

# THE COLORFUL EIGHTIES IN NASHVILLE

By **M. B. MORTON**

**No. 12**

***Some of the Famous Ministers of the Gospel of the Old Regime.***

Nashville Banner, *December 7, 1930*

Nashville, being the Southern headquarters for most of great churches, with denominational schools and publishing houses, has long presented an imposing array of ministers of the gospel. This was notably true in the eighties, for this educational and religious center had attracted men of force, genius and eloquence, who had dedicated their lives to the service of the Master. There were remaining some of the old soldiers of the cross, who had fought the battles of the church during the trying times of the sixties and seventies. Among these were Bishop Holland N. McTyeire and John B. McFerrin of the M. E. Church, South. and Bishop Charles Todd Quintard of the Episcopal Church. The latter, though not living here was an active factor in the religious life of Nashville. He was often in this city. He was eloquent and lovable, and an outstanding figure. He was a militant churchman, who had followed the stars and bars as a Confederate soldier.

A sketch of Bishop McTyeire has already been given. His history of Methodism is one of the best.

John B. McFerrin was over six feet tall, a rugged, commanding figure of strong features and a character in keeping with his physical appearance. He was at one time book agent of the Methodist Publishing House, and put that great institution of Southern Methodism on a firm financial basis. He also served as editor of the *Christian Advocate*; and among his literary productions was a history of Tennessee Methodism. He was a great revivalist and could sway his audience. His style was vigorous and he was a master in debate.

The McFerrin family produced many ministers of the gospel. A. P. McFerrin, a brother of John B. was a preacher, as were his three sons, John P., Sumner and A. P. Jr., the latter still living, in Franklin, Tenn. Rev. John

P. McFerrin, was a Confederate soldier.

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Dr. William Crane Gray was rector of the Church of the Advent. Dr. Gray afterwards became Bishop of Florida. He was a good speaker, an effective church builder, and full of the missionary spirit. One of his sons is Campbell Gray, Bishop of Northern Indiana and the other surviving son is Joseph A. Gray of Nashville.

Christ Church had two notable rectors. Dr. William F. Graham and Dr. James Ridout Winchester, now Bishop of Arkansas. Dr. Graham was a learned Scotchman, and a bachelor. He made a reputation as a pastor and was beloved by his congregation. During his pastorate the church was

located on Sixth and Church Street. Dr. Winchester was an extraordinary man as shown by the progress he has since made. He was a good executive, and it was under his leadership that the new church on Broadway and Ninth Avenue was built. When the chapel was finished the congregation abandoned the old church, and worshiped in the chapel until the main building of the new church was completed.

One of the greatly beloved and eminently successful ministers was Dr. Thomas F. Martin, rector of St. Ann's Church. When he accepted this service St. Ann's was located on Fourth Street and Watson, and it was under his direction that the location of the church was changed to Woodland Street, and the present building constructed.

He was rector of St. Ann's from 1879 until 1904, and was greatly beloved throughout the entire city. He was fifty-two years in the ministry, and during that long term served only three charges, one in Nelson County, Va., one in Clarke County, Va., and St. Ann's. He was the father of Charles S. Martin, a prominent citizen of Nashville. Another son, M. Cabell Martin, became a prominent minister. He was rector of Trinity Church and St. Peter's Church in Nashville and for a number of years was rector of the

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Episcopal Church in El Paso, Texas, where he died. As a young man he was principal of the East Nashville Academy, which was in the basement of St. Ann's Church when it was located on Fourth Street and Watson. He taught a number of boys in this academy, who afterwards became prominent men. Ed Barthell, now a successful Chicago lawyer, and the late John Bell Keeble, were two of his pupils.

A distinguished figure in the ministry was Dr. R. A. Young. He was a Methodist preacher, of wealth and wide influence. He was a powerful man, physically and mentally. He was considerably over six feet tall, a strong speaker and a leader. No stranger would pass him without turning to take a second look. He had a wide acquaintance and loved a good joke. He conceived the idea that Nashville should erect a memorial to Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt. He took the matter in hand, and as the result of his sentiment, translated into energy, the commanding statue of the Commodore now stands in front of the main building of Vanderbilt University.

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At this time three young Methodist preachers, who were destined to become famous, were professors in Vanderbilt University, Embrey E. Hoss, Wilbur F. Tillett and John J. Tigert.

