

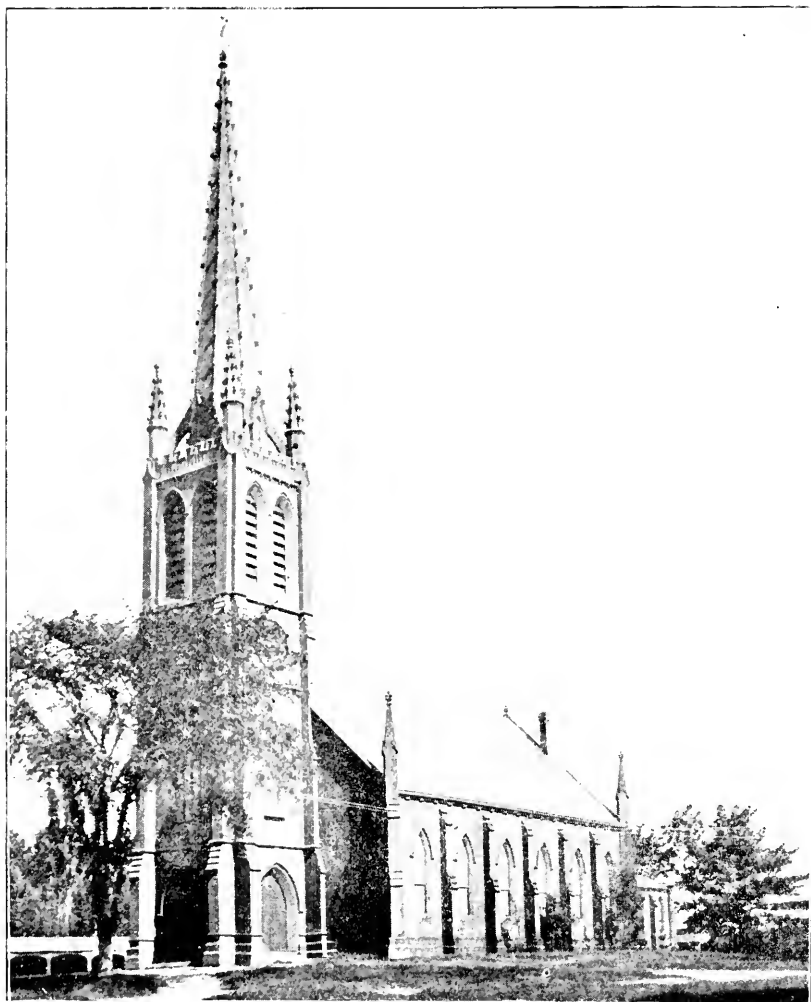
1700 1900
THE STORY OF
A CHURCH FOR
TWO CENTURIES

A SERMON
AT THE
FIRST PARISH CHURCH
FRAMINGHAM

JUNE TENTH, NINETEEN HUNDRED

By CALVIN STEBBINS

(PUBLISHED BY REQUEST)



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GEO. L. CLAPP, PRINTER, SOUTH FRAMINGHAM, MASS.

1900

Mr. Salberg

MINISTERS OF THE PARISH

JOHN SWIFT, H. U., 1697.

Settled Oct. 8th, 1701 — Died April 24th, 1745.

MATHEW BRIDGE, H. U., 1741.

Settled Feb. 19th, 1745-46 — Died Sept. 2, 1775.

DAVID KELLOGG, D. C., 1775.

Settled Jan. 10th, 1781 to Jan. 20th 1830.

A. B. MUZZEY, H. U., 1824.

Settled June 10th, 1830 to May 18th, 1833.

GEORGE CHAPMAN, H. U., 1828.

Settled Nov. 6, 1833 — Died June 2, 1834.

WILLIAM BARRY, B. U., 1822.

Settled Dec. 16, 1835 to Dec. 16, 1845.

JOHN N. BELLOWS.

Settled April 15, 1846 to Oct. 16, 1847.

J. H. PHIPPS, Har. Div., 1848.

Settled Nov 16, 1848 to 1853.

SAMUEL L. ROBBINS, Har. Div., 1833.

Settled 1854 to 1867.

HENRY G. SPAULDING, H. U., 1860.

Settled Feb. 19, 1868 to June 15, 1873.

CHARLES A. HUMPHREYS, H. U., 1860.

Nov. 2, 1873 to Nov. 1, 1891.

ERNEST C. SMITH:

Settled Jan. 21, 1892 to Oct. 1, 1899.

FORE-WORD

At a meeting of the members of the First Parish Church in Framingham held on April 8th, 1900, in consideration of the fact that the efforts for the incorporation of the town and the organization of the church were simultaneous movements, it was voted to celebrate in some appropriate manner the inception of the latter. A committee was appointed consisting of S. B. Bird, Franklin E. Gregory, William F. Gregory, Sidney A. Phillips, Joseph B. Cloyes, S. S. Woodbury, W. I. Brigham and Edward W. Kingsbury to make suitable arrangements. The committee invited the Rev. Calvin Stebbins to prepare an address for the occasion. The invitation was accepted and the address was spoken at the church on Sunday, June 10th. Later he was asked to furnish a copy of it and it with the other services is now published.

