

**THE BIOGRAPHY OF
ELDER DAVID
PURVIANCE**

CHAPTER I

His Ancestry. Col. John Puiviance. Marriage. Serves in the Revolution. Moves to Tennessee. His Son is murdered by the Indians. Removes to Kentucky. Returns to Tennessee. A Revival, and split in the Presbyterian Church. He joins the Cumberland Presbyterians. His last affliction and death. His family.

COLONEL John Purviance, the Father of David Purviance was a native of Pennsylvania, and was married to Jane Wasson. August 2d. 1764. Shortly after marriage, they settled on the south fork of the Yadkin River, Rowan (now Iredell County), North Carolina. The country was new, but by industry and frugality, he procured a comfortable living for himself and family. He and his wife were both respectable members of the Presbyterian Church. He filled the office of Justice of the Peace, for a number of years, with general approbation.

At the commencement of the Revolutionary war he volunteered in defense of his Country's Rights, and was appointed Lieutenant in the army. He behaved himself valiantly during the war and was gradually promoted to the office of Colonel. He fought bravely for the liberty of his country, and rejoiced to see the Colony free. He returned with a thankful heart to the bosom of his family and lived happily there until the fall of 1791. He moved with his family to Sumner County, Tennessee. The country there was almost a wilderness, and the savage barbarities of the Indians much afflicted the small settlements by stealing and taking away their horses, and murdering the citizens. In the spring of 1792, his second son John Purviance, while in the field at work, was shot, scalped, and left weltering in his blood by the Indian: he was so near the house, that his wife could hear

their savage yells, and she would have run to her husband in the midst of them, had she not have been prevented by the interposition of her friends. They had been married but a few months. Their only child (a daughter) was born after his death. Col. John Purviance becoming alarmed at these savage cruelties, left the place and moved to Caneridge, Bourbon County, Kentucky, where the inhabitants were less exposed to the barbarities of the Indians. He continued to reside there until the fall of 1800. He then returned to Tennessee, and settled in Wilson County. During all this time he continued an exemplary member of the Presbyterian Church.

About the beginning of this century, a very remarkable, religious excitement took place in the State of Tennessee, under the labors of James McGready and other Presbyterian preachers. In this revival many souls were converted from the error of their ways, to the service of the living God. The missionary fire began to burn in the hearts of many young men who felt that a dispensation of the Gospel was committed to them. They were constrained to cry out, "Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel." They were influenced by the Spirit of God to publish the Gospel to the world, and almost simultaneously proclaimed free salvation to all mankind. One Presbytery, without due regard to the rules and regulations of the Presbyterian Church, licensed about thirty preachers that had not a liberal education; this caused a division in the church, and gave rise to a new sect who call themselves Cumberland Presbyterians. They have since become a numerous and respectable Denomination. Col. Purviance was in the spirit of the reformation, and consequently united with the Cumberlands, and continued in full fellowship with them as long as he lived. His wife also was a pious and worthy member of the same church. She died in the year 1810, being sixty-eight years of age.

He died Aug., 1823, being something over eighty-three years of age. His death was caused by a slight scratch on the heel from the fall of a stick of wood. An inflammation took place and

caused his death in a few days. His constitution was yet good, and his mind but little impaired. When his physician told him that if he had any unsettled business he had better have it attended to, for he could not live long, he politely thanked him, and manifested no concern about his situation. He lived a pious, devoted, and exemplary life; and met death with a firm hope in his Redeemer. He gave his favorite preacher (Thomas McDonnel) this text from which to preach his funeral sermon. "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." I Cor. 3:11.

Col. Purviance and his wife raised and educated eleven children, three sons and eight daughters. They all lived to become heads of families. David was the second child. The youngest of the eleven is now over sixty years of age. The wholesome precepts, and godly example, given their pious parents, have been honored and respected by them (probably) as much as any other family. We are encouraged to "train up our children in the way they should go, and when they are old they will not depart from it." This has been truly verified in the case of this happy family. They were trained in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Although all of them who lived to be old, renounced some of the doctrines and usages of the Presbyterian Church, yet the wholesome moral and practical precepts, taught and inculcated in the discipline of that church, they conscientiously adhered to through life: particularly the observance of the Lord's day, which is at the present time so much desecrated by many loud professors of Christianity; for which we have great reason to lament and be ashamed. The writer does not believe that this worthy family have ever dishonored their parents, or committed any act calculated to cause shame, or bring a blush over each other's countenances.

As the writer expects this work to be read by the children, grand-children, and great-grand-children of this respected family, he would say let us never suffer ourselves to degenerate from the

holy principles of righteousness, honesty, and integrity taught by the precepts and example of our worthy predecessors.

CHAPTER II

His Birth and Education.

ELDER David Purviance was born in Iredell county, North Carolina, on the 14th day of Nov., 1766. The Country was then new, and the opportunity for schooling not so good as desirable but he was sent early to school, and made great progress in learning considering the ignorance and tyranny of the teachers of that age. His parents took great pains to have him well instructed in the principles and doctrines of the Presbyterian Church. He memorized all the Larger and Shorter Catechisms while very young. He was also well instructed in the good and wholesome moral precepts, contained in the discipline of that church, particularly the observance of the Sabbath day, which he was careful to reverence and respect as long as he lived.

When about twelve years of age he was placed in a seminary under the care of Dr. Hall,¹ a Presbyterian preacher, for the purpose of studying the Latin and Greek languages, and those sciences necessary to a preparation for the ministry. He prosecuted his studies with indefatigable industry; and made great proficiency in learning, considering his opportunity. It was during the Revolutionary War, and he was the oldest son, and very frequently he was detained from school, to assist the family in procuring a living, while his father was defending the injured rights of his country, and towards the close of the war he was sometimes sent an express for the army; but when opportunity offered, he prosecuted his studies for several years, until finally his health failed in consequence (it was thought) of too close and intense application to his books. He reluctantly left the school,

¹ See note on page 7.

and afterwards regained his health, and engaged in teaching, and taught Latin and Greek, and the common branches of literature.

He afterwards wrote for some time in the Clerk's Office in Salisbury, N. Carolina.

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NOTE: The reference is to Dr. James Hall, outstanding Presbyterian minister, missionary, and educator. "In 1776, the Presbytery of Orange licensed the celebrated James Hall. — a man with whose life the history of the Presbyterian Church throughout the Southwest is largely interwoven. He was of Scotch-Irish descent, a native of Carlisle, Pa. At an early age he removed with his parents to Iredell county, N. C., and within the bounds of the congregation of which he afterward became pastor. From early childhood his mind was religiously impressed. At the age of twenty he made a public profession of religion, and at about the same time he resolved to devote himself to the work of the ministry. In 1774, at the ripe age of thirty-one, he was graduated at Princeton, and such were his mathematical attainments that President Witherspoon expressed a desire that he should be retained as a teacher in the college. But the consciousness of his sacred purpose to devote himself to the work of the ministry forbade his acceptance of the offered position. His theological course was pursued under Dr. Witherspoon. Upon its completion he returned to North Carolina. On every side the broad field of spiritual destitution invited laborers. Various congregations pressed; Mr. Hall to become their pastor. These applications he felt it necessary to decline, and finally settled — where his early years were spent — over the united congregations of Fourth Creek, Concord, and Bethany. In 1790, he secured a release from the first two, that he might have more time to devote to the cause of domestic missions." From "History of the Presbyterian Church," by E. H. Gillett, pp. 229, 230.

