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A Retrospect of Fifty Years

A Discourse

BY THE

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GIVEN AT MORNING SERVICE NOV. 16, 1902, ON THE OCCASION
OF THE CELEBRATION OF THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE ORGANIZATION OF THE CHURCH

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A RETROSPECT OF FIFTY YEARS.

“Ye shall hallow the fiftieth year: . . . it shall be a jubilee unto you, and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and every man unto his family.”—LEVITICUS, xxv. 10. Also, “The house of God is the church of the living God; the pillar and stay of truth.”—1 TIM. iii. 15.

WE are not called upon to-day as we meet to commemorate the beginnings of this church, to look back into a remote antiquity. We probably could, but need not try to trace its ancestry back through New England, and old England and Holland perhaps; to Palestine, and further yet among those dim, almost primeval shadows of religious life and thought from which the liberal Christian fellowship of to-day has slowly emerged. We need not to go further back than that year in which the Church of the Redeemer—of which you and I are the living representatives—was born. The year 1852 A.D. seems to have been in no wise a remarkable year in the world's history. It was the year in which Napoleon III. became the emperor of France. Victoria had been queen of England for fifteen years. Millard Fillmore—a Unitarian—was President of the United States. The anti-slavery conflict, which was to result in the great civil war of nine years later, was at its height, approaching rapidly an acute and critical stage. The Unitarian movement here in America was steadily gaining in power, and influence; its motive and purpose were now clearly defined, its long and bitter controversy with orthodoxy having been already closed

some fifteen years, Mr. Gannett says in 1838. Dr. Channing had been dead just ten years, Dr. Hale — still among us — had been ten years in the ministry. Theodore Parker — looked upon then, by many Unitarians even, as a heretic — was preaching his wonderful sermons in Boston, and most of the great leaders of the Unitarian movement were alive, and in active service: Drs. Bellows, Dewey, Furness, Peabody, Walker, Hedge, May, Gannett, Pierpont, Eliot of St. Louis, and many others, of blessed memory, who have since passed on. The last edition of the Year Book shews that eleven ministers now in service were ordained before 1852. In the great, and rapidly expanding field of American literature, that noble group of men whose names are now famous, Poets, Philosophers, Historians,—most of them identified with the Unitarian movement,—were doing their finest work: Emerson, Longfellow, Lowell, Whittier, Holmes, Bryant, Bancroft, Motley, Parkman, and Hawthorne. It was an age of moral and intellectual vigor, great in its liberal influences; a time of expanding thoughts and inspiring motives, but not great in the effective organization of those splendid forces at its command. The power and usefulness of the church as an institution was undervalued, and even distrusted by many of the best minds of that time. This was especially true in our own fellowship, even among those who accepted the church idea at its face value. The American Unitarian Association had been in existence twenty-seven years, but organized Unitarianism had hardly made itself felt outside of New England; although churches had been founded, at Baltimore, and Charleston in 1817, at Washington in 1821, at St. Louis in 1834, at Chicago in 1836, and San Francisco

in 1852. Of the churches now in the Year Book, two hundred and one were organized before 1852, two hundred and fifty-two since that year, making this — the only church organized in 1852 — the two hundred and second in the record. In the decade between 1850 and '60 only eighteen churches which have lived, were organized, as against sixty-three in the last decade of the nineteenth century. The National Conference was not yet born: it came together first in 1864, twelve years later.

In 1852 the "first" church in New York had been in existence thirty-three years, the "second," twenty-seven; the first in Brooklyn ten years, the second in Brooklyn (Mr. Chadwick's) was organized the previous year, 1851.

