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HISTORIC SKETCH

OF THE

FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST

In Wethersfield,

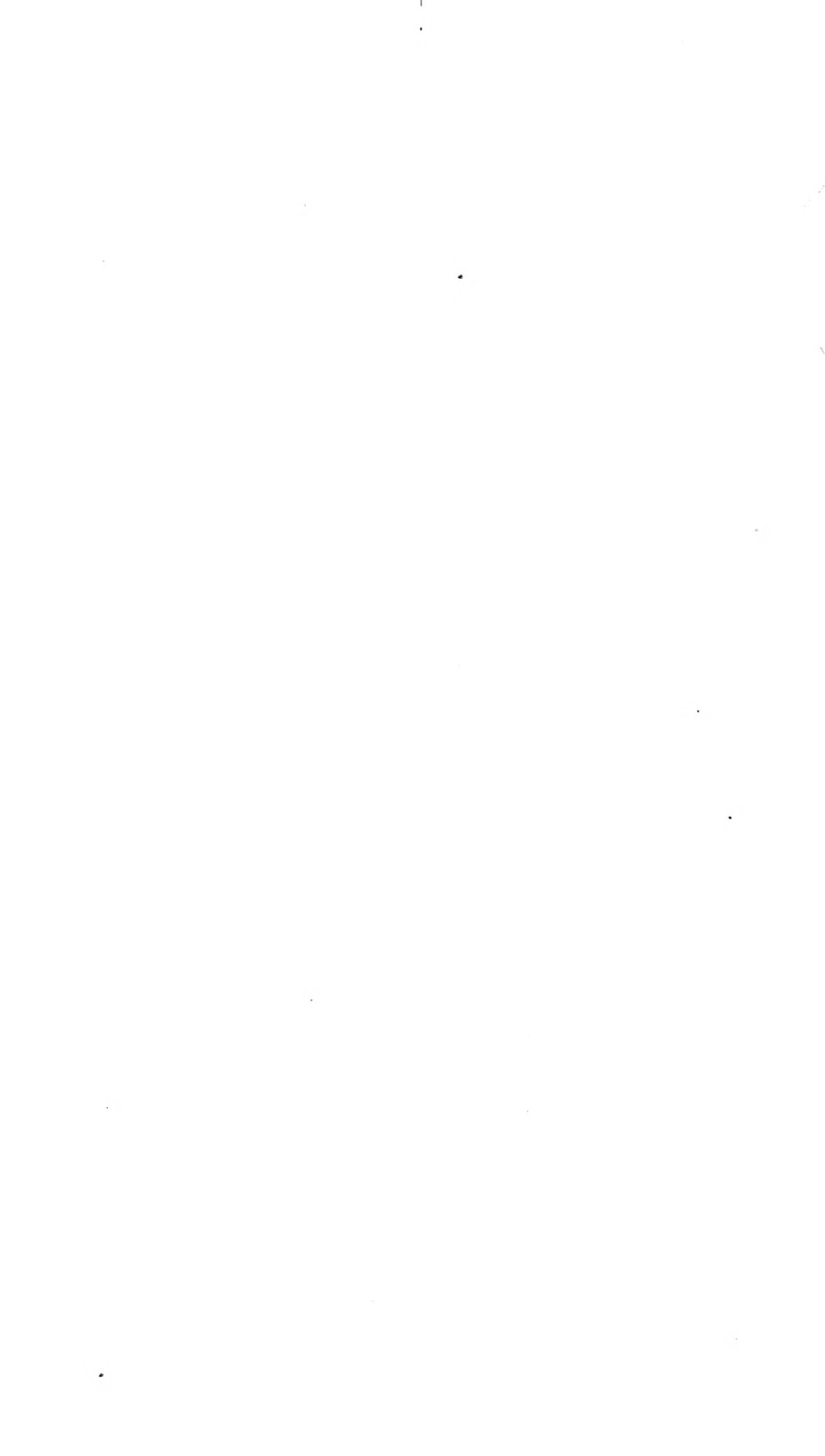
GIVEN FROM THE PULPIT JULY 9, 1876,

BY

A. C. ADAMS,

PASTOR OF THE CHURCH.

HARTFORD, CONN.:
THE ALLEN & SHERWOOD CO., PRINTERS.
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Gift
W. S. Richardson
June 2, 1929
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HISTORIC SKETCH.

“Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt; Thou hast cast out the heathen and planted it.”—PSALM LXXX: 8.

It is now a little more than two hundred and forty years since the valley of the Connecticut began to be occupied by our fathers. It was only about fifteen years from the landing at Plymouth, and five from the settlement of Boston, and yet the emigrating propensity, which has ever since characterized the Yankee nation, had already begun to work. There was not room enough in the Bay Colony, and it must be found elsewhere.

Why the first movement was made in *this* direction may be partly due to the representations of Wahquinacut, an Indian Chief, who visited the Bay as early as 1631, and invited the English to come and see for themselves the fertility and beauty of a region still accounted the Paradise of New England. About two hundred and forty years, and yet, if you date from the first demonstration toward a settlement, it is two hundred and forty-three years.

That Wethersfield was one of the three towns first settled, is universally agreed. But which was the first of the three, Hartford, Windsor, or Wethersfield? The facts seem to be, that in 1633 a trading house was built in Windsor, at the mouth of the Tunxis, now known as the Farmington; that in 1634 a little company of settlers came to Pyquag, soon after called Wethersfield, and built their huts there; that in 1635 other settlers came to Wethersfield, and also to Hartford and Windsor. The Windsor people speak of theirs as the oldest town in Connecticut. If you date from the establishment of the trading house, it unquestionably is; but if from the time when families came, and houses were built for them, then Wethersfield. On the whole it is a

pretty evenly-balanced question, and we may as well cast the deciding vote in favor of our own town, and call Wethersfield first. Hartford has no claim at all to that distinction.