"Dr. Hall was one of the great leaders of America in Presbyterian councils. He attended their General Assembly at Philadelphia sixteen times, serving once as Moderator. He helped to form the American Bible Society, was a life-member of it, and was the first President of the North Carolina State Bible Society. At his school he inspired many young men to enter the ministry. This was at a time when Tom Paine attacked Christian faith, and when doubt and disbelief were prevalent in the young Republic. He trained such outstanding minds as Rev. Richard

King, of Tennessee, Gov. Israel Pickens, of Alabama, and Dr. James Blythe, of Kentucky. Dr. Blythe was acting President of Transylvania University, Lexington, Kentucky, from 1804 to 1816. Blythe was a leading Presbyterian opponent in controversy with Barton W. Stone. Dr. Hall never married. He made a deliberate sacrifice in this, choosing thus to conserve his opportunities for an effective ministry in civilization's frontiers. He made fourteen long and laborious missionary journeys. Perhaps the most important of these was his mission to the region of Natchez, Mississippi, in 1800. This was the pioneer Protestant effort in the lower Mississippi valley. In 1810, he and Dr. David Caldwell on the same day each received the D.D. degree from the University of North Carolina." From "North Carolina Disciples of Christ," by C. C. Ware, pp. 34, 35.

It may be of interest to observe that Dr. David Caldwell, distinguished minister and educator to whom reference is made above, was a teacher of Barton W. Stone, friend and co-laborer of David Purviance. Thus it was the privilege of both Purviance and Stone to sit at the feet of celebrated teachers. — EDITOR.

CHAPTER III

His Marriage, and Settlement. His removal to Tennessee, and also to Kentucky.

WHEN he was about 23 years of age, he was married to Mary Ireland, daughter of John and Martha Ireland, in the year 1789. Her father was a native of Ireland, and her mother of Irish descent.

After his marriage his father settled him on a farm on the south fork of the Yadkin river. There he commenced farming; but only continued about two years before many of his friends and relatives moved, some to Kentucky and some to Tennessee. He sold his possessions on the Yadkin, and moved with his little family, consisting of his wife and one child (about nine months old), and settled on the Cumberland river, near to Nashville, West (now middle) Tennessee.

They continued there but a short time before they found themselves unpleasantly situated. They were surrounded by the savages engaged in stealing horses, burning houses, and murdering the inhabitants; and after the Indians slew his younger brother, John Purviance, he and his wife visited her father's family, and some near relatives, who had lately made a settlement on Caneridge, Bourbon County, Kentucky. They were much pleased with the appearance and situation of the county, and through the solicitations of friends, and finding that they would not be so much exposed to the depredations of the Indians, they were induced to leave Tennessee, and in the fall of 1792 they emigrated to Kentucky, and settled near his friends, in Bourbon County.

CHAPTER IV

His settlement on Caneridge. Elected to State Legislature, debate with Breckinridge, debate with Grundy. He fails to be elected to the state Convention on account of his opposition to slavery. Sketch of the lives of Breckinridge, Garrard, and Grundy. The Lexington Insurance Company. The district court system. He returns from political life, and engages in the ministry.

NOTE: The following chapter is exclusively from the pen of William Rogers, Esq., of Caneridge.

There is no man living, better qualified to give the following sketch than Bro. Rogers. He was a young man and lived a close neighbor to David Purviance, at the time he served in the State Legislature of Kentucky. There are many aged men yet living that will corroborate his statements.

David Purviance selected for his future home a small tract of land about three miles south of Caneridge meeting house. The spot he selected was doubtless a fertile one, but when contemplated in the wilderness state in which he found it, the prospect for living was gloomy in the extreme. Covered thickly with tall trees of forest growth, the ash, the sugar tree, the walnut, locust and other varieties common to that quarter of the country, superadded to these a solid brake of tall cane, so thick as to be almost impervious to man or beast, covered the whole face of the surrounding country.

We have said the prospect for a living from the picture given, was rather dreary, and forbidding. David Purviance had no slaves to work for him, for from early and fixed principles, he was opposed to the institution of slavery.

His fate is now sealed. He must either work hard or he must starve. He cheerfully and like a Christian philosopher (as he doubtless was), chose the former. He went to work with his own hands, he handled the implements of husbandry, he cleared off a spot and erected a cabin for a habitation. Next he cleared and reclaimed from its wild state, grounds sufficient to raise a supply for his family and flocks. Here in rural pursuits he passed several years in great contentment and obscurity. He was never disposed to seek an occasion to make himself known at any stage of his life. That kind of ambition was never an occupant of the bosom of the great and good Purviance.

True, he was intellectually competent to any station, but it is equally true, that he was the most meek, unambitious, and unpretending of the race of man.

But to our narrative. Mr. Purviance lived and labored upon his few acres, unnoticed and unknown, until early in the year 1795; during that year, memorable in the history of his life, we shall now proceed to record some events that occurred, that must forever interest the friends of David Purviance, and render his memory dear, very dear indeed, to his posterity.

Little did the master spirits of that day, who ruled and shaped the legislation of Kentucky, as best suited their policy and purpose, suspect, as they beheld this humble Caneridge farmer, in the garb of a laborer, sweating beneath a burning sun; — little did they dream, as they moved about in splendor and beheld the man we have described, that he was destined in a short time to arrest them in their unchecked career, and wrest from their hands some of their dearest measures, which by their sagacity and management in the halls of the legislation, had been brought to bear injuriously and oppressively upon the country.

One or two of the most obnoxious of the measures in question, it will be necessary for the reader of the present day to

be explained. At the session of '92, a law had been passed, giving original jurisdiction to the Court of Appeals in all cases respecting the titles to lands. At the same session, the oriental court called Oyer and Terminer, was also established, and had exclusive jurisdiction in all cases, where the penalty of the offence extended to life or limb. These courts held their sittings twice a year, and only at the seat of government, which made it extremely inconvenient, expensive, and indeed oppressive to the citizens to attend them. To the poor occupant of the disputed lands it was in many instances ruinous, while the felons of the country mostly escaped unwhipped of justice; for it was rare to procure the attendance of prosecutors, witnesses, &c., at so great a distance, and at such sacrifice of time and money.

Very few were interested in a continuance of the laws in question except a band of eminent lawyers, who, at the time held an extensive and lucrative practice in the courts in question, and who unfortunately for the country, controlled, to a great extent, the legislative action of the state.

The people, however, became restless under such misrule, and, as early as the session of 1795, the original jurisdiction of the court of appeals in said cases, which had been found upon practice to be so expensive and mischievous, was repealed, and the court of Oyer and Terminer was abolished. This, however, only tended to increase the excitement on the part of the lawyers in question, and they at once put in requisition all their talents and influence to revive those laws, and a fierce contest grew up between the court party and the people, which was kept alive for several years.

When the election for 1797 began to approach, much interest was manifested through the whole country upon this deeply interesting question; and as the canvass for members to the Legislature began to open, great anxiety was evinced on the part

of the people, to have men of the right stamp brought forward. This was particularly the case in Bourbon.

This county, if not in advance, was certainly as forward as any other, in the work of reform and she determined to have suitable individuals for candidates.

Gentlemen of the bar were most objectionable, as to that source the people attributed the mischiefs complained of; still, it was considered by the more sagacious, that men capable of the advocacy of their cause, should be brought forward. To this end, Wm. Garrard, Jr., a young lawyer of high promise, and then but recently embarked in the practice at Paris, was solicited to become a candidate; the more especially, as he was known to be sound in respect to the measures complained of. He, moreover, was a son of James Garrard who was then Governor of the State. He consented to run, and engaged in the canvass.

