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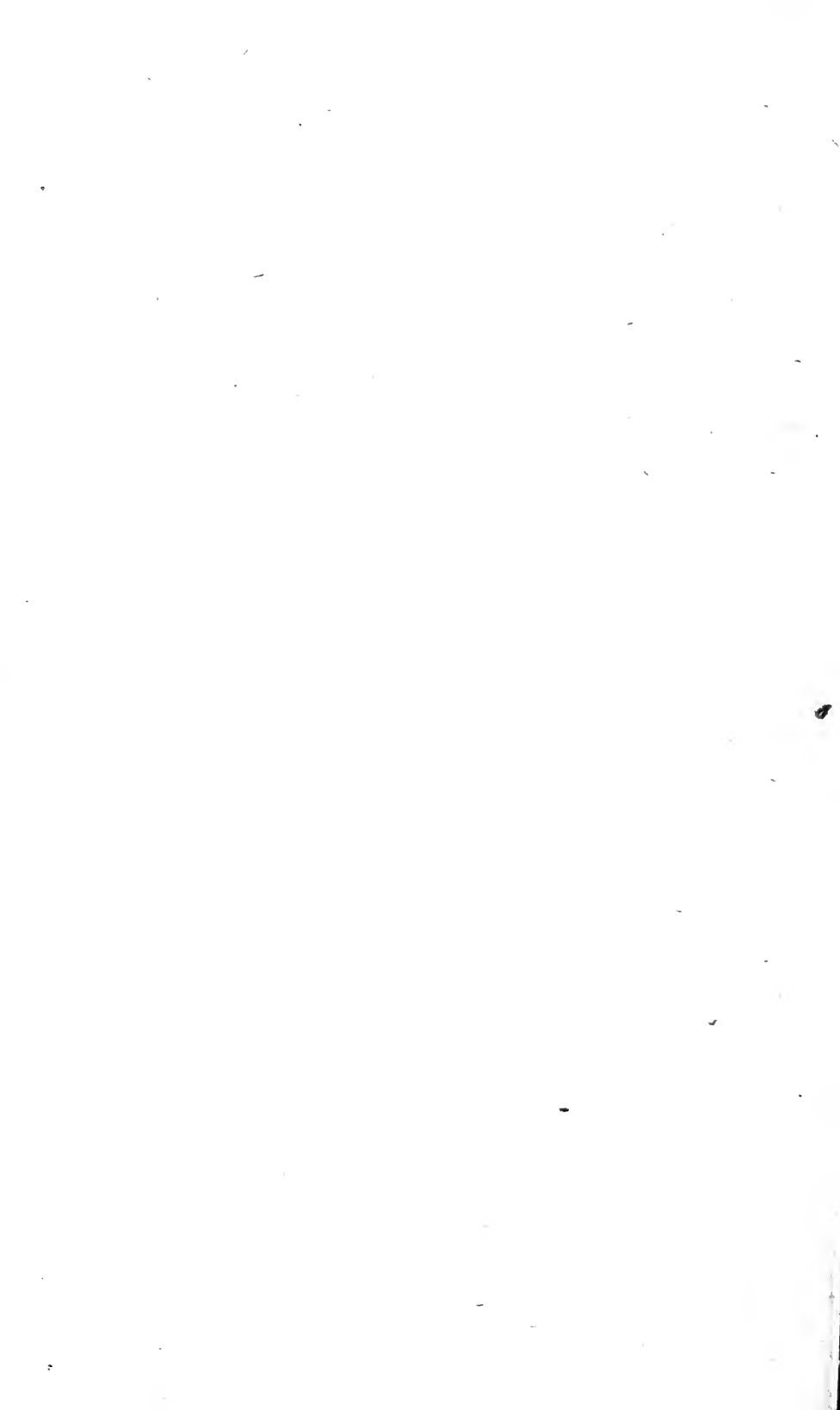




R. 688

PAMPHLETS.

Connecticut.
Local history. Vol. II



10

MR. HOTCHKISS'
HALF CENTURY SERMON.



A Retrospect on the Ministry and Church of Saybrook.

A

HALF CENTURY

SERMON,

PREACHED ON LORD'S DAY,

September 22, 1833.

BY FREDERICK WM. HOTCHKISS,

PASTOR OF THE FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH IN SAYBROOK.

“Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord
Jesus Christ hath showed me.” 2 Peter, i. 12.

HARTFORD:

PRESS OF JOHN B. ELDRIDGE.

1838.

At a meeting of the First Ecclesiastical Society in Saybrook, October
15th, 1833 :

Voted, That the Society's Committee be directed to request of Rev. Fred-
erick Wm. Hotchkiss, a copy of his Half Century Sermon for publication.

Attest, WILLIAM R. CLARK, *Clerk*.

S E R M O N .

2 TIMOTHY, iv. 7.

I have finished my course.

THIS is a part of Paul's valedictory to Timothy. "Watch thou in all things; do the work of an evangelist; make full proof of thy ministry." To animate him to fidelity and perseverance, amidst trials that may assail him, he develops the feelings of his heart, and the triumphs of his faith, in view of speedy death. "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge shall give at that day; and not to me only, but unto all them also, that love his appearing."

Such was the holy tranquility of his soul in view of his last hours. Here I might dilate on the labors, sufferings, successes, and triumphs of this faithful martyr; but I use only the words of my theme. "I have finished my course."

This I have chosen for a subject suitable to the present solemnity. The Lord hath showed me, by evidences which admit of no doubt, that I am soon to finish my course; and that there remains but the concluding scene of my ministry: that I must speedily put off this tenement of clay, and my spirit intermingle with the departed. Half a century has flitted over me, since I received the solemn charge to feed this flock of the Lord, over which I was ordained to be overseer. I stand, this day, in the desk, for the last *sabbath* of fifty years; and to-morrow closes the last *day* of that period.

