CHAPTER VII
THE FOUNDING OF UR SINUS COLLEGE

There were three causes which have been said to have led to the founding of Ursinus College. The first was a personal cause; the second, a theological cause; and the third, an historical cause.

The first or personal cause that was asserted to have led to the founding of this college was said to be the disappointed ambition of Dr. Bomberger, because he had not been elected professor of theology in the Theological Seminary at Mercersburg in 1863, when the Rev. Henry Harbaugh, D.D., was elected to that position. The charge was made that he broke away from Mercersburg Theology because he had not been chosen to fill this chair in the Seminary, and that in consequence he determined to found a new institution. This charge was made some years later by his theological opponents, but was always repudiated by Dr. Bomberger himself. It was publicly made in the Reformed Church Messenger and was answered by an article in the Christian World of November 19, 1874.

We do not believe that Dr. Bomberger became the founder of Ursinus College because of thwarted personal ambition, but that he was led in this movement by a succession of events caused by the narrow-
ness and oppression of the adherents to Mercersburg Theology toward the Old Reformed or Low Churchmen with whom Dr. Bomberger allied himself and whose leader and spokesman he became. That the charge cannot be sustained may be shown by the following facts: (1) At the Synod of 1860, three years before the election of Dr. Harbaugh to the professorship, Dr. Bomberger had differed from the followers of Dr. Nevin by urging that the Provisional Liturgy be sent down to the classes for adoption or rejection. This Dr. Nevin and his adherents bitterly opposed, because they feared that the Provisional Liturgy in this way would be rejected. (2) At the Synod of 1861 Dr. Bomberger was the leader in urging the immediate revision of the Provisional Liturgy. This was also opposed by the followers of Dr. Nevin. This was two years before the election of Dr. Harbaugh. (3) When the new committee, appointed by the Eastern Synod to revise the Provisional Liturgy, met, Dr. Bomberger urged that certain ritualistic features and language be stricken out. This, which occurred a year or two before the election of Dr. Harbaugh, was also strenuously opposed by the High Church party. (4) At the Eastern Synod of 1862 Dr. Bomberger was the leader of the Low Church party in bringing a minority report to the Synod on the revision of the Provisional Liturgy. This was a year before Dr. Harbaugh's election. (5) During the winter of 1862-63 Dr. Bomberger wrote a series of articles against the High Church views.

It will be seen that these five significant events
occurred before the election of Dr. Harbaugh, when it was said by the opponents of Dr. Bomberger that his ambition had been thwarted. The charge was that he broke with the High Church party because he was not elected professor of theology, but it is clearly shown that three years before this election he had begun to differ with them; yes, a year before the first date mentioned, in 1859, he had already begun to diverge from them, as may be seen in his book on Infant Baptism. This charge against him cannot, therefore, in the light of these facts, be proved. Dr. Bomberger may have had ambitions as every man naturally has, but he was not vindictive. The fact is that the cause of the founding of Ursinus College was not a personal one. Dr. Bomberger had nothing to gain by it personally, but on the other hand, he had everything to lose. He made a personal sacrifice when he became the first president of Ursinus College. He resigned as pastor of a prominent and prosperous congregation, the Race Street Church, in Philadelphia, to enter into the work of a college which at its outset had a somewhat uncertain future; he resigned his charge to enter upon a career full of anxieties, trials and persecutions. Had he consulted his own personal comfort he would never have founded Ursinus College. We must conclude that he founded it from a sincere conviction of duty that the theological crisis in the Reformed Church in the United States demanded such an institution.