David Purviance of Caneridge, to his surprise, was very strongly urged by members of his county, to become a candidate. He at length agreed to do so, provided he could make the canvass, without the degrading practice, then so prevalent among candidates, of treating for votes. His friends, although they approved his views in this respect, doubted his success unless he would yield, but this he firmly refused to do. But he, nevertheless, declared himself, and at once engaged in the canvass. There were now about a dozen candidates before the people, six only to be elected, that being the number of members in the lower branch of the Legislature to which Bourbon was entitled. The election came off in April. 1797. — David Purviance. William Garrard, Jr., James Smith, Charles Smith, Robert Wilmot, and John Grigg, were elected, but as our business is with the two former, the latter, although highly worthy men, will not again be referred to.

There was a called session of the Legislature in November, which however was continued on to the regular session; and altogether was the longest one, it is believed, ever held in Kentucky.

The House was at the commencement, organized by the appointment of Edmund Bullock, speaker, and in due time proceeded to the regular business of the session. John Breckinridge, an eminent lawyer and statesman of rare abilities, was a member from the County of Fayette. For some days he seemed to be the animating spirit of the House, and shaped and guided its action, as best suited his taste and wishes. None thwarted his plans, none attacked his position, or dared to enter with him the arena of debate. He held for the time an unchecked rein over the movements of the House, but this order of things was now to be interrupted. At the proper stage, as seemed to Mr. Breckinridge, he introduced a bill to revise the criminal court of Oyer and Terminer, and after a slight speech in its advocacy, obtained leave to take it up on a given day. This was a measure of weighty consideration, particularly with the two young members from Bourbon, Mr. Purviance and Mr. Garrard, who had been elected, mainly, in the hope of their successful opposition to that measure. Little else was talked of among members, until the day for its discussion arrived.

When that day had arrived, Mr. Breckinridge, true to his purpose, rose in advocacy of this, his favorite measure; for it must be noticed, that at the time the court in question was abolished, he enjoyed the most extensive practice in it perhaps, of any gentleman of the bar, in Kentucky. He began his speech, and continued it in a manner so strong, argumentative, and pathetic, as greatly to excite, and indeed alarm his opponents. His speech was not only eloquent, fervid, and imposing, but very lengthy; for when the hour for the evening's adjournment arrived, he gave way, with leave to conclude the next day.

During his speech, the opponents of his bill were in hopeless despair; they were alarmed at the expected result. That night, little was talked of by the members and numerous spectators, but the wonderful speech of the mighty orator, Mr. Breckinridge. And the interesting inquiry went the rounds, of who would dare a reply. A momentous question this, not readily answered. No member was to be found who was willing to hazard himself in so perilous a battle. Nay, the risk was too daring, too adventurous.

That night Garrard, for the first time, paid a visit to Mr. Purviance at his room, and his first salutation was, "Bourbon will look for a speech in reply to Breckinridge, to-morrow, and you, Purviance, must make it."

"I entirely agree with you," responded Purviance, "that Bourbon will look for the speech, but differ entirely, as to who shall make it. You, Mr. Garrard, are a lawyer, and have been elected in the confident expectation of your opposition, in a speech, to the bill now before the House; and should you fail to do so, no apology will atone to your constituents, for the delinquency."

These words of Purviance, spoken in truth and much candor, hung as a mill stone about the neck of Garrard, for he felt their weight.

During their interview, each insisted upon the other to make the speech, but neither would promise, even to try. After Garrard retired, Purviance felt himself to be in a strait. He looked at consequences. Should the looked-for speech not be forthcoming on the ensuing day, the result would be disastrous, and what was of greater consequence to the country by far, a mischievous measure would again be fastened upon the people.

And what did Purviance do? Did he fold his arms in idle and hopeless despair? No, that was not his character. What then did

he do? Why he did, in this trying exigency, precisely as he had done at the dense forest and canebrake a few years before; he went to work. He summoned to his aid the resources of a mind that rarely lost anything worthy of retention; he prepared, as best he could, for the next day's battle, provided he should be forced to fight. From his best recollection of Mr. Breckinridge's unfinished speech, he noted his outlines of agreement, and that same night, ere he slept, he pondered well a speech, which he then thought he might be compelled to make.

On the meeting of the House the next day. Mr. Breckinridge resumed his speech, and was, from the commencement to the conclusion, strong and imposing. He set forth in terms, argumentative and persuasive, the many reasons he entertained in favor of the bill for the revival of the court of Oyer and Terminer. That court, he said, had been sustained by the long usage and approval of Virginia, the parent commonwealth from whence Kentucky had derived her criminal code: and that it had been a dangerous experiment to abolish it. His zeal, his pathos, and unsurpassed powers for debate, were now all brought to bear upon the subject now before him. Deeply was he interested in the success of the bill; and it may be, he thought the good of the country required its re-enactment. Be this as it may, he was never known to be more able in debate, than on the occasion in question. Mr. Breckinridge's concluding remarks, it is said were in a high degree alarming to the enemies of the bill.

With a look of defiance and in tones of assured victory, he closed his two days' speech, much to the satisfaction of his friends, but to the great alarm and discomfiture of his adversaries, for they were struck aghast by the mighty efforts of the veteran orator.

And now followed a scene worthy the pencil of the most exquisite painter. Silence profound, painfully perplexing, pervaded the whole House; looks, eagerly anxious, and

portentous, were interchanged by the adversaries of the measure under discussion. But its friends were in secret triumph. Still no word was uttered; no reply was offered. No opposer of the bill rose up against it. All were dismayed.

At length, Mr. Garrard arose, but not for a speech. He passed over the entire floor, to where his friend Purviance was seated, and seizing him by the arm, he exclaimed — “Do you make a speech, Purviance, for I cannot.” He turned on his heel, retraced his steps, and took his seat.

Purviance had now no choice left him; he must make a speech, or all would doubtless be lost. The array before him was most fearful. It was enough to dismay the most accustomed and undaunted speaker. Not only the members, but a vast assemblage of spectators had been attracted to the House to witness the speech of Mr. Breckinridge, and were now all looking with intense interest, to see who would be courageous enough to dare a reply.

None, it will be readily supposed, thought of the plain and unpretending Purviance, clad in simple homespun, modestly seated at his table; unnoticed and unknown, was the man, now destined to this fearful task. He had now become willing to make a speech, but how to perform it, he “found not.” His heart, it is true, was indicting a good matter, but alas! his tongue was not “as the pen of a ready writer.”

But he had resolved to try himself on this interesting, and to his country, important occasion; and David Purviance was not the man to form a good resolve and not perform it. Now came the moment of trial.

By a mighty effort he arose and addressed himself to the Speaker of the House. All eyes were turned towards him, some in pity, all in astonishment. None had ever heard him before in

debate, for this was his first debut, — his first speech. Few indeed of his auditors knew, until that moment, that there lived on earth such a man as they now saw before them, essaying to make a speech, in reply to Mr. Breckinridge. His manner and gesture were extremely awkward and unbecoming, compared with the highly accomplished gentleman who had just preceded him. Mr. Purviance was so embarrassed, so confused for a short time, as to be much at a loss for language suited for the deep thoughts that were agitating his profound mind.

His friends were now more than ever disheartened and discouraged at the unpromising prospect before them. His young colleague, Mr. Garrard, was in deep despair; he was indeed as one without hope. But if the opponents of the bill were in gloom, its friends were in secret triumph, for they now looked on its passage as certain.

Their emotions and their expectations were but of a short-lived character; for very soon the whole scene was changed. Mr. Purviance suddenly freed himself from his embarrassment, and evinced to that wondering assemblage, that he needed not the decorations of tailors of velvets and of broadcloths to recommend him: that he stood panoplied in the greatness of his mind, the undaunted champion of right principles. And now with much circumspection he proceeded to the accomplishment of the weighty task assigned him.

