REPAIRING THE BREACH.

A

HISTORICAL DISCOURSE,

PREACHED IN PLYMOUTH, MASS.,

AT THE TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY

OF THE

PILGRIM CONFERENCE OF CHURCHES,

MAY 16, 1855.

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BOSTON:
PRESS OF T. R. MARVIN, 42 CONGRESS STREET.
1855.

North Scituate, May 18, 1855.

REV. DR. CLARK,

Dear Brother,—I herewith transmit the following vote, unanimously passed at our recent meeting of Conference, viz:—

Voted, That the thanks of the Pilgrim Conference of Churches be presented to Rev. Dr. CLARK, of Boston, for his very able and instructive Discourse, just delivered before this body, and that a copy be requested for publication.

DANIEL WIGHT, JR., *Scribe.*

REV. JOSEPH S. CLARK, D. D.

REV. DANIEL WIGHT, JR.,
Scribe of Pilgrim Conference,

Dear Sir,—Relying more on the judgment of the Pilgrim Conference, than on my own, I yield to their request, as communicated by your favor of the 18th instant, with the earnest hope that the Discourse, imperfect as it is, may suggest to abler minds the idea of doing a similar service for other sections of our State. Rarely has the grace and the glory of God been more signally displayed since the Christian era commenced, than in the planting and preservation of the Congregational churches of New England,—their rise to the rank of model churches, under the embarrassments of a wilderness life, and their subsequent recovery from a lapsed condition, under still greater disadvantages. Gratitude demands some suitable memorial.

"Why should the wonders he hath wrought,
Be lost in silence, and forgot?"

The time has come, moreover, when *the facts*, not only in the earlier, but in the later history of these churches, can be stated without acrimony, and be heard without prejudice. Let them be collected and given to the world, not in denominational pride, nor in theological controversy, but in unaffected honor to Jesus Christ, "who hath wrought all our works in us," and whom God has given "to be head over all things to the church."

Yours truly, J. S. CLARK.

Boston, May 21, 1855.

DISCOURSE.

ISAIAH LVIII. 12.

THOU SHALT RAISE UP THE FOUNDATIONS OF MANY GENERATIONS; AND THOU SHALT BE CALLED, THE REPAIRER OF THE BREACH, THE RESTORER OF PATHS TO DWELL IN.

In recovering this fallen world to holiness, it hath pleased God that each successive generation of his people should have a part to act, as workers together with him. One labors during the short day allotted to him here, and another enters into his labors, who is soon to be succeeded by another still. As in rebuilding the cities of Judea and the temple at Jerusalem, so in repairing the moral desolations of earth, some are called to lay the foundations, others to build thereon; while it may be reserved for future ages to realize the grand result to which the labor of ages past has been directed.

The progress of Christianity in every kingdom and commonwealth, where it has made any progress at all, illustrates this feature of the divine administration. The Apostles founded churches in various parts of the Roman empire; but it was not till centuries after they had gone to their rest, that the throne of the Cæsars was occupied by a Christian emperor. Other generations had risen up and entered into their labors; had built upon their foundations; had lived, and suffered, and died, defending the faith which the Apostles preached.

The gospel was carried to the isle of our pagan ancestors in the sixth century. But why did not its light go out as suddenly there, as in Asia Minor? Because the foundations thus laid by one generation, were raised up by another. The work of one century, instead of being left to crumble again to the dust, was carried forward in the next.

The gospel was brought to these shores by the Pilgrims* of 1620. It was the GREAT CHARTER of that new empire which began with their landing on Plymouth Rock. Its authority was their law. It controlled their private dealings with each other. It was seen in their public and political negotiations. It sat with the magistrate on the bench, and held before him the scales of eternal justice. Such were the men whom God selected from the old world, when he was about to establish his kingdom in the new. And the foundations which they laid correspond with this description of their character. The civilized world has paid the tribute of its admiration to the wisdom of their counsels and the grandeur of their designs. But where are those "master-builders" now? Resting from their labors. Their sepulchres are with us. The great moral enterprise which they commenced, if ever consummated, or even kept from going back, must be taken up by other hands. Their unfinished works, showing here and there sad marks of decay, meet the eye

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* Rev. Joseph Hunter, in his FOUNDERS OF NEW PLYMOUTH, (p. 5,)—a book of deep antiquarian research and great value,—objects to this application of the word "Pilgrim," as "philologically improper." "A pilgrim," says he, "is a person who goes, in a devout spirit, to visit a shrine." Yet he owns that "there is the same corrupt use of the word in the English version of the Scriptures:—'*And confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.*'" No intelligent person understands this word in any other than the New Testament sense, when he finds it applied to the founders of New England; for he knows that they themselves meant just this, and nothing more, when they accommodated that Scripture to their condition. The criticism seems hypercritical, and will hardly avail to change the popular terminology.

wherever it turns; while the providence of God, in a thousand ways, is calling on *us* to enter into their labors; to raise up the foundations which they so piously laid.

In obedience to this call, the PILGRIM CONFERENCE OF CHURCHES, composed chiefly of their descendants, and occupying the ground which holds their dust, was organized twenty-five years ago,* and has ever since been laboring, in accordance with the third article of its Constitution, "to promote a spirit of active piety," like that which imbued the Pilgrim Fathers—with what success, its published "Documents" show.†

At the end of this first quarter of a century, it may be useful to pause, and review the past, and see what lessons of wisdom it affords for our conduct in the future. I propose, therefore, on this occasion, briefly to sketch the religious and ecclesiastical history of the towns within the territorial limits of this Conference, following the course of church-extension, from the landing of the Pilgrims at Plymouth in 1620.

