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☞ HISTORY ☞

—OF THE—

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

—OF—

ALBERT LEA, MINN.

☞ A SERMON ☞

Preached by

REV. R. B. ABBOTT, PASTOR,

JULY 2, 1876.

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HISTORY OF THE
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF ALBERT LEA.

REMEMBER THE DAYS OF OLD---Deut. xxxii, 7.

The best lessons of life are those of experience. Our all-wise Heavenly Father largely adopts this method of instruction. He teaches us by experience; our own experience, and that of others. We are so constituted by nature, that it is difficult to impress us deeply by any other means. We can hardly have any idea of the punishment of sin, until we have some little feeling of it. "Thou shalt surely die," did not impress Adam and Eve as it would impress us, for it had never come near them as it has come near us. On the other hand, the promised joy of forgiveness, the sweet peace of reconciliation, cannot be appreciated by those who have not experienced it. We have hardly the faintest idea of heaven's happiness, until we enjoy a foretaste of it here.

Next to our own experience, we appreciate the testimony of those who have been through what we have not. We are scarcely less wise than our fathers, when we are willing to heed their counsel. "Experience keeps a dear school;" unless we are fools,

we may learn much at a cheaper tuition. The world is a great treadmill. As every twenty-four hours it presents its whole surface to the sun, in the same order of succession; as every three hundred and sixty-five days it passes through its annual circuit, bringing the same order of climate and season; so about three times every century, the human family passes through a new generation, presenting over and over again the same great problems of education, of government, of history, and of the destiny of the world for all the future. Once every thirty-three years, the whole world must be lifted out of barbarism. Once every thirty-three years the church must be filled again with new converts, or it perishes from the earth. The race, renewed every generation, starts again in the physical helplessness and mental imbecility of infancy, and in the moral guilt of original sin. Learning and morals and wisdom and holiness are not transmitted by inheritance. All must be learned, attained, over again by each generation, for themselves. There is in the world and in the race a constant and inevitable tendency to retrogradation and barbarism. Men sometimes flatter themselves that they are doing something to benefit the world, to lift up and send forward the human family; when, in fact, the utmost that any one can do is to check a little the universal decay, to withstand somewhat the downward tendency of all things, to hold back in part the tide of ignorance and barbarism that naturally tends to overwhelm the world. Man's arm is puny; man's wisdom is folly. Nothing less than the superintending providence of Almighty God has ever kept the world so far, has ever civilized a nation, or ever preserved a people from otherwise inevitable relapse into savage weakness and anarchy. And nothing less than the same Divine Providence ever will or ever can preserve the world from imbecility, decay, and self-destruction.

"Remember the days of old." This is the great lesson of experience, a lesson especially appropriate to the present occasion, the seventh anniversary of my pastorate with this people. We are admonished to make the world's experience our own wisdom. Let us enter into our fathers' wisdom as we inherit their goods. There is no need that we should set out in the world as children. Old heads may be on young shoulders. If my father's and my moth-

er's wisdom does not descend upon me, it is because of my incorrigible folly. If I do not profit by their mistakes, and even improve upon their virtues, then in my infatuation I am simply furnishing another evidence that the human race naturally relapses into barbarism and imbecility. God has endowed us with memory, for the very purpose of improvement and growth. He has made history possible, that each succeeding generation may grow wiser from the treasured stores of the past.

This was the precise purpose of Moses, and of the Holy Spirit who was guiding him, in the words of the text. Moses was now a hundred and twenty years old. He had reached the end of his journey. One of the most eventful lives ever passed on earth is now about to close with a sublimity worthy of a prophet of God. With the good hand of the Lord upon him, he has accomplished the most astonishing emigration ever undertaken. Two millions of people have been suddenly emancipated from most oppressive bondage; they have been miraculously conducted through forty years of wandering in strange and desert lands; they have been organized into a church and a nation, with laws which stand today for the admiration of the world; and they are now brought to the borders of their long promised inheritance. Warned that he must now leave them and resign their leadership to another, Moses assembles the Elders of his beloved Israel to take an affectionate adieu and give them his parting counsel. At the close of this solemn address, which contains more wisdom than any similar production ever put on record, Moses ascends to Mount Nebo, is granted one grand vision of the promised land, and then rises from the earthly to the heavenly inheritance. He dies alone with God, and is buried by Michael the Archangel.