With great deliberation, Mr. Purviance now took from the table his notes of Mr. Breckinridge's speech, and casting his eye over them, he, as by inspiration, reviewed the whole ground of debate; and intuitively moved forward in the execution of his purpose. His reply to Mr. Breckinridge was made in the same logical order, in which it had been delivered by that sound rhetorician.

His style was simple, plain, and clear. His address so natural, so humble, so unassuming, as to captivate and charm his whole audience. His friends had now the heart to begin to look up: and as he advanced he became clearer and stronger. He stripped the arguments of his adversary of the false glare, cast around them, by the wily orator, and with a ponderous hand he pulverized the foundations on which they had been based. At this crisis in his speech, the friends of Mr. Purviance could scarce restrain themselves from outbursts of applause.

As to his friend, Mr. Garrard, though a man of much gravity, yet such were the emotions of his mind, that, as by magic, he was attracted nearer and nearer the speaker; and ere he closed, he was planted at the side of Mr. Purviance,² animating and cheering him onward, by his every look and gesture, to the mighty onslaught upon the veteran debater, Mr. Breckinridge. Mr. Purviance now closed this, his first speech, which he had delivered with a clearness, a fairness rarely witnessed. His skill, his logic and astuteness in debate, had been so striking, so strong and perspicacious, as to astonish to admiration the whole

² More than twenty-five years after the debate, between Mr. Breckinridge and Mr. Purviance, the latter, in a conversation with the writer, remarked, that the opportune manner of his colleague, Mr. William Garrard, on that occasion, helped him much. He knew him to be a competent judge of the merits of the speech, he was then essaying to make, and the hearty manner in which he approbated it, by his every look and gesture, inspired him with a confidence, that made his speech longer, and better, as he believed, than otherwise it might have been.

Such was the innate modesty of Mr. Purviance, that he rarely mentioned his political performances to any one; and to none but very particular friends. Had he been more free in this respect, his political history would have been more full. For it will be remembered, there were no reporters of speeches in the Kentucky Legislature, at that day; and the journals are in manuscript.

The writer addressed a letter to Mr. Purviance, some months previous to his death, requesting of him, an epitome of his public life. In reply to that request, he gave some encouragement to hope for such a document. But it is quite probable, he suspected it might be used in commendation of himself, and therefore declined preparing it; at any rate, be that as it may, none was furnished: and his oldest son, L. Purviance, who has the care of his papers, informs the writer, no paper of that character, is found by him, among the writings of his deceased father.

audience. What was still better and of greater consequence to the commonwealth, it fixed a conviction on the minds of the members of the House, not to be shaken. Nay more. Mr. Breckinridge himself was wholly disappointed, and indeed greatly astonished, to find Mr. Purviance so thoroughly informed on a subject, which he had supposed him to be entirely ignorant of.

Mr. Purviance took his seat, amid the plaudits and the heart cheering congratulations of his friends.

Mr. Breckinridge again arose, and we regret to record, was guilty of an indecorum unworthy his great fame. He could not conceal the chagrin he felt from the sound drubbing he had gotten from the hand of the young plebeian; it was more than he could patiently bear. And in place of terms respectful and complimentary to Mr. Purviance, for the possession of powers for debate, such as he had exhibited, — he, in expressions, rude and unkind, alluded to the humbleness and obscurity of the life and fortunes of Mr. P.: alleging that it was impertinent and presuming for one so obscure and wholly withdrawn from the walks of public life; so unskilled in the jurisprudence of the state, as he was, to assail, in the manner he had done, the policy and measures of one so aged and so skilled in this respect as himself; — and, that he would not trouble himself or detain the House by arguments in reply to a speech, from such a quarter.

Mr. Purviance again rose, and in much composure, said he admitted to the utmost extent, the truth of Mr. Breckinridge's allusions to his poverty and obscurity; that hitherto, his life had been passed in entire seclusion from the theater of public men and measures; — that his days had been engaged in the culture of a little farm to provide for the wants of his growing family; and that, to the wealth, the honors, and blandishments of life, with which Mr. Breckinridge was surrounded, he could never aspire. In these advantages, that gentleman was far in advance of his

humble pretensions. Nevertheless, he had supposed that in his character of representative of a free and independent constituency, he had the right to discuss any measure, or oppose any bill, introduced before that House, provided he did so in a manner respectful to the House and rules of debate. These remarks he made with such candor and meekness:— with such kindness and forbearance, as started the tear from many an eye. Mr. Breckinridge found himself to be so signally rebuked, that he rose in an apology, which calmed the excited feelings of the friends of Mr. Purviance. As to himself, he had no grievances to be atoned for. If the audience had, a few moments before, been astonished to admiration at Mr. Purviance's powers in debate, they were now overwhelmed, at the unexampled kindness and forbearance of the Christian philanthropist.

The bill of Mr. Breckinridge was now put to vote, and was rejected by a signal majority.³ The attempt to revive the original jurisdiction of the court of appeals, in respect to suits for the lands, was also repealed at the same session of the Legislature; and thus fell prostrate in the dust, a second time, these expensive and mischievous measures in the legislation of the country; and although half a century ago, they have never shown the slightest signs of returning life; demonstrating beyond question, that the obscure farmer of Caneridge, and not the astute lawyer of Fayette, best understood and appreciated the wishes and true policy of the people. Now for the first time in the history of the young commonwealth, were the great body of the community, the farmers, able to claim from their own ranks, a champion, in every way fitted to judge and defend their true interests. Such a man was David Purviance. He was honest, and capable for any exigency, as he proved himself to be on many occasions, during that and subsequent sessions of the Legislature. Although a plain farmer, Mr. Purviance was, a few days after his debate with Mr. Breckinridge, added to the committee of courts of justice; a high

³ See note on page 22-23.

compliment this, and illustrative of the repute in which he was held.

During the whole course of his legislative history in Kentucky, he was one of the most attentive members of the House of Representatives. From an entire perusal of the old manuscript journals of the sessions of 1797-8, the name of David Purviance is found recorded on every call of the ayes and noes.

* * *

NOTE: Colonel Samuel Burke, of Cumberland County, Ky., a man of excellent sense, but one who it seems, did not think of himself more highly than he ought to think, was accustomed, in his day, to tell, occasionally, the following anecdote.

“I was first elected a member of the Kentucky House of Representatives, in the spring of 1797. The session met in November of that year, and in a very short time after the House had been organized and was progressing with the business of the Commonwealth: I became convinced, that I had mistaken my proper vocation when I left the walks of private life, and turned law maker, and I thought I saw other members also, who had as little business there, as myself. Of this class, there were, as I thought, a goodly number.

“But David Purviance from Bourbon, and a Mr. William Haycraft, from one of the southern counties of Kentucky I took to be two members, peculiarly defective, in respect to qualifications, for the station in which we were then, unluckily found. But it must be remembered, I knew them not, and formed my opinion from external appearances only. I played Lavater, but how well, it is to be seen.” said Mr. Burke.

“I was fond of companions, but chose to associate with none, but my equals. These two new friends, I made sure, would suit me in that respect, and I would seek an intimacy, mainly for the reason, that they were, as legislators at least, as deficient as myself.

“Well, I did so, and things went on pretty much to my notion for some week or two. It is true, at times, I began to distrust Purviance a little, but on the whole, considered him safe; no danger of his deceiving me. Billy Haycraft I never doubted, for he never gave me the least cause to suspect

him; and why should I? But as all sublunary hopes are liable to disappointment, so my expected reliance on my two companions, as every way qualified for my society, at least so far as Mr. Purviance was concerned, was suddenly and forever defeated.

