

AMERICAN PRESBYTERIANS



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Cover:

Milestone 1794: The United States of America, under its new constitution, faced its first armed revolt in the summer of 1794. Scotch-Irish settlers living in the Pennsylvania counties near the Allegheny Mountains were among those to rebel against the Washington administration's decision, in 1791, to place an excise tax on whiskey, since the popular beverage was also a economic commodity. The distillers considered the tax discriminatory, detrimental to their livelihoods, and to their liberty. Some complained that Alexander Hamilton, the Secretary of the Treasury, would next place a tax on our "cyder, and our bread and butter." When they took up arms, President Washington hastily gathered a military force and marched westward to put down the insurrection which became known as the Whiskey Rebellion. The revolt dissipated as he did so. Having demonstrated the will of the new federal government to enforce its laws, Washington pardoned those arrested in the matter.

The Reverend Charles Nisbet, a recent immigrant from Scotland and president of Dickinson College, Carlisle, preached a sermon on the "Guilt of Rebellion," and condemned this challenge to authority. The Synod of Virginia, sitting at Winchester near the site of the rebellion, also debated the issue. Although the Reverend Moses Hoge expressed outrage at the rebels, the synod, following the lead of the Reverend William Graham of Liberty Hall, declared a fast day and simply instructed the members of the synod to be subject to the "powers that be." Apparently not all Presbyterians were willing to condemn principles which justified in part the earlier American revolt against taxes imposed by the British. While the Scotch-Irish of the region laid down their arms, they continued to harbor a strong dislike of the Federalist party during the on-going public quest for a free, just, and stable political system in the early republic.

Cover Illustration: "General George Washington Reviewing the Western army at Fort Cumberland the 18th of Octob', 1794," reproduced from the collections of the Library of Congress.



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Lincoln, the Churches, and Memphis Presbyterians

by George M. Apperson

ON MARCH 4, 1864, A PETITION FROM the Second Presbyterian Church in Memphis was laid on Abraham Lincoln's desk. The trustees were begging the return of their building that had fallen into Federal hands early in June 1862. The loss of the elegant Greek Revival sanctuary, they affirmed, could be blamed directly on their deposed pastor, Dr. Robert Caldwell Grundy, who made "representations" to the Federal authorities when they took control of the city. It was not that he made misstatements, they admitted, but he withheld "important and qualifying truth."¹

The moment chosen by the trustees to make their appeal to Lincoln was fortunate because there were so many facets of the church's problems that the return of the building to the original congregation could be described as a minor miracle. One question is imponderable: How did five avowed rebels, in an occupied city, make a direct approach to the president of the United States to ask his help? One on-the-scene observer, hearing of the petition, wrote to colleagues in New York, "It is notorious ...that there are not 5 worse secessionists in the city of Memphis..."²

It did not take a close reading of the text to catch the point. The opening line



Second Presbyterian Church, Memphis, 1848

requested naively, "Be pleased to gratify us so much at least, as to read this communication." Lincoln doubtless glanced through it, turned the document over and penned a careful reply on a narrow fold of the back.

I have written before and I now repeat: "The U. S. Government must not undertake to run the churches. When an individual, in a church or out of it, becomes dangerous to the public interest he must be checked; but the churches, as such, must take care of themselves. It will not do for the U.S. to appoint Trustees, Supervisors, or other agents for the churches."

I add, if the Military have military need for the church building, let them keep it; otherwise let them get out of it and leave it, and its owners alone, except for causes that justify the arrest of anyone.

March. 4. 1864

A. Lincoln³

Lincoln had a tolerance for honest but contrary opinion on some issues that might have brought accusations of treason against him, had he not been president. This was apparent in the sensitive area of church politics. He professed to belong to no denomination but he had a keen sense of the conflicts that religion can engender, in particular where the Methodists and Presbyterians were concerned.⁴ Nevertheless, when he first arrived in Washington, he rented a pew in

Dr. Apperson holds a Ph.D. in European history and taught at Rhodes College, Memphis, Tennessee.

the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church where Edward Bates, the attorney general, and Simon Cameron, secretary of war, were also pewholders, and Dr. Phineas Dinsmore Gurley was the eloquent preacher.⁵

Lincoln saw in the Memphis case a striking parallel to one that had been thrust upon him in 1863. A Presbyterian minister from St. Louis, who had been ordered banished from the city because of his "unmistakable sympathy for the rebels," was escorted to his office by Attorney General Bates. Lincoln discerned from his conversation that Dr. Samuel B. McPheeters was a Confederate sympathizer. But he had taken an oath of loyalty to the Federal government, which he had not violated, and the president believed he ought not be persecuted "upon the suspicion of his secret sympathies." To resolve the issue, he wrote to the commanding general in St. Louis the exact words he would quote in his Memphis decision, "the U.S. government must not, as by this order, undertake to run the churches." He added, "exercise your best judgment, with a sole view to the public interest."⁶