These towns are now twelve in number, namely, Plymouth, Kingston, Duxbury, Marshfield and Scituate, bordering on Massachusetts Bay; and South Scituate, Hanover, Pembroke, Hanson, Halifax, Plympton and Carver, lying one tier back. Three of these, namely, Duxbury, Pembroke and South Scituate, though they have no church in connection with this Conference, yet, having members of churches that are thus connected, and falling as they do within its geographical bounds, are properly included.

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* April 27, 1830, at the meeting-house of the Second Parish in Plymouth, (Manomet Ponds.)—*See Docum. Pilg. Conf. No.* 2.

† The publication of these Documents commenced in 1848, and four numbers have been issued at irregular intervals. Each number, except the first, contains a historical sketch of one church within the bounds of the Conference. They are henceforth to be published annually, and will be an accumulating fund of historical information. Should all other similar bodies do the same, the results would be of inestimable value.

Without going over the water to the little town of Scrooby, in the north of England, where, in 1602, a small band of Puritans was formed into an Independent or Congregational church, at the house of William Brewster; without following that persecuted band on their exile path to Holland, in 1608, and thence in their pilgrimage to these shores in the winter of 1620, we begin at this last named date and place. Then and there was planted the first church in Plymouth; the first within the bounds of this Conference; the first in New England. The original number of members probably fell short of seventy-five; for the whole company, including children and servants, were only one hundred and one, of which forty-four died before the end of March. Perhaps forty is as high as we can reasonably set the number of church members in the spring of 1621.

Can we wonder that twelve years elapsed before this first church was able to send forth a second? The wonder is, that it did not itself expire. In no way can we account for its continued existence, but by referring to the depth of that piety which had been refining in the furnace of affliction for twenty years; the firmness of that faith which had not faltered under the imposition of fines and in sight of faggots; the strength of that brotherly love which had grown up between those who, after having so thoroughly learned to bear one another's burdens, found themselves in exile three thousand miles from their native home, "for the word of God, and the testimony of Jesus."

But the death of nearly half their number during the first four months of a wilderness life, was not so hard to bear, not so depressing to the church, as the "hope deferred" of seeing their beloved pastor join them in the spring, with the rest of his flock. This was confidently expected when they parted at Delft-haven on the previous July. But having passed through the fiery ordeal of

ecclesiastical proscription, that Moloch of Episcopacy, they were now to encounter Mammon. The "merchant adventurers" of London, many of whom had invested funds in this colonizing scheme merely as a money-making business, fearing that so much Puritanism would injure the speculation, found pretexts for keeping them back.* And it was not till the May-flower company, poor as they were, had actually bought out those merchant adventurers at an exorbitant price, that they could fetch the rest of their friends from Leyden; which they joyfully did in the summer of 1629, at an additional cost of £550, besides the expense of supporting them fourteen months after their arrival, till "a harvest of their own production" was gathered. Taking into view all the circumstances, this must be regarded as one of the greatest triumphs of Puritan principle, and as illustrating one of the loveliest traits in the character of our Pilgrim Fathers. It more than verifies the statement of their confiding pastor to Sir Edwin Sandys, when, negotiating for their passage to New England, he said, "We are knit together as a body in a more strict and sacred bond and covenant of the Lord, of the violation whereof we make great conscience; and by virtue whereof we do hold ourselves straitly tied to all care of each other's good, and of the whole by every, and so mutual." [Robinson's Works, vol. i. p. 40.]

But he who gave utterance to this noble sentiment, and who had done more by his life and teachings than any other man to foster its growth, was not permitted to see this grand exemplification of it, in the re-union of his long-divided flock. To their unspeakable grief, he died

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* Their chief objections were no doubt founded in their attachment to Episcopacy, whose "markett would be mared in many regards," by Mr. Robinson's presence and preaching; but the ostensible and popular argument against it was the one above stated.—*Felt's Eccl. Hist. N. Eng. pp.* 59 *and* 84.

in Holland, March 1, 1625, after a short sickness, at the age of fifty. As Moses was released from his charge, when he had conducted the children of Israel within sight of Canaan, so fell the leader of this Pilgrim band, when, through long wanderings and many perils, he had brought them within a step of their destined home. Nor did the tide of his influence, more than that of Moses, stop at his death. It has been rising ever since, and will never ebb. The practices and opinions of JOHN ROBINSON, more than those of any other man, have shaped the institutions of New England, though he never set foot on her soil. So deeply had his congregation drank at the fountain of his wisdom, and so fully had they imbibed his spirit, that the Plymouth church, without his presence, and for nine years without any resident pastor, still preserved the polity which he had prescribed, and was the model after which the Salem church and the Boston church were formed, notwithstanding their repugnance to "the separatists" when they left England. It was, in fact, with the slightest possible modifications, the polity which, in 1648, was embodied in the Cambridge Platform.

But to proceed with the narrative. When the Mayflower company left Holland, Mr. William Brewster, a ruling elder in the church at Leyden, was expected to fill the office of teacher also, but not of pastor—ministering the word, but not the sacraments, till Mr. Robinson should come. Being a man of liberal education and of most exemplary piety, he did this to the great edification of his hearers. Still, for the church to be deprived of the Lord's supper, and their children of baptism, through successive years, was a painful deprivation; and when their adversaries in England reproached them for this disuse of the sacraments, they feelingly replied: "The more is our grief that our pastor is kept from us, by whom we might enjoy them; for we used to have the

Lord's supper every Sabbath, and baptism as often as there was occasion of children to baptize." [Mass. Hist. Coll. vol. iv. p. 108.]

