

VIEW OF HOLLISTON IN ITS FIRST CENTURY.

A

CENTURY SERMON,

DELIVERED IN HOLLISTON, MASS.

DECEMBER 4, 1826.

BY CHARLES FITCH,

Pastor of the Congregational Church and Society of Holliston.

Dedham :

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1827.

HOLLISTON, DEC. 28th, 1826.

Rev. and Dear Sir,

The citizens of Holliston, with their numerous and respectable neighbours, who had the pleasure of hearing the truly learned and eloquent discourse delivered by you in commemoration of the past century of this Town, have been pleased frequently to express their admiration of the same, and a desire that it might be published. We, therefore, at a legal Town-meeting, have been elected to express the publick sentiment, and respectfully solicit a copy for the press.

Your most obedient and humble servants,

ICHABOD HAWES,
TIMOTHY ROCKWOOD, JR.
JAMES CUTLER,

Committee.

Rev. CHARLES FITCH.

GENTLEMEN,

It gives me pleasure to learn, that the discourse which was delivered in commemoration of the first century of this town, has met the approbation of those who heard it. And as it was expressly designed, as a History of the Town, for the use and benefit of its inhabitants, I scarcely feel myself at liberty to withhold it; which under other circumstances, I should be disposed to do. With sincere wishes and prayers for your individual welfare, and that of the people whom you represent, I subscribe myself,

Yours respectfully,

CHARLES FITCH.

Col. ICHABOD HAWES,
Capt. TIMOTHY ROCKWOOD, and
Mr. JAMES CUTLER,

Committee.

Holliston, Jan. 3d, 1827.

ADVERTISEMENT.

The first Century of this town was completed on the 3d of December, 1824; and it was contemplated by the inhabitants to have commemorated the day. But in consequence of the ill health of my predecessor, the Rev. Josephus Wheaton, who was unable to prepare a discourse for the occasion, the subject was delayed until December, 1826.

SERMON.

ZECHARIAH I. 5.

*Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets,
do they live forever?*

The object which assembles us, my hearers, is one of no ordinary interest. It is to commemorate, for the first time, the day which gave a distinct and corporate existence to that portion of the community, in which, by the good providence of God, our lot is cast. It is to go back a century into antiquity, and review the records of the years which have intervened;—to converse with generations that have gone before us;—to survey the doings of our respected ancestors, and the scenes in which they were actors;—and thus to look up and rehearse the most prominent and interesting particulars in the existence of our town. And in this developement of our object, how forcibly are we reminded of the pleasing, and yet mournful fact,

that the place, *we* now occupy, was once the abode of other people; the scene of their labours, enjoyments, sufferings, and trials; and their last and only earthly possession—the “possession of a burying place!”—And how naturally does the inquiry of the prophet suggest itself! and with what peculiar solemnity and impressiveness does it strike the mind!—*Your fathers—where are they? and the prophets—do they live forever?—*

In prosecuting the object of this discourse, I propose, for the sake of order and perspicuity, to comprise the history of this town in *three parts*;—the first part to contain its civil history; the second its ecclesiastical history; and the third a statistical view of the town, with the addition of other important miscellaneous matter.

The first part, we have devoted to the civil history of the town.

Holliston was originally a part of Sherburne; which at that time embraced a large extent of territory, from which a considerable portion of several towns has since been taken. The dismemberment of this part of Sherburne, and its subsequent erection into a town, originated in a disagreement upon the subject of a site for a Meeting-house. The people, who resided in this extremity of the town, were anxious for the removal of a serious inconvenience, under which they had long laboured, occasioned by their distance from the place of worship; and insisted upon a position more contiguous to themselves for the erection of the contemplated new House. While the larger proportion