New York and Brooklyn were then much smaller cities than they now are, and much further away for all practical purposes. Staten Island was a rural suburb occupied mainly by people of wealth, and culture; and was something of a summer resort for people from the South and elsewhere. In the summer of 1852 there were already existing upon the island two very young churches, neither of them having as yet a house of worship, although both seem to have had a goodly number of supporters, and to have been sanguine of planting here what they always referred to as "Liberal Christian Religion." The word Unitarian was seldom used in their reports. The title page of the oldest record book in our possession reads as follows: "Records of the Churches established on Staten Island for the propagation of Liberal Christianity, viz., The United Independent Christian Church at Stapleton A.D. 1851. The Congregational Church of the Evangelists at New Brighton A.D. 1851. The above were united

into one society April 20th 1852, and incorporated Oct. 24th 1852 as the Church of the Redeemer." It is evident that the record of the early business meetings, and the subscription papers of both societies were carefully copied into the same book at a later date by a faithful hand, probably that of Mr. G. A. Ward, the first clerk of the united church: at all events, to its possessor, whoever he may have been, you and I are greatly indebted to-day. It is hard to decide from the early records whether there was in the beginning a spirit of rivalry between "the liberal Christians of the North and the South shore," as they then called themselves. I am inclined to infer that at first there was, but, if so, that rivalry was carried on in the most gentlemanly and respectful manner, and lasted something less than a year. It is evident that the Rev. John Parkman, M.A., who was the minister of both churches,—preaching on alternate Sundays at the Lyceum in Stapleton, and in Belmont Hall, New Brighton,—was influential in bringing about that union of forces which was effected in the early autumn of 1852.

Of the two previous organizations the United Independent Christian Church at Stapleton was the older, having been organized at a meeting held in the house of the Hon. Minthorne Tompkins on Feb. 19, 1851. The Congregational Church of the Evangelists at New Brighton was organized "after service on Sunday, Sept. 21, 1851, at a meeting held in the Hall of the Belmont House for religious worship" (at which the Rev. John Parkman had preached on "The Temptations of Jesus"). At this meeting, which seems to have been large and enthusiastic, William W. Russell, Esq., presided, Mr. George A. Ward

acting as clerk ; and a very liberal subscription list "for the maintenance of Religious services" was taken on the spot. If at the first glance it seems strange that a second liberal church should have been started on the island, it should be remembered that the means of communication between the North and South shores were not then even what they are now. The relations existing between the two movements seem to have been cordial, and even intimate, from the first. The names of Wm. C. Goodhue, and Robert C. Goodhue, and others appear on both subscription lists, and Messrs. Alexander J. Hamilton, and John Crabtree appear to have been on the boards of trustees of both churches. Mr. Parkman, who was immediately called and who at once accepted the pastorate of the new movement, had been preaching at Stapleton several months already ; that is, from June 16th. An arrangement was soon made and a definite schedule fixed in accordance with which he preached in the two different places on alternate Sundays for the next six months, each society paying half his salary, but on April 20, 1852, the record of the New Brighton church says, "At a meeting of the Trustees held this evening, after discussion it being found that there was no place for worship on this side of the island to be had ; from this time we must give up the rooms we now occupy at the Belmont House, it is the opinion of this meeting ; that we as a Society join the Society now worshipping at Stapleton, and to this end it is therefore resolved That the organization now existing as the New Brighton congregation be dissolved — and further that we hear with pleasure that Mr. Parkman has already received a call from the congregation at Stapleton ; in the

acceptance of which we shall still be able to consider him as our pastor." "It was then moved and seconded that the funds remaining in the hands of the treasurer be divided among the original subscribers pro rata, and that the result of the meeting be communicated to Mr. Parkman, the meeting then adjourned," the trustees present being James Parker, Esq., John Jewett, Jr., Esq., and L. Tuckerman treasurer, Mr. Geo. A. Ward, clerk of the Society, being absent in Europe. And although the record book contains a copy of the certificate of incorporation of "the Congregational Society, and church of the Evangelists in the village of New Brighton," it contains no record of any further meetings of the Society, or of its board of trustees.

On April 21, the next day, Mr. Parkman was called to the pastorate of the Stapleton church for a second year. In their letter to him the trustees say: "This offer is predicated upon the supposition that our friends worshipping at New Brighton will not make arrangements for services there another year, and the trustees desire to have it distinctly understood that they do not wish to interfere in any manner with the interests of the society at New Brighton," and so on. In his reply to their letter dated a week later, Mr. Parkman says, "Brethren, having laid before the trustees of the Religious Society at New Brighton the proposition made to me in your communication, I am happy to inform you, that, in the same desire to promote the interests of liberal Christianity which has influenced the body which you represent they have with entire unanimity released me from my engagement with them, expressing also at the same time their desire to unite with you in the

effort to build up a strong and efficient society." Under these circumstances Mr. Parkman says that he has no hesitation in acceding to their request, and expresses new hope, and confidence in the success of the united movement.