I came to you like the one to whom this address of Paul was written, a youth in years and experience,* accompanied

* I graduated, at Yale College, before I was sixteen years; was licensed for the ministry before I was twenty years; and was ordained before I was twenty-one. I began to preach to this people, in the beginning of Nov. 1782: soon received a unanimous invitation to settle here in the ministry, but conscious of the inexperience of my youth, I deferred compliance with repeated requests till 24th of Sept. 1783.

with *often infirmities*, feeling my need of your prayers, and the counsel of the fathers; and, having obtained help of the Lord, I have continued to this day, witnessing, at the age of nearly seventy-one, great changes in the audience I address, and affecting solemnities staring on my view. It is but turning another leaf, and all is new; a new audience, a new speaker, and a new world. "The fathers, where are they?" and in what world shall *we* soon be found?

In this view I address you with my valedictory, before we separate. Standing on the verge of the grave, and in the twilight of eternity, I look back from the purlieu of earth; and sketch,

A retrospect of the Past,
A view of the Present, and
A prospect of the Future.

I. A retrospect of the Past.

But where shall we begin? The origin and progress of scenes past are all of them *to us* interesting subjects, on an occasion like the present.

It was in the month of Nov. 1635, that our Pilgrim Fathers came and established themselves in Saybrook, for the free enjoyment of civil and religious privileges, without involuntary subjection to any sovereignty on earth, but that of the people; or to any authority but the Law and Heaven.

The town derives its name from lord Say, and lord Brook, who, with other gentlemen of distinction, being discontented with the political and ecclesiastical orderings of the day, procured a Patent of this territory, with an extent of more than a hundred miles on the sea coast. In July 1635, they appointed John Winthrop, son of the chief magistrate of Massachusetts, then in England, to be their agent in building a fort, and commencing a settlement, at the mouth of the river Connecticut. Thus commissioned, he employed a sufficient number of families for this purpose, who began the occupancy of this place. It was constituted a jurisdiction in 1639; when George Fenwick, one of the original patentees, was invested with the government of this territory, and resided here in that character, till December 1644, when he sold the jurisdiction to Connecticut. Saybrook then included most of the township of Lyme on the east of us.

After the building of a fortification* of defence against the wild sons of the forest, the Pilgrims early sought for an evan-

* This fort was constructed under the superintendance of Lion Gardiner, who afterwards moved with his family, and established themselves on Gardiner's Island. His descendants possess that island, since called a lordship, to this day. His son, David Gardiner, is said to have been the first born of the Pilgrims of this State.

gelic ministry; and provided that the Sabbath and public worship should be regularly observed.

The Rev. John Higginson was the first minister who led the little flock that assembled in the fort. They carried with them military weapons to guard against the natives, whose savage war-whoops often alarmed them, by night and by day. Truly this was a church militant in the wilderness. He continued with them till 1643; when he removed to Guilford, and was one of the "*Seven Pillars*" of that Church, as an assistant to his father-in-law, the Rev. Henry Whitefield. Here he resided till 1660, being the sole pastor for the last ten years. After this, he removed to Salem, in Massachusetts, and was colleague with his father, while the latter lived, and continued in the ministry there, till December 9th, 1708, at which time he died in the 93d year of his age, and 72d year of his ministry. He left a volume of sermons dedicated to the churches of Saybrook, Guilford, and Salem.*

Rev. Thomas Peters succeeded him in the ministry at Saybrook; and after two years residence left the settlement, and returned to England.

Rev. James Fitch was soon after invited to officiate to this people; and the inhabitants, now being augmented in numbers and strength, commenced a building for public worship; and, an organized church being formed, he was ordained their pastor. He came to New England with thirteen young men designed for the ministry, spent some years in theological studies, under the tuition of Rev. Mr. Hooker, the first minister of Hartford, till he accepted the invitation from Saybrook. From the time of his ordination in 1646, he resided here, as pastor, till 1660, when he removed with the greater part of the people to Norwich.† He died in 1702, in the 80th year of his age, at Lebanon, where his children were then living. This removal is said to have been the result of a formal deed of that township being given by Uncas, the chief of the Mohegan Indians, in consequence of aid rendered to him by the military of this town in his war with the Narragansetts.‡

* See Field's Statistics of the county of Middlesex, a valuable compilation of noticeable occurrences. To this and the ancient records of this church I am indebted for the narrative of dates and events.

† In the early part of this ministry Gov. Fenwick returned to England, and was appointed one of the Judges, on the trial of King Charles I. 1648. His wife, who sustained the address of Lady Botleyr, as originating from a noble family, died in Saybrook; and her monument is still standing; probably the first table monument in this State.

‡ Among the names of the early inhabitants of this town, remaining here after the removal of so great a part of the people, we find those of the Tullys, Chalkers, Clarks, Chapmans, Bushnells, Lyndes, Willards, Whittelseys, Pratts, Bulls, Shipmans, Kirtlands and Waterhouses, which names are still retained with us.

Here, in the view of this first organized church and ministry, it may not be unprofitable to contemplate their form of government, and ecclesiastical constitution.

This ancient church, from the beginning to the present time, was of the Congregational order, like all the primitive churches of New England. Our fathers believed that a number of Christians, entering into covenant to worship God according to the laws of Christ's kingdom, and obligating themselves to walk in Christian fellowship with each other, fully constituted a church of Christ. They believed that such a church was invested with power to choose their own ministers, and exercise discipline according to the rules of the gospel. They acknowledged no superior order in the ministry, but considered Bishops, Elders and Presbyters, as of the same standing, and of equal authority. In this, they supposed they had for their direction the example of Christ, and the Apostolic churches.