It was Edward Bates, a Presbyterian elder, who had guided Lincoln in the McPheeters decision. Although there is no documented proof, an educated guess would be that it was he who advised Lincoln to return the Second Church to its owners.⁷

I

Friday, January 4, 1861, was a day of fasting, humiliation, and prayer, set by President Buchanan in the face of an unparalleled crisis. Many people in Memphis were unprepared for the shock of disunion and the fears aroused by the secession of South Carolina on the previous December 20th. In the pulpit of the First Presbyterian Church, Dr. James O. Stedman took a text from the Ninth Psalm and told his congregation:

the calamity that has fallen upon us is sudden, hardly anticipated six months ago. It has come to us in the dew of our youth, in the midst of unexampled abundance, at a time of peace with foreign nations, with all the elements of national wealth, prosperity and growth in vigorous and healthful exercise, with our territory extending from one ocean to another, and with the eyes of millions looking upon us from distant countries, in wonder and expectation, with earnest desires to be like us....⁸

Tennessee rejected the idea of secession and held aloof while six states joined South Carolina on February 4th to create the Confederacy.

The official apologist for the convention that made South Carolina an independent nation was Dr. James H. Thornwell, the greatest Presbyterian theologian in the South in the nineteenth century. His own state, separate and independent, had taken her place "as an equal among the other nations of the earth," and, he declared, "it involves the destiny of a continent, and through that continent, the fortunes of the human race."⁹

In Memphis, Dr. Grundy read Thornwell's pronouncements with anger and dismay. In an open letter to the *Presbyterian Herald*, the official newspaper of Memphis Presbytery, he published a lacerating attack on the man and his thesis.¹⁰ Thornwell focused on the character of the men who engineered secession, guided by the voice of reason and the authority of God. Grundy countered, "Already it has shaken to the center our Republic, and affected disastrously every department of business.... Already the result has been most calamitous, and neither you nor anyone else can tell what is to be the end of the matter. There is much reason to fear that what we have already experienced is only the beginning of evil." For Thornwell's laudatory description of the personnel of the convention, he had only sarcastic rage. "An excellent body of men in South Carolina, under mistaken impulses, perpe-

trated on the 20th of last December the greatest wrong that has ever been enacted in the face of modern civilization." The election of Lincoln, for whom Grundy had a certain contempt, was only a pretext for their action, he believed, and the convention's effort to secure the rights of the South "gives up the very thing contended for." His clear position was "that the South owes her greatness and safety to the American Union." Little more could be said, except to pray, "May God save us from the ruin in which your secession ordinance threatens to involve us."¹¹

Tennessee legislators, in a quandary, debated the issue in secret. On April 25, at a session called by Governor Isham Harris, a young Presbyterian minister, Joseph Bardwell, offered a prayer that was broadcast in southern newspapers. "Doubtless Thou art our God, though Abraham be ignorant of us, and Israel acknowledge us not. Thou hast been the God of our fathers, their refuge in every trouble...." Certainly no one mistook whom he meant when he recalled an ancient imprecation, "Wilt thou not defend the right and bring to naught the wickedness of the wicked?—Put thy hook in the nose of him who deviseth mischief against us. Circumvent and frustrate all his wicked devices; and may it yet please thee to save us from the horrors of civil war and bloodshed."¹²

On April 15, Lincoln had called for seventy-five thousand troops to bring the seceding states into line. Governor Harris refused to cooperate, saying, "Tennessee will not furnish a single man for coercion, but 50,000 if necessary for our rights and those of our Southern brothers."¹³ The state did not secede but, employing a euphemism, formally declared her independence from the Union. On June 8, yielding to a rising tide of public opinion, she became the last state to join the Confederacy. No prophetic eye had seen the woes that fell on the Presbyterian church as the

events of 1861 began to unfold. There were fears that the slavery question might be introduced in the meeting of the Old School General Assembly in Philadelphia in May. Secession was in full cry in Tennessee and only one representative of Memphis Presbytery was present. Dr. John Newton Waddel, president of La Grange College, busy with his duties, waited anxiously for news. "Northern people," he later wrote, "were perfectly infuriated toward the South." The few southerners who arrived in the City of Brotherly Love were disquieted when "irresponsible ruffians issued anonymous proposals to hang them as rebels and traitors to the lamp-posts on the streets."¹⁴ Dr. Gardiner Spring of New York urged in a resolution that the membership of the church be loyal to the United States. Fiercely debated and amended, a minority report was adopted that called on all Presbyterians "to promote and perpetuate...these United States, [and to] uphold, and encourage, the Federal Government in the exercise of all its functions under our noble Constitution [to which] we profess our unabated loyalty."¹⁶