At length, in the spring of 1624, the merchant adventurers, adding insult to injury, undertook to meet this pressing want, by sending them, not Mr. Robinson, but Mr. Lyford, his exact opposite, with the cruel aim of thereby more effectually keeping the pastor back, and of turning his church over to Episcopacy. His subtle intrigues, however, were exposed; and being convicted also of gross immoralities, he was expelled the colony. In 1628, these same adventurers sent another by the name of Rogers. Him the Pilgrims found to be deranged mentally, as Lyford was morally; and they sent him back the next year at their own expense.

These incidents of trial are worthy of our notice, as illustrating not only the faith and patience of our Fathers, but also the tough, cohesive texture of the church polity which they had adopted. *Congregationalism*, in their hands, was any thing but that "rope of sand," which some in later times have described it. It was a government designed by its framers to be administered, not only *over* the church, but *by* the church—by the whole body of believers composing it, and not by its officers alone—as it was most efficiently administered by the Plymouth church, when questions of the gravest character were continually arising, with no pastor to help them. And such was the inherent strength and self-adjusting power of its machinery, that it would have worked just so, if Elder Brewster and both the deacons had been taken away too.

In 1629, Mr. Ralph Smith, having just arrived at Salem in company with Skelton and Higginson, was called to settle at Plymouth, its first resident pastor. He is described in the church records as a "grave man," but "of low gifts and parts." After two or three years they employed

the celebrated Roger Williams to assist him; who, in the same records, is called "a young man of bright accomplishments, but of unstable judgment." Like many a church since, they found less room for choice, than they had supposed, between these opposite qualities,—found that brilliancy, coupled with indiscretion, was not much better than moderate talents with gravity. As neither of these men seemed adapted to follow the learned and judicious Robinson, they were both dismissed in 1635—the one as "not sufficiently gifted for the work;" the other for "beginning to vent some errors which were offensive to the church." To show, however, that the Plymouth people were not, after all, so hard to please as these records might seem to intimate, I quote the testimony which they give of Mr. Smith's successor, who was simply a plain, good man. "It pleased the Lord at last to send Mr. John Reyner, an able and godly man, of a meek and humble spirit, sound in the truth and every way unreprovable in his life and conversation." [Ch. Rec. in Mass. Hist. Coll. vol. iv. p. 10.] Mr. Reyner was settled in 1636, and continued his useful labors among them for eighteen years.

Thus far the history of the church at Plymouth is the history of all the churches composing this Conference; for, with a single exception, (and that but a partial one,) they were all embosomed in it, and have one after another grown out of it, like so many banyan trees, successively taking root from the spreading limbs of one mother trunk.

The first that went out was the church of Duxbury, in 1632,—though without any stated ministry, except perhaps Elder Brewster's, till the arrival of Rev. Ralph Partridge in 1636. He was driven from England by Archbishop Laud for non-conformity. As an index of his rank among the able divines of that day, he was appointed, with John Cotton of Boston, and Richard Mather of Dorchester, to draw up a model of church

government, which, in 1648, was adopted as the Cambridge Platform. The date of his settlement in Duxbury is not known; but he was in the pastoral office when the town was incorporated, June 7, 1637, and continued there, through many hardships, till his death in 1658. [Math. Magn. vol. i. b. iii. p. 365.]

The next colony from the Plymouth church was the present South church in Marshfield. The request from the Duxbury members, though clearly necessitated by the great inconvenience of getting their families to meeting three miles by water and twice as far by land, had been granted with some reluctance. There was a fear of weakening the mother church. It was a natural feeling, and is common now—much more common than that noble, persistent purpose of the emigrant members to sustain the gospel in their new settlement, though far less able than those they left behind. But to prevent farther depletion, and at the same time to meet the demands of an increasing number of families and flocks, they resorted to the expedient of "granting farms at a place called Green's Harbor, (now Marshfield,) where no allotments had been made;" with the understanding that the owners would still make Plymouth their home, and husband their distant farms by means of servants and hired help. [Prince Chron. p. 411.] The result of the experiment was exactly the reverse of what was anticipated. These Marshfield farmers are almost immediately found organizing a separate church. The exact date has not been preserved; but in the Plymouth records, "the beginning of the church in Marshfield" is assigned to 1632, and is there said to be "incorporated soon after Duxbury." [Mass. Hist. Coll. vol. iv. p. 11.] For several years they must have been destitute of preaching, though not of "prophesying," since Governor Winslow was among them, who is said to have excelled in that exercise. This most enterprising of all the Pilgrim band, in one of his

visits to England, induced several Welch gentlemen to emigrate to Marshfield, among whom was Rev. Richard Blinman, who supplied the pulpit for a season. But a want of harmony between the old and new settlers soon induced him to remove, with most of his countrymen, to Gloucester.* The town of Marshfield was incorporated March 2, 1641, and the next year Rev. Edward Bulkley, son of Rev. Peter Bulkley of Concord, was ordained their first pastor, and continued about thirteen years, till called to settle as colleague with his aged father.

The church of Scituate, which stands next in chronological order, dates its *origin* at Southwark, London, in 1616, as the Plymouth church does at Scrooby in 1602. But September 27, 1634, is the date of its beginning in Scituate. Rev. John Lothrop, and about thirty members of the Southwark church, (a majority of the whole,) fleeing from persecution in England, landed at Boston, and on the day above named "proceeded to the wilderness called Scituate," where others from Plymouth, who had belonged to Mr. Lothrop's church in Kent and London, had already begun a settlement. These were re-united with their newly arrived brethren soon after.†

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* Rev. Messrs. Wilson of Boston, and Mather of Dorchester, were called to settle the controversy. So far as the result has come to light, it would seem that the cause of the trouble was, "a few gifted brethren made learning or prudence of little avail. They compared him (that is, the brethren compared Mr. Blinman) to a piece of new cloth in an old garment."—*Felt's Eccl. Hist. vol. i. p.* 445; *also, Baylies' Hist. Plym. Col. vol. ii. p.* 285.

