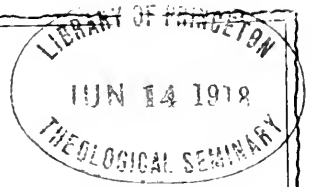


Rev. Charles L. Sinnett

Historic Lebanon
Lebanon, Maine,
and the Grand Work
of its
Congregational Church

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HISTORIC LEBANON

LEBANON, MAINE,

AND THE GRAND WORK

OF ITS

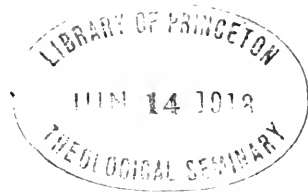
CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

IN

ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTY-EIGHT YEARS.

BY REV. CHARLES N. SINNETT.

HAVERHILL, MASS.,
C. C. MORSE & SON,
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OF THE

CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH,

LEBANON, MAINE.

And so the York, Maine Congregational Conference is to meet once more in the church at Lebanon Center — and the time is this bright year of 1903; and as the pen of the old pastor moves upon its appointed work of making a history of this peculiar building and the grand help which this church has widely given through one hundred and thirty-eight years, many memories come thronging upon the mind of the writer. Among these are questions which ring like the sentry's sharp challenge, and among them is that which God's people asked in Palestine long ago. "Will a man leave the snows of Lebanon"?

The query was answered in various ways by those who heard it then. Some lifted their faces to the grand old mountain whose name has just been repeated, and replied with truest loyalty, "no!" Others pointed to the famous cedars on these heights as if to say, "In no other spot are found such sturdy trunks as these!" and the head was shaken in a firm negative. Still others spoke eloquently of how the snows of Lebanon sent down streams to the plains below when the summer came, and how the winds from them were full of coolness and healing when the sultry gales would sap away the people's life, and these said, "Leave these great gifts of our God? no, never, till we pass out into the great beyond." And others sent back

queries to fire the question which had been put, "Are not the ridges and crags of Lebanon the symbols of God's eternal strength? Do they not daily teach us how He will evermore guard and keep us? And do we but use the wood of yonder mountain cedar for building our sacred places, because this is His handiwork, and the sight of it brings us closer to Him"? And no doubt some expressed their belief with a bright twinkle of their dark eyes, "yes, SOME will leave the snows of Lebanon, but they will be glad to come back again!"

If these men and women of the olden days did not thus reply such an answer has often been heard among these hills of Lebanon, Me., where the strong old trees which grew here in the early days have been called to mind; and where the lessons of God's strength here taught have been thankfully remembered. I seem to hear these words from the lips of many whom I knew here, who have long been praising God in an upper life for the truths which they here learned among the snows of Lebanon. And mixed with the answer are the thoughts by which the old Lebanon friends said, "We want to stay in this old town as long as life shall last."

And then they went on to tell me how many of Lebanon's sons and daughters had gone far out into the world. Some had been borne far away upon the seas by white-winged ships. Others had made their slow way to California and its golden treasures. In the south many had fought bravely for the old flag, or either, later on, had gone to teach in Freedom's schools and make reputations of which all who knew them are still proud. Others had gone here and there over prairies and fields.

Their work had been seen in all the most important walks of life. And wonderful scenes had they beheld; strange friends had been theirs; the successes which they won were manifold and great. And often the time friends said, "Their eyes are dazzled. The mind is having the old pictures crowed out of it." But always, when thoughts like these were uttered, there was some one ready to reply, "They see the hills of Lebanon in many a dream by night. And by day there is nothing so clear to them as the lessons which they learned in this our old Lebanon church. They know their present success has its largest foundation stone in the past in our old town."