Although the debaters disclaimed any reference to a particular political party or administration, advice was sought from and given by members of Lincoln's cabinet. Their telegraphed answers for or against the Spring resolution were read by speakers on various points. Edward Bates believed he spoke for the others when he advised, "The best thing the Assembly can do to sustain the government is to preserve the unity of the Presbyterian Church by abstaining from any discussion of our present troubles."¹⁷

There was a series of protests against the Assembly's adoption of the Spring resolution, none more trenchant than that of Dr. Charles Hodge of Princeton Seminary, who maintained that "The General Assembly in thus deciding a political question, and in making that decision practically a condition of mem-



Dr. Robert Caldwell Grundy

bership to the Church, has, in our judgment, violated the Constitution of the Church, and usurped the prerogative of its Divine Master."¹⁸

Tennessee was on the verge of making her commitment to the Confederacy when the news of the pronouncement of the General Assembly reached members of Memphis Presbytery. Dr. John H. Gray at La Grange College sprang into action. He was South Carolinian by birth, a protege of Moses Waddel, and one of the founders of the presbytery. He drafted a protest against the action of the Assembly, which was carried to an adjourned meeting of presbytery by his brother-in-law, Dr. Waddel. At the June 13th meeting, the agenda unannounced, with five ministers and five elders present, the protest was referred to a committee, which brought it before presbytery at seven-thirty the next morning. It was unanimously adopted. A reflection of the spirit of Dr. Hodge's protest, it went considerably further, declaring the connection of Memphis Presbytery with the General Assembly

dissolved. A copy of the action was sent to every presbytery in the South, "requesting them, if they concur with us, [to] approve Commissioners authorized to organize a General Assembly."¹⁹ It suggested a preliminary meeting in Atlanta in August and an initial organization of a new Assembly in Memphis in May of 1862.

Dr. Grundy knew that he had been bushwhacked when he read about the action of presbytery in his newspaper. He had not attended the meeting because June 13th was to be a day of humiliation, fasting, and prayer, proclaimed by Jefferson Davis for the Confederate faithful. "We were all anxious to observe it, and be at home with our people for the purpose." He immediately framed a protest of his own which was sent to every Presbyterian minister in the South and published in full in the *Presbyterian Herald*. It was a carefully measured analysis of the crisis and a bewailing of "the division of our great and beloved Church." He was unhappy because he felt that "To the Presbytery of Memphis belongs the glory or the disgrace of taking the initiative in this momentous matter." He was aggrieved that the action was the work of a mere fraction of the presbytery and done in virtual secrecy. The integrity of the Presbyterian Church was his sole motive, he claimed, for his criticism of the precipitous action of his fellow Presbyterians. They should have waited "until the storm is past...rather than do in the dark of the present what may not be the will of God." Nor did he want any action taken that might "bring down the Church from the high and independent position above the state...that we may help Caesar in his present crisis." Grundy professed to be ill at ease as a critic of his presbytery, and embarrassed that the action had been initiated by Dr. Gray, his predecessor at Second Church. He did not want the Presbyterian Church to divide: "Let this war terminate and we are, North

and South one Church...."²⁰

Some presbyteries in the South hesitated briefly to follow the lead of Dr. Gray and his supporters, but not for long. When the Presbytery of New Orleans, guided by Dr. Benjamin M. Palmer, unanimously declared its independence of the General Assembly, the *Presbyterian Herald* commented, "Dr. Grundy, so far as we have heard, is the only voice in the seceded States raised against immediate and final separation." On the other hand, the editor commented, "The Southern Presbytery, which attempted to settle the question in favor of the Southern Confederacy, in my judgment, travelled as far out of its true province as a court of Jesus Christ, as did the General Assembly."²¹

It is curious that neither his attack on Thornwell nor his lone effort to stem the tide of Presbyterian disintegration brought reprisals on the head of Dr. Grundy. Rather, it was a gesture by the trustees of Second Church that he strenuously opposed, one that would rise up to haunt them in the months ahead. General Beauregard, the hero of Fort Sumter, was idolized in Memphis.

Like a magic spark of Promethean fire
His very name doth the soul inspire;
And a thousand voices loud and strong,
Shout as he rideth the ranks along,
Waving the banner starred and barred,
"To glory or death with Beauregard."²²

He issued an appeal that touched many southern hearts, "More than once a people fighting with an enemy less ruthless than yours...have not hesitated to melt and mold into cannon the precious bells surmounting their houses of God...."²⁴ Protests from Dr. Grundy were futile as the bell of Second Church was lowered from the cupola. Ruling Elder Isaac Kirtland, treasurer of the Confederate church General Assembly's committee on education, was appointed to escort it to its destination.²⁵ About a month later, Memphis Presbytery met in adjourned session in the Second Church

and found conditions so grave that no hope of reconciliation remained. The pastoral relations between Dr. Grundy and the congregation were summarily dissolved.²⁶

II

Memphis was lost to the Confederacy on the morning of June 6, 1862, in a battle of ironclads and rams on the Mississippi. In an hour and twenty minutes the confrontation was over; one Confederate vessel escaped downstream and the rest were destroyed or captured. A Federal officer and three men came ashore to accept the surrender of the city from the mayor, who confessed, "we have no force to oppose the raising of the flags you have directed to be raised over the Custom-house and Post Office."²⁷ Memphis had been abandoned by the southern strategists. Not one volunteer was on hand to defend his own city that had sent seventy-two companies, with glowing patriotism and fervent hopes, to fight under the "Southern Cross."²⁸ But General U. S. Grant and General William T. Sherman were on their way to take command in the city on the Chickasaw Bluffs.