But if we are *first* we shall have to admit that it is because we were a little more willful and impatient of authority than our neighbors. People of Watertown, Dorchester, and Newtown, all petitioned the General Court of the Bay Colony for leave to emigrate. The Court refused, at first, the permission it afterwards granted; but we, the Watertown people, had made up our minds to come, and so came, regardless of the General Court, and were on the ground, a few of us, and built our huts in the fall of 1634. But this was only preparatory, and you must come to 1635 and 1636 to see the three settlements really established.

The journey of these little communities across the country, and the hardships which attended the first settlement, ought not to be soon forgotten by their children. Men, women, and children making their way on foot through a hundred and twenty miles of pathless forests, over mountains, and through thickets, swamps, and streams,—a fortnight on the way,—the Windsor people not reaching their destination till November, and in that same month the river frozen over; the winter one of great severity, not as fatal, but attended with as great hardship and suffering, as the first at Plymouth; household supplies, sent around by water from Boston, greatly delayed, and much utterly lost; starvation threatened; some of the people making their way back through the forest to Massachusetts, others by way of the river and the sea; the remnant, with what supplies they have, and with what they obtain from the forest, just managing to live through. Reinforcements come with the summer of 1636, and the colony is fairly established.

Wethersfield, as originally purchased of the Indians, was six miles long on the river, and eight miles from east to west, three miles on the east side of the river, and five on the west side. To this was added subsequently a five mile purchase eastward, which made the whole territory six miles by thirteen. The deed, as recorded on our Town Records, must have astonished Tarramngus, Massacuppee, and the five other Indians who set their marks to it. A whole Law Lexicon might as well have been discharged upon them. The Committee who made the purchase (it was in

1673,) bear names familiar to us of the present day,—Chester, Talcott, Treat, and Welles.

With these three towns—Windsor, Hartford, Wethersfield—Connecticut began; and the first General Court, made up of representatives from the three, was held in 1637, although a Court was held the year before under the authority of the Bay Colony.

In the preamble to the first Constitution we see upon what idea Connecticut began. That preamble reads as follows: “Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God so to order and dispose things as that we, the inhabitants of Windsor, Hartford, and Wethersfield, are now dwelling upon the river of Connecticut and the lands adjoining, and whereas, the Word of God requires that to maintain peace and union there should be an orderly and decent government according to God, we do therefore associate and conjoin ourselves as one public State or Commonwealth, and do for ourselves and our successors, and such as shall be adjoined to us at any time hereafter, enter into combination and confederation”—and what for? for herein is their peculiarity—“to preserve the liberty and the purity of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ which we now profess, as also the discipline of the churches, which, according to the truth of the said Gospel, is now practiced among us”—there is the first grand object, and then comes in secondarily this,—“also in civil affairs, to be guided and governed according to such laws, orders, and decrees as shall be made, ordered, and decreed.”

You have thus in the early Connecticut a community of free-men who must ultimately, if their tendencies are carried out, be free in form as well as fact, and turn their preamble into a Declaration of Independence. You have men who believe in God as the fountain of authority, and in government as ordained by him and responsible to him. You have a company of godly men, a confederation of Christian churches, coming out into the wilderness to occupy lands which they have purchased, to worship God as He prescribes, to organize society in His fear, and as they judge most for their own and their children’s good. I do not see but they had a perfect right to do it.

And yet they were men who had human nature in them, and besides, as is almost always seen in the beginning of things, they understood their principles better than they did the limitations

of those principles, and the wisest way of working them. Hence much that was extreme and impracticable, and that bred sometimes discord among themselves. In this Wethersfield had its full share, both in difficulties of its own and in those shared with the colony at large. It may be an encouragement to some of us, who are apt to magnify the troubles of our time, and to think that everything is going to the bad, to see what our fathers went through.

No Church was organized in Wethersfield for the first seven years (1634 to 1641), and the people were, during that time, a fragment of the church in Watertown. There were several ministers in their company, and men of excellent repute, but none who stood in the exact place of a pastor; and partly in consequence of that, differences and contentions arose. The ministers and elders of Hartford and Windsor, and subsequently Davenport of New Haven, endeavored to restore harmony, but in vain; till at length, upon advice, one party left Wethersfield, and began a settlement at Stamford. A second secession took place not long after, in which "a considerable number of families" went with another minister to Milford. Even those who remained were but moderately well united, and though the Church is said to have been organized in 1641, it was yet a debated question whether it was *duly* organized or not. As late as 1650, the General Court has a deliverance on the subject, which begins with a preamble, that "*Whereas*, It is well known that there was a Church orderly gathered at Wethersfield by the full approbation of the Court and Churches," and then goes on to allege that "divers members of said Church have removed without notice, and without the approbation either of the Court or of the Churches, and that some still resident in Wethersfield unjustly question the station and being of the Church," and thereupon the Court declares "that, for anything that doth appear, it is the true and undoubted Church of Wethersfield, and so to be esteemed." And yet the Court leaves it open for any who may think they can prove the contrary to appear at their coming session in May. From the subsequent silence on the subject, I conclude that nobody did appear, and that our poor little Church came to be an acknowledged fact. If a man or a church is alive, it goes a good way to show that sometime or other it was born.

The first duly installed pastor was Rev. Henry Smith, and with his advent you might hope that quiet times were coming. But no. Difficulty begins very early, first started and pushed forward by Mr. Chaplin, the ruling elder, who probably wanted to rule more than it was best he should.

Accusations were made against Mr. Smith, of some impropriety, or mal-administration in his office, and also of being no better than he should be in his business affairs. The trouble spread, and the fight waxed hotter and hotter, till at length it was carried into the General Court. The Court acquit Mr. Smith; but he wants more than a bare acquittal, and upon his suggestion, all who have any grievance against him are summoned. On a careful examination, the Court concludes that the complaints are mostly grounded in misapprehension, and that Mr. Smith was "much wronged by false reports and unjust surmises." His accusers are punished. Mr. Chaplin, "for setting his hand to a paper tending to defamation of Mr. Smith," is fined ten pounds. Francis Norton, "for setting his hand to the same," is fined five pounds. Mr. Plum, for preferring a roll of grievances against Mr. Smith, and failing of proof in the prosecution thereof, is fined ten pounds.