The second cause stated above—the theological—is the real cause for the founding of Ursinus Col-
lege. Great theological differences had developed in the Reformed Church, and it was because of these that the new college was brought into being. The roots of this theological division run farther back than has been supposed. The ultimate first cause of it all lay across the sea in Germany. In the year 1817 the king of Prussia, by an arbitrary political act, united the Lutheran and Reformed Churches into one body which was called the United or Evangelical Church of Germany. There grew up in this Evangelical Church a new theology called the Mediating Theology, which was neither Lutheran nor Reformed, but which was an attempt to mediate between the Lutheran and Reformed types of theological doctrine. It also, as in the case of Schleiermacher, tried to mediate between orthodoxy and pantheism, and was often, therefore, not orthodox. This Mediating Theology was of all sorts, some evangelical, some rationalistic, some irenic, trying to unite both wings. The fundamental question of the controversy in the Reformed Church in the United States for nearly a century was whether the Reformed Church should cling to its old confessional position and the Reformed type of theology, or whether she should reject that and accept the new Mediating Theology of the Evangelical Church of Germany, which was often as much Lutheran as Reformed, and as much rationalistic as orthodox. This produced the theological cleavage in the Reformed Church. The church has now arrived at an understanding and both views are permitted to exist, but it has produced much friction to bring it
The first theological professor to bring this new Mediating Theology of Germany to the Reformed Church in the United States was the Rev. F. A. Rauch, Ph.D., who taught in the Theological Seminary from 1832 to 1841. Before that time the theological position of the Reformed Church had been, mainly, either Zwinglian or Calvinistic. In Germany, Dr. Rauch, then a young man, had been an Hegelian rationalist. But after coming to America he had been converted to God through the influence of the Rev. Henry L. Rice, pastor of the Reformed Church at Chambersburg, Pa., and president of the Board of Trustees of Marshall College. Dr. Rauch was therefore, when teaching the Theological Seminary at Mercersburg, an evangelical of the Mediating School, but he could hardly be called confessionally Reformed, for although his father was a Reformed minister in Germany, he himself had been educated in the Lutheran university at Giessen. Confessionalism played little part in his creed, but he was distinctly evangelical, as is shown by his Sermons on the Inner Life. But although not confessionally Reformed, he did not influence his students from the old Reformed position. However his philosophical presuppositions were somewhat Hegelian, for though now evangelical, he never got over the terminology of his early training in Germany. At that time the Rev. Dr. Nevin, who had just come into the Reformed Church from the Presbyterian, was the conservative
—the confessional Reformed,* while Dr. Rauch was the liberal, holding to the Mediating Theology, although he was evangelical and conservative in doing so.

After the death of Dr. Rauch in 1841, the Rev. Philip Schaff, Ph.D., came to America in 1844 to become professor in the Theological Seminary at Mercersburg. Dr. Schaff was an adherent to the Mediating Theology, like Dr. Rauch, and was of the evangelical wing of that school. Having been born in Switzerland, Dr. Schaff was traditionally Reformed, but he had been educated and confirmed in the Lutheran Church of Wurtemburg. Later he attended the University of Berlin, where he accepted the positions of the Mediating Theology, as taught in church history by Neander, and became an evangelical of the Mediating School. He did not belong to the Reformed Church until he was ordained to the ministry at Elberfeld just before coming to America. He tried to adjust his previous Lutheran education and mediating views to the Reformed doctrine, but he only partially succeeded. He was always an adherent of Luther and thought more of him than of the Reformed reformers, though he also wrote excellently about the latter. His Lutheranism appears in his Mercersburg theology, which is Lutheran rather than Reformed in its emphasis on the high views of the sacraments and on the liturgical

*This shown by his articles on the Heidelberg Catechism and on other subjects in the Messenger, 1840-43.
in cultus. Dr. Schaff was a Broad Churchman rather than a confessional Reformed.

It was Dr. Schaff who gave the Mediating Theology a permanent place in the Reformed Church. Before he came to America Dr. Nevin had, under Dr. Rauch's influence, been inclining toward German philosophy, and Dr. Schaff's influence completed that process in Dr. Nevin's mind. But Dr. Nevin, although he thought he had accepted the idealistic philosophy of Germany, with his strong Scotch bent toward realism, never grasped it fully. Dr. Nevin, therefore, became an Hegelian in philosophy and thus laid the philosophical basis for Mercersburg Theology. Dr. Schaff in coming to America came into contact with Puseyism in England and was fascinated with its ritualistic peculiarities. These two, the Hegelian philosophy and the Puseyistic liturgic tendencies, blended together to form the basis of Mercersburg Theology. That Dr. Schaff was instrumental in introducing High Churchism in the Reformed Church is shown by the fact that, when in 1855 Dr. Nevin, discouraged, gave up the attempt to make the Reformed Church liturgical by resigning from the Liturgical Committee, Dr. Schaff was the man who put life into that committee which finally produced the Provisional Liturgy in 1857. Thus the Mediating Theology of Germany gained a permanent foothold in the Reformed Church.

But all this caused much and continued friction. The question which caused the division in the Reformed Church was whether the Old Reformed the-
ology should prevail, or whether the new Mediating Theology of Germany should become the theology of the Reformed Church. The latter opens the door very wide, for the Mediating Theology has had in its school rationalists as well as orthodox, and we have seen the rationalistic influence of the Mediating Theology in the Reformed Church in some movements that have come up since the death of Dr. Bomberger. It was this controversy between the old confessional Reformed theology and the new Mediating Theology that ultimately led to the founding of Ursinus College. The confessional Reformed, that is, the element in the Reformed Church that wanted to hold strictly to the Reformed confessions and consciousness, opposed the breaking away from the time-honored doctrines and worship and customs of their Reformed fathers. And when the Mediating Theology, with its Puseyite addition in ritualism, gained entire control in the Theological Seminary at Mercersburg, this movement had either to be quietly acquiesced in (but that would cause the old confessional Reformed consciousness to die, for the college and seminary were the feeders to the future ministry), or there was the other alternative, that the confessional Reformed should found a new institution to train ministers in the old Reformed faith and customs, and thus perpetuate that tendency in the Reformed Church. The founders of Ursinus College chose the latter course, and since the institutions at Mercersburg and Lancaster were the exponents of Mercersburg Theology, they founded a new institution. Ursinus College, it
will be seen, was not the outgrowth of disappointed ambition, as shown in the beginning of this chapter, but its founding was due to great, far-reaching theological differences. These differences were of such magnitude that the two tendencies could not at that time live together in harmony.