“That renowned statesman, John Breckinridge, then a member of the House, from Fayette, introduced an important and favorite bill, which he advocated in a powerful and imposing speech. When he had closed, and taken his seat, no member seemed courageous enough to venture a reply. For a few moments all was anxiety. Nothing was heard. But in the midst of the deep silence and suspense, who should arise to reply to Mr. Breckinridge, but Mr. Purviance, a man of my own sort, as I had supposed.

“The whole audience, members and lookers on were much surprised. As to myself, I was thunderstruck. I was truly at a loss what to think of the poor man; first I was vexed, then I pitied him, for I thought him harmless; and was grieved that he should in so signal a manner expose his weakness. But it was all a mistake, for soon he showed himself capable for the exigency. He deliberately went ahead, and delivered the best speech of the session, and sent Mr. Breckinridge’s bill adrift; for it was rejected by acclamation.

“Well, I rejoiced at Mr. Purviance’s success, but still I was left in a worse fix than ever; none to console me now, but Mr. Haycraft, for Purviance, it was demonstrably clear, had deserted our ranks forever, and placed himself, where we could never approach him.

“But it is due to that worthy man, Billy Haycraft for such in truth he was, to say, that he never deceived me, he abided faithful. He and I served together through that session, and three others, in succession, and he proved himself to the last, to be just the man I had taken him for on first sight.”

The facts, on which the foregoing anecdote are founded, were furnished to the author of it, by William Mitchell Esq., an old colleague from Bourbon, of Mr. Purviance for a number of sessions. Mr. Mitchell now resides in the county of Lewis, in Kentucky, which latter county, he has also represented in the state Legislature. In his letter to the writer, dated May the 4th, 1848, Mr. Mitchell says. “I considered Mr. Purviance as a legislator, equal to any man of his day. He mastered any subject, he undertook.” “And as a Citizen and Christian, he was surpassed by none.”

* * *

Himself and Breckinridge were continued as members of the House during several sessions after the one in question; and their intercourse was frank and respectful. Purviance always spoke of Mr. Breckinridge as a great and safe statesman.

Felix Grundy, whose fame, as a lawyer, jurist, and statesman of eminent ability, has now been before the public, for half a century, was, as early as the session of 1796, a member of the Legislature, from Washington County, in the southern part of Kentucky. Mr. Breckinridge was also a member. He, as has been stated, was from the County of Fayette, in the Northern section of the state.

At that session, the Green river settlers, as they were styled, forwarded a petition to the Legislature, praying indulgence for the installments, there due to the commonwealth, for lands they had purchased from the government. Mr. Grundy, from the first, espoused their cause, and was soon styled the southern or Green river champion. Mr. Breckinridge opposed the indulgence asked for, and he, in turn, was dubbed the northern champion.

During that session, and many a subsequent one, the subject of Green river relief was agitated in the House, and many fierce encounters in debate between the two champions happened, Grundy generally the victor. When Purviance became a member in 1797, as has been stated, he found the petitioners before the House, and witnessed the debates of Mr. Grundy and Mr. Breckinridge, upon the merits of their case. Mr. Purviance took no share in the debates, but as the settlers were generally poor, and money hard to be obtained, he voted with Mr. Grundy for the relief prayed for.

But at length at the session of 1799, Mr. Grundy introduced a bill, for relief in behalf of the settlers, so objectionable, as to

determine Purviance, should it become necessary, to oppose it. It was hotly combatted between the two champions for several days, Grundy as usual victorious.

Purviance now saw, that unless checked from some other quarter, Grundy would, as usual, succeed in getting his bill successfully through the House. But as himself and Grundy were on the best of terms, and moreover had usually gone together in respect to the subject in question, he resolved on a private conference, in which he urged on Mr. Grundy an amendment, so as to make his bill more palatable. Mr. Grundy listened with respectful attention to the proposed amendment of his friend Purviance, but was unwilling to yield, the more especially, as he was sanguine, from what had so far taken place in the discussion, that he would be able to get his measure passed in its present shape, and the conference ended.

But when the bill was next brought up by Mr. Grundy for further debate, Purviance moved to adopt his amendment, which was stoutly resisted by Mr. Grundy; and an animated debate sprung up between them, and at length, the amendment of Purviance was adopted by a slight majority.

Grundy felt himself somewhat disappointed; this was what he was not accustomed to. But, as a man of great resource, he bethought himself of a remedy, as he supposed, for the defeat he had sustained; and at once sought to avail himself of the expedient; it was to procure an amendment to the amendment of Purviance.

This amendment of Mr. Grundy was so cunningly shaped, as to nullify the amendment of Purviance if accepted. But the latter had the sagacity to perceive the snare laid for him, and he attacked and exposed the maneuver without gloves; and after a spirited debate, it was rejected by an increased majority; Mr.

Grundy was now not only disappointed, but vexed. He had not found it thus, when he had done battle with Breckinridge.

Though perplexed, he was not in despair. Mr. Grundy was not the man for despair, but expedients; and he now resorted to one rare indeed. Contrary to usage, he asked and obtained leave to withdraw his bill, with the amendment of Purviance appended. This accomplished, he, to the surprise of the House, came forward in a few days with a bill entirely new: at any rate, the heading and verbiage were new, if the former substance was retained. The head or preamble of the new bill was remarkable for its plausibility, be its provisions what they might; and his introductory speech in its behalf was of a very soothing and specious character.

Mr. Purviance had now become wearied with this management of his friend, Mr. Grundy, and he rose in a speech against it, as soon as the latter took his seat.

At the commencement he was rather humorous, a thing very unusual with him, being a man of great gravity: this however but served to increase the humor.

The head of his friend's new bill, he said, was a most beautiful and captivating production — its eloquence too, so persuasive, as to be almost irresistible. For these, and many other reasons, that might be urged, he should be glad, he remarked, to preserve it alive, if indeed it could survive the dissolution of the corrupt and diseased body, to which it was allied. Should that, however, be impracticable, then it must submit to its fate, for the body of the bill was too loathsome to be preserved.

Having indulged in these innocent and playful remarks, Mr. Purviance assumed his wonted earnestness, and proceeded in his attack upon the bill of Mr. Grundy, with a force and perspicuity so clear and convincing, as to result in its immediate rejection, by

a still greater majority. Now, defeated at every point, Mr. Grundy became quite in a bad humor. — a thing very unusual for him. That evening he visited Colonel James Garrard, who was then Governor of Kentucky. He soon perceived, that Mr. Grundy was in an unpleasant mood, and the following dialogue took place between them.

“What Felix! has Breckinridge whipped you today, that you appear to be in a pet?”

“Breckinridge indeed!” replied Mr. Grundy. “You of the north, speak of him, as your champion; but I regard him not. I have battled with him many a time! nay more, have often thrashed him soundly.”

“Pray tell me then,” said the Governor, “Who has drubbed you, Felix? For some one has, I know.”

“Ah Governor,” said Mr. Grundy, “you pride yourself in Mr. Breckinridge, as a mighty man of war; but I repeat, I fear him but little; he is not hard to defeat. But you have another man there, from the north. Withdraw him from the arena of combat; and I will measure arms with your Breckinridge, and have no fears for the result.”

“Tell me, do tell me, Felix,” replied the Governor, “who that can be. I thought you dreaded no member of the House, but Breckinridge.”

“Dread,” said Mr. Grundy. “I told you I dreaded him not. Breckinridge has no alarm for me. But, as you seem desirous to know the man, to whom I allude, I will tell you. It is the plain farmer from your own county of Bourbon, David Purviance.”

“Davy Purviance! Why Felix, you surprise me! Some fair Delilah has doubtless shorn you of your strength, that you let Davy whip you in a fair fight, for he uses no foul play.”