It would lighten our taxes wonderfully, if every man who alleges against his neighbor what he cannot prove, was obliged to pay for it.

It is further ordered that, "if any man shall renew these accusations against Mr. Smith, he shall be fined ten pounds." The malcontents, of course, are not pleased with this. Some of them go off in a third secession, and settle in Branford. Others stay in Wethersfield and grumble; till at length the General Court advises Mr. Smith, for peace sake, to lay down his office, "if it can be done according to God," which means, I suppose, if he can do it with good conscience. The Lord saves the poor man the trouble of deciding that question, and, in the seventh or eighth year of his ministry, releases him from the turmoils of the earthly Church, and takes him, let us hope, to the Church that is at rest.

In 1650, comes Rev. John Russel, and it is a satisfaction that the storm that raged in his day did not originate in Wethersfield. It began in Hartford, and was felt all over Puritan New England.

It was known as the Hartford Controversy. "What the precise nature of it was," says Cotton Mather, "it was difficult at the time to tell," and certainly you cannot expect a very clear account of it now. Something, no doubt, very weighty, rousing up the consciences of good men, and making them feel that the salvation of the Church and the world was at stake. The controversy involved a certain reaction against the terribly stern theology of the time, and the attempted rigidity of ecclesiastical rule. It began with baptism and the half-way covenant, and ran into the question of Presbyterianism and Congregationalism, and of the relative claims of clergy and laity. The minority of the first Church in Hartford, finding themselves in a very hot furnace, begged the privilege of transfer to Farmington, or to Wethersfield, but that was denied them. They might not go away, and they might not stay, with any comfort. So, at length, they determine to go at any rate.

They left their Hartford home, and made for themselves a home in what is now Hadley, Mass. The Church of Wethersfield, which sympathized with them, and was used to emigrating, went too, or rather a large, and some say the larger, portion of the Church, under the lead of the pastor, Mr. Russel. He became the first minister of the Hadley Church, and he it was, as our history-reading young people may remember, who sheltered for a considerable time, under his own roof, the two Regicide Judges, Goffe and Whalley.

So much for the first thirty years, (1634-1664.) It is absolutely all, of any special significance, that I have been able to gather. Church Records, we have none, for this entire period. The Town Records, scanty and hardly decipherable, throw very little light. We are dependent, almost entirely, upon the Colonial Record, and upon incidental allusions of various writers, in connexion with the "Hartford Controversy." Certainly, what we do get is not just what we would like to find it, nor greatly flattering to our pride of ecclesiastical ancestry; but it is, perhaps, just as well to see it as it is, and to know that the past was not all good, any more than the present is all bad.

Besides there are points of relief in the whole matter. Contention about religion is certainly unlovely, and yet I am not sure but it is more respectable than contention about the paltry

matters of money and of place, which afflict our every-day life. It seems to imply at least that men make some account of religion. Moreover, the times of our fathers were the very times to which we should look for sharp discussion. They were times in which the seeds of great thoughts were coming up and growing. Men were attempting new and advanced methods in society and in religion. They had broken out from the old social status, and from under all established rule. They were undertaking to organize a perfectly right society, and a right church, with little reference to former models. They were terribly conscientious. They were terribly in earnest. No wonder they sometimes, fell into difficulty and strife. It is to be remembered, too, that we have not the whole story of these years before us, but only that part which might be expected to wear the most unfavorable aspect. Communities are not to be judged altogether by the records of the Police Courts, nor the domestic and social condition of nations by the history of their wars. And so in the Church. The things that make difficulty, that break up ministers, that divide churches, that gather councils, that carry ministers and people to the General Court, are conspicuous. But meanwhile, and behind all this smoke and dust, the people live on their quiet life. The Sabbaths come and go. The Word is preached. The prayers and praises of God's house go up. Multitudes live godly lives, and are comforted and edified and saved, while at the same time foundations are laid for those who come after. Through tribulation the Church advances.

Upon the next thirty years (1664-1695), we have more light, and the whole look of things is more favorable. We have not, indeed, any Church Records, even in this period, and the explanation suggested in respect to the previous thirty years, that the Records were carried away in some one of the secessions and lost, is less readily to be accepted, since the lack continues for more than a generation after the last of these secessions. We have, however, the "Book of Town Votes," from which we can gather a good deal, chiefly, however, on the secular side of church life.

Three pastorates, and the intervals preceding and following, fill up the second thirty years. First, that of Rev. Gershom Bulkley (1666-1676). Mr. Bulkley was evidently a man of genuine goodness, and of large ability. He broke down in health,

however, early, and after ten years exchanged the ministry for the practice of medicine, in which, as also in the service of the State, he was much distinguished. One entry in the Town Records in respect to him, I like the tone of: "The town, being informed by their honored pastor that it was too hard for him, and beyond his power, by reason of weakness of voice, to carry on the whole work of the ministry, they declare themselves freely willing to provide another minister to assist him in his work, and to be a help and a comfort to him; and they desire that the honored pastor would afford them his advice and direction respecting a meet process for that work, for which they will be thankful to him, and will take the same into serious consideration."

You will not think it strange if I have a professional satisfaction in this action, both as evincing the people's generosity towards their minister, and their persuasion that in some things he might know more than they. They take the matter, thereupon, into "serious consideration," and in due time the Rev. Mr. Stone, whoever he may have been, is engaged as an assistant to Mr. Bulkley.

The next pastorate is that of Rev. Mr. Rowlandson, cut short by his decease in a little more than a year from his settlement. In connexion with this, a single item from the Town Records, certainly most creditable to the generosity of the people. "*Voted*, that Mrs. Rowlandson shall receive the whole salary for the current year, amounting to one hundred and twenty pounds, and thereafter thirty pounds a year, so long as she shall remain a widow among us." Considering how short the pastorate of Mr. Rowlandson had been, and that Mrs. R. had probably many years of life before her, it is a striking evidence of the people's regard for the ministry, and for all appertaining to it.