ORDER OF SERVICES

I. ORGAN VOLUNTARY.

II. EXHORTATION.

We are gathered here today in the fullness of the Summer, and on an occasion crowded with memories of the past, to praise and worship the God of our fathers and our God. His voice was heard in the morning of the world from afar, and in the evening He speaketh at the door; He saw the end from the beginning and wove the ages as upon a loom; He remembered the low estate of His children and bent to them His testimonies from of old; He made a way in the sea and a path in the mighty waters for our fathers and brought them in a way they knew not, and led them in paths they did not know.

Let us rejoice and be exceeding glad. Let us sing unto the Lord a new song, and make known his deeds among all the people. Let us talk of all his wondrous works, and sing of the glories of his kingdom, which is an everlasting kingdom, which makes the darkness light and the night to shine as the day, and us able able to say with the men of old: — “Doubtless Thou art our Father, though Abraham be ignorant of us and Israel acknowledge us not; Thou art our Father, our Redeemer; Thy name is from everlasting.”

“Praise God, our Maker and our Friend;
Praise him through time, till time shall end;
Till psalm and song his name adore
Through Heaven’s great day of evermore.”

III. CHOIR.

IV. THE 84TH PSALM.

From "The/ Psalms,/ Hymns,/ And/ Spiritual Songs/ of
the, Old & New Testament./ Faithfully Translated into/
English Metre./ For the use, edification and comfort of the/
Saints in publick & private, especially in New England./

Cambridge,/ Printed for *Hczckiah Usher*, of Boston,/ 1665."

Lined, and sung, by the Choir and the Congregation.

To the chief Musician, upon Gittith,/ A Psalm for the
Sons of Korah./

- How Amiable Lord of hosts,
thy Tabernacles be ?
2. My soul longs for Jehovah's Courts,
yea it ev'n faints in me :
Unto the strong and living God,
my heart and flesh do shout.
3. Yea sparrow finds an house, her nest
the swallow eke finds out :
Wherein she may her young ones lay,
thine altars near unto :
O thou that art of armies Lord,
my King, my God also.
4. O blest are they within thy house
who dwell, still they 'll thee praise :
5. Blest is the man whose strength 's in thee,
in whose heart are their wayes.
6. Who as they pass through Baca's Vale,
a fountain do it make ;
Also the pools that are therein,
their fill of rain do take.
7. From strength to strength they go : to God,
in Sion all appear.
8. Lord God of hosts, O hear my
prayer,
O Jacob's God give ear.

(2)

9. Behold, O God, our shield, the face
of thine annointed see.
10. For better 's in thy Courts a day,
than elsewhere thousands be:
I rather had a door-keeper
be i' th' house of my God,
Than in the tents of wickedness
to settle mine abode.
11. Because the Lord God is a Sun,
he is a shield also:
Jehovah on his people grace
and glory will bestow:
No good thing will be hold from them
that do walk uprightly,
12. O Lord of hosts, the man is blest
that puts his trust in thee.

V. PRAYER. The Rev. Henry G. Spaulding.

VI. RESPONSE. Solo by Mr. Howard Mason.

VII. HYMN, *By Samuel Longfellow.*

O Life that maketh all things new,—
The blooming earth, the thoughts of men,—
Our pilgrim feet, wet with thy dew,
In gladness hither turn again.
From hand to hand the greeting flows,
From eye to eye the signals run,
From heart to heart the bright hope glows.
The seekers of the Light are one:
One in the freedom of the truth,
One in the joy of paths untrod,
One in the soul's perennial youth,
One in the larger thought of God.
The freer step, the fuller breath,
The wide horizon's grander view,
The sense of life that knows no death,—
The Life that maketh all things new.

VIII. SERMON. By the Rev. Calvin Stebbins.

IX. PRAYER.

X. HYMN. *By Ralph Waldo Emerson.*

Read by the Rev. Horatio Stebbins, D.D.
of San Francisco, California.

We love the venerable house
Our fathers built to God ;—
In heaven are kept their grateful vows,
Their dust endears the sod.

Here holy thoughts a light have shed
From many a radiant face,
And prayers of humble virtue made
The perfume of the place.

And anxious hearts have pondered here
The mystery of life,
And prayed the eternal Light to clear
Their doubts, and aid their strife.

From humble tenements around
Came up the pensive train,
And in the church a blessing found
That filled their homes again ;

.

They live with God ; their homes are dust ;
Yet here their children pray,
And in this fleeting lifetime trust
To find the narrow way.

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XI. BENEDICTION.

XII. ORGAN.

W. E. CHENERY, Organist.

HOWARD MASON, Chorister.

SERMON

I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance.

2d Peter iii, 1.

But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers.

The Acts xxiv, 14.

