

MATTERS OF INTEREST SIXTY-THREE YEARS AGO

The destruction of the First Presbyterian Church, in Lafayette Square, the morning of the 20th of October, 1854, was an event deeply lamented by the whole community, especially by the old residents. It was the oldest existing Protestant church in the city. In the minds of a majority of the population of the city, it was conspicuously associated with the early history of the old Faubourg St. Mary, subsequently the second municipality. The First Dissenting Church erected in New Orleans was more recently known as Dr. Clapp's Church, in St. Charles street, at the corner of Gravier. That church was dedicated in 1819, nearly a hundred years ago, by the Rev. Sylvester Larned, the first Presbyterian minister to settle in this city. Mr. Larned had scarcely commenced his career, which promised to be one of great distinction and usefulness, when he fell a victim to the yellow fever. His remains were interred beneath a modest slab in the church whose destruction is now being recorded.

Dr. Theodore Clapp succeeded Mr. Larned, and filled its pulpit with great acceptableness to the people generally until 1833, when on account of doctrinal and other differences with a portion of his congregation Dr. Clapp seceded, or was expelled, and set up for himself as an independent minister of an independent and isolated congregation. Previous to this, however, the church had been sold to the sheriff, and was purchased by the venerable and benevolent Judah Touro, from whom the congregation rented. When Mr. Clapp's differences with a portion of his congregation arose, the latter offered to purchase the church, but Mr. Touro would not sell it until it was destroyed by the great fire which consumed the St. Charles Hotel in 1851.

In 1835 the Presbyterians erected their church in Lafayette Square. The first pastor was the Rev. Joel G. Parker, who subsequently rose to eminence in Philadelphia. The congregation was wealthy and prosperous, but previous to the installation of Dr. Scott, it was very unfortunate in obtaining permanent pastors. Mr. Parker left because of the excitement produced by a letter written by him, which was published in the North, reflecting upon the morals of New Orleans people. It is an instructive and remarkable fact, however, that Mr. Parker, who was so distasteful to the people of this city, was in turn seriously prejudiced in the estimation of Northern people, by his manly fidelity to the rights and honor of the Southern people in the matter of slavery. Dr. Scott, who succeeded Dr. Clapp as pastor of the church, gave it great popularity. He was a man of distinguished ability, and his church was constantly crowded by people representing every complexion of faith, taste and doctrine. Fortunately the building was largely insured, the amount said to be about fifty thousand dollars. "This and other resources of the congregation," said the Picayune, "will insure the erection of a larger and more impressive edifice. The church had recently been repaired at an expense of ten thousand dollars. There are many rumors as to the conflagration being the act of an incendiary, but at present we have no evidence to justify such apprehension."

"About half past four o'clock," said the Delta in its report of the destruction of the church, "just as the watch were being called from their beats, an alarm of fire aroused the drowsy sleepers of our city from their downy couches. The gloomy horizon was all ablaze, and the rumbling of the engines quickly responded to the harsh music of the watchman's rattle. So rapidly had the flames spread that shortly before the first engines reached the scene of conflagration, the building was completely enveloped in a sheet of flame, from basement to steeple. The fire brigade had on the attack under the supervision of the intrepid Colonel Adams, and fought the flames with their usual energy and determination, but their efforts were entirely ineffectual. The fire seemed to laugh in scorn every attempt made to reach its stronghold, and revelled in conscious safety. Upward and onward the fierce fiend shot with the speed of lightning, till he perched upon the apex of the electric rod, and there dancing in wild glee, he looked down upon the futile efforts of his enemies with derision, and continued the work of destruction. Still gallantly did the noble firemen combat the flames, regardless of the risk they ran of being crushed beneath the falling timbers of the belfry, and still gallantly did their brave forerunners lead on the forlorn hope, pouring their quenching streams through the windows into the very center of the burning building, but in vain—the total destruction of the church was certain. The belfry and steeple soon came thundering down to the ground with a crash that caused the earth to quake, breaking down the iron railing around Lafayette Square, and creating a panic among the thousands of spectators to the sublime scene. These people had assembled to witness the death, as it were, of an old friend—the church whose tall steeple had pointed the road heavenward to them for more than a quarter of a century. Fortunately no one was injured by the falling timbers, and the flames now began to rapidly decrease in volume and violence, and by 7 o'clock were entirely subdued, but the church was a mass of ruins, scarcely a vestige of the woodwork of which there was a great deal about the building, being left unburnt."

The Picayune in its account of the fire stated that there were many conjectures as to its origin, but it was very generally agreed that it was incendiary and the result of religious fanaticism. When the first fire company arrived it was discovered that the fire originated under the staircase leading to the belfry, in the right hand corner, fronting on South street, and one of the windows was open. It was believed that "a ball of cotton saturated in some combustible liquid had been lighted and thrown into the window." The church building was valued at \$35,000, but was insured for much more than that—as previously stated, about \$50,000, the policies being carried by the Home Mutual and Crescent Insurance Companies. A good deal of the movable property was saved by the firemen, such as silver plate, Bibles, etc. The school books and furniture of the schoolroom in the basement were mostly saved.

"By this calamity," said the Delta, "Dr. Scott's congregation was yesterday deprived of a place of worship, but, nothing daunted, the eminent divine, who has so long and ably presided over this flock, issued notices calling a meeting of his congregation at Odd Fellows' Hall,

for purposes of worship. In his sermon the Doctor alluded very briefly, but touchingly, to the destruction of his church, remarking that, after all, it might prove to be a blessing rather than a calamity. Yesterday the scene of the conflagration was visited by thousands of people who thronged Lafayette Square and its environs from morning till night. There were a thousand vague rumors afloat as to whom the incendiaries were, some connecting them with the recent Know-Nothingism disturbances, but there was nothing definite or tangible in what was gathered or said."