After some interval comes the ministry of Rev. Mr. Woodbridge, which continues for twelve years. On one occasion the town votes him twenty pounds additional, "on account of his extraordinary charges for the current year. At another time they vote that he shall have four score cords of wood—enough, one would think to keep him warm—"forty cords to be sent in by individuals, not more than one load to a man, and forty to be provided by the selectmen, in such way as they see fit," with a

proviso "that the loads sent in shall be viewed by Joseph Wright, and that if any load is not worth two shillings and six pence, it shall be returned to him who sends it."

Evidently they had no idea of compromising with meanness, and were ready to say to a man that would cheat his minister, in the spirit of the Apostle's outburst upon Simon, the magician, "Thy wood-pile perish with thee."

But no number of incidents that I can quote, will fully give you the impression made by the perusal of these old records. They abound in traces of the large place which religion held in the community, and of the great concern to have its institutions duly honored. The house of worship, the safeguards thrown around the Sabbath, the provision for training the young in sacred music, at the town's expense, the earnestness to secure and maintain a stated and permanent ministry, the many comings and goings to this end, the negotiations held, the messengers traveling on horseback, far and near, the careful and exact provision made, for both pastor and assistant, many things that I cannot well give, make the impression of a community singularly practical and in earnest in matters of religion.

There is one instance connected with the measures taken to fill the pastoral office, which is almost droll in its frankness and particularity. Rev. Mr. Willaabee is invited from "the Bay," to come and minister to them. If he will come and preach a year, "they will pay him seventy pounds, and furnish a house for him to live in, and give him the use of the land known as the Church's Land. They will also pay for the transportation of his family and goods from the Bay Colony, where he lives." Then, further, "If God shall unite our hearts in him to be our minister, we will add to his maintenance as God shall enable us; or if not, if he do not like us, or we do not like him to be our minister, we will pay for his transportation back again to the Bay." Certainly, that is frank and fair; he knows and they know that ministers and people sometimes like one another, and sometimes not, and they talk it right out from the beginning, and the minister knows just what to expect.

These old Town Records, let me say in passing, are a wonderful treasury. They open to us a state of society, and a domestic, social, religious ongoing of things, which it is not a little difficult

to realize as actually existent. A little, almost independent community, cutting down for itself a place in the forest, carrying on government, almost with the exactness and elaborateness of the most august legislative bodies, sitting in judgment upon all sorts of affairs, undertaking to maintain, however moderately successful, a perfect society, allowing none to come and live among them, save by town vote, regulating affairs between neighbors, sustaining religious institutions, making land grants to widows and orphans, loaning money from the public treasury—on good security, you may be sure—to unfortunate fellow citizens, punishing not crimes only, but negligencies, improprieties, and ill manners,—it could not last, but the attempt, and the motive, and the good training it gave, visible in its effects even to the present day, may well command our respect. Their Town Meetings, occurring very frequently, held sometimes, with an interval for lunch, from nine in the morning to nine in the evening, discussing and determining almost all imaginable questions, recall and impress the often quoted remark of DeTocqueville, to the effect that the free institutions of the American Continent had their birth in the New England Town Meeting.

I might dwell longer upon these things without straying from my subject, for the town was practically a Church in the early times, and the Church has been, down to our day, the shaping force of the town. But I pass on to what may be called the third period of our history, which begins with the ministry of Rev. Stephen Mix, in 1694, sixty years from the town's first settlement, and with whom our Church Records begin.

Our Church Records I say, and yet this little faded, tattered, leather-covered memorandum book, about the size of your grocer's pass book, is all we have for a ministry of forty-four years. (1694-1738.)

The book is taken up chiefly with a record of baptisms, and these mainly of children, with lists here and there of communicants received, and with a few brief notices of discipline, administered by the pastor rather than by the Church. One little peculiarity of Mr. Mix, you will pardon your pastor for extracting a little comfort from, considering his own poor reputation as regards the memory of names. Over and over I find entries like the following: "Baptized child of Josiah Riley,—Rebecca, I

think its name was. "Child of Isaac Goodwin,—Sarah, I think the name was." "Elizabeth, I think its name was, child of Joseph Steele." "Mary, I think was the name, child of Josiah Churchill." "Josiah, I think its name was, child of Jonathan Wright."

I suspect, however, from certain indications, that it is not altogether poor memory, but great scrupulosity on the part of Mr. Mix, as regards the exact truthfulness of his statements. Here and there we have one baptised upon the parents, "owning the covenant," though not really members of the church.

The good man evidently yearns to give assurance of God's grace in baptism to all he can. Now and then the Negro servant of this or that man is baptized, upon the master's promising to train him religiously. One entry, more perhaps in the spirit of his Master than the intense individualism of our time would readily acknowledge, is as follows: "Baptized Ebenezer, child of Jerusha Hollister. The mother had died, and this poor illegitimate orphan I spoke to the selectmen about, that they would engage in behalf the town for its Christian education, which was not I suppose, dissented from, and so I baptized him. The child died next day."

Almost all the baptisms seem to be of children, and there were probably very few adults in the community in those days who had not been baptized. Here are two or three cases of the manner of treating faults in those days: "I admonished"—John Smith, we will call him—"before the assembly, on the Saturday afternoon, for drinking to excess. He offered a confession of his sin; but having fallen the same way before, it was looked upon as a thing which he was frequently guilty of, and he was therefore by me admonished." Again: "reproved in the assembly," John Robinson, we will call him, for something, I cannot make out the entire record, but it has to do with "watermelons." The father of John "also spake before the assembly in a way of confession for his fault, in respect to his son's conduct, and that he had encouraged him to withstand public confession."

Nor was either sex spared in these Church administrations. "I read publicly the testimony of Henry Latimer and Grace Kilburn, against Prudence, the wife of John Smith," though what the offense was I cannot make out, and then used words

to this effect: "In the name of Christ I charge this sin upon you, and warn you to turn from it, and bring forth fruits worthy of amendment of life," applying to her those words, 1 Cor. vi: 10.