“Ah Governor! I can explain that matter,” said Mr. Grundy. “There is a dead majority of the House that go for Purviance, yea or nay, in all his measures; not only so, but would swear, that all he advocates must be sustained, as right, just what the country needs, and on the contrary, what ever he opposes, should be rejected, without much delay, by debate; especially should Breckinridge or myself chance to be the opponent.”

“Thank God,” said the Governor, “for the pleasing intelligence you give me, Felix; it augurs well for the country, it betokens a healthy condition of the functions of the government; and moreover, promises success to my administration of its concerns.”

“Why so?” inquired Mr. Grundy.

“Davy Purviance,” said the Governor, “is an honest man; and an able and upright legislator; and I repeat it, I thank God, that a majority of the members have the wisdom to perceive it, and the honesty and independence to sustain him. Davy Purviance has no selfish objects or ends to achieve. He goes for his country, and the best interests of the commonwealth. And these are my honest opinions of the man, of his motives, and of his merits, and you Felix, I know, will unite with me in the declaration of their truth.”

Here Mr. Grundy became entirely relaxed in his feelings, and freely gave place to his honest convictions, and heartily concurred in opinion with the Governor, that David Purviance was the great and good man that he had represented him to be. And, as the Governor had uniformly approved of reasonable relief to the settlers, he recommended to Mr. Grundy before they separated, to

seek a conference with Mr. Purviance, and for them to agree on a suitable bill, to be passed for their benefit. Mr. Grundy did so, and the matter was satisfactorily arranged, on behalf of the settlers.

The foregoing anecdote was related to the writer, by the Governor himself, the summer before his death. None need doubt its truth. In the same conversation, the Governor remarked, that he had always considered it a real loss to Kentucky, that Mr. Purviance had retired from the legislative councils of the state, for other pursuits: as he had long known that he was one of the most able, efficient, and faithful members, he had ever known, during the years he had served as Governor of the commonwealth. Mr. Garrard further added, that Mr. Purviance had the unshaken confidence of the House, during the whole time he was a member; that he rarely shared in the debates on minor or local questions. Such only as were of general interest commanded his notice. And from his permanent and abiding popularity, he was generally able to sustain his positions, in respect to measures of that character, — that he was doubtless the only member of the House from the farmer ranks that was much feared by the legal gentlemen of that day. The latter, he said, were many of them able and honorable members; but such a man as Davy, (as the old Governor familiarly called him.) was quite able, and occasionally needed, to check them a little, which he did with such meekness and wisdom, as to retain the respect of the lawyers themselves.

At the session of 1798, the act establishing a penitentiary was past, which was supported by Mr. Purviance, and its existence for half a century has been approved, and is still cherished, as a wise and humane institution. At the same session was passed the law, authorizing the call of a convention to re-revise the first constitution of Kentucky, which had been formed in the year 1792. That act was advocated by Purviance, Breckinridge, and Grundy, for all three were for a revision of the constitution, but with motives totally different. Purviance and his party in the Legislature wished the constitution to be so amended and

organized as ultimately and gradually to abolish, in Kentucky, the institution of slavery. Mr. Breckinridge and his friends wished the constitution amended, as to many of its provisions, but were entirely averse to interfering in any way, with the question of slavery, unless to rivet the chains of the bondman more securely.

At the annual election, held in the spring of the year 1799, Mr. Purviance, Governor Garrard, William Garrard, and three others on the same side, were candidates in Bourbon for a seat in the convention, these to be chosen for the purpose of amending or rather forming a new constitution. These gentlemen were in favor of a plan for the gradual emancipation of the slaves. Six other gentlemen were also candidates, who were in favor of the institution of slavery, as it then existed in Kentucky.

The canvass was truly one of much excitement, but the result was unfavorable to Mr. Purviance and his friends on the slave question. His popularity had well nigh elected him, although Bourbon was a strong slave county. At the same election, Mr. Purviance was returned a member to the House of Representatives, notwithstanding the prejudice attempted to be raised against him as an emancipator. Many noble spirits in Kentucky were with him, even on that question: among them Henry Clay; but it is a fact, that only one member in the state, was elected as an emancipator.

Mr. Breckinridge and Mr. Grundy were both chosen members of the convention, that formed the present constitution of Kentucky, — were both opposed to the emancipation principles, and to these two gentlemen, mainly, is attributed the work of the present constitution. That instrument has enjoyed an existence of now near half a century, but the signs of the times at present, portends its certain and speedy dissolution.

Had the gradual emancipation principle, contended for by Mr. Purviance, been adopted By the convention, the existence of

slavery in Kentucky, would now be extinct. But that favorable moment for action, on this interesting and imposing question, was permitted to pass off without the country's availing itself of the favorable action on this momentous subject, then within its grasp. The question is, doubtless, one of great magnitude, and is at the present time, greatly agitating the Union. What may be its results, time, the only sure revelator of the future, must unfold.

It may not be out of place to here offer a few facts and reflections, in respect to those mighty spirits, who shared so largely, and acted so distinguished a part in the political scenes, that so agitated the country about the close of the last, and beginning of the present century.

And first, Mr. Breckinridge. At the session of the Legislature, begun in November 1799, we find him still a member from Fayette, and by unanimous consent, chosen Speaker of the House. At the session of 1800, he received again the unanimous vote of that body, for the same station. But ere the session of 1800 expired, he was, by the joint concurrence of both branches of the Legislature, chosen Senator of the U. S.; and on the 4th of March, 1801, we find him at his post, in the Senate Chamber, ready to aid Mr. Jefferson, when first inducted into office, as President of the United States, in conducting the government back to true republicanism.

The next year, Mr. Breckinridge received from Mr. Jefferson, the appointment of Attorney General of the United States, and of course, was a member of Mr. Jefferson's Cabinet. He had now ascended the ladder of fame, almost to its topmost rung; had sustained among sage and patriotic statesmen, his high stand with a firm hold. With the President he was a great favorite. But alas! for worldly renown. Death, in the height of his earthly glory, touches the bubble and it breaks. The next news that is heralded abroad, notifies the admirers of this truly great statesman, that he has exchanged his seat in the Cabinet, for a lodgment in the

grave. He died in December, 1806, at the vigorous and manly age of forty six years.

Colonel Garrard continued in the office of Governor, to the end of his second term, which expired in September, 1804; and then retired to his country seat, in Bourbon county, a few miles below Paris, on Stoner, where he spent the evening of his life, in tranquility, and was much respected. His colloquial qualities were both entertaining and instructive; and possessing an ample fortune, he received and entertained, in good and welcome style, the numerous friends he had made in both private and public life. His old friend Purviance rarely passed him without a call.

He had long been a member of the Baptist Church, but he was not a sectarian. His piety was of a liberal and enlarged character, both in respect to his religious faith, and benevolent acts. He died a Christian in a good old age, and was gathered to his fathers. He departed this life Jan., 1822, in the 74th year of his age.

Mr. Grundy, at the time of removal from Kentucky to Nashville, Tennessee, or just before, was Chief Justice of Kentucky. He was frequently elected to Congress from Tennessee, was also Senator in Congress, and Attorney General, during the administration of Mr. Van Buren. At the close of that administration, he was again elected to the Senate. Mr. Grundy was also a churchman. His associations with Christians were liberal. At the time of his demise, he was still a member of the United States Senate. He died, about 1842, at the age of some sixty-six.

But, as our chief business is with the life of that excellent man, David Purviance, while a citizen of Kentucky, we shall close with a few brief remarks, in respect to him. His last session was in 1802-3; he was a prominent actor in that body, during the seven or eight sessions he served. The Lexington Insurance

Company, with banking powers conferred, was a work of the session of 1802; it was opposed by Purviance. And the evils that grew out of that institution proved a curse to the country and, at the same time, evinced the sagacity of Mr. Purviance.