Jesus ordained the twelve, but admitted no superiority among them. Sometimes he found them aspiring for pre-eminence, and disputing who should be the greatest in his kingdom; but he rebuked their ambition, and taught them, by the beautiful imagery of a little child, to learn humility. The same example they supposed was to be seen afterwards in the Apostles. Paul, though called of Heaven, to be an Apostle to the Gentiles, is seen intermingling with the prophets, and teachers at Antioch, and was ordained by them, with prayer and the laying on of hands. Here is nothing like calling in of any prelatical power to ordain; but simply the equal authority of the teachers in that church, a presbytery of elders. Acts, xiii. 1 to 3. And, after Paul was thus ordained, we find him claiming no power over the churches, like the Hierarchal or Pontifical orders; but when the church at Corinth, which then was probably without a pastor, had an open offender among them, he writes to the brethren to exercise the church's power of discipline, and excise him from their fellowship. 1 Cor. v. And, when afterwards he found this offender become a penitent, he writes to them that they ought to forgive and comfort him. 2 Cor. ii. 7. In all this, he places the whole power in the church.

Our fathers, also, believed that there were but two offices in the church, Bishops and Deacons. Thus Paul writes to the church at Phillippi, with the Bishops and Deacons: both words in the plural number. And, perhaps, there were several Bishops and Deacons, as at Ephesus and Antioch. Paul writes to the Elders of Ephesus to meet him at Miletus, and addresses them as Bishops; calling them *Episkopous*, the Greek word for Bishops. And thus, in our congregational churches, it was formerly usual to have two or more Elders.

In the church of Hartford, the first organized church in Connecticut, there were two Elders, Rev. Messrs. Hooker and Stone. In the church of Guilford, there were *Seven Pillars*, of whom our first minister was in the number in 1643. In the direction given by Paul to the officers of the church, he never mentions but two grades of distinction, as above observed. And though Timothy has the appellation of Bishop, yet he was ordained by the Presbytery, and not by any superior order. 1 Tim. iv. 14. In this Presbytery it would seem that Paul was in the number; for in 2 Tim. i. 6. he mentions the laying on of *his hands*.

Our fathers justly supposed that all subsequent opinions, and establishments of different grades in the Christian ministry, were of no weight and of no authority against the Bible. "No testimony of the Fathers can give Divine authority to any institution whatever." We will take a single instance to this point. Ignatius was an early father in the church of Antioch; and his writings are adverted to as the great champion of three orders in the ministry. Fifteen Epistles are ascribed to him, but eight of them are viewed as utterly spurious, except by a few Roman Catholic writers; and the other seven are considered as dubious in many points. Archbishop Usher, and some others, entirely reject the seventh, which is addressed to Polycarp of Smyrna.

But even if they were all true, his testimony would not favor the idea of a diocesan Bishop: for he uniformly addresses the Bishop and Presbyters of a single church; and never speaks of a Bishop whose authority was over many churches. It is also deserving notice, that he *never speaks of Confirmation*, nor drops one intimation of it as appropriate to that office. Clement of Rome, probably the same whom Paul mentions in Phil. iv. 3.; and Polycarp of Smyrna, both of them cotemporary with Ignatius, and living in Apostolic times, never speak of three orders. Polycarp does not even mention the name of Bishop, but confines himself to the term Presbyter.

The amount of all these observations is, that in the primitive church there were frequently several Elders, just as in the early puritan churches of New England; and the senior might be first named, without the least idea of any paramount authority.*

In the government of a church, our fathers supposed the power to be placed entirely in the members; even as Christ said in the ultimate resort, when an offender was irreclaima-

* See Chauncey's complete view of Episcopacy, as exhibited from the fathers of the Christian church, to the close of the second century.

ble by the preceding process—"Tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican;" i. e. let him be excinded or excommunicated. And, as to the power of the church, it is added, "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven." Matt. xviii. 17, 18. Here the full and ultimate power is given, not to a Pontiff, or to a Prelate, but to the church, or body of believers.

If you ask, as is not unfrequent, what is the constitution of a congregational church? We answer, It is the Bible. "*To the Law and the Testimony*," is our ultimate resort. We have indeed forms of faith, and of covenanting in each church; and this was expedient for more perfect mutual understanding and fellowship; but, in every case of discipline, we resort to the Bible for decision. We have, also, forms of agreement in our consociated churches, and among our associated ministers, for the purpose of harmonious intercourse, but in all cases, the ultimate question is, *what saith the Book?*

Such is the organization, and such the power and rights of those congregational churches, which our Puritan fathers have established. The experiment has been tested for nearly two centuries; and what has been the result? The churches of New England, thus organized, have been the great patrons of free researches into truth; great advocates for a pious, learned, and evangelical ministry; uniformly zealous for diffusing science among all grades of people; early and uniformly establishing, and liberally endowing primary schools and seminaries for qualifying their sons and daughters for superior usefulness in community, church and state; ever the firm and uniform supporters of civil and religious order, of the Sabbath, and the institutions of heaven; and the unshaken friends of republican rights and privileges. Their influence is favorably and powerfully felt through every portion of our land: and New England is known as the seat of good order and wholesome regulations; of freedom directed by law, and for science, morals and attachment to Divine institutions. As from a nursery, plants are taken from it, and borne to the west and south, and producing fruits which enrich and beautify and bless.

We now revert, from the organization of this ancient church, to the succession in the ministry.

After the removal of the first ordained pastor of this church in 1660, the people remained destitute of any permanent ministry for ten years.

Rev. Thomas Buckingham received an invitation to the ministry, and was ordained over this church in the year 1670.

He was from Wales in England; and the family, on their arrival, settled in Milford. He was one of the founders and trustees of the collegiate institution, since called Yale College. It was first located in Saybrook, in 1700, where it remained till 1717, when it was removed to New Haven.* He was Moderator of that memorable synod which formed the constitution for regulating the churches in Connecticut; since called the Saybrook Platform. This system was adopted on Sept. 9th, 1708, and is used to this day, in the decision of ecclesiastical differences; and in sustaining harmonious intercourse and fellowship, between the churches and among the ministry, and in all controversial questions.