It must have been a pretty serious matter to go to church in those days, unless one carried a clean conscience with him. Still farther, under date of March, 1700, just when the Baptist ways of thinking were coming up in Connecticut: "Naomi, the wife of Philip Goff, had ceased to attend the public worship of God with us, and had been re-baptized by Jonathan Sprague, living in the Narraganset country, *I think*. She owned her separation from the communion, and her re-baptization. She also alleged that we are no Church. I enquired of her what gave being to a Church. She said, 'profession of faith in Christ.' I replied, *as I think*, 'we profess faith in Christ.' She alleged that word in Corinthians, 'Come out from among them, and be ye separate,' and *I think* I told her that was a coming out from heathen temples. After debating this, and infant baptism, and whether by dipping or sprinkling, I admonished her, and suspended her from the Lord's Supper."

Then a second time the said Naomi is warned to "depart from her schism," but I fear to little purpose. I should not expect to make much impression on man or woman who could interpret Scripture as preposterously as Mistress Goff seems to have done. Then there is a case where "John Jillit acknowledged his sin in unfaithfulness to his word, and promised to amend in that, and so I baptized him." If John kept that last promise, I should say that there was more encouragement to baptize him than if he could tell a great experience, and was yet unfaithful to his word.

Then there are two or three other cases, which I will not quote, which imply quite enough strictness of discipline, and which the moderns would call meddling with what was none of the minister's business. On the whole, Mr. Mix was a man I should take to, more than to most. Modest, unpretending, rigidly conscientious, tender in his sympathies toward every living creature, yet marching right up to the hardest duties and the greatest severities without flinching—a good specimen of the Puritan pastor at his best.

It was in Mr. Mix's time that Newington and Rocky Hill,

then called Stepney, became separate parishes, both of them about the year 1720. Glastonbury had been incorporated as a town in 1690, just before Mr. Mix came, and its first minister was settled in 1692. The records tell us, not always in the clearest and most connected way, the whole story: the petition of the inhabitants in each case, the representation of their disadvantage in great distance from church, the town's consent to a separation, the grant thereupon of a portion of the parsonage lands, and the relinquishment by the people of the new parish of all claims on the old property previously owned in common. On these conditions they were permitted to set up for themselves.

After Mr. Mix, comes Rev. James Lockwood, whose pastorate extended from 1739 to 1772, thirty-three years. From the beginning of Mr. Lockwood's ministry, we have clearer day-light, and more sense of our own relation to the establishment than before. Glastonbury is gone, and Newington and Rocky Hill gone; and the "First Ecclesiastical Society of Wethersfield," stands out palpably before us. It has the same territory that Wethersfield now covers, and about the same population within that territory, all having one and the same church home, and listening to one and the same minister. It was a grand institution, and, for the pastor, a grand opportunity.

Mr. Lockwood was equal to the demand. "He was a good classical scholar," says President Stiles, "a man of prudence, and avoided intermeddling deeply with religious controversies. He was formed for usefulness, and was an honor to the ministry." You will not object to what the president adds, that "he spent his ministerial life in a large parish, of perhaps three hundred families, who are said to be as well instructed in religion as any Church in Connecticut. He has had the prudence to lead that flock in great peace and love through his ministry." The fact is added, which is perhaps quite as significant of the esteem in which he was held, that he was invited, in 1758, to the presidency of the College of New Jersey, and then in 1766 to the presidency of Yale College, both of which invitations he declined, and both for the same reason, "his strong attachment to the people of his charge, and his consequent unwillingness to separate himself from them." Two notable facts stand out beyond the rest in Mr. Lockwood's time. One, a revival, which is said

to be the first that Wethersfield ever knew, though far less powerful than others since. It was in Whitfield's time, and connected, according to tradition, with a visit which that famous evangelist made to this place. The Church Register gives indication of it in the fact that forty-three were received to the Church in 1741, and twenty-five in 1742, whereas, Mr. Lockwood's ministry, apart from these two years, averages only seven or eight a year, little more than half as many as the average of the last twenty years. The other prominent fact was the erection of this present house of worship, the corner stone of which was laid in 1761, a hundred and fifteen years ago. It was a great undertaking for those days, and a massive testimony to the hold which God's worship had upon the people. It was built, moreover, in *hard times*, one more illustration of the fact that it is when the people have a mind to work, and not when work is easy, that important undertakings are carried through. The Society Records abound in testimony to the consultations and devices, and comings and goings, and taxations and expenditures, through which the work was brought to its issue. Mr. Lockwood had the satisfaction of preaching in it for about eight years (1764 to 1772), when his ministry ended, and he was gathered to the company of God's faithful servants who had gone before.

After Mr. Lockwood, comes Rev. Dr. John Marsh, whose pastorate covers the time from 1774 to 1821, though the colleague-ship of Dr. Tenney commences in 1816, and Dr. Marsh's active ministry is probably to be regarded as closing about that time. His was the last and longest of three long pastorates, Mr. Mix filling out forty-four years, Mr. Lockwood thirty-three, and Mr. Marsh forty-eight. His ministry began and ended in times of great public excitement.

At the beginning was the Revolutionary War, and the grand epoch which the people of the United States commemorate so conspicuously the present year. The cloud of that war was already rising dense and dark, and its thunders muttering, at the time of his settlement in 1774, and soon the long and weary conflict came on. How largely Wethersfield shared in its toils and sacrifices does not appear from records so distinctly as might be desired. But we have enough from various sources to show us

that Dr. Marsh and the people were intensely in sympathy with it.

In 1775 we have on record the resolutions passed in town meeting, expressive of sympathy with the people of Boston in their privations, and providing for a contribution of supplies, to be sent them. Still earlier, resolutions endorsing the patriotic action of the General Court, and pledging co-operation for the country's defence. At the very opening of the contest, was the organization of that famous company of a hundred men, addressed by the pastor on a Sunday morning, upon the tidings of the battle of Lexington, dispersed in the afternoon to make the needed preparations, drawn up again near evening upon the green in front of this church, commended to God in prayer, and at once setting out for Boston, escorted by the pastor and others beyond the river. They returned indeed soon after, upon information that their services were not yet needed, but set out again, and were with the little army in season to share in the battle of Bunker Hill, under the command of Capt. John Chester. Many hints of what was going on, and of how the people felt and acted through those eventful years, are scattered through the town records, though hardly significant enough to demand quotation here. Enough to show that Wethersfield was not behind the State at large, and not to be behind Connecticut in that great conflict, was to be in the very front rank; for no State of the whole thirteen furnished, in proportion to its population, so many men, and so many years of service, as Connecticut did.