And by and by the white sails of ships were seen coming landward on the gray horizon's rim, and for their deeds glad hearts would welcome to these hills of home. And by and by the travellers from prairies, and city, and mart, and school, went up and down the old roads and woodland's paths. Again in the home they sat by their mother's side. In the place where she used to sit they knelt to ask of God, "Help me to carry on the work which her faithful hands have laid down." They sat in this old church, and amid all the memories of the missing faces and the change which time had wrought, they could not forget to thank God that as children they had been reared here. Some whispered to themselves as they bowed their heads in prayer, "The people are passing away, a thousand old landmarks are gone, but the doors of the Lebanon church must be kept open," and so this building has been kept in good repair. The money for the support of preaching has been freely given. The beautiful parsonage stands close by, and thousands of other proofs are seen that show that they were wise and right who said, "Yes, some will leave the snows of Lebanon, but they will come back again!"

And I have come as one of the great procession. For many old ministers have returned here with hearts as grateful as the hearts of those who were born here. And the first pastor of the church lies buried where the first meeting house stood — no chance or change could move him from this hallowed spot. And I am as glad to come as were those who have stood within this church in the past years, now so many! And I do not wonder that some of you ask with eyes, if not in open question, "Will a man leave the snows of Lebanon"? For it was in that wild winter of 1876 that I said, "If ever these drifts melt away, I shall go with them." Some of you here will never forget that winter, when for five succeeding Sundays no services could be held in the church, and when upon other such days only a handful of us could come together. But when my resignation was read, and some said when they knew how far away I was going, "We shall not see him." Others replied, "Oh, he will come back again!" and you kept your firm belief in the power of Lebanon "to have and hold," though more than twenty years rolled by before I could meet

with you again. But in all that time I thought of my lessons here learned of faithfulness to God as abiding as these hills, and since my first coming there has even been a deeper meaning in two thoughts of David: "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem so the Lord is round about His people from henceforth even forever," and, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help, my help cometh from the Lord, which made heaven and earth."

God bless the old church of Lebanon, whose help has gone shining out through so many glad and gay years!

It is very appropriate that we should meet as we do in this month. For, as you all remember well, it was on the 23rd of June, in the year 1765, that this church was organized, with much prayer and faith. The day was also marked with the sturdy activity which has characterized the people of the town through its long history. At that date the first pastor, Rev. Isaac Hasey was ordained, and many wise plans were laid for the future work of the church, which also meant the whole town itself, since the town affairs were then so largely under the care and blessing of the church. This is seen in the Towns charter. The original proprietors were required, in making divisions of land in the turnpike, to consider the first minister, the ministry, and the schools, each, as one of themselves; that is, as often as a proprietor should draw a lot for himself, one should be drawn for the first minister settled in the town, one for the support of the ministry, and one for the support of the schools in the town. This provision of the charter governed the action of the committee appointed by the General Court to lay out the lots of the first settlers.

How well these first settlers held to these rules is suggested by the names of those among them, whose descendants, through so many generations, have done much for the church and town: Farnham, Copp, Door, Hasey, Rives, Stevens, Blaisdell, Tibbetts, Kenny, Wallingford, McCrelis, Perkins, Corson, Burrows, Goodwin, Yeaton, Furbush and Cowell. The town from which these settlers came also gives good proof of firm integrity and honor, for Berwick, Kittery, Somersworth, Dover and York, were the places from which the sons and daughters of sturdish stock came: and what may be said of

these earliest settlers may be truly said of these whose feet pressed steadfastly to Lebanon as their owners heard of, or saw the stately pines upon her hills and casting deep shadows in their valleys: or who learned of the rich soil yearly watered by the unfailing Lebanon snows.

