others have done, and not in pessimistic gloom, as though all greatness were behind us; but let us recall the past with a deep and reverent gratitude to God for His unnumbered blessings, with profound appreciation of the toil and sacrifices of those who have gone before us, with a solemn sense of present-day responsibilities, and with the prayer that God will enable us courageously and faithfully to do our work in this our day and generation.

OLD AGE AT ITS BEST.

The text for the day comes to us across the lips and out of the life of a man to whom age was not infirmity. Down towards the sunset of a splendid career, Caleb said: "As my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out, and to come in." He was a man with a great past. He was one of the two spies who returned from Canaan saying, "We can occupy the land." While there he had seen Mount Hebron, and on his return he asked that it might be given him for his possession, when

the day should come for Israel to occupy the Land of Promise. His request was granted, and for forty years he lived without a doubt as to the value of his title. He grew to be an old man, but his hope was undiminished. Oh, these glorious old men who, as their bodies crumple and wither, have souls that take on the morning! In his old age, we find Caleb as vigorous as in his prime. At last the day comes when he asks Joshua to let him occupy Hebron. Joshua looks him over and speaks of the difficulties. He says: "Hebron is fortified. The giants dwell there. The sons of Anak are in undisputed possession, and you are old and infirm. Your day is over. Your dream must pass. Seek a quiet glen somewhere and there, free from strife, end your days."

Listen to the old man's reply. "No, I am not infirm. I am old, to be sure, but not worn out. My day is not past. The best is not behind me. The best is yet to be. As my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out and to come in." As Joshua listened to the ring in his voice, as he saw the glint of his eye, as he looked past the old man and caught a vision of the God who ever backs up such faith, he said to Caleb, "Forward, march!" Like the hounds of war when they have broken their tether, Caleb went into action. He stormed Hebron, not with the big siege guns of modern warfare, but with the indomitable might of a soul that trusts in God. The sons of Anak departed and stood not on the order of their going, and Caleb entered Hebron and dwelt there.

"As my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war, both to go out and to come in." May that spirit be ours as we cross the summit of the century! May we come to this day, not with a spirit of infirmity, and not in some cheap mood of self-glorification, but with a great and unconquerable determination, in the face of all obstacles, to enter into the rich promises of God. It is no part of my

purpose this morning to sketch the history of the church, or to dwell on the labors of individual men and women whose consecrated services have made its history notable. Others at the proper time in these centennial exercises will do this. I desire, however, to dip enough into the past to stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance, and then to set your faces forward. I want to speak of our strength as it was, and then of our strength as it is now, and then of our task.

THE PAST.

First, let me speak of our strength as it was. The strength of this church for a hundred years has been that of a people who sincerely accepted the evangelical doctrines of grace revealed in the Bible, and who have striven faithfully to practice and proclaim them.