To this day, too, it has proved a mighty bond of union and order; and stands as a monumental pillar of the wisdom of the fathers, notwithstanding all the missiles with which it has been assailed. It has proved itself able to sustain every shock, though it has often been threatened by the roarings of the *Bulls of Bashon*, and the vulgar brayings of the satyrist and scoffer.

This system embraces the faith of the reformed churches entire; and if the style, or language of certain articles, is expressed in fuller and bolder terms than suits a modern ear, or more refined taste, yet the fathers felt a confidence that the sentiments were inseparable from the plain teachings of the holy scriptures, and in perfect analogy with the open, manly, and fearless language, and decided sentiments of the most eminent fathers of the reformed church.

The church of Christ, here, was favored with the labors of the last mentioned venerable servant of the Lord, till his death in 1709.

Rev. Azariah Mather succeeded him in the ministry, in the next year, 1710. He was a descendant from the family of the Mathers, in Massachusetts, so long, and so justly distinguished for their piety and theological attainments. He had been tutor of the college in Saybrook; and, as a linguist he greatly excelled. A sermon, written in the Latin language, on the subject of being "*baptized for the dead*," from 1 Cor. xv. 29. is a specimen of his literary talents, and mental energy. He was a very pungent preacher, and fearless reprobver. He continued in the ministry till 1732, and died in the year 1737.

* The first public commencement was holden in Saybrook in 1702; and the first named graduate was Stephen Buckingham, probably the son of this minister. Fifteen public commencements were celebrated in this place, before the removal of the institution. The College building was a donation from Nathaniel Lynde, Esq. Other schools also had been generously endowed; and this church and people will long remember the valuable legacy of Edward Lovey and others.

Rev. William Hart, son of Rev. John Hart of East Guilford, was ordained over this church Nov. 17, 1736. Anterior to his ministry, two congregational churches had colonized from the first church, and formed distinct parishes, with local limits, on account of distance from the sanctuary, and the increase of population. One of them was established in 1725, and the other in 1726. A fourth congregational church was organized in 1742. Before this, it was not unusual for even females to walk to the sanctuary from eight to ten miles. In consequence of this repeated colonization, the church was much diminished in numbers, amounting only to forty-eight members. This venerated father in the ministry, was highly esteemed in council, by his brethren and the churches. By his talents and prudence he had a commanding influence, in conducting the concerns of his church and people; and retained their united affection through a ministry of nearly forty-eight years; and died July 11th, 1784, in the 72d year of his age.

In the course of his ministry he published many sermons and controversial treatises, in which he opposed the peculiar, and then prevailing sentiments of Doctor Hopkins and others, on the subjects of Divine efficiency and disinterested affection. He maintained that it was irrational, unscriptural, and impossible for a Christian to be willing to be forever miserable for the glory of God; and that the supreme love of God necessarily implied a supreme desire to enjoy God, and the bliss of his presence. This controversy continued for years, and was ably conducted. Those peculiar sentiments are now seldom vindicated.

The present Pastor of this church was ordained a collegiate minister with Rev. William Hart, on Sept. 24th, 1783. The number of communicants at that time was 69; of whom 31 were males: three females of the whole number are still living. There were but few accessions to the church till 1787; when in that and the three subsequent years, there were admitted 97 persons.

From 1790 there were but few annual accessions till 1808. At this time 18 were received to communion; and appearances existed of more than usual excitement among all classes of people. In the following year, 1809, there was a general solicitude and spirit of religious inquiry pervading all grades, from youth to very advanced years.

Here commenced the first great simultaneous revival of religion, in church and society, which had ever been known in this place, in the reminiscences or hearing of the eldest inhabitant among us. The celebrated revival of religion, in the years 1740 to 1750, which spread so extensively over New England, in the days of President Edwards, passed

around this place, without raising any visible excitement, except in a few solitary instances. Even the high zeal of a Davenport, accompanied by numbers from other places, who followed in his train, as they passed through the streets hymning their sacred songs, and encompassed this sanctuary, denouncing the coldness of the people,—all evanished without leaving any impression, but that of its being a spirit of fanaticism.

A general prejudice existed against the very idea of what is denominated a revival. They had heard of so many irregularities, that had formerly resulted from the indiscreet zeal of some individuals in the churches and ministry, that the very idea of a religious excitement was identified, in their minds, with religious dissensions and disorder. Evening meetings were utterly disapproved, even by the church, however regularly conducted, because they were viewed as a prelude to irregularity. Public lectures, at this time, were frequent, but in day time. Revival preachers of other denominations were introduced in the evenings; and the anxious flocked to hear them in their nocturnal meetings; and their assemblies, in dwelling houses, were crowded to overflowing with listening audiences.

In this period of deep interest to the feelings of the ministry, and the union of the church, the brethren were invited to meet at my house, to discuss the subject of evening meetings for prayer and religious services. They met accordingly, and the result was a happy unanimity of sentiment, and a conviction that unless the anxious were instructed from house to house, and *in season and out of season*, there would be schisms arising and operating to the detriment of brotherly love. The solicitous inquirer must be fed by his pastor, or he would seek others to give him food. *The sheep will hear the voice of their shepherd: he knows them and they will follow him.* With this full impression the church were united, and gave their pledge to assist their pastor in his future meetings for all revival calls at all seasons. On the next week, evening appointments for religious services, and for anxious inquirers, were assigned at different houses, and the brethren were found ready and faithful for all ministerial help.

Teachers of other denominations, from this time, were seldom seen or heard among this people. All seemed as one in sentiment and feeling, and a most delightful harmony pervaded all classes and gladdened all hearts.

At the close of the year following, in 1810, they were received to our communion the number of 91 persons. Among all the subjects of this revival, not one withdrew from our profession and the unity of our faith. Equally true also is it,

that not a single opposer of the work seceded from our worshipping assemblies.

From that time till the year 1827, there were, annually, some accessions to the church, amounting to 94 persons in seventeen years. Meetings for prayer among the people, and weekly appointments for preaching, were almost uninterruptedly observed, and not without a propitious influence. The moral and religious aspect of community was regenerated, and impressed with a new feature.