† The early records of Mr. Lothrop's church were supposed to be lost. But Rev. H. Carleton, of Barnstable, has recently discovered a copy of them among Pres. Styles's manuscripts in the library of Yale College. I am allowed, by my obliging brother, who has transcribed the whole, to make the following extracts.

"Touching the Congregational Church of Christ at Scituate.—The 28th of September, 1634, being the Lord's day, I came to Scituate the night before, and on the Lord's day spent my first labors, forenoon and afternoon.—Upon the 23d of November, 1634, our brethren of Scituate, that were members at Plymouth, were dismissed from their membership in case

Some difference of views among the members of his flock on the subject of baptism operating against the pastor's usefulness, he removed to Barnstable with the majority of his congregation at the end of five years, and thus founded the First church in that ancient town. The residue immediately re-organized, and called Rev. Charles Chauncy to become their pastor. He was settled in 1641, but against the remonstrance of nearly half the church. He remained twelve years. Soon after his dismission, he was elected President of Harvard College in place of Rev. Henry Dunster, who, in turn, took Mr. Chauncy's place at Scituate. Meanwhile, the disaffected portion of the church had withdrawn, and formed themselves into another, the present Unitarian church in South Scituate; though no traces of Unitarianism were found in it for nearly a century and a half from that time, as will be noticed in its proper place. This occurred in 1642; but the first pastor, Rev. William Witherell, was not ordained till September 2, 1645.

The third church that colonized from Plymouth (considering those in Scituate as derived in great part from other sources) was that of Eastham, on Cape Cod, which was gathered in 1646, after a long and earnest discussion, involving the grave question of breaking up the whole establishment at Plymouth, and removing bodily to some other place. But sober counsels prevailed; and those who insisted on a removal were peaceably dismissed, and went to the Cape.

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they joined in a body at Scituate.—Upon January 8, 1634, we had a day of humiliation, and then at night joined in covenant, so many of us as had been in covenant before,"—thirteen in all. This last transaction has usually been regarded as a *re-organization* of Mr. Lothrop's church, and its date on these shores has been fixed accordingly. But all the circumstances taken into the account, leave no room to doubt, that the covenanting on January 8, 1634, O. S., answering to January 18, 1635, N. S., was only the *re*-covenanting of those who had formerly been in covenant under Mr. Lothrop, and now removed their relations from Plymouth to Scituate.

And here the distressed state of this parent church—"the mother of us all"—as recorded by her faithful chronicler, Mr. Nathaniel Morton,

"Implores the passing tribute of a sigh."

The older members dying, the younger and more active moving away, "this poor church," says he, "was left like an ancient mother, grown old and forsaken of her children (though not in their affections, yet) in regard to their bodily presence and personal helpfulness. Thus she that had made many rich, became herself poor." It may be added, in this connection, as a circumstance affecting all the other churches, that the first crop of religious heresies in New England was now ripening under the husbandry of a few zealous Antinomians and Quakers; while many well disposed church members, influenced by busy sectaries of lower degree, were unconsciously weakening the power of resistance to these incoming errors, by crying down a learned and salaried ministry. This latter evil, which always cures itself before it quite kills a church, unsettled nearly all the ministers in the country a few years later. In Plymouth it drove away Mr. Reyner, and kept the pastoral office vacant fifteen years, till the settlement of Rev. John Cotton in 1669, who was eminently 'a repairer of the breach; a restorer of paths to dwell in.' He found the church reduced to forty-seven resident members; and during the first four of his thirty years' ministry, it had increased to a hundred and twenty.

Nothing more was attempted by way of church-extension till 1694, when a number from Plymouth, with some from other places, were organized into the church of Middleborough, having held separate worship there ten or twelve years before, under the lead of Deacon Samuel Fuller, one of the Plymouth members; who was ordained to the pastoral office when the church was constituted.

A similar process had been in operation, for a shorter

time, in Plympton, (then a part of Plymouth,) under the direction of Mr. Isaac Cushman, a ruling elder. In 1698, they too were formed into a separate church, and Elder Cushman was ordained as their first pastor, and continued his useful labors to the age of eighty-four.

The next church organized within the bounds of the Pilgrim Conference, was that of Pembroke, about 1711. The town was incorporated that year, and their first minister, Rev. Daniel Lewis, was ordained on the 3d of December, the year following. He continued in the pastoral office thirty-nine years.

The north part of Plymouth (now Kingston) "was set off into a distinct society" in 1717, and after three years of occasional preaching they settled Rev. Joseph Stacy in 1720, who labored there twenty-one years.

The church in Hanover was gathered in 1728, one year after the incorporation of the town. Rev. Benjamin Bass was ordained on the same day, and labored there twenty-eight years.

The residents of what is now Carver, began to sustain preaching by themselves in 1732. The date of the church formation is not known; but their first pastor, Rev Othniel Campbell, was settled May 13, 1733.

In 1734, nineteen members of the church in Middleborough, were dismissed for the purpose of forming a church in Halifax. These, with others from Plymouth, were organized on the first of October the year following, and Rev. John Cotton was ordained over them. He remained twenty years, till the failure of his voice compelled him to resign the work of the ministry.

In 1731, that part of Plymouth called Manomet Ponds was made a "precinct," and had separate worship occasionally till November 8, 1738, when twenty-five members were organized as the present Second church in Plymouth, and Rev. Jonathan Ellis was ordained their first pastor.

The Second, or North church in Marshfield, (now Unitarian,) was separated from the First, or South, in 1739. Rev. Atherton Wales was installed their first pastor at the same time, and after a ministry of fifty years, died among them at the age of ninety-two.