Near the close of this faithful and sublime address, he calls upon the Elders and all the congregation of Israel, to remember the days of old, to consider the years of many generations. This should be their wisdom, and their protection, and their glory. "Ask thy father and he will shew thee, ask thy Elders and they will tell thee." Why, the history of the world so far, and the disposition of all nations, had been directed towards the accomplishment of this very event, now to be realized, the establishment of

the tribes of Israel in the land of Canaan. "When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam, he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel. For the Lord's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance. He found him in a desert land, in a waste howling wilderness; he led him about, he instructed him, he kept him as the apple of his eye. As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings; so the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no strange god with him."

Most appropriate then, as breath to the lungs or light to the eye, is this exhortation to the people to remember the days of old. Almighty God was their Leader and their Friend, their Deliverer and their Portion. Should they not fear him and obey him? Should they not keep his commandments and abide in his covenant? Should they not adore him, and trust in him, and love him? All their success and establishment and permanence, their very existence even, as a nation, depended upon it. They were to be an everlasting memorial to all the world of God's faithfulness on the one hand, if they should abide faithfully in his covenant; or of his righteous judgments on the other hand, if they turned away from the Divine law. The old world had perished in the waters of the flood. Avenging fire from heaven had burnt up the polluted cities of the plain. Egypt had been scourged. Pharaoh and his host had perished in the sea, for their rebellion against God. The iniquity of the Amorites was full, and they must be destroyed. The Canaanites had exhausted the Divine patience, their time had come, they must be exterminated. There could be no salvation to any man, and no permanent prosperity to any nation, but in righteousness and obedience to the Ruler of all the world.

"Consider the days of old," says Moses. See how God has preserved you, and how he has destroyed others. Many nations have perished already. Some have been destroyed right before your eyes. Some are even now in process of destruction. Others are doomed, and their day hastens on apace. And will Israel, God's chosen Israel, whom he has led by the hand and nourished in his bosom, turn away from him, rebel against him,

and become another and the most stupendous monument of human folly, an everlasting memorial of the righteous judgments of Heaven upon a guilty nation? The most illustrious blessings on the one hand, and the most dreadful judgments on the other, are set before them; and they are exhorted to choose wisdom, and life, and everlasting prosperity.

But, brethren, wisdom for others is the cheapest kind of philanthropy. Let us study this lesson to-day for ourselves. Let us remember the days of old. More wisdom has come to us, through history and experience, than to any former generation. God grant us grace to be wise according to the time! God grant us grace to be wise for our children, for the church of God, for the glory of the Redeemer! In our humble place, in this young State of Minnesota, in our village church, we have received already many signal blessings from our Heavenly Father, and many lessons of wisdom and faith from his gracious providence. Let us treasure them up with grateful remembrance, this anniversary day.

Albert Lea was pre-empted for Presbyterianism, at its earliest settlement, by Rev. S. G. Lowry. He and Father McReynolds of the Methodist Church, were the pioneer preachers of the town and the county. To one of these two, it is not certain which, belongs the credit of holding the first religious service in the place. Father Lowry came to this State, then a Territory, and settled on the farm on which he still resides, in April, 1857. In the summer of that year he visited Albert Lea and preached to the people. His visits and preaching were continued, from time to time, for nearly three years. The question of organizing a church was often considered by him and the few Presbyterians in the place. In the meantime Mr. Lowry's health failed, and Rev. Mr. Cook, a Congregational minister of Austin, was invited to visit Albert Lea and preach to the people. The invitation was accepted, and after a short time a church was organized, adopting the Congregational form, composed of six members, three Congregationalists and three Presbyterians. This church, the first organized in Albert Lea, was maintained in this form until the Autumn of 1868, when it was changed by the unanimous action of the members, into the present Presbyterian Church.