It has been suggested that there are two kinds of memory. One belongs to the individual and has to do with his life only; it connects his today with his yesterdays, and gives continuity to his existence in time. The other takes him out of himself and brings him in contact with immortal principles as illustrated in the lives of others, and associates his life with exalted feelings and heroic deeds. When his pure mind is stirred by way of this remembrance, he is taken out of his personal experience and made partaker of another and a higher spirit. In response to its suggestions, he sets apart days in which to commemorate the announcement of great principles in politics, morals and religion. He keeps the birthdays of men he has never seen, decorates public halls, squares and gardens with the representations of heroic and civic virtues; he keeps the centennial of the state, of the incorporation of the town and of the formation of the church. This is the principle that brings us together today that our pure minds may be stirred by way of remembrance.

The incorporation of this town took place in the last year of the seventeenth century and about the same time the people went about the organization of a church. It was a period of great financial depression, accompanied

with spiritual dejection throughout all New England, and especially in the Province of Massachusetts Bay. The old century went out in gloom, and the new came in with a joyless morn. The period has been rightly called "The dark days of New England." The first generation, the sturdy men who laid the foundations and built the basement story of our great structure of nationality, had gone, and the great generation which achieved our national independence was yet to come.

In the meantime there was little, apparently, before the people but a hard struggle for life. The witchcraft mania had left a baleful trail behind it. The disastrous failure of Sir William Phipps's expedition against Quebec had broken the spirit of the people, carried mourning into hundreds of homes, left the borders open to the hostile incursions of French and Indians, had loaded the colony with debt, and an attempt to create money out of the public credit had resulted in great financial distress. Disasters on sea and land came thick and fast: hurricanes, hail-storms, floods whose violence changed the channels of rivers, ministers' houses struck by lightning, and great loss of cattle:—

To Horses, Swine, Net-Cattel, Sheep and Deer,
Ninety and seven proved a mortal year.

a scarcity of food, high prices, the coldest weather in winter since the country was settled, all this did not fail to have its impression upon the minds of the people. The tone of social and moral life had deteriorated, and there was a marked change in manners for the worse, but theology was triumphant. It was under these circumstances that the people of the new town laid another burden upon themselves and went about to build a church.

Two hundred years is not a very long period in the history of English-speaking men in their old home, but it is a long period in the New World. It measures one

half the time since Columbus discovered America, and about all the time that his great discovery has been a blessing to mankind.

This period of two hundred years has been a field for the action of occult and powerful forces, and through their agency amazing changes have been wrought in every department of human life. It seems impossible that the present should be the legitimate child of the past. Yet the men of old were the makers of today, but were unconscious of what they were doing. There are few more striking illustrations of the presence of a divine hand guiding in the affairs of men than the fact that men are not allowed to be frightened by foreseeing the results of their labors. If the founders of this church could have foreseen the results of these two hundred years, they would have dismissed at once the thought of building a church for such an end. And this is true in regard to every church in christendom.

The Puritans brought with them to this country two institutions which were almost co-eval with the origin of man. Both had the same object in view — the realization of the moral law in human conduct. One speaks in a command, and says to all for the good of all: "Thou shalt"; the other is voluntary, and speaks in a vow: "We will." The one is society in state, the other society in church.

A great experiment was to be tried here with both these forms of society. The experiment in state was no other than to see whether the social pyramid would stand more steadily on its base than as heretofore on its apex. The experiment in the church was equally bold; it was no other than an attempt to organize a voluntary body, without priest and without ritual, which should be self-governing and be able to meet the moral and religious wants of human nature.

We are here today to rejoice in the fact that the First Church in Framingham has weathered the storms and

vicissitudes of two centuries ; that it has adjusted itself to the changed conditions and wants that have occurred in that time ; that it has today no quarrel with civilization, science or reason, and that it brings to us the lesson, ever old and forever new, that is folded up in those four words of amazing import and exhaustless significance,— God, immortality, duty and liberty.

It has been wittily said that:—

Little of all we value here
Wakes on the morn of its hundredth year
Without both feeling and looking queer.
In fact, there's nothing that keeps its youth,
So far as I know, but a tree and truth.

The tree and truth have this in common,—they both grow, and truth grows forever ; it has perennial youth, and an institution that embodies it and grows with it, that can adjust itself to a fuller life and afford its tenant larger accommodations as the generations come and go, is here to stay while truth has need of it.

It might seem pleasant to look in upon the fathers as they gather for the first time in the new meeting house on the hill in yonder cemetery. We should without doubt, find them all there, for, as John Adams said,—“ Man is a church-going animal ” ; at least he was in those days. But only the most tolerant, and the most gifted spirits of today, could enter into those services two hundred years ago and rejoice with them that do rejoice.

The fathers of New England, as was natural, brought with them many old-world habits of thought and feeling and planted them here, but it is strange that the survival of the spirit of caste should have been fostered in the services of the church. “ It is somewhat noticeable,” says one of our historians, “ that equality in the worship of a common Creator has been as little observed in democratic New England as in any country classed as civilized, if, indeed, it has not been less observed.” (*Adams' Three Epochs, II, 739.*)

The assignment of the pews and sittings in the meeting house was a very important subject and one that had to be handled with great caution. This little church in the wilderness was keenly alive to social distinctions, especially in worship. In the town meeting all men were equal, The ballot-box swept away all distinctions.