Dr. Hoss was afterwards editor of the Christian Advocate and Bishop of the M. E. Church, South. He was a strong writer and powerful speaker, and aside from his ministerial duties was active in civic affairs, especially where a moral issue was involved. One of the great sermons of all time was his sermon; "What Think Ye of Christ?" It was a long oration, but it never wearied an audience. It was delivered effectively in this country, in South America, Australia and China. So far as known, the manuscript has been lost, if indeed it was ever written. Bishop Hoss was an entertaining conversationalist, and had a great fund of anecdotes gathered throughout his long life; he was an aggressive fighter, and as firm as adamant in the advocacy of what he conceived to be right. He was a descendant of John Sevier, the first Governor of Tennessee; he was intensely patriotic, and no spot on earth was so dear to him as the mountains and valleys of East Tennessee, where his mortal remains were laid to rest.

Dr. Tillett is best known in Nashville as Dean Tillett, for he was dean of the School of Religion at Vanderbilt University for many years, and is now dean emeritus. He is the only one of the trio mentioned still living. He is, as might well be inferred, a great student, well versed in Biblical lore and is the greatest authority on hymnology. His sermon on this subject is one of intense interest, and in a class by itself. It has no competition. His sermons are always instructive and leave a thought with his hearers. They appeal specially to the serious and thoughtful. As a writer on religious subjects he will be known to future generations, for his books are full of information, well matured thought, and hold the interest of the reader.

The last member of the trio of young professors, Dr. John J. Tigert,

afterwards became a bishop. Though a man of wonderful physique, he died at a comparatively early age, but not before he had made his mark. He was recognized as one of the best preachers in the Methodist Church, and one of the most companionable and entertaining of men. He was always a student and ambitious. Three sons survive him, Dr. Holland M. and R. McTyeire of Nashville, and John J. Tigert, president of the University of Florida.

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Dr. O. P. Fitzgerald, whom Dr. Hoss succeeded, was editor of the *Christian Advocate* in the eighties. By reason of his deeply religious convictions, his appreciation of humor, keen insight into human nature, and his ability to write, the *Christian Advocate* was widely read both by the Methodists, members of other churches and men not members of any church, while he was editor. In nearly every issue he had an original dog story. Before he came to Nashville he had met with wide success as a Methodist preacher in California in the days when the West was truly wild. He made friends readily with "the mammon of unrighteousness," and was popular with all classes and conditions of men. After his service as editor he was elected bishop. Many people now living in Nashville remember the benevolent countenance of the venerable Bishop Fitzgerald. His sermons were popular and educative, frequently with a humorous touch.

Rabbi Isadore Lewinthal of the Vine Street Temple was a prominent citizen. He was well informed, a fluent speaker, a deep thinker, and took an active part in civic affairs. He had many friends among the ministers of all denominations. He had a large acquaintance and an ever-increasing circle of friends.

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Dr. Charles J. Raymond, a unique and progressive figure, was pastor of the First Lutheran Church. Under his direction the church greatly prospered, and purchased the present church building from the First Baptist Church, having previously been quartered on Second Avenue, North. He was an effective speaker, and in conversation had a quaint style, all his own. He was born in Germany, a Jew. He embraced Christianity, joined the Catholic Church and studied for the priesthood. He afterwards joined the Lutheran Church and became a minister. While a young man he came to Nashville from Corydon, Ind., and lived here many years.

Under the ministry of Rev. Rin Cave the present First Christian Church on Seventh Avenue was built. Previous to this time the church occupied a building on Church Street where Loew's Vendôme now stands. This building had been the home of the First Baptist Church, Rev. Phillip Fall, pastor. When Dr. Fall announced that he had embraced the doctrine of Alexander Campbell and would join the Christian Church, all of his congregation, with the exception of four or five went with him, still occupying the building. The handful of Baptists left went their way, and became the nucleus that grew into the great First Baptist Church, now

presided over by Dr. W. F. Powell.

Dr. Cave was a live wire during the eighties. He was a good preacher and a good pastor, and under him the church prospered. He also had the prestige of having served as a soldier in the Confederate Army. His brother, Rev. Robert Cave, was pastor of this church when it was on Church Street.

Elder E. G. Sewell, and Elder David Lipscomb were two old-time preachers who did effective work as ministers of the Christian Church. Elder Lipscomb was editor and Elder Sewell was associate editor of the Gospel Advocate. Both were good preachers and much in demand. Elder Lipscomb was the founder of the Bible School on the Granny White Road now known as David Lipscomb College.