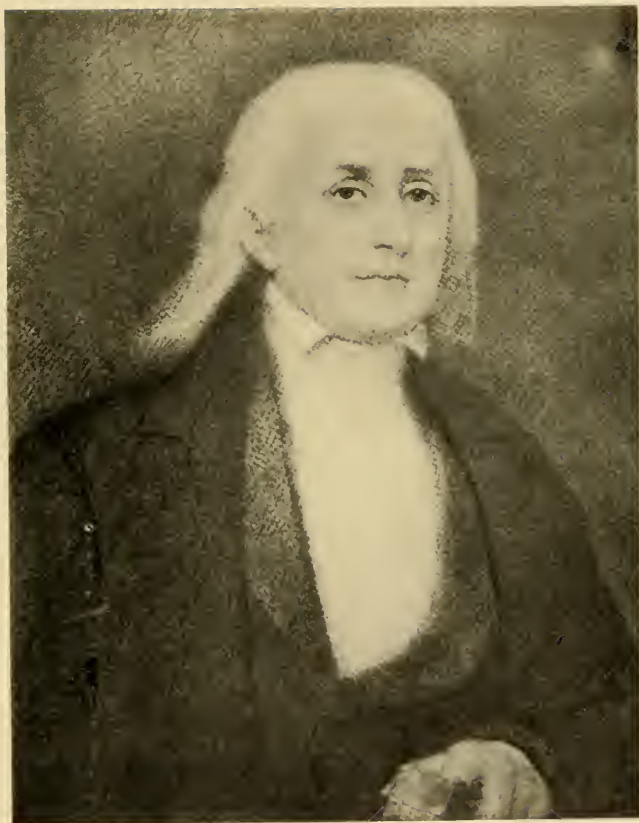
As we lift the curtain on the past the first to come before us are the founders, and along with them those who made the organization possible. Two godly ministers stand out in the early days of Presbyterianism in Middle Tennessee—Rev. Thomas B. Craighead and Rev. William Hume, both of whose names, through their descendants, abide on our church roll. In the same group with these pioneer ministers is to be placed a devoted woman, Mrs. Felix Grundy, the founder of Sunday school work in Nashville. Following these are the seven who met in the courthouse on a November day one hundred years ago and organized the First Presbyterian Church in Nashville—Robert Smiley, Mrs. Andrew Ewing, Mrs. Mary McNairy, Mrs. Josiah Nichol, Mrs. Ruth Greer Talbot, Mrs. Sophia Hall and Mrs. Margaret L. Anderson, six women and one man. They were a little company, fewer than we are accustomed to receive at a single communion. What could they do? Could they support a minister? Could they build a church? Could they storm and capture Hebron? Ah, but their faith was great and their devotion undismayed. "As our strength was then!"

The spirit of unconquerable determination and self-sacrificing devotion have characterized the church from the beginning. You cannot turn the pages of its past without a quickening of your pulse. It was organized in war times. The city was full of soldiers on their way to New Orleans to join General Jackson, who in his old age was received into the Presbyterian Church by a later pastor. With everything on the outside to distract, but with hearts garrisoned by God's peace and souls preoccupied with the glory of the "Kingdom that cometh not with observation," these true servants of Christ met and organized their little church. Soon they went to work to put a roof over their heads, and in two years they had erected the first church on the present site. Twice the house of worship here has been laid in ashes, and each time the people have arisen and, with a great generosity, erected a better building than the one they destroyed. The present edifice was dedicated on Easter Sunday, 1850, and cost \$51,000. At the time the church had three hundred and fifty-seven members. The money was raised during a period of great financial depression. What courage they had! What sublime faith? With few members in hard times, they built a church which will be a credit to religion as long as men meet on this corner to worship God! Soon the new church was unroofed by a storm. In a few years it was unroofed again. Then came the dreadful war, when the church was taken from the people by the United States Government and used as a hospital, while the owners of the church were left without a local habitation for their faith. It must have been a great day when they came home; when, with the war over and the church repaired and refurnished, they met once more in the place they loved so well and sang "How Firm a Foundation," and "I Love Thy Church, O God!" Such was the spirit of devotion manifested by those who have gone before us and such the strength of the church in years gone by.

From the first it has been a church blessed by the labors

of Christian women. For a while saintly Robert Smiley was the sole representative of his sex. Many women joined the church—so much so that Dr. Henderson, of Murfreesboro, protested to Dr. Blackburn that he was not in the habit of preaching to congregations of women only. What would the church have done without the work of these women! I am grateful, however, that the men have not continued to be in such a hopeless minority as at the beginning. It has grown to be a man's church, too, and among the elements of our strength have been men whose characters were the synonym of integrity and whose influence has been a saving power in the community. I think of three men who were here when I first became your pastor, and who moved among the people exalting the holy office of elder—A. G. Adams, James M. Hamilton and Joseph B. O'Bryan. There were others whose work will be referred to as these exercises proceed who loved the church and put it first. Two men in a notable way have remembered the church in their last will and testament—John M. Hill and his nephew and namesake, John Hill Eakin. Through their splendid generosity their influence will be felt as long as the old church has a name to live. Such men and such women were our strength in former days.