There is no further record for about three months, until July 18, when three of the North Shore trustees were elected to fill vacancies in the South Shore board; and at the meeting of the new Board on July 28 a committee was appointed to report upon a site for a church building, a plan for the same, and its probable cost. At a meeting on October 2 the committee reported; and their recommendation that "an acre of ground situated on the Turnpike (about half way between the two villages) be purchased" was accepted. At this meeting it was also "on motion resolved that the name of this incorporation be changed to that of the Church of the Redeemer." This is the first time that the name by which the church has since been known, appears in the records, and they furnish no clew as to why it was adopted, or by whom it was first suggested. At the same meeting Mr. Tompkins, Mr. Hamilton and Mr. Ward were appointed a building committee. The report of the previous committee on site and plan — of which Mr. Parkman was chairman — is very interesting, but too long to quote extensively. It shows that there had already been subscribed for building a church \$5400, of which \$1700 was subscribed in Stapleton and \$2250 in New Brighton, the remaining \$1500 (shortly afterward increased to \$3000) "having been subscribed by generous individuals in New York City and procured mainly through the solicitation of Mr. Geo. A. Ward." The report shows that such a building as was required could be built free of

debt, and goes at great length into the question of a site which the committee found to be a most difficult and serious one; there can be no doubt that they tried most carefully and conscientiously to reconcile the conflicting interests of the two villages, and probably did the best that was possible at the time; but their wisdom was not justified by the result. They claimed that "the larger number of people would probably come from Stapleton," and pointed to the fact that if the church site was "a little nearer to the South Shore than to the North Shore people" this seeming advantage was partially offset by the fact that the former "would have to climb a steep hill."

The subscription list for the new building gives the names of eighty-one subscribers, of amounts running from five to five hundred dollars, which was given by Mr. James Parker. On Sunday, Oct. 24, 1852, an adjourned meeting of the united congregations was held "after divine service in the Lyceum Hall at Stapleton, in the absence of Mr. Parkman," on exchange. "The Hon. William Emerson (a brother of Ralph Waldo Emerson), and the Hon. Minthorne Tompkins were chosen to preside." The action of the trustees in regard to the name of the church was ratified, and its first board of trustees was chosen. The following gentlemen were elected unanimously: Geo. A. Ward, Daniel Low, H. M. Harding, A. J. Hamilton, L. Tuckerman, J. F. Raymond, D. G. Garrison, W. C. Goodhue, and John Crabtree. After the record of this meeting there come in the record book copies of the Certificate of incorporation, dated October 24; of the By-laws, dated November 28; and of the deed of the church lot (which cost \$1000), dated Jan. 28, 1853. The subsequent records,

over which it will be necessary to pass more lightly, although they are filled with interesting details, are those of the existing organization and seem to have been kept very faithfully by Mr. Ward, and his successors, Mr. Eaton, Mr. Bryant, Mr. Jewett, Mr. Emmons, Mrs. Lowell, Mr. Willcox, and others.

The church was built and was dedicated on June 29, 1853, Drs. Bellows and Osgood of New York and Dr. Farley of Brooklyn taking part in the service; Mr. Parkman preaching the sermon to a crowded congregation. The pews were sold at auction (according to the old custom) on July 2, and brought unexpectedly good prices; in fact there were not enough of them, many people who had subscribed to the building being unable to secure even a seat in the completed church. In the month of July "a handsome communion service" — still in its possession — "was presented to the Society by Mr. James Parker," and a committee was appointed "to convey the hearty thanks of the society to Mr. Parker." In August the question of enlarging the church was taken up. The original building contained forty-five pews, and it was found desirable to add at least twenty more. There was no debt on the building, and a small surplus was in the treasury, the church and land having cost \$9184.10, while the subscriptions and sale of pews had brought in something over ten thousand dollars. With the help of a few additional subscriptions the enlargement was undertaken, and public services were suspended for several months while it was being done. On Sunday, March 26, 1854, the church was reopened, this time with seventy-six pews, of which three were free; Mr. Parkman preaching on the text "Ezekiel, xli. 7. And