At the same session, the district court system was abolished, and the present circuit system of courts was enacted, and has worked well. Purviance worked hard for the circuit system, but was stoutly opposed by the court party, as it was then styled, consisting of the judges, clerks, and the bar. The latter class, however, to their honor, be it noticed, aided in the good work of reforming the judiciary. The circuit courts still exist, and are popular with the community. And here closes the political life of David Purviance in Kentucky.

As early as the year 1803, he had resolved, that in future, the ability, with which his Maker had blessed him, should be employed, chiefly in preaching to his fellow men, that religion which he had found to be so precious to his own heart. If ordained to the ministry, of necessity he must decline political life in Kentucky; for the constitution inhibits that class of individuals from the halls of legislation.

But he, in this respect, was firmly fixed in his purpose, to proclaim and enforce, to the acceptance of mankind, that Christian faith and practice, which he had so long realized to be of more true and abiding value than the attainments of earth. At the time Mr. Purviance retired from the councils of the state, his political character stood high. His prospects were flattering in the extreme. All this he must have been fully aware of meek and unambitious though he might be. Yet we find he had resolved, and that was enough, as we have again and again witnessed, in respect to this man of true, undaunted moral courage. Like Moses, he chose rather to submit to poverty, and the loss of worldly fame, with his Christian brethren, a poor and despised

little band, than to enjoy, in all their glory, the emoluments and honors of public life, and worldly fame, for a brief season.

We have said that David Purviance was not ambitious; and he was not, after the sort the sons of this vain world call ambition. Yet he was not without ambition to God. He was ambitious, that his name should be enrolled in heaven, in the Lamb's book of life. Then, however it might be disregarded on earth, it would be had in honor, and lasting remembrance before the Lord. This, of all distinctions, he considered by far the noblest.

In the year 1803, as is known to all. Barton W. Stone, and other clergymen, seceded from the Presbyterian church, and shortly after, instituted upon the Bible. David Purviance was a ruling elder in the church at Caneridge, and he united with Stone and the others, and was shortly after ordained to the ministry. He preached extensively and to great profit.

He was the first preacher in the Christian church, so styled, that publicly repudiated infant baptism, and insisted that the immersion in water of a believing penitent was the only baptism known to the New Testament.

Elder Purviance has given a history of the first immersion that took place in the Christian church, in a recital of some early events, furnished by him to the biographer of B. W. Stone, which may be found at the 12th page⁴ of the life of Stone. That account is unquestionably true. The writer was present, and witnessed the occurrences of that memorable day. It took place early in the month of July, in the year 1807. That fall, Elder Purviance removed to Ohio. His departure from the church at Caneridge was deeply regretted.

⁴ The page citation is in error. Seemingly the reference is to an article beginning on page 120 of Biography of B. W. Stone. Ed.

But he returned on many a visit, and was always welcomed in the most cordial and affectionate manner. He proved a blessing to many pious souls in his old Caneridge Church, on such visits. Many and many of his wise and affectionate discourses are still vivid and warm to the heart of the writer, and he trusts will be more and more operative, till we meet again and embrace each other in the Kingdom of glory.

The writer now closes these hasty sketches of the political life and times of Mr. Purviance. His Christian character, private and public, he earnestly recommends to the pen of the able and faithful historians who shall portray to the world, in its just light, the virtues and excellencies of this amiable and venerated man of God.

WILLIAM ROGERS.

CHAPTER V

A remarkable revival. Leaves legislating and becomes a candidate for the ministry. A split in the Presbyterian Church. The Springfield Presbytery. Takes the name Christian. The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery, and the Witnesses' Address.

THE spring of 1801 witnessed a very remarkable religious excitement, which took place in Kentucky, known by the name of the "Great Revival." Mr. Purviance had professed religion in the state of North Carolina, when about the age of 20, and was at this time a Ruling Elder in the Presbyterian Church. He drank deeply into the spirit of the reformation, and received a license from the Presbytery to exhort. He was elected to the Legislature that summer, and served the next winter; but his mind and heart were very much in the reformation, and frequently, during the session, he obtained liberty of absence, on the afternoon of Saturday, and rode home the same evening, some forty miles, and met the congregation on the Lord's day, and enjoyed himself well. When this session had closed, he placed himself under the care of the Presbytery, and became a candidate for the ministry. And as the constitution of Kentucky will not admit a minister of the gospel, to a seat in the legislative councils, he was never after a candidate for political promotion in that state. At the next sitting of the presbytery, according to custom he was called on to deliver a trial sermon. He readily complied, but it was not very well received. There was a little too much liberality, and free salvation in it, to suit the sticklers for Calvinistic orthodoxy. He was then examined on the principles and doctrines of the Westminster confession of faith. It was soon ascertained, that he would not fully subscribe to the faith of this creed, consequently, he was continued on probation. While he was thus held in

suspense, a charge was brought against Richard McNamer,⁵ a very talented and influential minister, for preaching doctrines contrary to their creed.

He first appeared before the Washington Presbytery of Ohio; from this his case was carried up to the Synod at Lexington, Kentucky. McNamer was willing to have all the doctrines he had preached, tested by the word of God; but this was out of the question, for they had “a law,” and by this law he must be tried, and it was well known, that by it he would be condemned. There were four other preachers present, that believed, and preached the same doctrine, that he was charged with preaching. These were Barton W. Stone, John Dunlavy, John Thompson, and Robert Marshall. They very well knew, that if he was excommunicated, they would share the same fate. These five brethren, during a short recess of the Synod, drew up a protest against the proceedings in McNamer’s case, and declared their independence and withdrew from Synod.

This protest was immediately presented to Synod. The Synod immediately issued their bull of excommunication against them, and declared their congregations vacant. But the dissenters argued, that the act of Synod, in this case, could have no avail, as they had formally withdrawn. There were no charges, even preferred, against four of these brethren, before they withdrew themselves. They further insisted, that if their ministerial office was vacant by this act of Synod, that there was no authority in the Protestant Churches; for Luther was expelled by the Pope of Rome, after he had withdrawn, and there were charges preferred against him before he withdrew. These five brethren immediately formed themselves into a separate organization, and called it the Springfield Presbytery. David Purviance immediately withdrew, by letter, from the Presbytery, under whose care he had placed

⁵ The name is also spelled M’Namar, M’Nemar, McNemar, and MacNemar. M’Nemar or McNemar is perhaps more standard. No uniformity is followed in this book, but his attempt has been to keep it faithful to the original each place the name occurs. Ed.

himself, and forthwith became a member of the newly organized Springfield Presbytery, and was, by this body, immediately set forward to the work of the ministry. The Dissenters returned to the churches of their charge, and laid the whole circumstance of their withdrawal before them. This caused quite an excitement among the churches. But a majority of them adhered to their former pastors, and united with the Dissenters. By this time, some of the Presbyterian preachers began, publicly and privately, to oppose the great revival; this, with the excitement on the subject of the late secession, caused something of a declension in the work, especially in the Presbyterian churches. The Dissenters went on boldly, publishing and teaching the doctrine, that they had been charged with teaching, viz.. “That God loved the world, and gave his well beloved Son to die, that whosoever believeth in him might not perish, but have everlasting life. That Jesus Christ, by the grace of God, tasted death for every man.” And “that there was no partiality with God. That the provisions of the Gospel were full and free provided for all mankind indiscriminately. That if sinners were lost, it was not because God had decreed it, but because they would not come to him, that they might have life.”