It has been a family church. All of the founders, with possibly one exception, are represented by their descendants in the membership today. While it has long since become a downtown church, the love of the children for the house of their fathers has been such that they have declined to desert it, and for long distances they come to the Sunday school and to the church services. What memories gather round such a place! What hallowed associations are treasured in such a shrine! A church with a past is a heritage, and when you add to this the sacramental ties of blood, the legacy of association is priceless. Here are men in office who bear the very names, as well as perpetuate the services, of pious forbears. Here come children to the baptismal



REV. GIDEON BLACKBURN, D.D.,
Pastor 1814-1819.

altar from an unbroken line in the old church, and their very names lift the curtain on the past. As I look down on you this morning I see not only yours, but the faces of men and women who have joined their voices with ours in the worship, for I cannot conceive that they have ceased to care for the old church. All of this goodly fellowship is a part of our strength as it was.

It has been an unselfish church. Colony after colony has been sent out to organize new churches. Eight independent congregations have been thus formed. It has not been a sectarian church. While it is Presbyterian, its denominationalism has not been intruded on the community. It is commonly called just "the First Church." This abbreviation sometimes gets us into trouble, as was the case with the lady living in the suburbs, who, in putting her little girl on the street car, told the conductor to put her off at the "First Church." The child was lost, and when at last the conductor was found, he straightened out the situation by saying, "You told me to put her off at the first church, and I put her off at the first one I came to." This title is not used in arrogance. It merely means that the church is not a sectarian, but a community institution. Here some of the great public events have been held. Governors have been inaugurated into office. Interdenominational gatherings have convened. It was in this house that the Southern Sociological Congress was inaugurated. And all of this is but the smallest part of our strength "as it was," for the great glory of the church has been above and beyond all this. Here souls have been saved. A great company have found the Lord.

This is enough to give us a glimpse of the past—a hint, at least, of the kind of church that has been doing business on this corner for the last hundred years. We have nothing to be ashamed of. We may hold up our heads and say with honest pride and gratitude to God, "As our strength was then."

THE PRESENT.

Let me speak next of our strength "as it is." The strength of this church today is made up of people who sincerely accept the evangelical doctrines of grace as revealed in the Bible, and who strive faithfully to practice and proclaim them. Our resources and opportunities, however, for doing this are vastly increased, and likewise our responsibility.

We occupy a costly site. More people throng these four corners probably than any similar section of the city. Real estate here is correspondingly high. We are not willing to sell out to business and take a lower-priced site. We pay no taxes. We must vindicate our location. We are accessible. All the lines of urban transportation land passengers at our door. Sometimes we are disposed to complain of the noise of the cars. But there is a compensation. They bring us the people.

We have a large membership. For many years this has been the largest congregation in the Assembly. This fact in itself is no particular distinction save as it represents resources for Christian work. We have between fifteen and sixteen hundred members—a big crowd compared with the little group of seven who organized the church a hundred years ago. If they could step out and say, "We can," why should this big church hesitate? We are not poor, not if judged by the tax list, by the style in which we live, by the money we spend on ourselves. We are not a poor congregation if judged by the gifts we make to causes outside our church benevolences. When the Young Men's Christian Association recently raised four hundred thousand dollars for a new building, about half of it came from members of this church. If in 1815 a handful of members could build a church, surely we should not be staggered by an undertaking. If, in 1848, with the church in ashes and a financial panic blighting the land, less than one-fourth the present membership of the church could build this house,

we should be equal to any forward movement the work demands; and if we hesitate, it is not from lack of ability, but of inclination and interest and sacrifice.