At the Fall meeting of the Presbytery of Southern Minnesota, Old School, a petition was presented, subscribed by the members of the Congregational Church in Albert Lea, and a few other persons, requesting the organization of a Presbyterian Church. The petitioners were eighteen in number, all expressing a desire to become members. In response to this petition, the Presbytery appointed Rev. D. C. Lyon and Rev. A. J. Stead a committee to meet the petitioners, and, if the way should be clear, organize the church. Accordingly, on the 29th of September, 1868, these brethren held a meeting for this purpose in the Court House in Albert Lea. Rev. S. G. Lowry and Rev. Theophilus Lowry, of the Presbytery of Mankato, New School, were present by invitation, and assisted in the proceedings. The Church was then formally organized, under the name of the First Presbyterian Church of Albert Lea, with the following members:—Benjamin Brownsell, Mrs. Elizabeth Brownsell, Curtis B. Kellar, Samuel Eaton, Mrs. Clarissa Eaton, Mrs. S. M. Robinson, Mrs. Eliza Hunt, Mrs. Harriet J. Barden, Mrs. Mary F. Armstrong, Samuel Thompson, Mrs. Amanda Woodruff, Mrs. Darrow, Mrs. Henrietta Ruble, Mrs. C. E. Sheehan, Thomas Sherwood, Clarence Wedge, Mrs. Mary Buell, Samuel Batchelder, and Wm. J. Squier—19. Samuel Batchelder, Samuel Eaton, and Curtis B. Kellar, were elected Ruling Elders, to serve respectively one, two, and three years. A public service was held in the evening; a sermon was preached by Rev. A. J. Stead, and the Elders were ordained—the charge to them was given by Rev. Theophilus Lowry. Brief addresses were made by Rev. S. G. Lowry and Rev. D. C. Lyon, and the meeting was dismissed with the Apostolic benediction.

Thus the former Congregational Church of this place was, by the unanimous choice and action of its own members, merged into the Presbyterian Church; and they, with a few others received at the time, constituted the original membership of the present organization. And it is interesting to note in this connection that they are all yet living, and though several of them have removed to different places, they are all Presbyterians.

As to the share in this movement of Rev. W. M. Paxton, D. D., of New York, it is proper to say, that, instead of intentionally procuring the change or persuading to it, he was himself persuaded by the members of the church and the people of Albert Lea, to assist them in making the change from Congregational Association to Presbytery, and to aid them in building a house of worship. If any shadow of blame could be found resting anywhere, it would be chargeable to the church itself, and not to Dr. Paxton, nor yet to the Presbytery. The Presbytery had no other hand in the matter than to visit the place and organize the church when requested by the people to do so. Dr. Paxton had visited the place a few weeks before, as a quiet rural resort for spending a part of his summer vacation. He had set out from home, uncertain where he was going, and was evidently directed here by the hand of Providence. He became interested in the place and the people, and at their urgent request and upon their statement of their unanimous desire to change ecclesiastical relations, so as to become Presbyterian instead of Congregational, he promised them pecuniary assistance in the erection of a house of worship.

As to the course of the church in this transaction—every church has the same perfect and indefeasible right to change its ecclesiastical relations at will, that every church member has to transfer his membership to another church, whenever he pleases. And the change from Congregationalism to Presbyterianism is not a great one. It is but a step upwards. It implies no giving up of one single point of doctrine, or faith, or scriptural order. No two churches are so nearly alike in all doctrine and worship. The ministers of either pass into the other with the utmost ease. Congregationalists unite with Presbyterian churches, and Presbyterians unite with Congregational churches, everywhere and almost indiscriminately. In either connection you will find tens of thousands formerly in the other. And many scores of churches, perhaps hundreds of them, have made a similar transition. The two churches are so nearly the same in every essential point, such a change involves no sacrifice of truth or principle.