The spirit of caste took refuge in the Church in a form that had already an unenviable reputation on account of the fierce imprecations called down upon the heads of those who sought the chief seats in the synagogues. But our fathers were Old Testament Christians.

In this church at first the most highly esteemed situations for worship were under the galleries, and the representatives of social position and wealth secured these, and with the permission of the town built pews for themselves and their families, and without permission cut doors and windows of all shapes and sizes in the walls. Our fathers had some strange notions on this subject of pews. At Braintree, the town gave William Rawson the privilege of building a pew, between or upon the two beams over the pulpit, but in such a way as not to obstruct the light. (*Braintree, Town Records, 36.*)

The body of the church was filled with benches. The half of the floor and galleries to the left of the minister was assigned to the women and the right to the men, and the boys were put by themselves, and the tythingman was instructed to see to it that they did not neglect the means of grace. The town records show how the dignity of the sittings was adjusted. It was voted: "That in dignity the seats shall rank as follows: — the table (the deacon's seat) and the foreseats are the two highest; the front gallery equals in dignity the second and third seats in the body of the house; the side galleries equal in dignity the fourth and fifth seats in the body of the house." The worshipers here were very jealous of their rights, and the deacons were requested to take special

notice "that all persons do keep to their own seats appointed to them and keep out of the seats of others whereby the Sabbath is profaned."

Wealth has wiped out most of these distinctions in the church, but one was especially tenacious of life and many of you may recollect it. Behind the men's seats, or up in the corner of their gallery, was the place of dignity for the colored population both slave and free, for the slave was here in early times. The Rev. John Swift, the first minister of the church, owned five of his fellowmen. The parson does not seem to have been a hard master. After the first secession from the church, about the year 1735, Nero, one of his slaves followed those who left and joined the church in Hopkinton on the same conditions as the others. The rights of his mind at least were respected by his master. Mr. Swift however showed that he had a will of his own. He refused to give the seceders letters of dismissal from this church. They were however received into the church at Hopkinton and years of controversy made the case very celebrated in the history of ecclesiastical polity in New England.

There is something like irony in the fate that lifts one of the humblest worshipers in a church to fame and leaves his betters to be forgotten. Just before the Revolution a slave belonging to Major Lawson Buckminster joined this church under the "half-way covenant," which indicates to us that he was a very sensible man. He joined the "Minutemen" also and when the first alarm came he went to Lexington, Concord and Cambridge. He enlisted at once for three months, and, as his master was a patriotic man, he received without any doubt his liberty. He then enlisted for eight months, then for three years and at the expiration of the time enlisted again for three years and was honorably discharged at the close of the war. This man, Peter Salem, as he was called, was at Bunker Hill and Saratoga, as his tombstone in the cemetery testifies.

In the Trumbull Gallery at New Haven, hangs a picture of the Battle of Bunker Hill by our great historical painter, John Trumbull. The thousands from all parts of this wide land who look in admiration at the noble work of the artist, will not fail to notice the colored man in the foreground behind the retreating Americans adjusting his firelock as for one more shot in defense of the half finished redoubt.

One of the greatest orators of our country, and indeed of our century, said on Bunker Hill, as he pointed to the noble shaft:—"It is the monument of the day, of the event, of the battle of Bunker Hill; of all the brave men who shared its perils,—alike Prescott and Putnam and Warren,—the chiefs of the day and the colored man Salem, who is reported to have shot the gallant Pitcairn as he mounted the parapet."

Whatever our fathers may have done and whatever we may do, it is well to bear in mind this one fact: that there is a church of the living God on earth, the great church of history. In this church where the immortals are gathered no questions are asked about a man's social position, wealth, color, orthodoxy, or heterodoxy. The brave heart loyal to truth and liberty gives a man a place in the ranks of the just, and humanity is satisfied, for no one is ashamed to stand beside Peter Salem at Bunker Hill.

Important as the meeting house of our fathers was in a religious point of view, as the meeting place with God, it was also the meeting place with men, and was the centre of their social and political life. They never allowed any superstitions to grow up around it. They had no such feelings towards it as the Catholic or the Episcopalian cherish for their places of worship, nor even the milder reverence that has grown up in the minds of their children in this irreverent generation.

There was no sacred enclosure; the ground in front of it was usually the training field, the stocks were in close

proximity to the door, and the whipping post was not far off. The ammunition and arms were stored in the loft over the auditorium, and the minister was allowed to store his corn there, but not in such quantities as to endanger the building; in one case the poor man was limited to two hundred and fifty bushels. In the auditorium the town meetings were held, and they were of frequent occurrence.

The church and the town were virtually one until the charter of William and Mary, when a property qualification took the place of a theological. But the two continued to act together until the constitution in 1820 which completed the separation of church and state. When the first minister of this church was settled, the town acted in its corporate capacity in calling him, and all the inhabitants were assessed to build the church, pay his salary and the running expenses.

But the outward history of a church is of little consequence compared with the history of the progress of its thought. To understand this we must take a general survey of the religious thought of New England during these two hundred years, and then we shall be able to see more clearly the work done here.