there was an enlarging." An extract from a local paper says, "A large Sunday-school room has been made in the basement, the whole of which is above ground. The church is cushioned and carpeted throughout, the recess in the rear of the pulpit draped with satin damask is a handsome improvement, as is the black walnut balustrade which encloses the communion table." The Society had also been presented with an organ by the Hon. Minthorne Tompkins, and Mr. Chas. E. Butler (who was about to leave the island), and the new church seems to have been on the whole very well equipped. In April, 1854, Mr. Parkman was called as permanent pastor: he accepted the invitation. The church was evidently in a prosperous condition; and it is hard to tell how the subsequent decline in its prosperity began. It is evident that many of its supporters for one reason or another left the island, and during the years '54 and '55 financial questions seem to have been the principal subject considered at the meetings; there were many delinquents on the treasurer's books, and repairs of the church building were found necessary as early as January, 1856, when a certain Mr. Esterbrook, an architect, was consulted; but the society was still strong, and in May Mr. Parkman's salary was increased.

At the annual meeting of this year Mr. Francis G. Shaw succeeded Mr. Daniel Low as president of the board of trustees, and Mr. M. B. Bryant succeeded as clerk of the Society Mr. William S. Eaton who was leaving the island. Although the records do not say so, they indicate that there were many departures, and the average of attendance at the services declined. No doubt the inconvenient situation of the church had something to do with this, though most

of the attendants then drove to church with their own horses. On Dec. 2, 1858, Mr. Parkman offered his resignation of the pastorate in a beautiful letter which is copied in full in the record book. It was very reluctantly accepted, and a letter of regret was sent to him, signed by every member of the congregation. The pastorate of Mr. Parkman, the longest that this church has yet enjoyed, seems to have been in many respects the golden age of its history. In a letter recently received from a former clerk of the Society, telling something of the people who were active in those days, the writer says, "A very sterling company of good people they were; Mr. and Mrs. Parkman enjoyed the affectionate respect of the entire society, and his quiet scholarly discourses were always heard with the utmost satisfaction. The congregation was always small, not often exceeding fifty or sixty, but its means were always ample for its needs. Its great lack was enthusiasm. Everybody was already so comfortable that they felt no call to exert themselves to any considerable extent in behalf of their church or denomination. There was not a poor man in the Society. . . . Its lack of the common people was its greatest misfortune." It is perhaps as well to admit that — with one brief exception of which I shall speak — the subsequent history of the church, until quite recent times, is not entirely satisfactory, nor all that we could wish, but we can congratulate ourselves upon the fact that the church has been fortunate in always holding, even during its darkest hours, the loyal interest, and sympathy of some small band of devoted men and women who have never allowed the flame upon its altar in their hearts to be extinguished.

After Mr. Parkman's departure the interest of many people, and with it their subscriptions — as is apt to be the case — fell off, but a little group of faithful souls with Mr. Shaw at their head stood loyally together. The Rev. Charles Ritter was called at a reduced salary for a year. He remained not much more than a year, then — on his return from a two years' absence in Europe — Mr. Parkman was asked to resume the pastorate, but declined to do so; and on April 9, 1862, a call was extended to the Rev. R. P. Cutler, who accepted, and served apparently for about two years. I find no record of his resignation or withdrawal; but at a meeting of the trustees in April, 1864, it was decided that "at present the active members of the society are not sufficiently numerous to justify the reopening of the church." How long it had been closed I do not know. It is evident, however, that neither of Mr. Parkman's immediate successors were able to build successfully on the foundations laid by him. It seems probable that no attempt was made to call another pastor, and at a meeting of the Society Nov. 20, 1865, after filling several vacancies in its board, "The trustees were authorized to sell all the real, and personal property belonging to the church except the communion service and books," . . . and the treasurer was "directed to invest the proceeds in U. S. securities, to be held subject to the order of the Board." And then there follows in the records an interregnum of about three years during which no services were held, and no meetings of the congregation, or of the trustees are reported. To all outward appearances the church was extinct. It, however, was not dead, but only sleeping. It was reorganized and reincorporated; a new church edifice was built on the land