The new organization thus effected, the church at once set about the erection of a house of worship. A Board of Trustees were

elected, and before the following Winter had fairly set in, this house was raised and inclosed. It was completed the following Summer, and was dedicated to the worship of God on the 15th day of August, 1869. The Presbytery of Southern Minnesota was in session here at the time, and the dedicatory sermon was preached by Dr. Paxton, from Matt. 26:8. "TO WHAT PURPOSE IS THIS WASTE?" The success of the enterprise was largely owing to the liberality and exertions of one who has since gone to his rest. Your minds will instinctively recall the name of Augustus Armstrong, who, though not a communicant, was nevertheless among the wisest in counsel and the most efficient in executing all that was needful to the establishment of the church. While he lived he manifested a lively interest in the growth and prosperity of the church, spiritual as well as material; and was always to the minister a prudent and safe adviser.

Along with the names of Dr. Paxton and Mr. Armstrong, honorable and grateful mention must be made of Miss Mary Gelston, a member of Dr. Paxton's church, in the city of New York, who from first to last has contributed more than half the means necessary to build and complete our church property in its present form. This excellent christian lady, though an entire stranger to every one of us, became interested in Albert Lea and this church through her Pastor, and sent us \$3,000 for the church building and grounds, \$2,000 towards building the Manse, and less than two years ago sent us \$500 more to assist in the erection of our chapel, besides at one time a handsome donation for our Sabbath School Library. Altogether we have received from her nearly \$6,000. It is her munificence which, under God, has raised up and established this church. Let us record her name in our hearts with most affectionate remembrance, and in our prayers let us seek for the blessing of God upon one through whose beneficence so great blessings have come upon us. This church has been raised up and fostered by Mary Gelston; let it be her everlasting memorial. Let it tell to the end of time what well-directed giving can accomplish. And may God grant that her unselfish devotion to the cause of Christ, and her liberal spirit in giving to build up the church, a church

she has never seen,—may be imitated by the people she has blessed—by all of us upon whom the blessing has come.

For nine months after the church was organized, it was supplied with preaching by different ministers. Among these were Rev. Charles Thayer, of Farmington, Rev. John L. Gage, of Kasson, and myself. My first visit to the place and first religious service were on Sabbath, March 21, 1869. Three times afterwards I visited you and preached for you, before my removal from St. Paul here, which was on the first of July. In the meantime the church made out a call, in due form and order, for my permanent settlement as Pastor. This call, having been presented by the Presbytery, was accepted, and I was formally installed Pastor of this church, by the Presbytery of Southern Minnesota, on Sabbath evening, Aug. 15, 1869—the evening of the same day on which this house was dedicated. The sermon was preached by Rev. W. S. Wilson, of Owatonna, the charge to the Pastor was given by Rev. D. C. Lyon, and the charge to the people by Dr. Paxton.

The resident membership of the church at this time consisted of eighteen persons, as follows:—Mr. and Mrs. Brownsell, Mr. and Mrs. C. B. Kellar, Mr. and Mrs. Eaton, Mrs. Robinson, Mrs. Armstrong, Mrs. Barden, Mr. Samuel Thompson, Mrs. Woodruff, Mrs. Ruble, Mr. and Mrs. Squier, Mr. Batchelder, Mrs. Buell, Mr. Clarence Wedge, and Mr. Sherwood. These persons are all still living. Eight of them have removed, the other ten are with us still—most of them present this morning. The same three who were originally chosen Elders, still hold that office, having been since twice re-elected; and of the original eighteen, Mr. Thompson holds the office of Deacon. Some of you remember Father and Mother Brownsell. The Fall after my settlement here, they removed to the vicinity of Fond-du-Lac, Wis., where they still reside with one of their sons, in the feebleness of advanced age, waiting for the Master to say, “Arise ye, and depart; for this is not your rest.”