Towards the close of the last mentioned year, 1827, we were favored with a second general excitement, and simultaneous inquiry of "what must I do to be saved?" In the progress of this work, there was more opposition exhibited; and several hostile and threatening appearances indicated reason for apprehension that a schism was forming and maturing, with a sufficiency of wealth, among a few individuals of property, to promise success, on human calculations. Subscription papers were issued to form an Episcopal church; and thus sunder our happy union. But the cloud soon disappeared, and all things continued to proceed in, apparently, the same religious harmony and united order, as before.

The effusions of Divine influence bore down all hostility; and a conviction that here was "*the finger of God,*" closed the lips of opposition. The work of grace uniformly advanced and matured, with a result highly favorable to every friend of Zion. In the year following, which was 1828, there were received into the church the number of 93 persons, of different ages, from early youth to very advanced years. Not one had as yet seceded from the worshipping assembly, or the ancient faith of our profession.

A certificate of withdrawal was, I believe, utterly unknown among us. A general union in sentiment and feeling, with pleasing harmony in the church, rose paramount to every effort at opposition or secession.

From this period, if there was a gradual diminution of zeal and engagedness in religious assemblings, yet the spirit of the revival appeared to be well sustained; and happy fruits were visible, in forming benevolent societies, and in the increasing numbers and efforts of the various kinds of missionary and charitable institutions, in so successful operation among the active Christians of the day. In this onward and regular progress of benevolent effort, we find no unusual impulse, or quickening religious impression, for the space of two years and four months, when the spirit of the former revival received re-invigoration, and renewed excitement.

Our last general revival commenced in Nov. 1829; when the spiritual influence of the preceding, was so recent, and

the fruits of it so visible and tangible, that the present seemed to be a continuance of the past, with a renewed vigor. The effusions of Divine grace now came upon this people like "*a rushing mighty wind,*" filling all the place. The church was ready to move onward, and hail the return of a season of refreshing from the presence of the Lord; and united prayers were frequent, invigorated, spiritual, and successful. In a very short time, the subjects of this excitement amounted to 140 hopeful converts. Of these, the number of 73 were admitted to communion on the sacramental Sabbath in March, 1830.*

Our communicants, at this time, numbered 334, which is about one third of our whole population, amounting by the census of the same year, to 1017 of all ages.

But now we have to record a different scene from these overflowings of spiritual influence, and this state of Christian harmony and sweet union in counsel. Soon was I called to bitterly remember and realize what a fellow-laborer pleasantly observed to me—"What, sir, do you think that the adversary will do to you, when invidiously seeing you thus highly favored of the Lord, with a united flock, and rapidly growing church? Surely he will make an effort to raise a storm and scatter the flock."

Hitherto we had been an unusually united people in all our ecclesiastic concerns; and for nearly two centuries, since the Pilgrims arrived and commenced a settlement in this place, 1635, there had been but one denomination of Christian worshipers; all meeting in the same house for their public solemnities. If novel preachers made ingress they held their assemblies in private dwellings, or the district school houses; and their influence was transient, and evanescent as the day. But now we turn the leaf, and see a page altogether different;—a page blotted by disunion, and the rendings of deforming schism.

At an early period from the commencement of the last powerful revival, of so much spiritual promise, the introduction of Wesleyan sentiments originated much controversy, and drew over to the Methodist class some individuals of very honest zeal, who, to this day, are in fellowship with that denomination of Christians.

Soon afterwards, as early as the beginning of February, the month anterior to the great accession to this church, and in the midst of a full flow of revival feelings, and the all thrilling sympathies of religious excitement, some of our opulent citizens invited an Episcopal clergyman to officiate in pri-

* My fellow laborers in the two last revivals were Rev. Nicholas Patterson and Rev. Samuel Griswold.

vate dwellings, and hold a weekly evening service. These meetings continued week by week, either in those mansions, or the school house, till, on April 9th, they observed a public day of worship, on Good Friday. In May 31st, as I understood, they organized their church, and elected their Wardens and Vestry-men. On the 9th of August 1830, the corner stone of the Episcopal church was laid; and, on the next year, Aug. 16th, 1831, the church was consecrated.

Public worship has been sustained by them to the present time; and we have now two houses of worship within our local boundaries. All this constitutes a new era in my ministry, and in the religious history of Saybrook. With all this schism from the ancient church of our fathers, there seems however to be but little diminution of strength, in sustaining the congregational form of worship. Our house is usually well filled, and not unfrequently to overflowing; especially on the monthly sacramental solemnity. None, so far as I can learn, utter the least complaint, nor feel any additional burden of expense. It is believed there never was more harmony, union, and cheerful co-operation, in all ecclesiastical concerns, than at the present time.

The result of this separation among the people of my charge, in my advanced years, and near the close of my ministry, and in the midst of a powerful revival of religion, so cheering to the hearts of the pious, and so invigorating to me, amidst my multiplied labors, has indeed caused me many trying sensations: but the union and firmness of my church—their unshaken and unwavering stability in the faith, and the affectionate attachment of the people to my ministry, with the distinguished constancy and steadfastness of our dear youth in church and society,—to their praise be it mentioned—these united considerations have greatly strengthened me, and the grace of God has sustained and animated me, far beyond my most sanguine expectations. I feel as if I had never enjoyed so much, and so constantly, the presence of God, and the fullness of the consolations of faith, as in the year which now closes my half century service. “*To me who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given.*”

The dark cloud has passed over, without desolation; the moral atmosphere is serene, and prophetic denunciations have fulminated without ruin.

To return to the affairs of this ecclesiastical community. Amidst the ancient customs of this church, it had been formerly the practice to admit persons to give public assent to a form of covenanting, and then to offer their children in baptism. This habit had been coeval with this church; and it had formerly been customary for ministers to call on the pa-

rents, and young people, to acknowledge publicly, what was termed the *renewal of the baptismal covenant*: and the youth would, in classes, as I have been informed, present themselves, at certain periods, before the church, for this purpose. This custom has now become obsolete. From the first general religious excitement, in 1809, the practice has gone almost entirely into disuse; and I have been asked by several, whether this custom was ever admitted. Four only, of this description, are now living with us; and the last, remaining in this standing, was admitted more than twenty years since.