The discussions in the New England churches were not at first of a theological character, but were confined chiefly to matters pertaining to church polity or government. This was natural, as they were departing widely from the usages of the reformed churches. The first churches in New England were bound together by a covenant and not by a creed, and, while on friendly terms, were wholly independent of each other. There was nothing in the covenant of the First Church at Salem that an ordinary Unitarian would object to. Indeed it is inscribed on the walls of the church today and reads as follows:—“We Covenant with the Lord and one with another; and do bind ourselves in the presence of God, to walk together

in all his ways, according, as he is pleased to reveal himself unto us in his Blessed word of 'Truth.'"

These discussions finally culminated in the Synod of Cambridge in 1648. The churches were all but two represented and adopted with singular unanimity a platform prepared by Richard Mather. It laid down the doctrine that every candidate for church fellowship must satisfy the church as to his knowledge of Christian doctrines and the reasons therefor, and have experienced what was called regeneration. The standard of the Westminster Assembly of Divines was adopted and the churches of New England became hot-beds of dogmatism and intolerance.

After the settlement of the question of church polity the people turned their attention to theology and became the most Calvinistic people in the world, with perhaps the exception of the Scots. The five points of Calvinism covered the whole field of their thoughts.

It is a very striking illustration of the complete revolution that has taken place in religious thought in New England that the themes which occupied the attention and thought of the fathers have lost all interest for the children. They have disappeared from the life of to-day and hardly left a wreck behind them. There are probably very few persons in this audience, if any, or in this town, whether orthodox or heterodox, who could name "the Five Points of Calvinism." We are not told by any high authority in spiritual things that: "The times of this ignorance God winked at but now commandeth all men everywhere to repent." "But brethren I would not have you ignorant" of what the fathers thought vital to salvation. The Five Points are as follows:—

- I. Predestination, or particular election.
- II. Irresistible Grace.
- III. Original Sin, or Total Depravity.
- IV. Peculiar Redemption.
- V. The final perseverance of the Saints.

It was a period of astonishing theological activity. In illustration of these frightful themes whole bodies of divinity were published, but they were first delivered as sermons. Samuel Willard left a work entitled "A complete Body of Divinity," which was published in a huge tome of nine hundred and fourteen pages, each page having two columns, in small and compact type. It was all delivered in two hundred and fifty sermons in the nineteen years, extending across the period of the organization and early years of this church.

But whatever we may think of the theology of John Calvin, we must acknowledge that Calvinism has produced a very remarkable race of men, and has left to us a royal inheritance of political institutions and liberties. It was not a bad mental stimulus and the child was early exercised and trained in it. He was not sent to a girls' school, but he was given the catechism of the Rev. John Cotton,— "Milk for New England Babes Drawn from the Breasts of both Testaments for their Spiritual Nourishment." You may think that there was little milk in it, but you may be assured of this one thing,—there was no water. The child had a rugged training and acquired a mental culture of inestimable value. He was taught to think clearly and deeply. Thus Calvinism nursed, educated and armed with invincible might an antagonist who by and by would question not its reasoning but its premises.

But Calvinism as exhibited in Puritanism not only exercised the reason, it strengthened the domestic affections, and through them brought into the field of church polity another factor. In the Puritan church everything culminated at the communion table, and no one could approach it but a member of the church who was sound in his belief and had had personal assurance of his own regeneration, and only such had a right to bring their children forward for baptism. But the younger generation, although good men living blameless lives and who had

themselves been baptised in infancy, did not join the church. The position of their children was pitiable enough; they were little pagans who had strolled into the services of a Christian church, but were outside its guardianship and beyond "the ecclesiastical inspection" that goes with baptism.

The parents were anxious to have their children baptised, and, on the ground that they were born into the church and entitled to its care and nurture, the church yielded and parental affection triumphed over orthodoxy. This is known in our history as "the Half-way Covenant." It met with little opposition, as the grandparents who had the matter in their hands wished to have their grandchildren baptised and see them under the protection of the church.

The half-way-covenant theory is usually looked upon as the mother of that brood of heresies known as Unitarianism. However this may be, it introduced into the polity of the church of that time a new principle, a principle that announced that the church was made for man and not man for the church. It was the beginning of a movement which in time changed the church from a little private party of "visible saints," who thought they had been elected from the foundation of the world to be the especial recipients of divine favor, and made it an organization of men and women whose object it was to succor, and cultivate all noble aspirations after the divine and quicken and energize all kindly feelings towards the human.

It was the beginning of a great advance in thought, feeling and practice. Some of the bars were removed and not even Jonathan Edwards could put them back, and he lost his pulpit at Northampton for trying to do so. Let me quote on this point the words of an accomplished historian whose recent death we all have reason to lament.