From this beginning, the history of the church has been one of remarkable and unbroken prosperity. During the first year there were added to our communion, thirty-nine persons; the second year fifty-two; the third year, thirty; the fourth year, twenty; the fifth year, fourteen; the sixth year, twelve; the seventh year, the

one just closed, seventy-five; making a total of two hundred and forty-two communicants received in seven years. Of these, forty-six have been received by letter from other churches, and one hundred and ninety-six on profession of faith in Christ. It has already been stated that at the beginning of the present pastorate there were eighteen resident members. Besides these, there were on the church roll four names of members at a distance—twenty-two in all. Thus the whole number of names on the roll from first to last amounts to two hundred and sixty-four. We have dismissed to other churches forty-two, only four less than we have received by letter. A few have been suspended, and a considerable number have been set aside on the Retired List, on account of distance and non-attendance, or removal without letters. After making these deductions, we have one hundred and seventy-two resident members.

Almost every year we have enjoyed a season of especial religious interest in connection with the Week of Prayer. One of the most remarkable of these outpourings of the Holy Spirit was enjoyed in 1871, five years ago last Winter. Some of you here present to-day, and others not with us now, will long remember that occasion as the turning point in your eternal destiny. It was then, as you trust, that you were born from above, that you received Jesus Christ by faith, and gave yourself to him in everlasting covenant. And he has blessed you ever since. In proportion as you have been diligent and faithful, and far beyond your own faithfulness even, he has given you joy in his service, he has led you all the way, and multiplied unto you grace, mercy, and peace. Is it not so? I call upon you to record—Has not Jesus Christ kept his word with you? Has he not even gone out after you when you have wandered? O, the precious love of Jesus! Remembering the days of the past, you can sing to-day with swelling heart,

“Here I'll raise my Ebenezer—
Hither by thy help I'm come,”

But a still larger number will remember the past Winter as the day of your salvation. Never before was so great a blessing in spiritual things poured out upon this community. For months before, the Lord had drawn out our hearts to him in earnest, im-

portunate prayer for revival. And when the time was come and all things were ready, he sent his servant, our dear brother Welton, to labor among us; which he did with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. You will not soon forget his faithful expositions of scripture, and his affectionate pleadings with sinners to repent and believe on Jesus Christ. The crowded congregations, the tearful interest, the scores of inquirers, the presentation of Jesus Christ as a present Savior, the offer of full salvation at once through faith in his blood, the happy rejoicing in new-found hope—all these stand out in your memory as a picture that will never fade away. The good Lord has signalized this centennial year with most abundant outpourings and ingatherings all over the land, bringing tens of thousands of souls to new life through the cross of Christ. And nowhere, perhaps, has he more magnified his grace, or more blessed the people, than in our own village of Albert Lea and our own beloved church. Let our hearts magnify the Lord! We shall never forget these things. We will talk them over in heaven! THERE will we remember the days of old!

Besides these seasons of special interest, we have never been without tokens of the Lord's presence and blessing. Our Sabbath School has been prosperous and well attended almost without exception. Beginning first as a Union School, it has suffered diminution from the successive withdrawal of other churches to establish schools of their own, and yet has steadily increased in numbers and interest. It was never in a more prosperous condition than now. Many of the children and young people have been brought to Christ, and others, we trust, are coming. The school is perfectly organized, well supplied with efficient officers and teachers, and has an excellent Library. It numbers about one hundred and fifty members. Besides this school, which is our central work, we are carrying on six Mission Schools in the surrounding country, with an aggregate attendance of about two hundred and fifty persons. All this, with Heaven's blessing, must tell favorably on the work of the Lord in this region. If we shall be diligent in labors, and fervent in spirit, and faithful in prayers, will not the Lord command the blessing upon us, and send us salvation, for his name's sake?