But there was a third reason why Ursinus College was founded. It may be called an historical one. A series of historical events occurred that greatly outraged the feelings of the Low Church minority in the Eastern Synod of the Reformed Church. While the second reason given above, namely, that the founding of Ursinus College was due to great theological differences, is the main reason for the origin of the college, yet there was added to this a series of events that goaded the Low Churchmen on to radical action. In saying this it is not intended to impugn the motives of their opponents. The High Churchmen were honest and conscientious in their beliefs and actions. They were zealous, but their zeal, especially viewed from this distance of time, was not according to wisdom. Undoubtedly both sides, in the heat of the controversy, made mistakes. The High Churchmen made mistakes, for they, in addition to their peculiarities in doctrine and cultus, also emphasized one side of church government, namely, authority; while the Low Churchmen, following the easy-going methods of their fathers, emphasized liberty. The former emphasized the power of the minister, due to their high idea of the priestly office of the minister. They also emphasized the power of
the upper church courts, while the Low Churchmen emphasized the power of the lower church courts. The clash finally came, as it always does in denominations, on questions of church law and constitution. In their zeal for the authority of the church the High Churchmen did some things that seemed tyranny to the Low Churchmen. One of these was that with their high views of the priestly office of the minister, they claimed that the minister alone had the right to decide what the character of the worship should be. To this the Low Churchmen objected, claiming that the congregation, or at least the consistory, ought to decide so fundamental a matter. The Peace Commission, which at the end of the controversy settled the dispute, upheld the Low Churchmen's view on church government. The special act that seemed to outrage the feelings of the Low Churchmen was the attempt by some of the adherents to Mercersburg Theology to force the Provisional Liturgy into congregations which the opposite party said did not want it, as at Lancaster where the consistory and congregation twice rebelled against it.* But the crowning abuse was the introduction of the Provisional Liturgy into the college at Lancaster and into the Theological Seminary. The Low Churchmen claimed that this was contrary to the wishes of a large number of the supporters of those institutions. They saw in it a plan to capture the church for ritualism, and they

*See Dr. Good's "History of the Reformed Church in the United States in the Nineteenth Century."
feared that, if they sent their sons to these institutions, they would become tinctured with ritualism. Another abuse that the Low Churchmen greatly objected to were the assessments. It was claimed by the High Churchmen that the synods and classes had sufficient authority to collect these, some even threatening to go to law to compel reluctant congregations to raise the assessments laid on them by the synod. There was still another grievance. The Low Churchmen were in the Eastern Synod being crowded out of the prominent places in the church by the High Churchmen and kept from getting prominent charges. They claimed that the whole machinery of the church was in the power of the other party, who were using it against them, and thus the church was becoming a political machine. This discrimination against the Low Churchmen became so severe that a number of them were forced out of the active ministry because they could not get charges. The High Churchmen, we believe, did not realize what they were doing in their zeal to carry everything for their side. Now against such high-handed measures there could not but be a reaction. And that reaction finally led to the founding of Ursinus College.

Then finally came the straw that broke the camel’s back. This was the action of the Eastern Synod in 1867. In the summer of 1867 the Low Churchmen had held a convention at Myerstown, Pa., to protest against the introduction of ritualism and high sacramentarianism into the Reformed Church. They had drawn up a series of resolutions on this
subject, which they presented to that synod. The synod virtually treated them with contempt. The communication was treated as non-official, because it was the action of a free convention and not of an authorized church court. And yet the synod recognized these petitioners in a way, for it adopted an action based on the Myerstown resolutions. The synod adopted resolutions charging that the Myerstown Convention and its resolutions showed a tendency to schism and rebellion in the church. Though not recognizing the petition as official, the synod adopted a severe action based on the petition. It ordered a pastoral letter to be prepared by a committee of synod and ordered it to be read in all the churches by the ministers. This letter denounced the Myerstown Convention as unwise, dangerous and schismatic. The letter was so extreme that even many who were sympathetic toward the Mercersburg Theology, as, for example, the Rev. Dr. B. Bausman, did not read it from their pulpits. This was the last straw. The Low Churchmen now felt that they had no means of redress at synod or anywhere in the church. They therefore proceeded to take matters in their own hands. Fortunately the Myerstown Convention had appointed a "Committee of Ways and Means," consisting of the Rev. Messrs. Rupley, Vaughan, George Wolff and Bomberger, together with seven elders, in order to meet any exigency. This committee proceeded to move, and ultimately Ursinus College came into existence. Freeland Seminary, at what is now Collegeville, was purchased in 214.
FOUNDED OF UR SINUS COLLEGE