The Church and the pastor were heartily in the work. Indeed that was true of the Churches and pastors of New England generally. "It was the ministers that did it," said President John Adams. And the late Rev. Dr. Spring, of New York, affirms with a positiveness that will be justified more than ever when the researches of this centennial year are complete: "Had the Congregational and Presbyterian ministers taken the ground that the ministers of certain other denominations did, the war of independence would never have been carried through."

The fact of Washington's sojourn in Wethersfield, for some days at least, during the war, and of the presence of other high officers, both French and American, who were here in consultation with him, is undoubted. His attendance upon this church, his courtesy to its pastor, his demonstration of interest not to

say surprise, at the great choir of a hundred and fifty, lining the entire gallery front, are facts that have been handed down to us. The patriotic utterances of the pastor throughout the war, and the patriotic earnestness of his prayers, are spoken of by those who were accustomed to hear of them from their older kindred.

And yet, undoubtedly, the war excitement wrought unfavorably, for the time, on the spiritual interests of the people. Still more unfavorable the year that immediately followed, when war had so largely demoralized the country, and the infidelity which came in so largely through the French alliance had spread through the central portions of the country, and almost poisoned the fountains of the national life. In such times Dr. Marsh's ministry began. Hardly less unfavorable were the closing years when that contest, surpassing in bitterness all others that Connecticut has ever known, was going on between the "old standing order" and Federalism on the one hand, and the Democratic party and the newer religious sects on the other. The new constitution of Connecticut, putting the churches upon one common footing, and upon their own unaided resources, fell like midnight upon our churches and pastors, and yet ushered in for them a more glorious morning than they had ever known. It was adopted, and the great conflict ended the very year that Dr. Marsh died. And yet, amid all these disturbing influences, his ministry was a fruitful one. The work of the Church went steadily on. There were ingatherings from year to year; the most conspicuous in 1814, two years before Dr. Tenney came as colleague. In that year eighty-six were added to the Church, and in the whole period of Dr. Marsh's ministry, four hundred and eighty-five. Rev. Dr. Sprague, in his *Annals of the American Pulpit*, says of Dr. Marsh, "There is reason to believe that he feared God from his youth. He used to say that he did not know when he had not a love for religion. His sermons indicate a much higher degree of literary culture than was common among his contemporaries. He was an earnest friend of education, and rendered important aid to indigent young men, who were preparing for usefulness. He was a zealous patriot, and took a deep interest in the establishment of our independence and of our constitutional government. In his last illness he had great tranquility of mind, and died in the joyful hope of a better life."

Next comes the pastorate of Rev. Caleb J. Tenney, D.D., who

was settled as colleague with Dr. Marsh, in 1816, and became sole pastor at Dr. Marsh's decease, in 1821. His ministry lasted twenty-five years, or, if you count it closed when a colleague was furnished him, it was nineteen years only. The most memorable event of his time, if I may not rather say in the whole history of the Church, was the great revival of 1820-21, none equaling it in extent or in power, whether before or since. It was in a time of revivals, widely spread through Connecticut. It was preceded, as one who vividly remembers it tells me, by a great amount of wonderfully instructive, faithful, impressive preaching, in the ordinary course of Sabbath labor; preaching which, sent home by the Holy Spirit, brought profess'd Christians to a deep sense of their sins, and to deep repentance before God. From December 1820, onward for several months, Rev. Mr. Nettleton, so famous in that day and since, labored in connexion with the pastor. I cannot do better than to give an extract from Mr. Tenney's own account of the revival as contained in a religious newspaper. "Previous to the revival our Church consisted of about two hundred and sixty members. As its fruit, precisely two hundred more have been added, seventy-nine of them heads of families. Some instances of conversion have been strongly marked. The awakening of some has been sudden and powerful, and has soon issued in triumphant peace. In others it has been as the still small voice. One man, who had been a total disbeliever in revelation, examined the subject with all the coolness of a mathematician, until, in the course of a few weeks, the great truths of Scripture bore upon his soul with insupportable power, and he yielded to God. One aged man said, 'If I have ever been born of God, it was on the day I was seventy-six years old.' Another said, 'It was the day I was sixty-eight.' In one family, a mother of eleven children, who had long gone to the table of Christ mourning that of her great family there was not one to accompany her, now hopes that eight of her children are converted to God. In another family, consisting of parents and seven children, all but one hope they have become Christians. God has illustriously displayed his perfections in the work which is emphatically His. To Him all the glory is due."

Very considerable additions were made to the Church in 1826 and in 1831, thirty-seven in the first-named year, and fifty-five in the last-named. It was after this ingathering that the Church

had a membership of five hundred, a larger number than at any other time in its history. Rev. Royal Robbins, in a historical discourse prepared for the Centennial of this church edifice, in 1861, but in consequence of his own sudden death never delivered, says of Dr. Tenney: "As a preacher and a man he was so plain and unpretending, that his scholarship seems to have attracted little notice; but the power of his discourse and the influence of his piety were wonderfully felt by all who came in contact with him. I hardly know whether to characterize him more as a son of thunder, or a son of consolation."

In the later years of Dr. Tenney, came up that theological controversy which the older ministers, and people of our time, so well remember, and which, passing beyond the limits, I will venture to say the fit limits, of the ministerial association and the professional school, shook the churches almost to their foundations. The plain people, like Ahimaaz, the son of Zadok, "saw a great tumult," even if like Ahimaaz, they "knew not what it was." Dr. Tenney was deeply, and of course, most conscientiously enlisted. The people were, to some extent, arrayed in parties. Rev. Mr. Warren brought in as colleague, through the influence of Dr. Tenney, and the portion of the church that most fully sympathized in his views, continued but a single year. Then, after a year's interval, came Rev. Robert Southgate, knowing enough not to know Taylorism or Tylerism, but only Jesus Christ and Him crucified, and the church was at peace again. Mr. Southgate's ministry, as well as that of Dr. Tenney, must be accounted as among the richest spiritually, in the history of the church. The greater part of it was a time of revival, and in the five years, during which it continued, one hundred and seventy-five were added to the church.