Our prayer meetings have been, for the most part, a pleasing feature of our church worship, and one principal means of our growth and progress. They have usually been well attended, uniformly interesting, always profitable to those participating. During the last few months, the attendance at the Thursday evening meeting has been from forty to seventy. A Cottage prayer meeting is held also weekly on Tuesday evening, which has mostly been a very pleasant and precious meeting. The Young People's prayer meeting, organized more than five years ago, has been maintained all the time without interruption, meeting on Sabbath evening, one hour before public service. Among our young members who are faithful to this meeting, it is training up successive recruits of Christian workers for larger usefulness in all departments of the church. It has been an inestimable blessing to many. May the Lord give our young people grace to be faithful to it, and maintain it forever! Will each one of you consider your own individual responsibility in the matter?

Somewhat less than two years ago, we undertook the erection of a Chapel, which was felt to be almost a necessity for carrying forward our church work. To assist us in this, Miss Gelston came forward with her accustomed liberality in our need, and gave us \$500, evidently regarding us with affectionate solicitude as a foster child, largely provided for hitherto by her munificence. It is beyond estimate, how much we owe to that excellent Christian lady. With her \$500 and a little over \$500 more, the Chapel was brought to comfortable completion. How much it has been used, and how invaluable it has been, for many of our prayer meetings, the Young People's meeting, the Infant Department of our Sabbath School, the Bible Class, the Ladies' Missionary Society, and other purposes, many of you know. We could not do without it.

In addition to the three Elders already mentioned, who are still in office, we have now three others, six in all. Mr. J. W. Smith was elected and ordained in 1869; Mr. R. B. Skinner, in 1870; and Mr. B. Woodruff, in 1871. Mr. Woodruff and Mr. Lorin Blackmer were elected and ordained to the office of Deacon in 1870; Mr. H. D. Brown, in 1871; Mr. Samuel Thompson, in 1872;

Mr. D. G. Parker, in 1873; and Mr. John Slater, Sen., in 1876.

During my seven years' pastorate with this church, I have baptized here one hundred and twenty-four persons, and six elsewhere. Two of my own children have been baptized here by other ministers. Out of the one hundred and twenty-six baptized here, all but two are still living—two have passed on over the river to everlasting life. They are now, we trust, with Him into whose Name they were baptized, and for whom the whole family in heaven and earth are named.

I have married, during these seven years, forty-three couples—eighty-six persons—all of whom, so far as I know, are still living.

But clouds follow the sunshine. Tears often mar the countenance lately lighted up with smiles. The tomb and the bridal altar stand in mournful proximity. I have sometimes passed from one to the other the same day. With all the healthfulness incident to this climate and to a new country, death has been at work among us. Since coming to this place, I have been called to officiate at sixty-nine funerals. How often have the tenderest ties been snapped asunder, some in your own households; how often have loving hearts been broken, and families bereaved, and homes made desolate! May the Lord sanctify affliction to those who have passed under the rod! May he bring us to hail again the departed on the other shore!

During my pastorate here, I have preached nearly 1,000 times. My first sermon here was the 1,855th of my ministry, and to-day I am preaching the 2,834th.

Our history so far has been distinguished by remarkable harmony and good-feeling among the membership of the church. But few cases of discipline have occurred. No serious dissension has ever risen among us. The will of the majority has been cheerfully acquiesced in. Our form of government precludes alike the possibility of anarchy on the one hand, or of oppression on the other. The decisions of the Session, in all matters referred to them, have been promptly accepted as final. The grace of God, I trust, has enabled us all to bear with the ordinary frailties of but partially sanctified humanity in each other; and differences which must inevitably arise have been settled in prayer at

the Throne of Grace, in the spirit of the petition, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us."