The first ranking Federal officer to arrive in Memphis was General Lew Wallace, who made a dash for the city to prevent Colonel Nathan Bedford Forrest from occupying it, so he claimed. Without consulting his superior, General Grant, he took control of the city. He put a quietus on the *Avalanche*, a newspaper that had violently attacked Lincoln. Another paper, the *Memphis Appeal*, quoted in the *New York World*, had sneered, "Let the brutal minions of a beastly despotism come on! The slaughter pens are ready, and Yankee blood shall flow as free as festal wine."²⁹ That publisher wisely packed his presses aboard a train and left town.

The churches were next on Wallace's list. Governor Harris, who led Tennes-

see out of the Union, attended the First Methodist Church where his nephew was the minister. Memphis Presbytery had deposed Dr. Grundy a few weeks before, after finding "irreconcilable differences" between him and his flock. Both congregations had spacious buildings and their vacant pulpits made attractive targets for the new regime. A Richmond, Virginia paper reported from Memphis, "Preaching the 'gospel of treason' has been stopped by General Wallace." Prayers for the Confederacy were banned, and Wallace's chaplain "preached this morning in the Methodist Church of the runaway rebel Harris...." The location of Second Church, Wallace observed, was ideal for an army chapel, so he made the seizure of the building permanent, while the Methodists were allowed to retain control of their sanctuary.³⁰ The chaplain was a New School Presbyterian, but Second Church, a model of conservatism, belonged to the Old School persuasion. "With a file of soldiers," he installed the Reverend Samuel Sawyer "to preach to the citizens and others."³¹ It was a harbinger of future contention, when Methodists, Congregationalists, Baptists, and Presbyterians in the North would seize the property of their co-religionists in the South with the sanction of the War Department.³²

General Grant arrived on June 23rd and looked about with disapproving eye. The next day he wrote, "Affairs in this city seem to be in rather bad order, secessionists governing much in their own way."³³ Wallace's directions to the churches were regularized at Grant's dictation, "you can compel all clergymen within your lines to omit from their church services any portion you may deem *treasonable*, but you will not compel the insertion or substitution of anything."³⁴ This meant, in practical terms, that prayers for Jefferson Davis and the Confederacy were to be omitted, while Lincoln and the Union were not to be

the subjects of forced intercession. An elder called on Grant and asked for the keys to Second Church. "It will be at your service," he responded, "when you recall Dr. Grundy to the pulpit."³⁵ The idea of forcing the Presbyterians to take him back was beyond his imagination.

Grant's measures had done nothing to revive business or civic activity. When General Sherman entered Memphis on July 21, 1862, he records in his *Memoirs*, "I found the place dead; no business doing, the stores closed, churches, schools and everything shut up."³⁶ Confederate sympathy was as strong as ever. He got the city moving. Trade and business were reestablished. Churches, schools, theaters, places of amusement, the city administration, and the civilian police were activated.

Dr. Grundy had continued to hold services in Odd Fellows Hall with the support of his loyal followers, but now a new effort was made on his behalf. An account in a New York newspaper, reprinted in a Philadelphia paper, then copied by a Louisville, Kentucky, editor, described his return to his former pulpit. "Application has repeatedly been made for the building to be given up to its proprietors, but our Commanders have invariably refused, unless Dr. Grundy was first taken back to preside over it. Last week friends of that gentleman made application for the Church, with special provision that the Doctor was to be reinstated." It fitted neatly into Sherman's plans for the rehabilitation of the city, so he "complied with the request and Dr. Grundy once more sat under his own vine and fig tree."³⁷

Memphis Presbytery officially took note of the event in a meeting held at College Hill, Mississippi. "[W]e have been informed that Dr. R. C. Grundy has returned to the pulpit of the 2nd Church Memphis in defiance of the order of this Presbytery dissolving the pastoral relation." They voted unanimously "That this Presbytery regard said conduct of

his as contumacious in the highest degree, but owing to the peculiar circumstances in which we are at present, we are unable to prosecute this to conviction."³⁸