This house, in which we worship God, was built in 1726. The former one stood in the middle square near the Pilgrim's fort. That was in use from 1646, till the present was completed, the space of 80 years. The duration of this building is 107 years. There was no steeple to it till 1793. The bell was procured 1794. The present one, of heavier weight, was received, and in use, April, 1833. The series of ministers has been mentioned. The names of the Deacons, who have served in this church, are in number eighteen. Of these, Deacon Francis Bushnell stands first on record. Since my ministry, nine have been chosen, and all of them been consecrated with *prayer and the laying on of the hands of the ministry*. The number of baptisms, under the present ministry is 1001. The number of the communicants, during this period is 618: more than half are still living; but some of them distantly removed. The number of deaths is 722. The number of marriages, in which I have officiated, is 356. Among all the united heads of families residing in this place, when I commenced my ministry, not one now remains in this union: each has been separated by death from the friend of his youth.

In our retrospective view, we have noticed events that occurred, but have only glanced at the perils and sufferings of the fathers, in the early period of their pilgrimage. They had to conflict with dangers and trials altogether unfelt and scarcely to be imagined by us. For years they were watched and hunted by the native sons of the forest; and many of them wounded and killed while going to their fields of labor, or pursuing their usual callings.

The name of *Butterfield's meadow* is still retained, to remind us of one of the five, who, in 1636, were surprised by the *Pequots* as they were laboring on Calves Island. The greater part of them escaped with wounds, but *he* was put to the torture, and expired amidst their cruelties. *Tilly's Point* will remind us of one, who landing on the same island for the purpose of hunting, was surprised, with his fellow, by the concealed natives, and both of them put to death with

unfeeling barbarity. *Cornfield Point* had a garrison of six men, of whom three, as they were out with their fowling pieces, were surprised, and wounded, but survived. At this time the fort of defense where the inhabitants resided, was in almost perpetual siege, till the Pequot war of 1737 was closed, when that nation was effectually and finally subdued.

Pequot Hill and Pequot Swamp retain the name of a once formidable enemy, who are now no more. But the names of Mason, and Underhill, the gallant chiefs and successful leaders of a little army, who subdued the foe, ought never to be forgotten.

Remnants of different tribes still roamed the forests, and, for near seventy years, caused frequent alarms to the inhabitants, and especially on the sacred stillness of the Sabbath. A very aged man, living here when I first came to reside among you, informed me he could well remember when the inhabitants carried their military weapons of defense to the house of worship, lest they might be surprised by the artful natives.

Much indeed were our Pilgrim fathers willing to endure, if, by their labors and sufferings, they could secure for themselves and their descendants, the quiet possession of republican privileges, with civil and religious liberty. They suffered but persevered; and we enjoy the legacy and its rich inheritance. Much do we owe to their memory; and high and solemn is our responsibility to our families and future generations, that these blessings may descend to them unimpaired, and unadulterated, by anti-republican sentiments in church or state.

"I love thy church, O God!
Her walls before thee stand,
Dear as the apple of thine eye,
And graven on thy hand."

If there ever was a people that had reason to venerate their ancestry, and to appreciate valuable privileges, the result of much labor, expense, and suffering endurance, surely the descendants of the Pilgrims are *that people*.

Hitherto, amidst many dangers, we still enjoy the rich legacy, and are presenting before the world, evidence that the church of Christ can stand without the wealth, and power, and religious establishments of the kingdoms of this world;—that an enlightened republic can be sustained by law, and the church of Christ by its own inherent excellence, without the interference and aid of civil government, or ecclesiastic hierarchies.

II. The arrangement of my subject will next lead us to take a view of the present period.

It is in many respects very different from the past. In the latter, you see a little church in the wilderness, flying from the intolerance of civil and prelatical power; making an establishment in a far distant land, among the ferocious natives of the woods, but firmly trusting in their God;—we see them laboring and suffering, but hoping and believing;—we see them struggling, but emerging;—we see the forest clearing, and the vineyard growing;—we see the church rising, and the garden of God beautifying;—we see the Christian school enlarging, and sons and daughters educated in the knowledge of truth, and the rights of man;—we see the rules of social intercourse, and the laws which came from heaven, all simplified and brought to the child's eye, and unsophisticated by forms of man's devising, and from the illusions of imperial or pontifical impositions.

The work was great, but their hands were strengthened: the foundation stands, and the edifice is progressing.

Contrast all this with the present; and where now are the sons of the forest, with their painted visages, to awe the timid and defenseless? Where now is to be heard the war whoop of the natives? Where now the trackless desert in which the savage roamed and yelled? Your children have rarely seen the copper-colored skin, or painted form; and scarce one of us has ever heard the yell of the Indian reverberate in the forest, or seen the bloody wounds of the scalping knife. We must go far west to behold scenes like these. Here the wilderness is changed to a garden; the desert to cultivated fields; "*the mountains and the hills break forth into singing, and the trees of the field clap their hands,*" while your sportive children pluck the "*rose of Sharon and the lily of the valley.*" Here the alarm by night, and the terror by day, are no more; and here the rock of Obed's altar* is changed into the mount of Zion; and the forest to the city of God. Here instead of natives worshipping the good and evil Spirit, we see a church of Christ, and temples dedicated to the true God. Here we sit under our vines and fig trees, and have none to make us afraid. Here we can go to the "*house of God in company, and take sweet counsel together.*" Here we can hear what God tells us, directly from heaven; and then go home, and read and examine for ourselves, *what saith the law and the testimony.*

With an almost unparalleled union, for nearly two centuries, has this church sustained the old puritan faith and wor-

* An altar of rock where Obed, a native Indian, sacrificed a deer to the Great Spirit, two miles north of the Pilgrim's fort.

ship; and now counts for its professors more than four times the number of any period anterior to the late reiterated revivals; and, in the four congregational churches of the town, nearly one thousand communicants.