The Rev. George Leon Walker, D.D., in a lecture delivered to the students of a theological school has said :

“ It is no exaggeration to say that, though the Congregational churches of New England have rejected the Half-way-Covenant theory, they are today generally admitting to full communion a membership which exhibits less clearly understood and realized convictions of sin and of the necessity of atoning grace as the only hope of lost men than under that system were often expected of those who came only halfway within the covenant doors.” — (*Some Religious Aspects, 174.*)

In the fourth decade of the eighteenth century it was noticed that a marked decadence of religion and morals had taken place and a thorough reform was called for.

The man was at hand to organize the crusade and restore the old discipline and rigidity. The powerful genius of Jonathan Edwards now came to the front. He was unsurpassed as a dialectician, but his clear, calm, cold and merciless logic was reinforced by an imagination that the greatest poets might have envied, which gave to everything he said an intense realism. He appealed at once to the mind and heart, to the reason and to the feelings. The dogmas of Calvinism in his hands ceased to be mere theological abstractions that might lie dormant in the soul until the day of judgment, but dreadful realities of imminent and supreme importance, and he introduced and emphasized with great skill a new feature, the personal responsibility of the sinner for his graceless state. “The Great Awakening” was the result of his preaching. Whitefield came from England with his blazing oratory to swell the influence until the country was in a whirl of religious excitement of the greatest intensity. “The dry bones of the prevailing orthodoxy rattled, and the people came to Christ in flocks,” as Edwards said.

The excesses of the movement were very great, and some questioned the spirit, whether it was of God or no.

Among these was Charles Chauncy, one of the leading ministers of Boston. He opposed the whole movement, publicly denounced Whitefield, and entered into a discussion with Edwards himself. But the Lord's Supper was more strictly guarded and the road to church membership was made more difficult and thorny than before. The result, however, was not encouraging. When the excitement subsided and men began to think once more, a reaction set in which produced astonishing results.

The reaction brought together scattered influences that had been working for a long time in silence. The clergy and the laity began to study in the spirit of real investigation, and heretical views ceased to be feared. At the close of the "Great Awakening," a Boston bookseller bought out an edition of Emlyn's "Humble Inquiry," in which was stated very cogent reasons for not believing the doctrine of the Trinity. The great teachers began to give reasons for the opinions they taught, and did not depend upon scriptural proof-texts. The War of the Revolution had a tremendous influence upon the religious thought of the people, for of religion it may be said, as Hosea Bigelow said of its great coadjutor:

"civlyzation does git forrid
Sometimes upon a powder-cart."

The humanities began to come into the foreground and scholastic dogmas sank into the background. When the alarm was sounded it was too late; the great majority of the people in the leading churches had ceased to be orthodox.

The legitimate result of these reactionary and advancing forces was American Unitarianism. As a movement it was open to the influences of all the ages, and has been so far open to the influences of the age that was present as time advanced. It allowed human nature its right to speak on the high problems of the soul, of time and

eternity, and it affirmed with all its strength the veracity of its intellectual, moral and spiritual convictions. It has drifted, rather than been guided by any human hand, through many stages of experiences and many phases of thought, and has been vexed by many sharp controversies, but its discussions have seldom descended to wrangling. At last it has taken a position upon which all can stand.

The youngest church in christendom, it has accepted the oldest and the simplest statement of faith and practice in the world. This statement is an affirmation of the aim of all the various manifestations of religion on earth. It is so broad that it takes in all the races of men and is good for all time and eternity. Its disciples may be denied the name of Christian, they may themselves think they are or they may think they are not; it is not a matter worth discussing. But it is well to remember that you have the only bond of union and liberty in christendom that has the express and unequivocal sanction of Jesus of Nazareth. He said of the two great commandments of the law which are inscribed on your banner: "Do this and thou shalt live."

When we pass from the broad stream of the general history of the Church to the history of individual churches, we find ourselves very often, alas, in eddies, whirled about by angry waters that chafe and foam and fret and are dark with mud, and full of floating debris which has drifted in from all directions. Men are never absurd on purpose, but a church quarrel comes very near the line that divides the reasonable from the great inane. I have never heard one cited as an evidence of "total depravity." Perhaps it would prove too much and weaken the cause.

It is not worth our while to rake the ashes of the past for the dying embers of old church quarrels. They are in their origin usually of a personal nature, and they try to invest themselves with ecclesiastical dignity by putting on a dress clumsily patched up out of so-called Christian

doctrines. It is astonishing how pious and orthodox men will grow when they are like to get worsted in a church quarrel. They are then just in a condition to do an incalculable amount of harm, that does not die when the original actors are dead, buried and forgotten, but illustrates the truth of Mark Anthony's saying: — "The evil that men do lives after them, the good is oft interred with their bones." But the kingdom of God suffereth violence and violence taketh it by force. There is no better evidence of the vitality of the church than that it can stand a succession of these rackets. This church has great vitality.

The original covenant of this church, signed by eighteen persons (men) on the 8th of October, 1701, is a document of about two hundred words in one sentence. (Forty years later Jonathan Edwards proposed a covenant of one thousand five hundred and sixty-eight words.) It began in the conventional form of the time with a confession: — "We do, under a soul-humbling and abasing sense of our utter unworthiness of so great and high a privilege as God is graciously putting into our hands, accept of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for our God in covenant with us," and so forth.