III

An outraged businessman and former Methodist circuit-rider paid Lincoln a visit in February 1864. He came to protest the authority assumed by Methodist bishop Edward Ames, whom he vigorously opposed for his activities in Missouri. The bishop, a man of powerful presence and a chaplain in the Union army, was unloved in Dixie. It was he who began the movement to bring churches in the occupied South under direct control of a clergy loyal to the Federal government. On November 30, 1863, he had obtained an order from the War Department, giving him authority in an area extending from Missouri to the Gulf, to call on the military to assist in taking "all houses of worship belonging to the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, in which a loyal minister, who has been appointed by a loyal bishop ...does not now officiate."³⁹ Memphis was one of the bishop's first targets, where he had no difficulty enlisting the services of the military commander in installing a loyal minister in Wesley Chapel.⁴⁰

The secretary of war was equally cooperative when approached by American Baptists, who obtained an order on January 14, 1864, in language identical to that given the Methodists. The response was jubilant. "We are marching on' with a tread that is shaking the very foundation of things," a Baptist editor wrote, "hundreds of abandoned Baptist pulpits will be open to loyal Baptist Ministers of the North."⁴²

Nothing had yet been heard about action by the Presbyterian Church in the North, "to secure her rights in the distribution of vacant churches in the

South."⁴³ But when the news of the activities of the Methodists and Baptists reached Kentucky, it was received with alarm. A headline read, "Churches Solemnly Enacting Robbery of Their Christian Brethren."⁴⁴ Presbyterian participation was not long in coming, however. An order, dated March 10th, was issued by the War Department to all commanding generals and officers of Federal armies: "The Board of Domestic Missions of the Presbyterian Church and the Presbyterian Committee of Home Missions, enjoy the entire confidence of the War Department, and no doubt is entertained that all ministers who may be appointed by them will be entirely loyal." There was a singular difference in one provision of this document. Ministers claiming to be emissaries of the two Presbyterian Boards were required to present proof of identity to convince military authorities "that their commissions are genuine."⁴⁵ This was aimed at keeping Congregationalists, New School Presbyterians, United Presbyterians, and the like, from preying on southern Presbyterian churches.

It became obvious almost immediately that the Presbyterian Church in the North was unprepared to do more than talk about sending loyal ministers into the South. A Presbyterian chaplain traveling from Memphis to Vicksburg sent a description of his trip to Philadelphia. He was appalled at what he saw all along the route. "What shall be done—what *ought to be done*—with the Presbyterian Church property within our lines?" he wrote. "How can the scattered sheep of the fold be again brought together, and the ordinances of God's house be re-established in this desolate land...?"⁴⁶ About a week later, reflecting on the current struggle over the control of the Second Church in Memphis, he again wrote, "Shall we sit still and do nothing, while the busy emissaries of the [Congregational] American Home Missionary Society seize all the valu-

able Presbyterian Church property in the South?"⁴⁷

In Philadelphia, *The Presbyterian* predicted that this church-state cooperation was "sure to end in unpleasant complications." Lincoln was quoted to buttress the argument, "The U.S. Government must not undertake to run the churches."⁴⁸ Louisville Presbytery in Kentucky decried accepting aid from the War Department as "having transcended in an alarming degree, the powers with which they are vested, as agents of the Church." Not only was it contrary to the constitution of the church, but "a practical surrender of the freedom of the commonwealth of Christ."⁴⁹ An appeal to the General Assembly was framed.

Stung by criticism, Dr. Thomas Janeway of the Board of Domestic Missions defended his actions before the General Assembly of 1864. "The conditions of the South after God shall give us rest and peace," he avowed, "is a problem of unusual importance.... Old organizations have been swept away by the tide of war; new organizations must arise on the blackened embers."⁵⁰ A loyal congregation, housed in Second Church, Memphis, was on his agenda. Moderation, evident at the beginning of the year, was inundated by a tide of patriotic fervor. The Assembly of 1864 rejected the protest of Louisville Presbytery.

IV

A wandering Congregational minister came as a military chaplain to Overton Hospital in December 1862. The Reverend Z. K. Hawley began to see a potential for missionary enterprise in Memphis. He wrote to his superiors, describing the churches and pointing out:

One of the O[ld] S[chool] Ch[urch]s is Dr. Grundy's ... & is now occupied under authority of the Govt by the Hospital Chaplains, to accommodate the Military...but is the center for

the religious Union sentiment in the city. Of this latter, there is enough for a nucleus, & is gradually increasing; not only from immigration, but is coming out of its holes and hiding places.⁵²

A prompt answer from Dr. David B. Coe, a secretary of the American Home Missionary Society in New York, assured him, "Our attention has already been directed to Memphis and other places in the South which are occupied by Federal forces & it is the desire & purpose of our Committee to do their part to supply these places with a better Christianity than they have hitherto possessed."⁵³