adjoining the spot where we now are, and was dedicated on Dec. 2, 1868, Drs. Putnam, Farley, Bellows, and Edward Everett Hale taking part in the services, together with the Rev. W. R. G. Mellen who seems to have been the man who did more than any other to bring the church again to active life.

The best record of this renewal I find in a report of the trustees submitted to the Society at its next annual meeting by Mr. A. M. Davis; after speaking of the condition of affairs which we have seen, Mr. Davis says, "Rev. W. R. G. Mellen, at that time Secretary of the Hudson River Conference, learning of the disbanded state of our Society, determined to gather the congregation and attempt its reorganization. Our struggles during the time when we held our meetings in the Union Sabbath School room, the patience with which Mr. Mellen continued his apparently hopeless task, and the ability which he brought to bear upon these labors are familiar to all." The report goes on to describe the steps that were taken to revive the legal status of the Society, and to erect a new church building. This second house, which, as I have said, stood on the adjoining lot, the Society was unable to pay for even by the sale of its securities and some new subscriptions; there was a debt upon it of over five thousand dollars, it with the land upon which it stood having cost nearly fifteen thousand. Tradition says that the building, although very churchlike, was built in that most ultra style of wooden Gothic, which was then popular. The walls were so low and the roof so steep and high that it was irreverently spoken of as "The church of St. Rufus." There is abundant evidence that it was difficult to keep its interior warm

and dry, but the people who came to it seem to have been spiritually warmed by a new enthusiasm and hope. Among those who were active at this time we miss many of the old names, but new ones appear, such as Emmons, Merrill, Henderson, Davis, Hicks, Willcox, Simonton, Vermeule, and Mrs. Johnson. The names of Shaw, Goodhue, Low, and Jewett still appear as those of active workers and supporters. In March, 1869, the Rev. Henry C. Badger was called to the pastorate, and he appears to have ministered very acceptably until he was obliged by ill health to retire in October, 1870, and on March 20, 1871, the Rev. W. R. G. Mellen, then apparently in Detroit, was asked to take charge of the church he had restored to life; during this interregnum Mr. Geo. Wm. Curtis, one of the Board of Trustees, supplied the pulpit for several months, and the church thus learned of his exceptional capacity in this office. As the next annual report says, "Mr. Curtis has thus demonstrated what usefulness is within his reach in the pulpit as well as in literature." Mr. Mellen did not take charge until the first of May, and did so then apparently with some unwillingness, although both he and Mr. Badger were paid larger salaries than Mr. Parkman had received. The debt still remained, although the financial resources seem to have been abundant. There is ample evidence in the records that the attendance at service was small. In January, 1874, Mr. Mellen offered his resignation, which was accepted by the Society with expressions of regret, but was looked upon as unavoidable, the attendance having become so very small.

Meantime efforts had been made to pay off the debt, and it had been greatly reduced. There is no doubt that the

growth of the church had been seriously hindered by this burden during the brief pastorates of Mr. Badger and Mr. Mellen, both of whom were men of recognized character, ability, and standing in the denomination; and the relations of both with the people of this church seem to have been at all times most cordial and friendly. After Mr. Mellen's retirement the pulpit was filled for quite a time by various ministers of whose names I find no record, the services being steadily maintained, and the contributions for their support being quite liberal. The pews in the second church were never sold, the system of free seats having been adopted from the first, and the Society evidently contributed frequently and liberally to the support of other churches and deserving charities, as well as for its own music. Much of this liberality was due to the fact that the Society had no longer to pay its minister's salary, as it was being ministered to freely and most acceptably from Sunday to Sunday by one of its own members, who read most effectively a series of well selected sermons. I have been unable to find any record of the exact date when the Society gave up the practice of hearing ordained candidates for the vacant pulpit and called upon one of its own laymen of whose ability it already had ample proof to conduct its regular services. But in the report of its annual meeting held on May 19, 1875, we read that "a vote of thanks to Mr. Curtis for his kindness in conducting the Sunday services was then passed." It is evident that his regular occupancy of the pulpit had at that time become an established, and most welcome fact, and his valuable services must have continued for more than four years. It was at the annual meeting of the Society on May 16, 1880, that