This doctrine was almost universally received by those who were in the spirit of the reformation. It also had a glorious effect, in removing the unbelief of mankind. They were taught that they had the power and facility of acting faith, and were exhorted to believe with all their hearts, in the Lord Jesus Christ, that they might be saved. They were also clearly shown that the doctrine that they had been taught from infancy, viz. That it was as impossible for man to believe, as to make a world, was not a doctrine of the Bible. McNamer, Dunlavy, and Thompson were in Ohio; Stone, Marshall, and Purviance, were in Kentucky. And the good work of reformation went on. But before one year had rolled away, they began to discover, that they had taken a sectarian stand, and saw clearly, that it would lead to a party spirit as well as practice. This they believed to be wrong, and

calculated in its nature, to retard the progress of reformation. They, therefore, unanimously agreed to renounce their former name, with all man-made creeds, and acknowledge no name, but that given to the disciples at Antioch, (Christians), and no creed but the Bible. They then wrote and published what they called The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery. As many of our readers will, (no doubt,) be desirous to know what kind of an instrument this is, we will here insert it.

* * *

“For where a testament is, there must of necessity be the death of the testator; for a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.” “Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die.” “Verily, verily. I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit.” “Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.” — Scripture.

The Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery

PRESBYTERY of Springfield, sitting at Caneridge, in the county of Bourbon, being through a gracious Providence, in more than ordinary bodily health, growing in strength and size daily; and in perfect soundness, and composure of mind; but knowing that it is appointed for all delegated bodies once to die: and considering that the life of every such body is very uncertain, do make, and ordain this our last Will and Testament, in manner and form following.

Imprimis. We *will* that this body die, be dissolved, and sink into union with the Body of Christ at large: for there is but one body, and one Spirit, even as we are called in one hope of our calling.

Item. We *will*, that our name of distinction, with its Reverend title be forgotten, that there be but one Lord over God’s heritage, and his name one.

Item. We will, that our power of making laws for the government of the church, and executing them by delegated authority, forever cease; that the people may have free course to the Bible, and adopt the law of *the spirit of life in Christ Jesus*.

Item. We will, that candidates for the Gospel ministry henceforth study the Holy Scriptures with fervent prayer, and obtain license from God to preach the simple Gospel, *with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven*, without any mixture of philosophy, vain deceit, traditions of men, or the rudiments of the world. And let none henceforth take *this honor to himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron*.

Item. We will, that the church of Christ resume her native right of internal government — try her candidates for the ministry, as to their soundness in the faith, acquaintance with experimental religion, gravity and aptness to teach; and admit no proof of their authority but Christ speaking in them. We will, that the church of Christ look up to the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers into his harvest, and that she resume her primitive right of trying those *who say they are apostles, and are not*.

Item. We will, that each particular church, as a body, actuated by the same spirit choose her own preacher, and support him by a free will offering, without a written *call* or *subscription* — admit members — remove offences; and never henceforth *delegate* her right of government to any man or set of men whatever.

Item. We will, that the people henceforth take the Bible as the only sure guide to heaven; and as many as are offended with other books, which stand in competition with it, may cast them into the fire if they choose; for it is better to enter into life having one book, than having many to be cast into hell.

Item. We will, that preachers and people cultivate a spirit of mutual forbearance, pray more and dispute less; and while they behold the signs of the times, look up, and confidently expect, that redemption draweth nigh.

Item. We will, that our weak brethren, who may have been wishing to make the Presbytery of Springfield their king, and wot not what is now

become of it, betake themselves to the Rock of Ages, and follow Jesus for the future.

Item. We will, that the Synod of Ky. examine every member, who may be *suspected* of having departed from the Confession of Faith, and suspend every such suspected heretic immediately; in order that the oppressed may go free, and taste the sweets of gospel liberty.

Item. We will, that Ja____ ____, the author of two letters lately published in Lexington, be encouraged in his zeal to destroy *partyism*. We will, moreover, that our past conduct be examined into by all who may have correct information; but let foreigners beware of speaking evil of things which they know not.

Item. Finally we will, that all our *sister bodies* read their Bibles carefully, that they may see their fate there determined, and prepare for death before it is too late.

Springfield Presbytery, June 28th. 1804.

Robert Marshall,
John Dunlavy,
Richard M'Namar,
B.W. Stone,
John Thompson,
David Purviance
Witnesses.

The Witnesses' Address

We, the above named witnesses of the Last Will and Testament of the Springfield Presbytery, knowing that there will be many conjectures respecting the causes which have occasioned the dissolution of that body think proper to testify, that from its first existence it was knit together in love, lived in peace and concord, and died a voluntary and happy death.

Their reasons for dissolving that body were the following: With deep concern they viewed the divisions, and party spirit among professing Christians, principally owing to the adoption of human creeds and forms of government. While they were united under the name of a Presbytery, they endeavored to cultivate a spirit of love and unity with

all Christians; but found it extremely difficult to suppress the idea that they themselves were a party separate from others. This difficulty increased in proportion to their success in the ministry. Jealousies were excited in the minds of other denominations; and a temptation was laid before those who were connected with the various parties, to view them in the same light. At their last meeting they undertook to prepare for the press a piece entitled *Observations on Church Government*, in which the world will see the beautiful simplicity of Christian church government, stript of human inventions and lordly traditions. As they proceeded in the investigation of that subject, they soon found that there was neither precept nor example in the New Testament for such confederacies as modern Church Sessions, Presbyteries, Synods, General Assemblies &c. Hence they concluded, that while they continued in the connection in which they then stood, they were off the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, of which Christ himself is the chief corner stone. However just, therefore, their views of church government might have been, they would have gone out under the name and sanction of a self-constituted body. Therefore, from a principle of love to Christians of every name, the precious cause of Jesus, and dying sinners who are kept from the Lord by the existence of sects and parties in the church, they have cheerfully consented to retire from the din and fury of conflicting parties— sink out of the view of fleshly minds, and die the death. They believe their death will be great gain to the world. But though dead, as above, and stript of their mortal frame, which only served to keep them too near the confines of Egyptian bondage, they yet live and speak in the land of gospel liberty; they blow the trumpet of jubilee, and willingly devote themselves to the help of the Lord against the mighty. They will aid the brethren, by their counsel, when required; assist in ordaining elders, or pastors — seek the divine blessing — unite with all Christians — commune together, and strengthen each other's hands in the work of the Lord.

We design by the grace of God, to continue in the exercise of those functions, which belong to us as ministers of the gospel, confidently trusting in the Lord, that he will be with us. We candidly acknowledge, that in some things we may err, through human infirmity; but he will correct our wanderings, and preserve his church. Let all Christians join with us, in crying to God day and night, to remove the obstacles which stand in the way of his work, and give him no rest till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth. We heartily unite with our Christian brethren of every name, in thanksgiving to God for the display of his goodness in the glorious work he is carrying on in our Western country,

which we hope will terminate in the universal spread of the gospel, and the unity of the church.

This was one means of leading the people to a close examination of the word of God, and many of the honest inquiring minds soon began to discover that some of these doctrines, they had been taught from their infancy to regard as the fundamentals of Christianity, were not to be found in the Bible.

Many of the self-styled orthodox raised their warning voice, and the press and pulpit poured forth bitter invectives against those men, that would presume to call in question, any doctrine found in the approved system of their Church. But their Reformers were devout, prayerful, and humble; and the Lord made them “polished shafts in his quiver.” And the good work of reformation went on, and many souls were converted to God, and new preachers and exhorters were raised up among them, that were willing to share their persecutions, toils, and labors, that they might reap their reward. Errors in doctrine were not only faithfully pointed out, but errors in practice were both privately, publicly, and fearlessly, opposed.

This is a sample of the material contained in
*The Biography of Elder David Purviance
with His Memoirs and Biographical and
Historical Sketches*
by Levi Purviance

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