A glance at this charter of the town shows that by it "the proprietors of the town were required to build a meeting house, and to settle and maintain a learned Orthodox Minister, for the inhabitants, and to build him a house. In 1753, seven years after the first few settlers came hither, these proprietors erected a frame for a meeting house, and the next year it was boarded and shingled, doors made and hung, a double floor laid, and rough seats made inside, arranged in two rows, one for the men, and one for the women. The dimensions of this house were 30 by 40 feet, and two stories in height. It was erected upon the lot drawn for the use of the ministry, and stood upon an elevated spot of land on the west side of the old road, so called, about one-fourth of a mile southerly from the house occupied by James R. Chamberlain in these later years. In 1759 the proprietors also erected, on the lot, a little to the southeast of the meeting house, and nearer the road, a frame for the house of the first minister. This frame stood only a short time before it was burned down. In 1762 the second frame was erected, and so far finished as to render it fit as a place in which to keep a school. It appears, by the proprietor's records, that during this, or the preceding year, they hired one Ezra Thompson to preach and to teach the school for the term of six months. This was no doubt the first preaching and teaching in the town.

The name of the town was then "Towow," and we hope that this first preacher had much to do in changing it to its present good old bible name. Lebanon it has been since the incorporation in 1767, or it may have been given at the suggestion of the Rev. Isaac Hasey, who was ordained here two years before that name was duly given.

This Mr. Hasey who graduated at Harvard College 1762, the first regular minister of the Lebanon Congregational Church, was settled here by the proprietors of the town according to the instructions of their grant. They were to pay him

\$290.00 during the first eight years of his ministry, and \$245.00 per annum after these first eight years, so long as he should continue the minister of the town; together with the use of the house which they had built for him, and the use of all the ministerial land in the town, and the lots drawn for the first minister, in fee. Mr. Hasey moved with his family into the house provided, where he lived for several years; afterwards the proprietors made him a present of the house. Before this, however, the minister had acquired, by purchase, or otherwise, two of the house lots, lying a short distance southerly from the meeting house, and on the easterly side of the highway. To one of these lots Mr. Hasey moved the house, and in time he made additions to it. He lived until the time of his death, Oct. 1812, when he was 71 years of age. As he was ordained pastor of the church when he was 24 years of age it will be seen that his very useful ministry covered a period of forty-seven years. His influence is seen in the work which in that period, and for some years afterwards, was done upon the church building. It may be seen in the position of this very building, for his wise counsel ever was, "God's house must be where the majority of the people can reach it, and feel that it is for them and theirs." He was a pioneer in the "up town church movement."

In 1771 the town gave Mr. Hasey the privilege to build a pew in the meeting house on the right side of the pulpit. During the same year they voted to repair the meeting house, which was faithfully done on the following year. The rough seats were mostly removed from the body of the house, and their places supplied by pews: the galleries were finished, and pews erected across one end. The pews throughout the church were sold by auction to private individuals, and the proceeds taken for the payment of the repairs made. In this house the people worshiped until the year 1786, when, settlers having located on what was called the new road, in the vicinity of Little River Falls, it ceased to be the centre of population, and the town voted that the meetings on the Lord's Day should be holden half of the time at this, the center of the town. By 1796 the inhabitants of the town had much increased, and the town thus voted to erect a new meeting house here. In 1798

this building was made of strongest timber from the old hills, and was soon finished so that it could be used for worship. In 1835 the present church was builded in its place.

In 1801 the old church building was sold by the town to the Free Baptist Society, as a small membership of that church had then been gathered. The old building was taken down that same year, and moved to West Lebanon Village.

As you are well aware, about the site of the old Congregational Church of Lebanon is the largest cemetery in Lebanon. Here lies the old pastor, Rev. Isaac Hasey, and almost all the first settlers of the town.

The second regular minister settled over this church was the Rev. Paul Jewett. He came to the town a few months after the death of Rev. Mr. Hasey. He was ordained April 13, 1814, and was dismissed, at his own request, Oct. 5, 1819. During these little more than five years the church prospered and grew as did few others in all this region. The word was often spoken, "A second Paul is with us!"