“Mr. Curtis stated that after the last Sunday in June next he should be unable to continue the present form of service,” and a committee was appointed “to prepare a suitable minute expressing the feeling of the Society upon the occasion of Mr. Curtis’s retiring.” On June 27 the committee reported “placing upon the records an expression of the Society’s mingled feelings of gratitude for the past and regret that the close has come.” The report says, “During the past four years Mr. Curtis has generously devoted his distinguished abilities to the service of the congregation with results which are familiar to all. Upon each Sunday the most elevated ethical teachings have been enforced with a strong and sweet eloquence which has made each service an occasion, not only of valuable instruction, but of rare intellectual pleasure as well. The noble lessons of our religion have been fitly set forth with a power and a grace which will keep them fresh in the memory of all the hearers.” And so closes what is probably the most interesting and satisfactory episode in the history of this church.

During those four or five years the Society enjoyed an experience which is rare, if not unique. Mr. Curtis here and then identified himself and his broad and healthful public influence with this little church, and the fact is recognized in our denomination to-day by all those who instinctively speak of this as “Mr. Curtis’s church” just as men speak of “Mr. Beecher’s church” or the “churches of Dr. Bellows, or Dr. Hale.” I have always felt that this identification should be openly and formally recognized, and I sincerely hope that a time will come when it will be found desirable and possible to exchange the somewhat archaic and incongruous name which the church has

inherited from its founders, for the name of "the Curtis Memorial Church,"—a name which would have a double significance and meaning, inasmuch as it would be a local memorial rightly placed, and a denominational recognition of the church's indebtedness to one of its most gifted and loyal laymen. I believe it would also add to the dignity and in many ways promote the influence and usefulness of this church itself. The rest of the story, so far as we need consider it to-day, is briefly told. After his withdrawal from the pulpit, Mr. Curtis was still active with a small but loyal band at meetings of the congregation and the Board of Trustees which were held sometimes at private houses. The meetings of a Sunday School organized in 1878 were also continued after the regular services were for a second time suspended. Of the exact date of this second suspension I can find no record. It is certain that candidates for the vacant pulpit were heard and that a "Mr. Weeks" declined a call of the Society.

In the summer of 1884 an application was made for the use of the church building by a Baptist Congregation and a committee was appointed with power to lease the church. I believe it was leased for a time, but of this I am uncertain. In the spring of 1888 Mr. Morehouse, then newly appointed Secretary of the Middle States Conference, proposed that an effort should be made to reopen the church, but the Committee appointed to consider the matter reported that "it was inexpedient to do so," for several reasons which the Secretary approved. In June of the same year it was voted that the church property be sold to pay the debt. This, however, was not done, although the building was in a somewhat ruinous condition; and the debt has since been cancelled by other means.

At a meeting held June 4, 1893, the Society again showed signs of returning life. It was then and there proposed to sell part of the real estate and erect "a new building for Sunday School purposes," the school which was still active having met for some time in private houses. A liberal member of the Society — the daughter of one of its most generous founders — offered to advance to the Society, without interest, the amount of a legacy from another member, to be collected later. This sum (which, I am happy to say, has recently been freely given to the Society by the original donor), together with a trust fund for a free circulating library in the hands of another member, when placed in a mortgage, were found to be sufficient to erect the desired building. A committee was appointed to do this, and the building in which we now are, the third church edifice of the Society, was immediately built, the old church on the adjoining lot being destroyed. Some of its material was used in this structure, the organ, the window behind the same, and some other fittings being removed here from the older church. With the new building came new hopes and new interests which we are enjoying to-day. It was dedicated on March 31, 1895; the pastors of the Unitarian Churches of New York and Brooklyn taking part, as upon former occasions of the same kind. Intermittent services were afterwards held by various ministers until January, 1897, when your present pastor was called and accepted; preaching his first sermon, as pastor, on February 7 of the same year. And here it is proper that our present record of the past should close. As we look back to-day upon the somewhat checkered history of this church, we find many things to be thankful