January, 1869, and Ursinus College was founded in February of the same year, and began academic work in September, 1870. But although Ursinus College was then established, there still remained a controversy in the Reformed Church about its status. The High Churchmen, because they made much of authority, detracted from it continually and cast aspersions against it, in that it did not have ecclesiastical sanction. Its defenders replied that it had been endorsed by Philadelphia Classis and that that was sufficient sanction. As long as it remained a college, there was no formal attack made on it. But its charter provided that theology could be taught in it. In 1870 its advertisement stated that theology would be included in its curriculum. The attention of Philadelphia Classis was called to this on June 10, 1870, by the Rev. S. R. Fisher, D.D. The classis decided against Dr. Fisher in favor of the college, so he carried the matter up by appeal to the Eastern Synod.

The point at issue between the two parties was this: The High Churchmen claimed that no persons could teach theology unless they had been elected by the synod as professors of theology and by it ordained to that office. This had not been done in the case of the Rev. Drs. Bomberger and Super, who taught theology at Ursinus. On the other hand the Low Churchmen claimed that from the beginning of the Reformed Church in this country, ministers had privately taught theology and this right had never been
J. H. A. Bomberger

recalled.* The synod referred the matter back to classis. But two years later the matter came up again before the synod. It then passed a resolution that "the conduct of Dr. Bomberger in teaching theology was disorderly," and ordered him to desist. At once Dr. Henry W. Super, who was a member of the synod, took up an appeal to the General Synod of 1872, which met at Cincinnati. That General Synod sustained Dr. Super's appeal by a vote of 100 to 78. Its judgment in the case was "that the conduct of Dr. Bomberger and those associated with him was not disorderly or contrary to the constitution of the church, even though they had not been invested with the office of teacher of theology, or conducted their training under the direction of the synod." It also declared that the Eastern Synod had acted unconstitutionally in assuming original jurisdiction in the case in not letting the Classis of Philadelphia, of which Dr. Bomberger was a member, take the initiative. Under this decision of the General Synod of 1872, Ursinus College always claimed to have the authority of the General Synod to teach theology. The High Churchmen used to minimize that action by saying that the action of that General Synod was negative and not positive. Efforts were made to get this decision reviewed at the next General Synod at Fort Wayne in 1875, but General Synod refused to reopen the case. To Dr. Super, who happened to be

* See Dr. Good's "History of the Reformed Church in the United States in the Nineteenth Century," pages 510-512.
present at the Eastern Synod of 1872 (Dr. Bomberger was not present) and who carried up the appeal to General Synod, must belong the credit of stepping in at this great crisis and saving the theological department of Ursinus College.

Thus Ursinus continued to live in spite of opposition, thanks to the efforts, at times almost heroic, of its friends to sustain it. Among these, Dr. Bomberger stands pre-eminent. He guided it through its dark days, when sometimes the door of hope seemed almost to be closed.

Before concluding this subject we desire to call attention to the mission of Ursinus College and its Theological Department, as it used to be called. It is not too strong a statement when we say that Dr. Bomberger and Ursinus College saved the German Reformed Church from being Romanized by the extreme Mercersburg men. The founding of Ursinus caused a reaction in the church against the Romanizing tendency. It kept the Reformed Church Protestant. It became the centre around which the true Protestant element in the Reformed Church rallied. Its very existence was a continued protest against such a tendency to Catholicism and it led to a reaction in the Reformed Church against the extreme Mercersburg views. This is shown by the fact that, although Dr. Gans was elected the Tercentenary Professor, yet some years later when the choice of a theological professor was made by the synod, the Rev. T. G. Apple was elected and Dr. Gans was passed by. The reason was that the church had outgrown
J. H. A. Bomberger

Gans's Romanizing views. And when some Reformed ministers later went over to Rome, Ursinus College by its firm adherence to Protestant principles aided in holding together the Protestantism in the Reformed Church. It is, therefore, not too high praise to Dr. Bomberger and Ursinus College to say that the movement led by him saved the Reformed Church from Romanism,—that it saved the church to herself—to her old faith as a continued protest against Catholicism, for her name shows she was a Church reformed from Catholicism. May the college ever remain true to the Scriptural, evangelical principles for which it was founded by Dr. Bomberger and his early colleagues.

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