It was a tribute well given. Under the preaching of a single sermon of his a dozen of strong men were lead to earnest faith in God. While he was prayerfully writing some of these discourses the spirit would come with great power to some men at work in a distant field, or to a mother caring for her large household. Young men and women gave up great dreams of worldly prosperity and decided to follow only the guidings of their Savior. There seemed to be no house in the parish but was blessed by the work and prayer of this true servant of God. Large numbers not only united with the church, but gave themselves to a long life of great self-denial and trust. His energy and strength seemed to be inexhaustible; and to questions which had long troubled others he could give replies which quickly banished doubt and fear. In strength and vigor of intellect he has had few peers in any of the towns of this region.

But it was just in this time of wonderful revival work that a great shadow loomed on the horizon of the history of this town and church which grew into a cloud whose influence has not been wholly obliterated in the long years which have followed. As one said quaintly long ago, "The evil one could

not endure to see so many souls slipping forever from his clutches!"

Its history has emphasized that thought which one sees inscribed in an old English town:

"Where God erects a house of prayer
The Devil also builds a chapel there!"

Out of the strife which begun between the town and parish over the ministerial lands, a bitter law suit grew, and was carried on for many years. This suit was eventually terminated in favor of the parish, giving the ministerial land to the Orthodox Congregational Society for the support of the ministry, according to the proprietors' grant. It was also then decreed that the funds could not thus be held unless there was always a minister settled as pastor over the church. This is the reason why from that date onward the church records bear the many entries of a former pastor being dismissed and the new one installed as nearly on the same stroke of time as possible. It was for this reason that, when I had thought to leave behind me the snows of Lebanon, no one was found who wished to be installed as pastor here, and I was still in that office for a term of nearly 12 years! This old suit has thus produced a few humorous scenes to enliven its gloomy records.

The third regular pastor of this town was the Rev. James Weston, and he was ordained pastor of the church and society on the 10th of Feb., 1824. He was a faithful laborer here until June 26, 1836. A greater contrast in two pastors is seldom seen than was marked in Mr. Weston and his predecessor, Mr. Jewett. The former pastor had a clear and ringing voice. Mr. Weston was troubled with an impediment in his speech. "Yet," says one who knew him well, "in the midst of some of his prayers and sermons God gave him such a clear utterance that the thronged church was hushed in wonder, and the appeals to the Savior for a blessing on the people were speedily answered." The former pastor had been perfectly fearless in his approach to men when he wished to tell of their position and of the change of life which they at once need to make. Mr. Weston was a man of a very modest, retiring disposition. He was so diffident at times when he felt that God had called him to personal work for some soul that his hands trembled and

great beads out of perspiration stood out upon his face. But he was so loving, faithful and persevering in all his work, that the Lord blessed his labors in a very wonderful way. In spite of the sharp controversy between the people of the parish and town there was a great revival and seventy-two members were added to the church while Mr. Weston labored here.

It was during this period of revival that Mr. Weston went to see a man for whom he had long been praying. He had hoped to find him at home, but he was at his work bench and meant to stay there "until the minister had gone home about his business." He was surprised and angry, therefore when Mr. Weston walked into the shop, pale but earnest. "Have you not some interest in the revival which is now in progress," he asked, his voice shaking timidly in spite of all his efforts. "I have not," was the quick reply, as the man drove his plane over a board with fierce energy. Mr. Weston was cut to the heart by the man's manner and words. But he said quietly as he walked out, "I know you will be a christian," and the very next day would come to him that his words which he had thought so poor and weak had been of great good. The man could find no peace in his work or anything else, until he had fallen on his knees and asked his Savior to forgive his sins. He became a faithful Deacon in another church.

Rev. Joseph Loring succeeded Mr. Weston, and was ordained Oct. 12, 1836 and dismissed in Feb. 1853. His work was very helpful to many here.

After Mr. Loring left, until 1856 the pulpit was supplied by students and ministers who were hired for only a short period.

When Rev. Mr. Fobes was ordained here it was hoped that he might long remain with the people; but his health failed and he was obliged to give up the work in a little over a year. This sad experience was paralleled in the case of Rev. Benjamin G. Page the next minister but one.