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The First Baptist Church during the decade under discussion had two notable pastors, Rev. Tiberius Gracchus Jones and Rev. C. H. Strickland. Dr. Jones was a stately and superb man. He was well named Tiberius Gracchus, and he lived up to the name. He was dignified and kindly in his manners. He was succeeded by Dr. Strickland. Dr. Strickland was an eloquent speaker. He was well groomed and always dressed elegantly.

He was another of the many Nashville preachers of that time who had been a Confederate soldier. When the Baptist Church was dedicated at Fairview, Ky., on the site of the log house in which Jefferson Davis was born, Dr. Strickland preached the sermon. He and the President of the Confederacy had been friends during the Civil War, and Mr. Davis himself was present, and made a short speech on this occasion. Many citizens of Nashville attended the dedicating exercises.

At this time Rev. E. E. Folk and Rev. O. L. Hailey were owners of the Baptist and Reflector, the former was editor and the latter associate editor.

Rev. C. S. Gardner, who is now living in Virginia, was pastor of the Edgefield Baptist Church. He was afterward pastor of the Leigh Street Baptist Church in Richmond, Va., and professor of homiletics at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville.

Perhaps the most effective Baptist minister in Nashville was Dr. G. A. Loftin, long pastor of the Central Baptist Church. He was a good speaker, a man of fine sense and a public spirited citizen. He was interested in civic affairs, and was once a member of the City Board of Education. He was eminently practical and possessed of high ideals. He was one of Nashville's most popular and most highly respected citizens.

Dr. Jere Witherspoon; who was pastor of the First Presbyterian Church, went from Nashville to Louisville where he became pastor of one of the flourishing churches of that city. He came of a family of pulpit orators and lawyers. and, himself measured up to the standard. Sam A. Witherspoon a lawyer of high standing and Congressman from Mississippi was his cousin. His pastorate in Nashville was successful from every point of view, and he is still affectionately remembered by many of the older

citizens. He was pastor of the First Presbyterian Church from 1884 to 1895. He was preceded by Dr. Thomas A. Hoyte, a noted pastor of the old regime.

The Second Presbyterian Church was then one of Nashville's strong churches. It was located on Third Avenue near the Square. Its pastors during the decade were Rev. John F. Young, Rev. John F. Arbuthnot, and Rev. John W. Stagg.

Dr. J. H. McNeilly, father of E. L. McNeilly, Sr., now a veteran lawyer in Nashville, was in the full vigor of his manhood fifty years ago. He served four years in the Confederate Army and worked for fifty years or more in his Master's vineyard. He possessed the solid virtues and ability. He was a Presbyterian, an effective preacher and pastor, beloved by his congregations, and respected and admired by a large circle of friends outside his church. He was a graceful writer, and contributed many interesting articles to the secular press during his long life.

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The Cumberland Presbyterian Church was a strong denomination, dominated by strong men in the eighties. The First Church was located on Fifth Avenue where the Central Church of Christ, with its great organization for social service, now stands. One of its great preachers and pastors was Rev. A. J. Baird, the father of W. B. Baird. He drew people of all classes, and always preached to packed houses. He was a friend of "publicans and sinners," and was a sort of father confessor to the gamblers and the "down-and-outs" generally. His work had far-reaching results. He was succeeded by Rev. J. M. Hubbert, now affiliated with the Presbyterian Church, U. S. A., and a resident of Philadelphia.

One of the saints of the church was Dr. M. B. DeWitt. He was a good preacher and greatly respected by the people of this community. He and Dr. T. E. Blake were editors of the Sunday School publications of the church. Dr. D. M. Harris was editor of the Cumberland Presbyterian. Rev. J. C. Provine was an outstanding preacher. Dr. William E. Ward, founder of Ward Seminary was a Cumberland Presbyterian preacher of ability, though he was chiefly known as an educator.

Drs. DeWitt, Provine, Baird, Blake and Ward formed a group of old friends who were inseparable. They knew and trusted one another. It is a remarkable coincidence that their sons, now living in Nashville are all good friends, and form a group almost as closely knit as that of their fathers. The sons referred to are Judge John H. and Dr. Paul DeWitt, William E. Ward, W. B. Baird and Dr. W. A. Provine.

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The head of the Catholic Church, during the period under consideration, was Bishop Joseph Rademacher. At that time the cathedral was at the corner of Fifth Avenue and Cedar Street. He was a man well equipped for the duties that developed upon him. He was democratic and approachable and had many personal friends outside his church. He was

preceded in Nashville by Bishop Feehan.