for, and much justification for honest pride as we recall the long roll of honorable and honored names of our fore-runners ; of those men and women who have given to this church its character by identifying themselves with what at first was quaintly called "the propagation of Liberal Christianity on Staten Island." It is certain that their hearts were true and loyal ; that their minds were broad and free ; and this is not the time nor the place to criticise their judgment. They certainly had many difficulties to contend with from the first, with some of which we are still familiar. They certainly gave liberally from their abundant resources to meet the needs of their own time ; but it is hard to understand why so many wealthy people failed to make any provision for the future of the church they founded, as with two exceptions, those of the late Geo. W. Jewett, of honored memory, and the generous lady still with us (of whose gift I have spoken), they all have failed to do ; and it is hard to understand how those shrewd and energetic business men, whose names we find upon our earlier boards of trustees, were apparently so unsuccessful in the organization and conduct of the affairs of a church which they so evidently loved, while they were conducting with marked success their own business affairs in the great city across the bay. But there were doubtless many reasons which do not appear to us. And it is certainly due to those men and women, to their children and successors, that there is no doubt in the mind of any one as to what this church stands, and has always stood for in this community: a free and rational interpretation of the Christian gospel ; the highest and broadest social usefulness ; the most modern and enlightened philanthropy, and the highest

moral and spiritual culture. In these things are indicated the inheritance we have received and the privilege and responsibility that are ours to-day.

The half-century that is ended has been a period of marked transition throughout the world, and it has been a period of marvellous transition here on our little island which has been, and is being rapidly transformed from an elegant resort and abiding place of wealthy, and cultured people to a mart of trade and manufacture, having become an integral part of the greatest commercial city in the world. With this change the character of the population has naturally been largely altered; which implies also a necessary change, not in the spirit or the purpose, but in the methods of any church which would fulfil its office and increase its usefulness in the community. It would be indeed strange if the temporal interests of this church had not suffered somewhat, as we see that they have done during this transition. There is no doubt that they have suffered greatly from the temporary closing of the church and suspension of its activities, once for four, and again for fourteen years, although such action no doubt seemed necessary and unavoidable when taken. As a result of this, not only individuals, but whole families have drifted away and found a home in other churches, where naturally they still abide: or they have lost altogether their interest in church life, and the habit of church attendance. But, as I have said, there has never been a time in all these fifty years, whether the church was open or closed, when there have not been here at least two, or three faithful souls, mostly women, who have clung loyally to their sacred memories of the past and their hopes for the future; to

them, some of whom are still with us, while others have departed recently, or long ago, we can never measure our indebtedness, nor express our gratitude.

It is to them the living, and the dead to whom our heartfelt thanks should go out to-day.

Of the future it is now — as always — too soon to speak, and we came not here to-day to prophesy, though I think we have a right to be most hopeful. Since this church was opened seven years and a half ago, our gain, if not great in membership, has been great in other ways. There has been a steady gain in courage, and confidence, in wisdom and in the power to co-operate in efficient work; and I believe that with that great increase in population which we all recognize as inevitable in the near future, we may reasonably expect a steady and healthy gain in numbers, which would perhaps be more evident, if not more rapid than it has been, if we could heartily and unanimously adopt the more modern methods of church development. In any case I congratulate you all, as I do myself, that we begin the new half-century with such advantages and opportunities as we now enjoy, made doubly sacred by those memories of the past to which your attention has just been called. I think we can safely trust that the Divine blessing must rest upon a church which has twice within fifty years died and come to life again. I doubt whether there is any other church within our fellowship with such an experience, and I hold it evident that such a church is destined to live and to fulfil some useful purpose in the world and in the community where it is placed.

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