When Bishop Ames arrived and a loyal Methodist minister was installed, it excited Hawley's imagination. Two days later, he wrote to report the "'Silencing' of Dr. Stedman of the 1st Pres. Ch. by the Military...as he refuses to take the 'Oath'." This church might be filled at any time, he felt, in the same way the Methodist had been.⁵⁴ Then, on February 21, 1864, the Reverend Thomas Bliss arrived to serve the Congregational mission board. "I preached in Dr. Grundy's old church last Sabbath," he boasted, invited into the pulpit by the chaplains who controlled the building under military authority. None of them, except for Hawley, knew that he had come to get possession of the Second Church building to establish a "*Union Church—*independent of any ecclesiastical name—or outside control."⁵⁵ Bliss plunged into his project and six days after his first letter, he wrote again that "An Old School man may come on the ground *any day* which would...render success well-nigh hopeless." He sensed his plan might be in jeopardy because "There is so *very little positive & permanent* element here that is Congregational." With no trace of embarrassment, he added, "the positive—active and real ability is in great measure among...the Presbyterians."⁵⁶ It was impossible to keep his plans quiet and he immediately encountered strong opposition from the

chaplains, who had no wish to lose control of the building. "They have stirred up the Presbyterians," he explained, "& encouraged the Old School men to stick for an Old School Church." However, he was not discouraged in his quest for free possession of one of the finest church buildings in the area, even when he knew what he was facing. "The most difficult sectarians to manage that I have found in all the West," he grumbled, "are Presbyterians."⁵⁷

At the time trustees of Second Church were presenting their petition to Lincoln, Bliss devised a scheme to wrest the building from the chaplains' control and thwart the Presbyterians. He "drew up a paper," securing the cooperation of some thirty people who signed it. From the signatories he sent a committee of three to General R. P. Buckland, asking that he appoint "a Board of Trustees to hold the 'Union Chapel = (Dr. Grundy's old church)' in trust for the benefit of a Union Church & Congregation now forming...." The committee carried a pre-written order to the general, revoking the control of the chaplains. Bliss boasted, "The order was carefully drawn—as I drew it myself."⁵⁸ General Buckland cooperated willingly.

The chaplains, unwilling to yield, petitioned the head of the military hospitals, describing Bliss and his allies as "religious adventurers from the north." They urged that control be retained by the medical department, maintaining the original arrangement, or else awarded to loyal Presbyterians when they were ready to occupy it. Five military surgeons concurred in an attached petition. The head surgeon added an appeal on behalf of the loyal, patriotic patients, their families, and the staff who worshiped there, and particularly for "the maimed and disabled soldiers, who have been stricken down in defense of our country and her rights."⁵⁹ The loyal Presbyterians characterized Bliss's group as "a sectarian society of congregational

denomination, under the specious name of 'Union'." They informed the military commander that they were in contact with Dr. Janeway.⁶⁰

News of the Memphis events spread across the country. The *New York Independent* printed a dispatch that was copied by *The Presbyterian* in Philadelphia, which reported, "After a few weeks of labor at Memphis, Tennessee, Mr. Bliss, the agent of the American Home Missionary Society, has secured the organization of a Congregational Church. General Hurlbut...has given them the use of Dr. Grundy's Church which (one of the finest in the city) was confiscated...." Obviously ruffled by the news, *The Presbyterian* continued, "We would be glad to know by whose order this Presbyterian Church was confiscated. [It] still belongs to the General Assembly...and is listed in the *Minutes*...."⁶¹ In Louisville, *The True Presbyterian* railed against "that old arch-enemy of the Presbyterian Church, the American Home Missionary Society. Had a fullblown Unitarian been possessed of the place it could not have been a greater outrage on truth and righteousness."⁶²

Receiving Lincoln's order, General S. A. Hurlbut acted on March 18th to return the building to the owners when they should "satisfy Genl Buckland of their loyalty."⁶³ On hearing the news, the enterprising Bliss wrote to his sponsors, complaining that Lincoln's letter "has confused matters...as to who shall hold the Church building." He quoted Hurlbut as saying that the session was thoroughly rebel in sentiment. "Some of them," he knew, "had sons in the rebel army."⁶⁴ When the general actually dispossessed the Congregationalists, Bliss was livid. With less than strict truth, he fumed, "This turns the old loyal members out of their religious home for the *special benefit of rebels and traitors*." The president, he assumed, was under the influence of Dr. Gurley and others.⁶⁵ Bliss and his group tried an appeal to the

president. On May 13th Lincoln replied, reiterating the stand he had taken consistently since his judgment in the McPheeters case. He quoted the last sentence of his letter of March 4th, with emphasis added, "If the Military have Military need for the Church building, let them keep it; otherwise let them get out of it...."⁶⁶ Lincoln continued,

I am now told that the Military were not in possession of the building; and yet in pretended execution of the above, they[,] the Military put one set men out of and another set into the building—This, if true, is most extraordinary. I say again, if there be no military need for the building, leave it alone, neither putting any one in or out of it, except on finding some one preaching or practicing treason, in which case lay hands upon him just as if he were doing the same thing in any other building, or in the streets or highways.⁶⁷