We are a downtown church. Some regard this as a handicap. I look upon it as an asset. These smoke-begrimed towers look down on the busy street thronged with people and seem to say, "Remember God!" The great bell in the tower peals out its summons above all the noises of the city, reminding men of the other world. Give me a church located where life is densest, and human need is greatest—not a church in some sequestered sylvan retreat, not a temple in some lonely solitude far removed from the walks of life and attended only by the children of privilege and leisure, but give me a church whose doorstep is on the pavement, against whose walls beat and lap the tides of labor, whose hymns mingle with the rattle of cars and the groans of traffic, whose seats are within easy reach of men falling under heavy burdens, and whose altars are hallowed by the publican's prayer. God grant that this old church on the busiest corner of the town may be increasingly this kind of a church!

There is an enrichment which comes with an historical background. We have a big asset in our past. For a hundred years this church has stood at the center of a great State, and under the leadership of ministers who have been, not sectarian bigots, but public servants, it has sounded out a message that has heartened the men who were fighting for the cause of the people. With such a past we have come upon the greatest era in human history. The world never needed a real church more than now. There was never so much work to do. Its market value was never so high. If the church does not help the world in these days, God have mercy on civilization!

We have all the spiritual assets; all the promises are ours. God is as near to us as He was to our fathers. He has as much for us as He had for the founders. If they

could step out seven strong, shall we, fifteen hundred strong, rot down in ease? In view of all this, may we not say that the century has at least not loaded us down with infirmity? "As our strength was then, even so is our strength now."

OUR TASK.

Let me speak, in closing, of our task. It is still to train people who sincerely accept the evangelical doctrines of grace as revealed in the Bible, and who strive faithfully to practice and proclaim them.

It is a poor remembrance of the past that forgets the future. These celebrations of church anniversaries are a sign of decay if they end in nothing but a panegyric of the dead. What is there for us to do? Why are we what we are? Hebron waits for us to possess it. The sons of Anak are still there. Have we the heart to go against them? Do we believe by the help of God we can drive them out and possess the land? Have we grown soft and senile with age, or can we say with Caleb, "As my strength was then, even so is my strength now, for war?"—not for ease, but for war!

We must do more than hold our own. No army ever conquered an enemy by holding its own. The curse of the one talent man was that he did nothing but hold his own. He brought back all that Christ had given him and got a condemnation. The same awaits a church that does no more. How are we meeting our task? What will they be saying of us a hundred years hence? Will they say as much for us as we are saying for those who have gone before us? They will ask, "Did the church at its centenary move forward? Did it plan a larger work? Did any one bring a gift? Did any one celebrate the centennial by yielding himself to Christ?" The fact that we happen to be alive, at this date, and members of the church on its hundredth anniversary does not invest us with a halo. What are we doing with our strength? Are we merely enjoying our religion?

We must make it possible for the church to do its largest work. If we do not, who will? We can fetter or release its energies. If the project were a hospital or some new philanthropy, its success might not depend on us. It would find friends to furnish the funds needed in all churches and outside any church. But if we are to have a new Sunday school building we must come forward or the thing will not be done. We owe it to the past to give the church the best chance for the future, so that, when a hundred years hence the people recall our times, they may hold their heads high and look the sons of Anak in the face without a fear and say, "As our strength was then—"

Is this church as safe in our hands as it was in the hands of preceding generations? Are we as devoted to Christ's cause? Are we as quick to see what is needed and as ready to meet it? Are we as bold to plan and as faithful to execute? Is personal piety as fine? Are family altars as common? Are we as diligent in giving our children religious instruction? Are we as reverential in the observance of the Sabbath, as regular in our church attendance, and as concerned for the salvation of souls? Is the stock in this old church improving or petering out? I leave you to answer, and pray that God may give us vision and faith! May this centennial season be a time of revival! O for the faith of Caleb! Let us believe that what God has promised is as securely ours as what He has already bestowed, and let us live accordingly. Let us push on. We have a mighty God, and in His name we can get the victory. Hebron has been given us. Are we the people to take it? God help us to say we are! Be it ours to maintain the traditions of this church, to keep the banner flying, so to live and labor that now, and in the years to come, our Zion shall merit the "Well done!" of God and man.

"Up! Let all the soul within you
For the truth's sake go abroad;
Strike! Let every nerve and sinew
Tell on ages, tell for God!"