The half century in which I have resided with you, discloses a period of successive effusions of Divine influence, for forty years, throughout our highly favored land, till scarce a village, perhaps not one, but has experienced the refreshing dews, or more plenteous showers of grace.

With these benign visitations of heaven, there has simultaneously risen a spirit of Christian enterprize and effort, for enlightening, civilizing, emancipating and christianizing all the unenlightened and oppressed nations of the world. This benevolent spirit is manifested in the numerous beneficent institutions of the age, spreading from north to south, and from east to west, through all climes and regions of the earth, and sustained with augmenting liberality, as mind is informed and hearts touched with the living *coal from the altar*; or imbued with grace from above. The great principles of the reformation, and the great republican simplicity of the religion of Jesus, probably never stood in greater firmness and stability, nor in higher and more increasing estimation than at the present time.

The eastern world looks with amazement to see this young republic rising, and spreading, and taking still deeper root in sustaining the rights of man, and maintaing civil and sacred freedom, by the power of diffused truth, and the innate force of righteous laws, well understood, and widely spread among all grades of people. While the kingdoms of the east have been revolutionized, and Papal power, founded in the deceptible ignorance of the multitude, has been shaken—we see, in the west, a mighty and growing republic, based on the knowledge of truth, and sustained by the religion of the fathers, stand firm amidst the shock of realms, and crash of empires.

What wonders crowd before us, in the past half century! Never was there a time in which greater and more united efforts have been put into requisition, in our beloved country, to enlighten and meliorate minds, than in this period; and never have the people felt themselves more able to do great things, than since they had believed that great things may be accomplished by human means; and efforts been put forth for this purpose, in full confidence that God will bless the prayers of his church. Never were bibles so multiplied as since millions have been sent to distant lands; never were churches better sustained with a pious and talented ministry, and the descending grace of heaven, than since the heralds of truth have been sent far abroad to illumine the

nations, and build up the *desclations of many generations*; and never have the useful arts, and the science of literary truth so flourished, as since men have been taught to *have great objects before them*, and that nothing is too great to be attempted in a just cause; no, *not even the conversion of a world*. Faith and effort have already civilized and christianized whole nations of idolaters; and the church have already, in their national institutions, passed the resolution of attempting to send the Book of Life to every family on earth. Oh! faith is like a mighty lever which can raise a world all merged in spiritual death.

If we would dwell farther on the great moral events of the half century, there rises to view the late effort of the Temperance Institution, which has enlisted a great portion of the first talents, and first characters in our nation, in a cause which all must acknowledge to be of incalculable interest to the morals and welfare of the people; and which has succeeded beyond the most flattering expectations of its most sanguine advocates.

The Colonization Society stands high among the institutions of the half century, and seems to promise, in its operations, the founding of an *empire of light and truth*, in a long neglected, degraded, and injured quarter of the world. And I believe we are now on the dawn of one of the most glorious revolutions that have been known in the Christian world; and that is, the entire abolition of that slavery of man, which has been, for so many ages, the blackest stain of the Christian nations; and that too with all their boast of civilization, refinement, pure religion, knowledge of the rights of man, and love of liberty. *The axe now seems laid at the root*; and the moral and religious enterprise of the day combine to inspire a confidence that the work will go forward, and that mountains of difficulty, arising from prejudice and self-interest, will be a level plain, or melt away before the sun that now radiates into the recesses and labyrinths of self-deception. A Wilberforce, whose eloquence in the cause of truth, once shook Senates, and poured conviction on minds strongly intrenched with self-interest, aided by the roll of ages, and riveted by the customs of the most enlightened nations; this man is no more! Deep is the sleep of the dead! but his name lives, and his spirit moves in a Clarkson, and multiplied successors of the same untiring and unshaken nerve, and the cause is advancing in Europe and this Republic, with a bold and fearless step, till the western Indies, and the islands of the sea are beginning to hail the twilight of a glorious freedom from a long and barbaric bondage.

In the mighty work, Christian nations seem to have felt a simultaneous impulse, as from Heaven, with a voice saying,

Let the slave go free, and emancipate the world from the chain of bondage and degradation.

All this is the achievement not of the military arm, but of reason, of truth, of Christian faith.

I rejoice that amidst the various benevolent operations of the day, you, my dear people, have not stood idly looking on, and folding your hands in indifference. Something, though too little, has been done in this last mentioned enterprise, as well as in the diversified operations of Christian beneficence, which distinguish the present era.

And here I think it not an unsuitable time and occasion, to thank my good people for generously contributing to constitute me an honorary member of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions; also a life member of the American Bible Society; also of the American Home Missionary Society; and lastly, of the American Sunday School Union.

III. We now arrive at the last proposed theme of contemplation, viz.—A view of the future.

Here we can say but little with certainty. The future is a *book with seven seals*. We know that we must die, and that this body must return to dust, and the *spirit unto God who gave it*. Yes, soon it will be said of us, as we speak of the departed; "*the fathers, where are they?*"

Amidst this general uncertainty of the future, if we take up the telescope of faith, and look through the dark vista of future scenes, to the prospects of the church, we see the kingdom of Christ rising over the fall of the kingdoms of this world, and irradiating all nations. But what transient triumphs of infidelity, and heresy, may exist, we cannot predict; what sufferings and persecutions the church may yet be called to sustain, before the great battle of *Armageddon* is fought, we cannot know; but for the ultimate triumphs of the Redeemer's kingdom, we have no fear, nor the shadow of a doubt. In this, we have the full assurance of faith.