General C. C. Washburn, somewhat dense as usual, could not understand Lincoln's instructions. He wrote on June 22nd, asking for a final resolution of the case. He told Lincoln about Beauregard and the bell, about Sherman, about Grundy and the "union people," and he quoted Lincoln's letter of March 4th back to him. He also quoted the letter of General Hurlbut which had allowed the old trustees to reassume possession of the church. After signing the letter, he added a postscript in his own hand, "I believe that the parties in possession are generally disloyal."⁶⁸

Lincoln had heard enough. At the end of the document there is the notation, "Ansd. July 5, 1864. President declines making any further order in case of Presbyt. Church in Memphis."⁶⁹ It was a judgment given with blunt finality. He remained true to his original insight on the power of the state and the right of churches to order their affairs without interference, except where there was conflict with the public interest.

Bliss waited, fretting in Memphis, for the word from Washington. When he heard the decision, he seemed resigned.

"The President is the strangest man I ever knew," he mused, "to sacrifice his friends for the gratification of his enemies."⁷⁰ When Dr. Grundy heard, he was apoplectic. He raged in the newspapers and in the pulpit. He persuaded Cincinnati Presbytery, to which he now belonged, to join him in a petition to Lincoln and to send him on a mission to Washington.⁷¹ The president, it was rumored, cut him dead.⁷²

At the Second Presbyterian Church, Dr. John Hannah Gray returned at the invitation of the trustees to the congregation he had helped organize, to hold things steady until the storm might pass.

NOTES

1. MSS petition of the trustees of Second Presbyterian Church, undated, Rhodes College Archives, Memphis. Signed: I. B. Kirtland, R. H. Patillo, Henry Wade, B. M. Estes, Edwin M. Avery.
2. Thomas E. Bliss to Drs. Badger, Coe, and Noyes of the American Home Missionary Society, 25 March 1864, American Home Missionary Society Papers (AHMS), Amistad Research Center, Tulane University. Original at Rhodes College.
3. Abraham Lincoln, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler, 8 vols. (New Brunswick, NJ, 1953–55) 7: 223, with note, "The original of the memorandum of March 4 has not been located, and the occasion which necessitated the repetition of Lincoln's aims has not been determined."
4. Lincoln, *Works* 3: 84, 87, 310, on internal conflicts in the Methodist and Presbyterian churches.
5. *Christian Observer and Presbyterian Witness* (Philadelphia and Richmond) 20 June 1861.
6. Lincoln to S. B. Curtis, 2 January 1863, *Works* 6:33–34.
7. The first signature on the petition to Lincoln is that of Isaac B. Kirtland, who had family connections in St. Louis, and who joined Dr. McPheeters's former congregation when he moved there after the Civil War.
8. *Presbyterian Herald* (Louisville, KY) 24 Jan. 1861.
9. James H. Thornwell, *The State of the Country* (New Orleans, 1861) 1.
10. *Presbyterian Herald* 18 Apr. 1861.
11. *Presbyterian Herald* 18 Apr. 1861.
12. Charleston, SC, *News* 20 May 1861, reprinted in *The Rebellion Record, A Diary of American Events*, 12 vols. (NY, 1862–65) 5: 2: 179.
13. *Messages of the Governors of Tennessee*, ed. R. H. White (Nashville, 1959) 5: 283, 288.