The pastorate of Rev. Dr. Mark Tucker (1845-1856), comes within the clear remembrance of many of you, and I will not speak of it at length. He was already widely known and honored as a faithful and successful minister of Christ, when he came among you. He had occupied various positions of prominence and importance. He came, comparatively in the evening of his days, and yet fresh and vigorous, and hopeful. How true a man he was, how conscientious, how faithful, how charitable, how christian, you well remember. Even to old age, he carried sunshine with him. For the greater part of the time after his

pastorate closed, he lived among you honored and beloved, till a little more than a year since, God took him to his reward.

Rev. Willis Colton's ministry, (1856-1866), so faithful, so earnest, so kindly, leaving behind it so many friends and so many who felt that their minister was their friend, is fresh in your remembrance, better known to you than to me, and does not seem to require extended notice. It gathered into the church about a hundred and forty members. My own pastorate dates from January 1868, and is consequently in its ninth year.

I have given, thus, a rapid sketch of the history of the First Church of Christ in Wethersfield, glimpses rather of its condition, such as I have been able to gain through openings here and there in the darkness of the past. I cannot stay to speak of town affairs as such. I cannot stay to speak of particular families: of names honored in this community, and commonwealth, and country; of officers and men who shared in the contest for our national independence; of judges and chief justices, who were born here, and baptized in this church; of men conspicuous in the councils of the nation; of the brothers of a single household, who went out from among us, and whose benefactions to private and public charities are reckoned in millions; of christian ministers, trained up among us; of many others, who in various spheres have served God and their country. I speak of the church, and of the town, only as it connects with the church, and as I can, within the limits of a Sabbath discourse.

The study which I have given to the whole subject, though yielding less than might have been hoped on some points, has been to me a study of great interest. It has been pleasant to come so near the roots of our New England life, and to see a little more distinctly what manner of men our fathers were, and from what beginnings our structure of church and state alike has been reared. One would like to know those beginnings more minutely. One would like to be put back, if that were possible, into a week of Mr. Mix's ministry, or Mr. Lockwood's, and to see and feel the whole ongoing of a society so peculiar and so unlike our own. There was a wonderful manhood in the best part of society in those early days; a God-consciousness, as they say now, a sense of justice, equal and exact, a genuine and yet a carefully meted and bounded philanthropy, an impossibility of doing anything save by exactest use of square and compass; an inflexible

determination to do right, and yet not to go a hair's breadth beyond right. And yet there was a bad element in society even then, as bad and base as anything in our day; kept under and punished with great severity, indeed, but not eradicated. Nor was the good, all that a glowing imagination has sometimes painted it. There was wilfulness as well as conscientiousness, rigidity, as well as firmness, harshness, as well as faithfulness.

The records do not show a golden age. The sharp and frequent contentions of the first thirty years, the ceremonialism of good Mr. Mix's time, the immoralities among church members, intimated on almost every page of Mr. Lockwood's records, the infelicitous methods by which, here as elsewhere, it was sought to maintain the tone of public morals, and to compel the support of religious institutions of all these things show that our fathers had not attained perfection, either of theory or practice, and save us from the temptation to worship them or their times.

Bright spots then, are in the past and grand features of the early times, in the presence of which we cannot well help confessing a certain degeneracy, but I am not inclined the more, from these recent studies, to believe that the former times were, on the whole, better than these. If we have lost something of the good which our fathers had, we have attained other good which they knew little about. The cause of truth, and humanity, and of our Lord Jesus Christ "goes marching on."

A word in closing, on the present and the future of our church. We occupy a position very different from that of our fathers a hundred years ago. The change that has passed upon our older communities generally, has passed upon us also. We are no longer the homogeneous people we were then. The "old standing order" has no longer the spiritual leadership of the entire community. The original impulse, under which New England institutions began, has somewhat spent its force. The power of the old traditions is weakened. New varieties of the christian faith, and of church order have arisen to divide with us the labor and the responsibility. As the world is, and as the church is, it is, perhaps, better so. At all events, it is so, and our part is to acknowledge in all cordiality and brotherliness, our christian neighbors, and the christian churches among us, of whatever name, and to work, so far as they will let us, in a kindly co-operation with them.

At the same time our distinctive field of labor is large enough to draw out all our energies, and the encouragements which attend it on the whole, as great as at any previous time, certainly greater than a century ago. We are indeed, but one church out of five, in a population no larger than when one church, a century ago stood absolutely alone. But we have still a hundred and seventy-five families, more than all the other congregations together, and have a proportionate privilege and responsibility. We have three hundred and thirty-six church members, a larger number in proportion to the congregation than ever before. Something more than one third of these have come in within the past eight years. Of the comparative piety of the present generation, it would not become me to speak. I certainly shall not say that we are better than our fathers. The study of the past makes me more than ever afraid that they were not much better than we. Our Sabbath School numbers about two hundred and sixty. It is larger than it was twenty-five years ago, when, with an equal population, there was no other school within the limits of the present town. If you add to it the Griswoldville school, which, though called a Union School, was originated, and is mainly carried on by members of our church, you have almost a hundred more to set down to the credit of the present time.

A century ago, nay, mainly until fifty years ago, prayer meetings were unknown among us. We have now four stated meetings in as many different localities, gathering weekly, for prayer and praise, not less than two hundred persons. They are growing in interest: and if there are among us none so conspicuous for leadership in christian work as were a few whose names have come down from a generation ago, the number of those who share in that work is greater, and is still increasing. In our religious charities there is the same advance within the last thirty years, that is noticed in christian churches generally. In our parochial affairs we have emerged somewhat from the old darkness of law, and tax, and compulsion, and are learning to depend on public spirit and the spontaneous liberality of christian hearts.