The humility expressed in the early covenants, so foreign to our thought and feeling, was not of the Uriaah Heep type. The familiar couplet of the New England Primer: —

" In Adam's fall
We sinnéd all,"

is very democratic in its spirit; it puts kings and priests on a level with the lowest, poorest and weakest, and humility is the only becoming state of mind, for "all are made liable to all the miseries of this life, to death itself, and the pains of hell forever." Humility is the only

possible state of mind for him who believes this and sees the everlasting glories on the one hand and the everlasting fires on the other.

There was a time when men believed that they were born children of wrath, but that God had opened a way of escape and had given them assurance of it. We today, both orthodox and heterodox, are prone to forget that the infinite Originality is equal to any condition a human soul may be in and can give it the peace of heavenly places if it looks up to God.

This covenanting with God is at best a matter of legality, and belonged to the thought of a people who clung to the idea of commercial relations in spiritual things. There is a vastly higher relationship folded up in the familiar words taught us at our mother's knee, "Our Father who art in Heaven." The simple question for us to settle is whether we feel the latter as strongly as our fathers did the former.

It was without doubt understood that the creed of the Church was the Confession of Faith adopted at Boston in 1680. But the Church was not up in all respects to the requirements of organized Congregationalism. The office of Elder does not seem to have been provided for. The theory was that the will of Christ ought to govern in the Church. But who was to interpret that will? In the New England theocracy it was not revealed to the church members but to the elders. When the elder ordered business or administered admonition, every faithful soul was expected to assent, and if he did not he was held as "factious and obstinate." The elders have been rightly called "a speaking aristocracy in the face of a silent Democracy." With this class of ecclesiastical tyrants this church would have nothing to do. The church was right, for the office of elder has no foundation in either Scripture or reason, and was an invention of John Calvin. But the rejection of this functionary caused a great deal

of trouble and was one of the causes of two secessions from the church. The spirit of dissension ran so high at one time that the Lord's Supper was omitted, and at another time that a day was set apart for humiliation and prayer on account of dissensions.

It is a very significant fact that while the Great Awakening was in progress and the churches in the neighborhood were aroused, and Edwards himself preached in this immediate vicinity, he was not asked, so far as I can find, to occupy this pulpit; Whitefield preached in town once but not by invitation of this church. The people seem to have objected to the methods pursued, and the name of their minister is not among those who signed the great declaration of approval.

But quite as significant of the tone and temper of the people is their action at the ordination of their second minister, the Rev. Matthew Bridge. A committee was selected "to be the mouthpiece of the church at the council." They proposed to the candidate two questions; one of a general nature as to church government, and the second was, "if in important matters he was willing to take the vote of the church with uplifted hands." His answer was satisfactory to the great majority. But a protest was sent to the council against the ordination of the candidate on the ground that "the scope and tenor of his preaching was unsatisfactory, that many such doctrines, as we esteem of greatest importance, are wholly omitted or at best slightly touched upon in his sermons, particularly the doctrine of original sin, the imputation of it; the total loss of the image of God in the fall of Adam; the wrath and curse of God consequent thereon," and six other doctrines that have the genuine ring of the faith once delivered to the saints by John Calvin.

Mr. Bridge was, however, ordained, as he said, "on the old foundation." The dissenting brethren seceded and formed a new church which had a short history, and the

newly ordained minister was left to pursue his work in peace for years to come. After his death the church was without a settled minister for some years, but at the close of the Revolutionary War the people called the Rev. David Kellogg. He was a conservative man who held orthodox views, loved peace, and did what he could for union. He reinstated the reading of the Scriptures as a part of the church services, which was looked upon as "unedifying" in the churches of New England, and the town granted eight dollars to purchase a Bible for the pulpit. He was also instrumental in inducing the people to use Watts's Hymns and Psalms.

This church as an organization, like many others at that time, was steadily declining in numbers and power, owing to a very gradual and silent change that was taking place in the minds of men. During Mr. Bridge's administration, extending over twenty-nine years, from 1746 to 1775, eighty-one men had joined the church on confession of faith. During the administration of Dr. Kellogg, extending over forty-eight years, from 1781 to 1829, there were only sixty-nine.

A crisis was approaching and its coming was accelerated by a meeting held on the 24th of April, 1826, at which a parish was duly organized according to law. From this time all connection between the town and the parish ceased, and the church became independent of civil authorities. This movement opened the way for the parish to take a hand in the management of affairs and have a voice in the proceedings, and the need of an assistant to the now aged Dr. Kellogg afforded an occasion.

It was, however, soon apparent that the church and the parish were not likely to agree in the selection. They sought to bridge over the difficulty by employing preachers of the old and the new school to occupy the pulpit alternately. But the experiment was a failure, and nothing remained but a trial of strength, and the parish was

victorious. The minority seceded. This was the third secession from the church in its history. The first two were failures, but the third was a success. It took the name of the "Hollis Evangelical Society"—a name sacred to Unitarians, and we have to thank them for educating the Rev. Minot J. Savage for our ranks.