14. *Christian Observer* (Philadelphia) 2 May 1861.
15. John Newton Waddell, *Memorials of Academic Life* (Richmond, 1891) 372. *Presbyterian Herald*, 29 August 1861, reports an image hanged opposite the Seventh Presbyterian Church with a shingle attached, reading, "Death thus to clerical traitors."
16. *Minutes of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America ... 1861* (Philadelphia, 1861) 328–30.
17. *Christian Observer and Presbyterian Witness* 20 June 1861.
18. *Minutes, General Assembly, 1861* 339–41. The Hodge Protest was signed by J. H. Gillespie of Memphis Presbytery.
19. *Minutes, Memphis Presbytery, Somerville, TN, 13–14 June 1861*, 263–64. MSS, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Department of History, Montreat, NC (hereafter Montreat)
20. *Presbyterian Herald* 1 August 1861. E. T. Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South*, 3 vols. (Richmond, 1963–73) 1: 567, mistakenly indicates that a resolution on forming a Confederate General Assembly was passed by Orange Presbytery (NC) on June 13. They transacted no business that day but observed the Confederate fast. On June 15 they took action that only predicted the need for a new organization. MSS Minutes of Orange Presbytery, 15 June 1861, 161, Montreat. He also mistakenly dates secession in TN on 5 June 1861 rather than 8 June.
21. *Presbyterian Herald* 1 Aug. 1861.
22. *Memphis Bulletin* 23 Apr. 1864.
23. Wilmington, NC, *Courier*, quoted in [W. P. Snow], *Southern Generals* (New York, 1865) 227–28.
24. *Rebellion Record* 4: 2: 294.
25. *Memphis Bulletin* 23 Apr. 1864.
26. *Minutes, Memphis Presbytery*, 10–11 Apr. 1862, 359–63.
27. *Rebellion Record* 5: 2: 176.
28. *Memphis Argus* 2 June 1862.
29. *Memphis Appeal*, reprinted in *NY World* Oct. 1861, in *Rebellion Record* 3: 3: 25.
30. *Christian Observer and Presbyterian Witness* 10 July 1862.
31. *The True Presbyterian* (Louisville) 4 Sept. 1862.
32. *True Presbyterian* 12 May 1864. Memphis and Vicksburg, MS, are cited.
33. Grant to Henry W. Halleck, 24 June 1862, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, ed. J. Y. Simon (London and Amsterdam, 1967–) 5: 149–50.
34. *Papers of Grant* 5: 150, n. 2.
35. *Memphis Bulletin* 13 Aug. 1862.
36. William T. Sherman, *Memoirs of General William T. Sherman by Himself*, 2 vols. (New York, 1875) 1: 265.
37. *True Presbyterian* 4 Sept. 1862.
38. *Minutes, Memphis Presbytery*, 10–11 Apr. 1862, 361–65.
39. *True Presbyterian* 17 Mar. 1864; Lincoln to Stanton, 11 Feb. 1864, *Works* 7: 178–79.
40. *True Presbyterian* 9 June 1864; Edward McPherson, *The Political History of the United States of America*, 4th ed. (Washington, DC, 1882) 521–23.

41. *Baptist Home Missions in North America* (New York, 1883) 374.
42. *New York Examiner*, in *True Presbyterian* 9 June 1864.
43. *The Presbyterian* (Philadelphia) 27 Feb. 1864.
44. *True Presbyterian* 3 Mar. 1864.
45. *The Presbyterian* 19 Mar. 1864.
46. *The Presbyterian* 30 Apr. 1864.
47. *The Presbyterian* 7 May 1864.
48. *The Presbyterian* 19 Mar. 1864.
49. *True Presbyterian* 28 Apr. 1864.
50. *Annual Report of the Board of Domestic Missions of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America... 1864* (Philadelphia, 1864) 27.
51. Z. K. Hawley to D. B. Coe, 4 May 1864, AHMS.
52. Hawley to Coe, 26 Oct. 1863, AHMS.
53. Coe to Hawley, 11 Nov. 1863, AHMS.
54. Hawley to Coe, 22 Dec. 1863, AHMS.
55. Thomas E. Bliss to Drs. Badger, Coe and Noyes, 23 Feb. 1864, AHMS.
56. Bliss to Badger, Coe and Noyes, 29 Feb. 1864, AHMS.
57. Bliss to Badger, Coe and Noyes, 29 Feb. 1864, AHMS.
58. Bliss to Badger, Coe and Noyes, 7 Mar. 1864, AHMS.
59. Surgeon B. J. D. Irwin to Maj. Gen. S. A. Hurlbut, 14 Mar. 1864, Rhodes College Archives.
60. Angus Campbell, et al., to Maj. Gen. S. A. Hurlbut, 14 Mar. 1864, Rhodes College Archives.
61. *The Presbyterian* 30 Apr. 1864.
62. *True Presbyterian* 12 May 1864.
63. Lincoln, *Works* 7: 427–28. (See note 67).
64. Bliss to Badger, Coe and Noyes, 25 Mar. 1864, AHMS.
65. Bliss to Badger, Coe and Noyes, 15 Apr. 1864, AHMS.
66. Lincoln, *Works* 7: 339, n. 2. The Illinois State Historical Library owns a 2 x 7 in. paper in Lincoln's hand, heavily marked through on the reverse, which may have been cut from the petition of the "loyal" church members, i.e., Bliss and his group. The "loyal" Presbyterians joined the "secessionists" when they recovered the church building.
67. 13 May 1864, Lincoln, *Works* 7: 339; *Index to Abraham Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress* (Washington, DC, 1960) no. 33033 (microfilm, Memphis State University).
68. Lincoln, *Works* 7: 427–28 and n. 1; C. C. Washburn to Lincoln, 22 June 1864, *Lincoln Papers* nos. 33947–51 and endorsement. Washburn postscript is on 33951.
69. Lincoln to C. C. Washburn, 5 July 1864, *Works* 7: 427.
70. Bliss to Badger, Coe and Noyes, 3 Aug. 1864, AHMS.
71. *Minutes, Cincinnati Presbytery*, 3 May 1864. MSS, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Department of History, Philadelphia. The Department of History, Montreat, has a draft in Grundy's hand.
72. *True Presbyterian* 15 Sept. 1864, "There were rumors that Dr. Grundy went...to Washington to meet with President Lincoln. The President refused to hear him beyond the first paragraph...."