Mr. Page was preceded by Rev. John H. Garmon who remained slightly over 5 years, being ordained Sept. 19, 1860 and being dismissed Sept. 27, 1865.

On Nov. 9, 1869 Rev. John Parsons was installed as pastor of the church, a man of fine scholarly attainments, and whose

earnest work will long be remembered. His services would have been much longer continued had not such a great shadow come to his home. Scarlet fever took away all his children but the son Charlie. In the midst of this grief he felt that he must seek another home, and yet how glad we were when he could visit among us in the years which followed.

And then, for two Sabbaths in the month of April, 1874, your old minister who writes these words, preached here, on the second of these Sabbaths accepting a call to become pastor of the church, and coming here to live, as soon as he graduated at the Bangor, Me., Seminary in the following June. There was plenty of snow in Lebanon when he first saw it in the April days, but in June the snowy flight of falling petals of apple blossoms was in the air and dotting the grass and brown roads. The minister was then a somewhat younger man than he is to-day, and fears that he did not hear all the words which Dea. Joseph Grant spoke to him as he drove him homeward from the East Lebanon station. He had been sick in school, and had not the usual stock of sermons, and this day he was haunted by the thought, "What will the next one be about"? He wished he had not preached the one from the text, "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment." That, held in reserve, might help the people to wait patiently on his ministrations. Three years later he found that the preaching of that sermon had helped to secure for him the pastorate. Two men who listened to it had each thought it for "the other fellow" and so had urged his staying among the snows of Lebanon; and here, among the love and prayers of as true a people as I have found in many states, or across the seas, I began my work. I was ordained and installed here on my birthday, May 31, 1874.

Here were the first whom I received into church membership. How well I can see the earnest face of the little girl of twelve as she told us how much she wished to unite with the church, and help all that she could in its work! Her splendid work since then has led many to trust in the Savior. There came others to be enrolled on our church list, and to go forth to lives of great usefulness.

Here I married "my first couple." It was in the midst

of such a thunder tempest that the nearly wedded lady sprang several inches from the floor, as it then seemed to me, at the near fall of a blinding bolt.

Here I wrote my first childrens' stories for the Congregationist, and my only bit of verse which has ever been set to music, "Sailor, there are Prayers for Thee."

How well we can all see the faces of the dear old people who were with us then, and of the boys and girls who now, as men and women in the great battle of life, are scattered so widely, or who are here so nobly doing all they can for the helping of the church and town.

Deacon Charles Shapleigh and sainted wife, with their large family, came from West Lebanon way. Dr. Samuel W. Jones, the ripe scholar, and other dear friends from West Lebanon Village, were often here. The families of Roberts, Grants, Hansens and Wiggins, came from the road to the west. From the south came Mr. John Lord and son Stephen, Mrs. Abbie Horn and her stalwart sons; the Blaisdells, Goodwins, and the two Elisha Shapleigh families, Dea. John Moody's family, and that of Mr. Gardner Moody and Mr. Calvin Gowen. the Oliver Shapleighs, Paul Smith and wife, and others, came from down that road. Nearer at hand were Mr. James Hayes, the Shapleighs of the Center, the Wentworths, the Dea. Chamberlin family. From up the road to the north Miss Mary Lord, the Noah Lords, the Hersems; Mr. Frank Lord and Squire Millett Wentworth, and Mr. and Mrs. Amasa Grants and the Colesons were often with us.

And there were others, who came back to the snows of Lebanon. Richard Shapleigh the successful business man of Boston, who was always ready to help, and whose generosity we owe the present beautiful parsonage, Judge Grant of Ann Arbor, Mich., Miss Hannah Lord, who had been such a successful teacher in Fisk University, Nashville, Tenn., Joseph Gerrish of West Lebanon. Every summer brought such as these of whom the town will always be proud. And among the strangers Mr. Ole Bull, the famous violinist of Norway, who loved the place sincerely.