The death of the Lieutenant Governor of Louisiana, W. W. Farmer, occurred in New Orleans of yellow fever, October 29. The sad event produced a profound sensation in the community, and more particularly in the large circle of the lieutenant governor's friends. Coming to this city from his home in the northwest of the state, on business, eight or ten days before, Mr. Farmer was seized with what was regarded as by no means a severe case of malarial fever. Subsequently it was pronounced yellow fever, but his friends and attendants believed he had passed the crisis when his condition suddenly became serious. From thence he began to sink and on Sunday when the bells were ringing for matins, he died. His remains were followed to their resting place in the Protestant (Girod street) Cemetery, by the military of the city, the Masonic fraternity, and a large concourse of citizens. The procession moved from Masonic Hall, in St. Charles street, under command of General Tracy, assisted by Colonel Nichols and Lieutenant Colonel Jacques, Mr. S. G. Risk, grand secretary of the Masonic Grand Lodge, W. A. Andrews, and Mr. Levinson, had charge of the civic ceremonies, and General Palfrey and Colonel Monaghan and Wood directed the military. First in the procession came the Washington Regiment, composed of the Louisiana Grays, the Emmet and Kossuth Guards and German Yeagers. Then followed the hearse, accompanied by the following gentlemen as pallbearers: John L. Lewis, mayor of the city; Hon. B. W. Moise, United States district attorney; Hon. J. Blount Robertson, judge of the First District Court; Hon. T. S. McKay, state senator; Hon. J. R. McMyrdo, state senator; Samuel G. Risk, grand secretary, Masonic Grand Lodge; Thomas Warren, United States appraiser; A. Levison, assistant secretary of state; W. A. Andrews, Colonel John Armstrong, Hon. F. Hatch, state representative; Benjamin Bloomfield, General H. W. Palfrey and Colonel W. W. Wood, of the legion; Colonel William Monaghan and Colonel Daniel Edwards, of the governor's staff. The hearse was followed by various staff officers and other military civil dignitaries, the governor's Horse Guards, the National Guards, Masonic fraternity, in full numbers, and a large number of citizens on foot and in carriages. St. Charles street was crowded with people when the procession moved from the St. Charles Hotel, where the lieutenant governor's death occurred at 5 o'clock in the afternoon. The interment in Girod Cemetery was only temporary. The flags on all public buildings were displayed at half-mast during the day.

Lieutenant Governor Farmer was a native of Louisiana, and a son of one of the earliest settlers in the wealthy district known as the Ouachita region. His father was the founder of the flourishing little village of Farmerville, in Union parish, formerly a part of Ouachita. Much of the lieutenant governor's life was spent in the fields and swamps of the Northwest, in the pursuit of his profession as a surveyor. His service had left its traces in a constitution which, naturally robust and vigorous, had become, by this exposure, peculiarly susceptible to febrile diseases. Mr. Farmer's first appearance in public life was as a state senator from his district, which post he filled for several years with much dignity and usefulness. Though not a brilliant man, his judgment was excellent and his motives unquestioned. In the energetic and successful efforts of General Downs to build up a party in the northwestern region of the state, which should claim and exercise a distinct and powerful influence over the policies of the Democratic party in Louisiana, Mr. Farmer was one of his most reliable and useful confederates. No less as a compliment to himself than out of regard to the great power of his section of the Democratic party, Mr. Farmer was selected as the candidate for lieutenant governor, with Colonel Hebert for governor. He was forty-two years of age at the time of his death, leaving a widow and two children.

In this connection, the Delta had the following: "Little over two years ago, in the house of a planter of Iberville, an extraordinary scene was exhibited. Around the bed of a young man who appeared to be in the last stage of debility, in whose face and form disease had made terrible havoc, there were assembled a dozen grave individuals, whose countenances were full of sadness and sympathy, whose light step and long breathing indicated their earnest anxiety for the repose and quiet of the invalid. There were female faces, too, to impart a still more solemn and softened interest to the scene, faces which were eloquent with deep affection, pride and anxious solicitude. The gravest and most venerable gentleman in the assembly stepped forward with the Holy Volume in his hand, and laying it upon the bed, placed the invalid's hand on it, and then proceeded to repeat in solemn tones the words of the oath prescribed by the state of Louisiana for all her officers. In a weak voice the invalid followed the words, and at the conclusion kissed the sacred volume, and then with some difficulty scrawled his name to a written copy of the oath. The grave dignitary who had administered the oath then turned to a tall, stalwart, handsome, remarkably healthy and vigorous looking gentleman, in the very flower of manhood and health, and proceeded to administer to him a like oath. This was the inauguration of the governor and lieutenant governor of Louisiana. Who would have predicted that in two years that almost hopeless invalid would have survived his healthy and vigorous associate!"

November 6: The marriage was announced of Henry J. Leovy of this city to Miss Bettie A. Monroe, youngest daughter of the Honorable Judge Thomas B. Monroe of Frankfort, Ky., the ceremony taking place on the 20th of October, the Reverend Henry E. Thomas officiating.

The death of Colonel D. J. Fluker of East Feliciana was announced in the Delta as having occurred on the 4th, at his residence near Jackson.