Our church organ, purchased seven or eight years ago, at a cost of two thousand dollars, was the first that Wethersfield ever had, and, so far as I can learn, the first thing of any considerable magnitude that Wethersfield ever did by voluntary subscription.

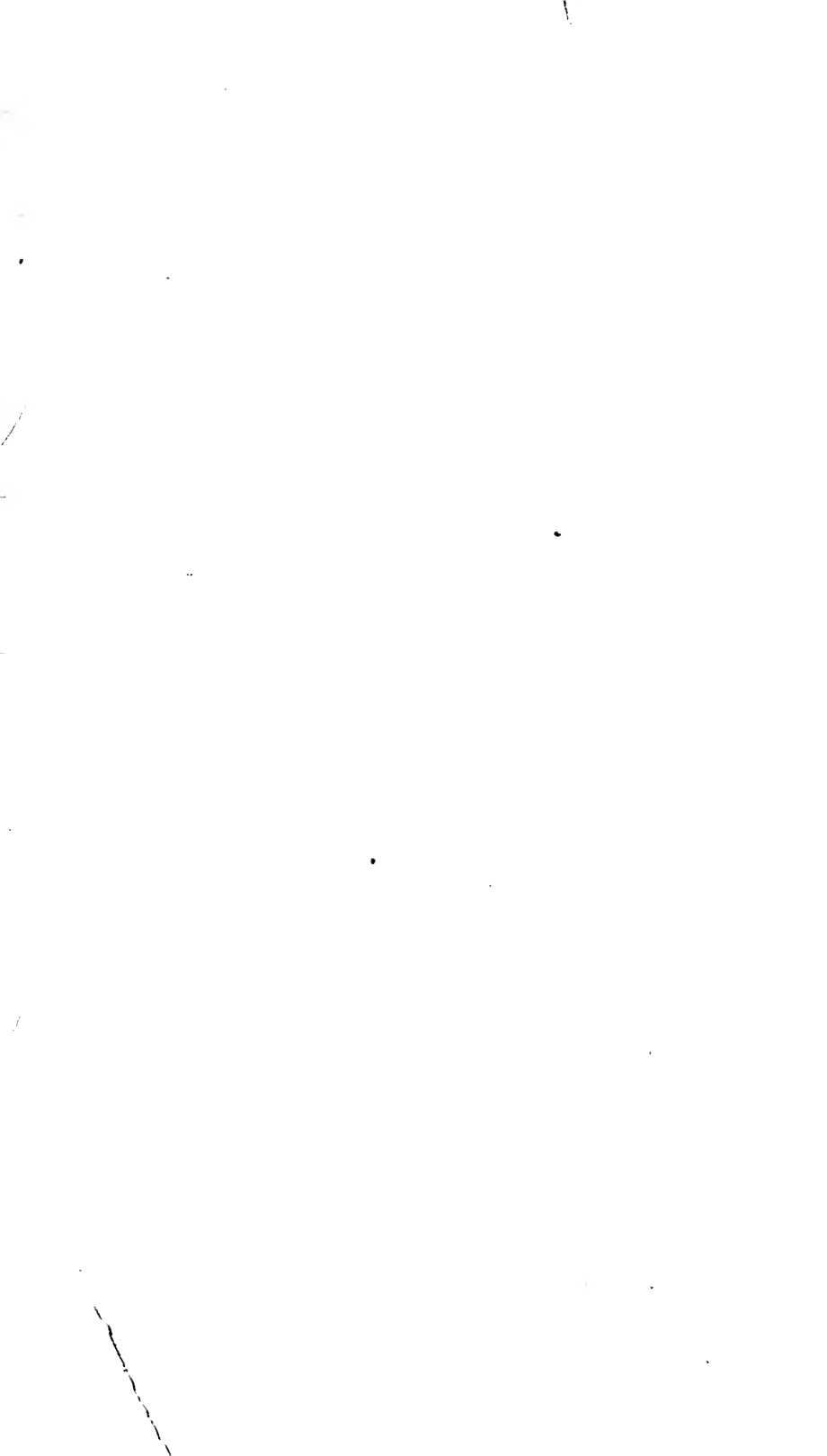
Our new chapel, built and furnished at a cost of five or six

thousand dollars, followed soon after; and, along with it, the chapel of our Griswoldville brethren, at a cost of four thousand dollars. The same idea of public spirit and of spontaneous giving, and giving for the cause sake, and for our Lord and Master, and not merely to pay the charge for a value received by ourselves, will put our finances and our whole establishment on a better footing than they ever held in their palmiest days.

Some of you may be almost ready, in view of these statements, to ask if your minister is not "become a fool in glorying." If there be such, my answer is that "ye have compelled me." I do but put glorying against wailing, and gratefully recognize the good of the present as well as the often exaggerated glories of the past.

Our fathers were men of like passions as we are, and because they *were* our fathers, we are what we are to-day, in evil as well as in good. They were nothing without the grace of God; with that grace we may hope to do our work as well, at least, as they did theirs.

I thank God for the past, but I thank him also for the present; for the better understood gospel; for freedom from entangling alliance with the State; for the system which puts the support of religious institutions on the friends of religion, instead of compelling it from friends and foes alike; for the broad field of labor which is still left us, notwithstanding the denominational varieties of our time; for the theory and the growing practice which confers the privilege and imposes the responsibility of christian work upon the whole body of christian people, instead of restricting both to a professional class; for the comparative peace and harmony of our time; for the good work of God's grace which is going forward in many of our churches and is not wholly unknown among us; for the hope awakened by the Divine promises, by the signs of the times, by the Spirit working in our own hearts, of blessings in the near future. Earnest labor, fervent prayer, the indwelling and the outworking of the Spirit, have been the strength of this church in its best days past. In these lie all our hopes for the future. I pray you bretheren, engage in God's work anew. Give yourselves anew to prayer. Be such men that God will dwell with you by His Spirit. "Ye that make mention of the Lord, keep not silence, and give Him no rest till He establish and make Jerusalem a praise."



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