The church in Hanson was gathered August 31, 1748, and Rev. Gad Hitchcock, D. D., was ordained in October following. He held the pastoral office in that town about fifty-five years, and died at the age of eighty-three.

We have now reached an important era in the history of these churches, as also in the religious history of our whole country—the era of the "Great Awakening," in the days of Edwards and Whitefield. And as we have nothing more to record for the next forty years in regard to church-extension, let us pause in our course just to look around and note the effects of that revival within the bounds of this Conference. Here were fourteen churches and fourteen pastors to be wrought upon by that deep religious movement, which, in one way or another, agitated all New England from 1734 to 1742,—resulting in the hopeful conversion of souls, variously estimated in numbers from 25,000 to 50,000. Did these Pilgrim churches and their pastors favor this work of God, or frown upon it? Did they receive the blessing, or the curse, that is said to have so invariably followed the reception or the rejection of Mr. Whitefield and his co-adjutors?

After the lapse of a century it may not be easy to answer these questions fully. But it is gratifying to find so much evidence that the *pastors*, at least, were almost unanimously in sympathy with the revival. It is well known that a strong testimony was uttered against it in the "Convention of Congregational Ministers of Massachusetts," at their annual meeting, May 25, 1743. It is also known that the friends of the revival met the next day and agreed to hold another Convention; which was

accordingly held in Boston, "the day after Commencement." In the "Testimony and Advice" which *they* put forth, and subscribed, each with his own hand, like the signers of the Declaration of American Independence, they say: "We think it our indispensable duty, in this open and conjunct manner to declare, to the glory of sovereign grace, our full persuasion, either from what we have seen ourselves, or received upon credible testimony, that there has been a happy and remarkable revival of religion in many parts of this land, through an uncommon divine influence; after a long time of great decay and deadness, and a sensible and very awful withdraw of the Holy Spirit."

In Prince's Christian History, [pp. 164–66,] the names of all the signers of this declaration are preserved; and among them are Nathaniel Leonard, of the First church, Plymouth; Jonathan Ellis, of the Second church, Plymouth; Nathaniel Eells, of the Second church, Scituate; Samuel Veazie, of Duxbury; Samuel Hill, of the First church, Marshfield; Othniel Campbell, of Carver; Benjamin Bass, of Hanover; Thaddeus McCarty, of Kingston; John Cotton, of Halifax; and Jonathan Parker, of Plympton;—*ten* out of the fourteen. Omitting Dr. Hitchcock, of Hanson, who was not then settled, there remain but three who did not subscribe; nor is there any evidence that *these* opposed the revival.

But this cannot be affirmed of all the *churches*. The mischievous influence of the "Half-way Covenant" in letting in unregenerate members, and the Arminian notions respecting the nature of regeneration and the way of effecting it, had leavened the churches to a greater extent than any one could know without some searching test. Such a test was found in the new style of preaching introduced by Edwards and Whitefield, and the Tennants, especially the increased prominence and sharper point that was given to the old doctrine of the "new birth," as

a pre-requisite for admission to heaven, and therefore for entering the church on earth. It was "a rock of offence," at which not a few members of these churches stumbled. Several of the pastors published full and deeply interesting narratives of the revival in their congregations; and they all speak of strong opposition. Mr. Cotton, of Halifax, says, that in his place "the greatest cry comes from those that are of Arminian principles and of irregular lives." * In Kingston, the opposers succeeded at length in driving away the pastor. Mr. Leonard, of Plymouth, says: "A violent opposition presently arose and prevailed so far, that a number of this congregation went out from us into a distinct society, and nine of the brethren asked a dismission from us, to embody into a church by themselves."

This church, however, unlike the other six that had colonized before it, was doomed to an early death. At the installation of their first pastor, Rev. Thomas Frink, November 7, 1744, Dr. Chauncy, of Boston, preached a sermon, or rather a phillipic, as it might be called, against Mr. Whitefield and the revival. After a short ministry—four years—Mr. Frink was succeeded by Rev. Jacob Bacon, who continued till 1776, when the congregation had become so reduced that, by mutual consent, he was dismissed, the church disbanded, and the meeting-house demolished.† The society was never large, though comprising much of the wealth and fashion of the town.

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* Prince's Christ. Hist. p. 266. Mr. Cotton also observes, that "those who have been most opposite to this reformation, have all along betrayed an *utter aversion to examine things to the bottom;*" and pertinently asks, "Is this a *rational* way of acting? Are these the men that so highly pretend to reason? that laugh at every body else as fools? If this be reason, to judge of things before they know them, may I forever be delivered from reason."—p. 264.

† This meeting-house stood on the north side of Middle street, and was called the "lower meeting-house." It was a neat wooden building, with a tower and spire in front.

Had they kept their separate organization, the old church would undoubtedly have retained its evangelical character to this day. Their return to its bosom, with whatever satisfaction regarded at the time, was the cause of its melancholy lapse—a warning to those societies in our times that make too much account of wealth, and fashion, and numbers, and too little of piety, and principle, and harmony of views.

Here we resume the history of church-extension, which, from this date assumes a new aspect, as its course is governed by new laws of development and progress. The uncongenial elements that were mixed, but not combined, in the old church of Plymouth, after the seceders went back, created no disturbance under the bland and affectionate, though highly evangelical ministry of the venerable Dr. Robbins. Respect for age and character, and a certain consciousness of their position as returned seceders, would naturally restrain them from any open expression of dislike to the old Puritan doctrines which had been instilled into their childhood. But no sooner was the aged pastor gathered to his fathers, on the 30th of June, 1799, than the thing of which he himself had a painful presentiment in his last years, came to pass. A new style of preaching called "liberal," as distinguished from "evangelical," was demanded; and those who could not sympathize with that demand, finding themselves in the minority, withdrew from the church to the number of fifty-two members, (only one less than half,) and were organized, May 12, 1802, as the third church; and on the same day, Rev. Adoniram Judson was installed their pastor. It was the eighth and last colony that came forth entire from this mother of churches.