The people of the First Parish immediately erased the names of the second and third persons of the Trinity from their covenant and called a minister. Their intelligence and their theological position is clearly indicated by the character of the men they invited to take part in the ordination of their new minister. They named for the sermon Dr. Channing or the Rev. James Walker, for the ordaining prayer Dr. Lowell, and for the concluding prayer the Rev. Raph Waldo Emerson.

Now that the noise of the controversy has died away it is pleasant to note the undertones of kindly feeling that have come down to us. The First Parish put on record an expression of their sorrow that so many of their fellow-worshippers and their old minister had left them. Dr. Kellogg was invited to sit with the council at the ordination of his successor, but declined on account of the infirmities of old age. He was invited to occupy his old pulpit afterwards and did. At his funeral the minister of this church, the Rev. William Barry, the conscientious and graceful historian of the town, took part in the services. It had been decided by the Supreme Court of the Commonwealth that a church separating for any cause from a parish loses its existence in the eye of the law, and, therefore, that the seceding body could have no right to either the name, furniture, records or property of the church. The First Parish appointed a committee to confer with a committee of the new church and instructed them to make this proposal:—That the records go to the First Parish and the communion service to the new church; it was accepted. The time is coming when the proud and

opinionated with their egotism will vanish and only the bright side of these old stories will find a place in our remembrance.

It would be pleasant, did time permit, to look in upon the charities of the church,—and there are plenty of illustrations of the great human heart that was in it,—and to speak of private generosity that with wise foresight has blessed the present and the future. It would be pleasant to speak of those men of culture and deep moral convictions who have stood in this place and spoken for God and duty, and to remind you of those brave men whose hearts “on war’s red touchstone rung true metal,”—and among them stand two of your own ministers, Matthew Bridge and Charles A. Humphreys, who ventured their lives, one to throw off the yoke of an English king, the other to redeem the land from the more odious tyranny of a slaveholding oligarchy; it would be pleasant to speak of those men of affairs who have taken no unimportant part in the great business of the world, and of those who have been interested in the world of letters, one of whom has become the conscientious and painstaking historian of an unpopular cause,—the Loyalists of the Revolution.

It is a pleasant duty to pause in the rush of affairs and commemorate the heroic virtues of the men and women who toiled in the past and made the summits of the present accessible to their children; summits where the air is invigorating and bracing, and the outlook is wide, and where the native spiritual instincts of the soul, those

“High instincts, before which our mortal nature
Did tremble like a guilty thing surprised;
Which be they what they may, are yet the fountain
Light of all our day; the master light of all our seeing,”

can act with greater freedom and power.

It is indeed a blessed privilege, as well as a duty, to give thanks for the organization through which the fathers

wrought with such beneficent results for us and those who come after us. We celebrate today the formation of that Organization two hundred years ago. What are its relations to us now? Is it like "a Pine-tree Shilling," valuable chiefly on account of its age, or is it about to enter upon a larger field of action and exert a greater influence than ever before with the coming in of another century?

It has helped the fathers to deliver themselves and their children forever from the thrall of cruel creeds, and from those grim idols "graven by art and Man's device," called theological dogmas, some of which had a striking resemblance to Moloch, "horrid king," who "made his grove

The pleasant valley of Hinmon, Tophet thence
And black Gehenna called, the type of Hell."

Their efforts have left us an atmosphere unpoluted by brimstone-fumes, and a sky without a trace of apocalyptic phantasmagoria. It was, indeed, a great work, but a greater remains to be done, and it is a work in sweet accord with the spirit of a Christian church; a work not of destruction or of theological controversy, but of discussion and education, peace and union.

Human nature as we have come to see it, is not a devilish anarchy, but a hierarchy of powers, rising one above another until the highest brings the human into communion with the divine. Each has rights in its own sphere, but the lower has no rights except to serve when the higher makes its demands.

It is the high function of the Church today to remind us of the great possibilities of our nature, to encourage us to trust our spiritual intuitions as we trust the revelations of our sense; to show us that "the perennial fountains of religion lie in the primal essence of the reason and the moral conscienciousness," and that there we find "a

Spirit that beareth witness with our spirit that we are children of God ;” to so cultivate the devout trusts and habits of the soul as to enable us to read aright the moral significance of the past and separate with unerring instinct the truth of God from the egotism of man ; to so nourish the spirit of humility that we may ever be seekers and learners ; to so inspire our minds with the spirit of reverence that we may walk with uncovered heads, not only in the presence of the sublime manifestations of nature, but in the presence of sobbing grief and kneeling penitence ; to so emphasize the power of the conscience as to make us sure “ our sins will find us out ;” to so encourage us to believe in the good and its final triumph over evil that the night will shine as the day, while we work or wait for the dawn ; and to impress upon us the all-consoling fact that, whatever may happen, the infinite Love and Care is so great that even “ the hairs of the head are all numbered.”

On these grounds and for these causes the Church makes today its appeal to you all, both young and old. It is the noblest appeal that was ever made to man, for it makes possible a glorious state of society based on a reasonable and consecrated obedience of the two great commandments of the law, — love to God, and love to man.



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