Well known members of the Catholic clergy were Father T. C. Abbott, Father Thomas S. Dulaney, Father Patrick J. Gleason, and Father Eugene Gazzo. It was Father Gazzo, who as an old man built the Church of the Holy Name at Sixth and Woodland Streets, after the great East Nashville fire in 1916, when the old church on Main Street was destroyed. Father Gleason beautified and improved the school and grounds of St. Joseph Parish, once one of the show places on Church Street. The only one left of this strong coterie is Father Abbott. He came here a young man full of vigor and energy, and good fellowship. St. Patrick Parish and St. Patrick School in South Nashville are monuments to his enterprise and force. Now for over forty years he has been in charge of this church and school, and though his step is not so elastic as it once was, he is vigorous for a man of his age. He is still looking to the future, and his genial smile and cordial hand-shake retain their pristine magnetism.

Two bright boys who were playing on the sandlots and going to school in Nashville about this time are now Bishop John A. Floersh of Louisville, and Bishop Samuel A. Stritch of Milwaukee.<sup>34</sup>

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Dr. D. C. Kelly was a Methodist preacher, "small in stature and large in ability," as was often said of him.

He had been Maj. D. C. Kelly, Forrest's "fighting chaplain," during the Civil War. He prayed for and comforted the "boys in gray" when they were sick and wounded. He officiated when they were laid to rest in the trenches and when a fight was on, seized a musket and went in. He was a speaker of decided ability, and served as pastor of the leading churches in the Tennessee Conference.

He was active in politics, especially where a moral issue was involved. He once accepted the nomination for Governor of Tennessee as a prohibitionist, and got himself suspended from the ministry by the M. E. Church, South. He was afterwards reinstated and died in harness. He thought Nathan Bedford Forrest the greatest man in profane history and old Forrest loved him, admired and trusted his youthful courage and enthusiasm, and honored his deep, religious convictions.

McKendree Church had three notable pastors during the eighties, Dr. James D. Barbee, Dr. Warren A. Candler and Dr. Joseph B. West, the father of the present clerk and master of the Chancery Court here. He came first, then Dr. Barbee and then Dr. Candler. It has been said that McKendree reached the highest point in its career under Dr. Barbee's administration. He was a forceful expounder of the gospel, and was

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<sup>34</sup> Floersh would become Archbishop of Louisville (1937-1967) and founder of Bellarmine College (now University). See the 1886 cigar ad on page 68, placed by a J. A. Floersh who was probably the prelate's father. Stritch (1887-1958) was elevated to the College of Cardinals in 1946. In 1958, shortly before his death, he became the first American cardinal to be placed in charge of a congregation in the Roman Curia.

orthodox to the core. He succeeded John B. McFerrin as Book Agent of the church which position he held for many years. Dr. Candler, now Bishop Candler, was the pastor of McKendree at the time of the Emma Abbott episode, which is too well known to warrant a detailed notice here. He had preached a sermon criticising the stage and when he finished Emma Abbott arose in the back of the church and replied to him.

Rev. R. K. Brown, a strong, dependable man, was pastor of several leading Nashville churches during this time.

Dr. Joseph B. Erwin was one of the noted Methodist preachers in Nashville during the latter eighties, when as pastor of the Tulip Street Church he engineered the construction of the present building, one of the handsomest specimens of church architecture in the city. He was an eloquent preacher, and prayed with great earnestness. During his pastorate Tulip Street Church grew and prospered. His features were clean-cut and in figure he was tall and well proportioned. He looked like a distinguished actor rather than a preacher. His conversation was bright and sparkling, and he was always a welcome visitor in the home. He had many friends among the ministers of other denominations; and one of his especial chums was Dr. Jere Witherspoon of the First Presbyterian Church. One day, after it had become generally known that Dr. Witherspoon had received a call from a Louisville church, they met on the street, when the following conversation took place:

“Hello, Jere!”

“Hello, Joe!”

“Jere, I understand you have had a call to a Louisville church?”

“Yes, that is true.”

“Are you going, Jere?”

“I don’t know. I am thinking about it, and praying over it.”

“Do they offer you more money than you are getting here?”

“Yes”

“Well,” holding out his hand, “goodbye, Jere.”

(Editor’s Note — This is the last of this series of reminiscences, “The Colorful Eighties in Nashville.” The author realizes that there have been many names omitted that deserve recognition; but is hopeful that he has been able to assist in the perpetuation of some of the stirring incidents of the decade from 1880 to 1890. He appreciates all the kind words of appreciation that have been spoken.)

***THE END.***