It is a suggestive fact, that this first case of secession for the faith of the Pilgrim Fathers, which has since been followed by nearly a hundred others in Massachusetts, should have occurred in the first church of their planting

on these shores. It was every way fitting, that this new dispensation of self-denial in vindication of God's everlasting truth, as received through them, should have opened where it did; on the spot made memorable, through all coming time, by their heroic self-denials in vindicating the same. But it is a sorrowful reflection, that the victory which Mr. Robinson achieved over Episcopius, the renowned pupil and co-adjutor of Arminius himself at Leyden, should have been reversed two hundred years after, by the triumph of Arminianism over Mr. Robinson's church. So mutable is earth! So checkered is the history even of Christianity in its progress on earth!

At the opening of the present century nearly all the churches, and a large proportion of the ministers within the bounds of the Pilgrim Conference, were more or less tinctured with these Arminian views, mixed also with Arian and Socinian notions concerning the character of Christ. Some of the churches have since been recovered wholly. From others, the evangelical members have seceded, not as colonies, but as exiles, to be gathered into the nearest evangelical churches in the vicinity, or reorganized by themselves. While in others still the old Puritan faith suffered such a complete paralysis, that no signs of returning life have yet appeared, and *Unitarianism* now takes its place.

It may here be remarked as a historical fact, that Unitarianism, though not developed in its present form, nor even known among us by its present name, till about the year 1812, nevertheless had its rise a hundred and fifty years before, in the "Half-way covenant," and its first outward manifestation in the controversy which arose out of the great revival in 1740. The custom which extensively prevailed, after its sanction by the Synod of 1662, of baptizing the children of such as had themselves been baptized in childhood, provided they were free from vice, and would "own the covenant," though professedly unre-

generate, naturally led to the full admission into the church, of those who were thus already half way in; not *because* they were converted, but that they *might* be. It was *as a means of grace*, that the "venerable Stoddard," of Northampton, advocated this fatal step—fatal, because it would, of necessity, come to be regarded at length, as a *substitute* for grace.

Thus had Arminianism* been practiced long before it was professed; and had gradually grown into Unitarianism, which also became prevalent years before it was avowed. So prevalent had it become in this part of the State, that when the line of separation began to be drawn, as it did in ministerial associations soon after the disclosures of 1812, the pastors of only five, out of the fifteen Congregational churches then existing within the bounds of this Conference, were prepared to stand forth openly as *Trinitarians*. If any of the other ten were not decidedly Unitarian in their views, they chose to be nothing else *distinctively*.

From this lowest point of depression, the evangelical interest has been steadily rising among us, as will now be described in the briefest possible way.

When the pastor of the Second church in Plymouth, Manomet Ponds, lapsed into Arianism, about the year 1813, and shortly after avowed the Unitarian faith, a small portion of the church and society withdrew from his ministry, but formed no separate organization. The little band meeting for worship on the Sabbath in a private

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* This term is used here, and throughout this discourse, to denote the doctrine of DO AND LIVE, or salvation by works,—a system which dispenses with the necessity of regeneration by the Holy Spirit's agency, and is more properly named *Pelagianism*. In this sense of the word, it can hardly be affirmed that Arminius himself was an Arminian. But as the word was uniformly employed by our Fathers of the last century to indicate these Pelagian views, which were coming into the churches, it is thought best to retain it in tracing their growth.

house, with no preaching except an occasional supply from the missionary society, slowly but steadily increased, till "the Spirit was poured upon them from on high" in the summer of 1819. This was the turning point in their destiny. The pastor, now nearly deserted by his flock, left his post,—which was speedily filled by an evangelical preacher, as was also the empty meeting-house by its former occupants; and no trace of Unitarianism now remains in the parish.

Meanwhile another place of worship was opened in the neighboring village of Eel-river, (now Chiltonville,) and the Fourth Congregational church in Plymouth was formed, chiefly from the Third, and Rev. Benjamin Whitmore was settled over it, October 13, 1818.

In 1825, the North church in Scituate, growing dissatisfied with the "liberal and Unitarian" preaching of their pastor, and his loose way of administering discipline, yet finding the majority of the congregation disposed to retain him as their minister, separated from the parish bodily, and were joined to a new society, incorporated for that purpose. They also built another meeting-house, and on the day of its dedication, November 16, 1826, installed Rev. Paul Jewett as their pastor. Simultaneously with these energetic movements a revival of religion was experienced, which added to the church a larger number than they had left behind when they came off from the parish.

Not far from this time the churches in Hanson and South Marshfield, both imperiled by the insidious entrance of Arminian and Unitarian sentiments "while men slept," were both delivered by the providential settlement of evangelical ministers, when the waning interests of Orthodoxy had nearly lost their preponderance.

In Kingston, the evangelical members were less fortunate. After years of patient waiting and earnest praying,

a little band of six males and nine females, mostly seceders from the old church, were gathered into a separate body March 19, 1828, under the ministry of Rev. Plummer Chase. Their first pastor, Rev. John W. Salter, was ordained April 29, 1829.

Under similar auspices a still smaller remnant, numbering only thirteen in all, were gathered out of the old church in North Marshfield, and organized July 4, 1835, as the representatives of the ancient faith in that place.

In the Congregational churches of Duxbury, Pembroke and South Scituate, that faith has become extinct, except as it may yet live in the breast of here and there an aged Simeon, or a praying Anna, still "waiting for the consolation of Israel,"—which, as God is true, and the churches of this Pilgrim Conference are worthy of the trust committed to their hands, will at length come.