It was a weary day for the little minister when all these were present in church of a Sabbath morning, and some of

them were likely to be at the afternoon service, which then followed the morning worship with only a brief intermission. But these people were all very kind, and came again and again. The prayer meetings which we held in many neighborhoods were always well attended, and productive of much good. We were soon asked to preach at West Lebanon on Sunday afternoons, and many pleasant memories remain of services in the Free Baptist church there.

The ministers who have preached here since I left in the summer of 1877 are Rev. Benjamin Dodge, who remained for about five years; Rev. Mr. Classon, Rev. H. E. Thygeson, Rev. W. W. Dow, each of these three staying about two years. Then came Rev. John E. Curtiss, who found his helpful wife among these Lebanon hills, and who remained here about three years, Rev. A. E. Lambert followed him, and was succeeded by the present pastor, Rev. Edward C. Haynes.

And now some of you will be saying to me, "Are you evading the one great thought of sadness which must be with you with every old name, and date, and house, which you mention"? And I shall answer promptly in the negative. For I know only too well the pain which is in your hearts as you recall the multitudes who sleep in our quiet cemeteries here and in those of remote places. I know too well what sadness is yours as you think of the many houses which are closed here, or which have fallen a prey to the pitiless flowers. I know what deep sorrow is yours when you see the many vacant seats in the church. For in decades past the same changes have been going on here as in other towns around us, where the railroads have skirted the borders of the lands, and strong villages have grown up here and there, the population has been steadily decreasing.

But amidst all this sadness, and pain, and sorrow, I cannot evade the other thoughts which also are so dominant and clear. And one of them is the lesson of the grand help which this old church has been to this town in these one hundred and thirty-eight years. The first Town Clerk was the first pastor of the church, the scholarly Rev. Isaac Hasey; and through all the days since then the church has shaped the character of all the truest and best of the towns officers, soldiers, and citizens.

This may be clearly seen in the case of Squire Thomas Millett Wentworth who was one of the most influential men of his time in a large group of these town. It is true that he came of a very strong old family. But he always averred that his coming to Lebanon when he was a very young man had most to do with whatever strong or good thing he did in after years. And in saying this he would glance at his wife who was Rebecca, daughter of Rev. Isaac Hasey, nor did he fail to remember how much he owed to the influence of the church. Thomas Millett Wentworth was a member of the Mass. Legislature in 1788, which ratified by that State the Constitution of the United States. He represented Lebanon in the Mass. Legislature 17 years. He was one of the wealthiest men in York County. His son, bearing his name in full, always attended services in this church, and exerted a great influence in all the town affairs, and often holding offices of trust therein.

And because such men as these have grown upon these hills like stately cedars in Lebanon of old, I am grateful for this old church.

Another thought which must ever help us as we look onward is that all the labor and prayers of these years are before the love of our Heavenly Father who will remember them. For surely nothing but such Divine remembrance and blessing could have guided this church upon its way through all its perils and fears. For when I came here 29 years ago some said, "I know not how long we can keep up the work."

And others would answer in the brave spirit in which spoke Mrs. Charles Shapleigh in those long years of her christian service which had begun in the old South Church in Boston: "God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved."

Dear mother in Israel, whom we laid to rest on that bright January day in 1891, we may say of others as we said of her—

"Our old friend sleeps, but memory fills
The myriad pages with her love,
Her home, girt by these dear old hills,
Guarded by Love Divine above.

To her ne'er seemed remote, afar,
For all she made it shine with cheer, .

Which, like some strong, pure-hearted star,
Touched mission land and far-off year.

Keep thou God's path through this fair year,
Through all the years which come and go,
Each dear one blessed with memories clear
Of love which the long years did show :

Rich thine inheritance, their prayers
Light all the paths where thou shalt roam,
And He shall help with all thy cares
Who has led each old friend safely home."

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