One other fact in our history deserves especial and grateful mention. In connection with our growing numbers and the time the church has continued, it is a remarkable fact. WE HAVE NEVER YET LOST A COMMUNICANT BY DEATH. So far as I know, only two persons who have ever been united with us are not now living, and they had taken letters to other churches before their decease. These were James E. Smith and Luther Parker. They died in faith, as we trust, and departed to be with the Lord, which is far better. Not only should we gratefully record the goodness of God in providentially preserving our numerous membership so long unbroken by death; but we should also receive it as a mark of special favor to this church, and a stirring call to more earnest devotion to all that work in the gospel for which evidently our lives have been prolonged, and for which our membership has been multiplied. The Lord help us to remember that no man liveth to himself.

For rarely ever in the history of churches has the call of Divine Providence to any particular church been more clearly made known. The Lord has constantly widened our field as fast as we were ready to occupy it. Almost the last church organized in the Presbytery (now the Presbytery of Winona), God has increased us with people like a flock, until we stand to-day, in numbers at least if not in influence, the foremost church in the Presbytery. Our relation to this community, so large a portion of which is with us; our relation to this county, in which we hold a central and influential position; the fields of labor and usefulness, white unto harvest, which the Master is opening all around us; and our relative position to the churches in the Presbytery—all indicate the favor of God bestowed on us, and his call to increasing diligence and devotion in all ways of gospel labor. Do we hear the call? And does it stir the depths of our hearts? The Lord has raised us up, and established us, and increased us, for a purpose. That purpose manifestly is to maintain the truth undefiled, to shed forth the light undimmed, and to carry forward the glorious gospel of Christ in all this region. And now will not

every member of the church, in view of all the good Lord has done for us, seek to be filled with the Spirit, and animated with new zeal in the gospel? Knowing, brethren, that your work is not in vain in the Lord. His call to us to-day, as we enter our eighth year, is FORWARD! Do ye not hear it? It sounds from every blessed Ebenezer of the past, from every hill-top of grace we have ascended. Let every one arise and gird himself for the race and the work! Be your motto still, "FORWARD IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!"

One year ago to-day, in my sixth anniversary sermon, I called upon you to remember that we were just entering upon our seventh, our Sabbatic, year; and it was proposed that we should make it a year of consecration, of devotion, of praise to God as well as zeal in his service. You heartily responded to the sentiment; you linked your prayers with mine; and O, how wonderfully and graciously the Lord has answered and blessed us! The blessing has fallen in showers beyond our most sanguine expectations. We have witnessed nearly a hundred conversions, and we have received to our own communion alone three-quarters of a hundred. And have we not all been baptized with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven?

We now enter upon our eighth year,—upon a new week of years. Hitherto hath the Lord helped us. What shall the next seven years be? With the Master's presence and blessing, shall they not be as the past, and yet more abundant? Is anything too hard for the Lord? Let us to-day—here and now—covenant with the Lord and with one another, that these coming years shall be years of faithfulness. Faithfulness is the highest form of saintly excellence; and that, through grace, is attainable by every one of us. The Lord help us all to say, "By thy grace we will!"

But before another week of years shall pass, some of us will have ended our labors. These weary hands and aching hearts will throb and faint no more. The tired ones will rest with the setting sun. "Shall we then gather at the river that flows by the Throne of God?" What say you, friends? Yes, or No, in Christ to-day? Shall we leave to our children the legacy of faith in Jesus Christ, of prayer unceasing, a pure and working

church, and the uncorrupted gospel of salvation? Shall we, as we step down into the dark margin of the river of death—shall we bid our friends meet us in heaven, with holy confidence that we are going there ourselves through the blood of Christ? Shall we so live, these short years lying between, that our Lord may say in infinite grace, "Well done, good and faithful servant, * * * enter into the joy of thy Lord."

We are laying foundations for all the future. Especially in this western country, what we do in this generation may survive in its influence till the end of all things, when Christ shall come to judge the world. Let us so lay the foundations in Christ, that our children and others building thereon shall complete here a glorious temple for the spiritual worship of the Savior of sinners, the Lord of all ages, under the flaming motto, "Glory to God in the highest; on earth peace, good will to men."

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