I have only to add, in completing this sketch, that a fifth church in Plymouth, named the Robinson, was gathered chiefly from the third, in 1829; which, after enjoying the ministry of several able preachers, has lately disbanded and the members returned; while two others of the same faith, viz.: a second one in Chiltonville, and a second in Hanover, have been organized,—making now fourteen evangelical Congregational churches in these twelve towns, where, at the opening of this Unitarian controversy, there were but five that could be counted as such. To illustrate the severity of the conflict through which they have come, it may here be stated that seven of these fourteen churches have been compelled to throw themselves on the Massachusetts Home Missionary Society for help, without which they must have died in the fight, if indeed they had ever entered the lists. They are all, at present, in a condition of vigorous self-support, and ready "to comfort others with the same comfort wherewith they themselves have been comforted of God."

Having drawn out this sketch to an unexpected length, (which yet is too summary to satisfy,) I will suggest only two or three of the many practical hints which a reflecting mind may derive from it.

1. It warns us against a certain uniform tendency in churches to *lapse*—or at least to pass from a higher to a lower standard of faith and practice. If there ever was a fraternity of churches on earth that seemed to be placed, by their position and character, beyond all danger of this sort, they were those which fled from the infected moral atmosphere of the old world to the untrodden shores of the new, purged as they had been by the fires of persecution, and most thoroughly evangelical in their views of Christian doctrine and duty. Yet scarcely had the first generation passed away before signs of declension were seen; and many a departing elder who still remembered "the days of old, the years of ancient times," left his dying admonition.* These warnings, if not unheeded, were generally unavailing, and grew fainter as degeneracy

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* Passages like the following might be cited to almost any extent:—"Are we not this day making graves for all our blessings and comforts? Have we not reason to expect that ere long our mourners will go up and down, and say, How is New England fallen! The land that was a land of holiness, hath lost her holiness! that was a land of righteousness, hath lost her righteousness! that was a land of peace, hath lost her peace! that was a land of liberty, is now in sore bondage!"—*Rev. Thomas Walley's Election Sermon at Plymouth, in* 1669.

"O New England! New England! look to it that the glory be not removed from thee! for it begins to go! O tremble; for it is going, it is gradually departing! Although there is that of divine glory still remaining which we ought to be very thankful for, nevertheless much of it is gone. You that are aged persons, and can remember what New England was fifty years ago, that saw these churches in their first glory; is there not a sad decay and diminution of that glory! How is the gold become dim! the most fine gold changed! Yea, how are the golden candlesticks changed in New England! Alas, what a change is there in that which hath been our glory! There is sad cause to fear that greater departures of that glory are hastening upon us."—*Dr. I. Mather, in his book, "The Glory departed from New England." See also Prince's Ch. Hist. pp.* 66—99.

increased—a lower standard of morals all the while inducing a laxer theology, and *vice versa.*

> "Errors in life breed errors in the brain,
> And these reciprocally those again."

Thus did these churches gradually depart from the faith and practice of their founders, though not without frequent checks and self-reproaches; till, by a continual divergence from the true orbit, gravitation turned the other way, and departure from old standards was reckoned *progress.* However deplorable the fact may be, there is nothing new, nothing strange in it. The same tendency and the same results can be traced back through all time, —the people of God devoutly singing his praise, and then stupidly forgeting his works; till wrought upon by some new reformative agency, they again renew their covenant vows, which again they gradually forget; while Prophets, and Apostles, and Christian Martyrs are beseeching them with tears of earnestness, to be on their guard. When will the admonition be heeded? When shall we once learn, that "eternal vigilance" is the price, not of liberty only, but of pure religion, and that the first divergent step is the one to be avoided, if we would effectually shun the perils of apostasy?

2. Notwithstanding this backsliding tendency, which our churches have in common with others, they also have an immense *recuperative power*, which is *not* so common. From the foregoing sketch it would seem that the time was, and within the last forty years, when evangelical preaching was nearly silenced throughout the limits of the Pilgrim Conference; when ten out of the fifteen pastors in the Congregational churches then existing here had dropped the Puritan faith from their system, leaving only five who stood forth in its defence. At present the whole number of Congregational Churches on the same ground is twenty; and fourteen of them sustain evangelical

preaching—leaving but six who do not. Thus, while ours are nearly *three times* the number they were forty years ago, the others are scarcely more than *half* as many as they then counted.*

And here it may be stated, that those five churches which represented the evangelical interest on this ground forty years ago, were of the feeblest class, numbering less than four hundred members in the aggregate, and without a dollar of parish funds on which to rely in paying their ministers' scanty support, which, by the by, was not quite $400 per annum, on the average. *Now*, the fourteen evangelical churches among us, though a large proportion of them are in a state of infancy, number nearly one thousand members; and after having built twelve meeting-houses during this time, are paying an average salary of $600. Let it be considered, too, that just one half of these churches have actually been recovered either with or without the loss of meeting-houses and parish funds, from a lapsed condition,—a much more difficult achievement than simply to colonize in a new place.