If from this general view, we look at the future prospects of *this church*, we entertain no hesitancy that the Puritan faith of our fathers will be sustained, not because it is the faith of the Reformers merely, but because its doctrines find their strongest advocate in that great Apostle, who had from *Jesus a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun*. Equally do I not hesitate, that the congregational form of conducting the order of the church will be essentially maintained. I fully believe that Jesus Christ established a congregational church; and when I hear him directing his disciples to carry their cases of discipline before the church as the tribunal of ultimate decision, and then adding with a *verily*, "*Whatever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in*

heaven," Mat. xviii. 18, I cannot admit a shade of doubt to flit over my mind on this subject. Our fathers have here formed such a church, *on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone*: and I believe it to be the purest sample of the primitive church, that is now in the world. It has been from century to century growing in numbers, and light, and strength; and been often refreshed, and highly favored with divine influence—and who can doubt? Shall it be said that prelati- cal churches, of a very different form of government, and a different faith from that of the reformed churches, have also at various periods grown in numbers, light and strength; we should ask, have they received all these without the aid of civil establishments? and have they required experimental religion, and a change of heart to be the terms of communion?

Thus far have I spoken for the Puritan faith, and forms of worship, while looking at the future: shall I add—if another edifice for divine service shall soon be wanted to supply the decay of a century building, the *silver and the gold are the Lord's*, and will be presented. If a successor to the present ministry shall be soon required, the *Lord will provide*. If more ample means of support are needful for the future ministry, heaven has already given the ability, and will give the willing heart, and show this oft experienced truth, "*there is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty. He that watereth shall be watered also himself.*"

The closing scenes of my ministry remind my audience, and myself, that soon we must part; and that the voice which has been heard on the Sabbath, and lectures, and conferences: altogether amounting, as nearly as I can calculate, eight thousand times, will soon be heard no more. In these past services in the ministry, my health has been unusually sustained. Only five Sabbaths, in half a century, have I been prevented, by infirmity, from meeting the calls of my people, and performing pastoral labors. And if the duration of the ministry is to be valued, that of my venerable predecessor, with mine, amounts to nearly a full century.

Over the imperfections of my services I weep: over their breathings of earnest desires for the salvation of souls, I can entertain no doubt; and I look forward, this day, with delightful anticipations of meeting many of my hearers, with all hail my father and my mother, my sister and brother, my son and my daughter, my neighbor and my beloved. All hail to these mansions of peace and praise for ever! Oh! for ever! and what a sound to reverberate through the mansions of the blessed! for ever and for ever! But who of us will

then be absent, and far away? Perhaps some who we thought will surely be there—*perhaps some who thought themselves sure!* Oh, who can tell, till we have passed over Jordan?

To have been the *savor of life unto life* to my hearers, is heaven itself; but to have been a *savor of death unto death* to one soul;—Ah, the thought is too painful;—I shut the scene;—the curtain is drawn;—I can go no farther *Brethren, the time is short.* What thou hast to do, let it be quickly done.

In view of soon leaving the ministry, and the world, may I remind you of the importance of being prepared for the supply of a successor in this charge; and of the union of special prayer, and decided effort, to sustain the evangelic worship, and the faith of the fathers in primitive simplicity.

Happily, we live in a period in which talent, piety, a finished education, devotedness to the kingdom, and an engagedness to get souls to heaven, are most interestingly united in the rising sons of the church. Numbers are coming forward, and saying, Lord, here am I, send me; ready for the calls of the church, either to do, or to endure.

This gives me high consolation. I go to the land of my fathers;—I go to my mother earth, but when I sleep, there are the sons of promise rising to feed the church; and there the blessed assurance, "*Lo, I am with you always.*" This thought makes my sleep to be sweet. Yes, it makes my heart spring with joy, when feeling the cold grasp. It makes me live while descending to the grave; and I exclaim with Isaiah, "*Thy dead men shall live; with my dead body shall they rise. Awake and sing ye that dwell in the dust; for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead;*" that is, the church rising from spiritual death, as the sleeping saints from the graves that held them, till the voice spake and the dead obeyed.

In this thrilling view of the ministry closing on my part, and reviving in my successor, I feel at this moment, something perhaps as Aaron did, when going up the mount to see the land of promise, and then to die: I feel something as this ancient father of the church, when his sacred vestments were stripped off from him, to be put on Eleazer, his son and successor; and then appearing in his grave-dress. Here on the mount I stand—look over to the land of promise—then look on my flock—then take my last look—one more farewell view, as in the twilight of heaven—one more farewell view; and once more—then drop into the cold arms of death, and wake to meet you in the resurrection morn.

Whether I shall yet live to *lay hands* on the head of my successor, as my venerable father Hart welcomed me to the

ministry in this place, and consecrated me to the holy work ; or, whether I shall die in the Lord's service, without seeing the younger prophet who is to come after me, is all written in the book of God, but the seal is now upon it. One thing would greatly please me, and that is, to see my successor a colleague with me, and one who is truly evangelical and devoted, and prudent to guide and feed this much beloved flock of the Lord, before I die. One thing more I can cheerfully say, I am ready to meet your desires and prayers on this subject. If you say let my successor be on this year, or that it is needful for you, that I should continue longer in the flesh, and labor while life and strength endure, I respond at once—ready ; ready ; the Lord's will be done.

In the mean time, let me add, that my prayers for many years, and the present earnest breathings of my soul are, that my ministry may continue only so long as I can be useful to you, and that my last years may be blessed for your good, and spiritual union. For this I pray ; I hope ; I believe. Brethren, pray for me, while "*my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they may be saved.*"

Finally brethren, farewell ; be perfect, be of good comfort, live in peace ; and may the God of love and peace be with you. Peace be within thy walls, Oh, thou church of the ancients, and prosperity within thy dwellings. For my brethren and my companion's sake, I will now say, peace be within thee. If I forget thee, Oh, Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her skill. Oh, Zion, may thy prosperity vibrate on my heart ; thrill on every nerve, and beat in every pulse, till my last breath shall bid you say, he's gone : he is no more.