As a further illustration of this recuperative power in our Orthodox Congregational churches, I will add, that during the same period, there have been nearly one hundred other similar cases of recovery in different parts of the State—a re-installment of evangelical preaching, if not in the same pulpit, yet in the same place, where it had been silenced. In 1810, there were three hundred and sixty Congregational churches in Massachusetts, of which one hundred and seventeen were found to have renounced the evangelical faith when the line was subsequently drawn between the Trinitarian and Unitarian denomina-

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* The whole number of churches, of all denominations, within the territorial bounds of the Pilgrim Conference, is now 52; viz., 14 Evangelical Congregational; 11 Methodists; 9 Baptist; 8 Universalist; 7 Unitarian; 1 Episcopalian; 1 Christian, and 1 Second Advent;—of which 35, at least, are generally considered as holding evangelical views.

tions,—leaving us only two hundred and forty-three. Our present number is four hundred and seventy, (having nearly doubled,) with a membership of about sixty-eight thousand, which is probably three times as large as it was then.*

These facts certainly indicate a remarkable power of self-recovery—a vigor of constitution, as we should call it in the human system, favoring the physician in his effort to throw off disease. This power, no doubt, is mainly the force of evangelical truth, always "mighty through God, to the pulling down of strong holds," and the building up of feeble churches. But even the truth of God does not work out its full results without appropriate conditions and appliances. And we cannot doubt that the scriptural simplicity of our ecclesiastical order has been greatly helpful in repairing the breach and restoring the old paths. TRUTH needs no decrees of ecumenic councils to enforce her teachings; no heavy artillery of prelatic conventions, or general assemblies, to help her beat down the strong holds of error. These defences, moreover, can be just as easily turned *against* the truth, as they often have been—oftener, perhaps, than otherwise. Her spontaneous impulse is to put them all aside, as David did Saul's cumbersome armor when going to meet Goliath. She seeks an open field and the untrammeled use of her own heaven-appointed sling and stone. This is just what she found among the Congregational churches of New England in the day of her battle here, and what she will always find where pure Congregationalism prevails.

3. The churches composing this Conference, and all others in the land of like precious faith and order, have every thing to encourage them in further efforts "to raise

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* The Unitarian churches have, meanwhile, grown to 165, of which about 120 were founded by the Puritan fathers, or their Orthodox descendants, the remainder having been started by Unitarian enterprise alone.

up the foundations of many generations." Their past history inspires the most animating hope of their future progress, and is itself a mighty means of securing it. The remembrance of John Robinson and his achievements; of New England's founders and their fortitude; of the first Congregational churches in this country, and their invincible faith, will act on their descendants through all coming time as an incentive to piety and a rebuke to degeneracy.

> "Though dead, they speak in reason's ear,
> And in example live;
> Their faith and hope and mighty deeds
> Still fresh instruction give."

These precious memories becoming daily more vivid, will not only render the faith through which they "subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness and obtained promises," ever dear to those who still hold it, but will also arm them with fresh courage in its defence, and gain new converts to its side. Some of us can remember when the honest, conscientious adherence of these Pilgrim churches to the religious doctrines and practices of their founders, was called BIGOTRY—a word that drove away many from their ranks, or frightened them into silence. But where is now the man, with the blood of the Pilgrims in his veins, and their spirit in his soul, who could be terrified by that harmless word, or would object to passing for *such* a bigot, if to avoid it he must stand before heaven and earth as a RECREANT to the principles of such Fathers? It was once thought strange, and by those too who would go to Plymouth Rock annually to celebrate the deeds of their Puritan ancestors, that any body should care to preserve that *Puritan religion* which gave birth to those deeds, and which alone can reproduce them. But there is a larger number now, who think it more strange that intelligent men and women, of consistent views on all other subjects,

should hold such absurdities on this,—like inconsiderate children regaling themselves on the delicious fruit of a tree in their father's garden, which, in their childish philosophy, would be just as fruitful if the trunk and roots were gone. Formerly an organized effort, through home missions, or otherwise, to succor the tempted, to strengthen the weak, or to recover the lost, in the fraternity of evangelical Congregational churches, was deemed a conspiracy against the public peace; as if obedience to the great natural law of self-preservation was rebellion. But common sense is returning, and with it a more liberal spirit. Should the evangelical men and women of any community in the State be disposed now to form themselves into a Congregational church and society, to support a preacher of their own faith, it would create no riot, and probably provoke no insult.

These altered and alleviated circumstances challenge our gratitude to God and man. They also encourage our hopes in regard to the future, especially when viewed in connection with the habits of Christian activity and endurance, to which the members of our churches became so thoroughly inured under the less genial skies of other days. Those struggles for dear life, in which churches, scarcely able themselves to stand, were called upon to hold up others that were actually fainting, have given them incomparably more strength, more power of self-propagation than all their lost meeting-houses and parish funds together would afford, were they now at their disposal. It has accustomed their sympathies to flow out toward the weak, by imposing on them the *necessity* of bearing one another's burdens. It has taught them to GIVE. Who does not know that there is a *habit* of beneficence, as there is also a habit of parsimony, and that both are strengthened by use? Yet how few have ever fallen into the practice of an easy, cheerful generosity from mere spontaneity! When would the evangelical Congregational

churches of Massachusetts have reached the point of giving $200,000 per annum, in diffusing the gospel over the earth, as they are actually now giving, if they had not been schooled to it under the hard hand of necessity? We cannot over-estimate the value of these rough and painful experiences to our churches, considered as a preparative for the great work which Heaven has assigned them, as repairers of the breach; as restorers of paths to dwell in.

It is much to be regretted that a truthful history of these churches cannot be given without reviving the recollection of some things which our Unitarian friends and ourselves alike would willingly forget. But they are self-registered facts, like volcanic eruptions and inundations of the ocean in the physical world; and as, in the latter case, whatever new formations may supervene, the geologist still finds the indelible foot-prints of fire and flood, which he is bound to notice in explaining the present phenomena of the earth; so in the former, will the historiographer of these Congregational churches find imperishable evidence of transactions and events, which he cannot ignore if he would, as the existing state of things cannot be made intelligible without referring to them. Far from us be the wish to re-open the dying embers of former strifes. But when God sends help in answer to agonizing prayer; when his afflicted people cry unto him "out of the depths," and are delivered, who shall forbid them to speak of "the horrible pit and the miry clay," from which his almighty arm has lifted them?