of the inhabitants were resolved upon its location upon the spot, which had long been occupied for this sacred purpose. Under these circumstances, the minor party respectfully petitioned for the privilege of disunion; which being granted, the parties, peaceably, and on friendly terms, separated. The petition for dismemberment was signed by thirteen individuals,* and presented to the inhabitants of Sherburne, in town-meeting, Nov. 18th, 1723.—The colonial government was next petitioned; and on the 3d of Dec. 1724 the Act of Incorporation formally passed both branches of the General Court; giving the town the name of Holliston, in token of respect for Thomas Hollis of London, a patron of the University in Cambridge; who, in return, presented the congregation with an elegant folio Bible[†] for the Desk.—The form of Holliston has always been extremely irregular. From plans taken in the year of its organization a map has been drawn, and the number of acres, which the township comprises, ascertained to be 15,086.—The first town-meeting was held, agreeably to the provisions of the act of incorporation, at the house§ of Timothy Leland on the 21st of the same month in which the act was passed. At this meeting,

* The names of those who petitioned were as follows; Jonathan Whitney, Timothy Leland, Aaron Morse, Moses Adams, Joseph Johnson, Ebenezer Pratt, Gershom Eames, John Goulding, Joshua Underwood, Thomas Jones, Isaac Adams, John Twichell, and John Larnite.

§ This house was situated on the place now occupied by Mr. Amory Leland.

† For a further account of the Bible, see Cambridge Chronicle of 28 Feb. 1850

five Select-men,† with the other appropriate officers, were elected; which gave the first impulse to the operations of this infant member of the body politic.

It was certainly an important object, with the new established community, to promote its growth in population and wealth by holding out every possible encouragement to emigrants. And yet, desirable as the inhabitants, doubtless, felt it to be, we find them early adopting and prosecuting measures to guard against the introduction of a mixed and corrupt population;—at one time, raising monies to encourage and aid the removal of certain French families to Canada; and at others, expelling immoral and licentious individuals and families, that had crept into their territory, and were polluting their soil, by the rigour of law. We notice this as forming a peculiar and interesting feature in the character and acts of the primitive inhabitants of this place; and as constituting an important basis for the subsequent character and prosperity of the town.

The attention and efforts of our ancestors were early directed towards the education of their children. In August 1731, the town voted the appropriation of a considerable sum to defray the expense of a reading and writing school. This was its first public act upon the subject of education; previous to which, the young probably received instruction at private expense. After this period,

† The names of the Selectmen were John Goulding, William Sheffield, Ebenezer Hill, Jonathan Whitney, and Thomas Marshall.

the sum annually appropriated for the support of schools was increased as necessity required, until it has grown to the amount of \$600 per annum. No suitable places were provided, however, for the accommodation of schools previous to the year 1738; when three school-houses were erected at the expense of the town. These have subsequently been multiplied, till they amount to more than double that number. The value and importance of the system of education, so early introduced, are now apparent in the general diffusion of learning; the prevalence of virtuous habits; and the increasing attention paid to the higher branches of education.

The original inhabitants of this town were not wanting a proper measure of the spirit of civil liberty. And although, with their fathers and neighbours, they were wont to dwell quietly under their colonial subjection; yet when the grievances, imposed by the mother country, had become too many, and too mighty to be tamely endured, they were prepared to second every worthy measure for the resistance of oppression, and to venture their property, and their lives in a common and united struggle for freedom. Accordingly, as though actuated by a presentiment of the approaching revolutionary conflict, they resolved upon a measure for preparation for the worst that might befall them, and began in 1731 to collect military stores, which they afterwards continued to augment, as the aspect and feeling of the times seemed to render necessary.—The first publick and formal step taken by them to—

wards the independence, which they afterwards aided in achieving, was in the form of a resolution adopted in 1768, in accordance with proposals from the people of Boston; "that this town will take all prudent and legal measures to encourage the produce and manufactures of this province, and to lessen the use of superfluities imported from abroad." I give the resolution in the very language in which it stands recorded. And as a pleasing evidence of their conscientious and inflexible adherence to it, and steadfast purpose to carry it into execution; we find them seriously voting, upon the very back of it, to use *no gloves* at funerals, but such as were made in the province; and to procure *no new garments* for those occasions, but such as were "absolutely necessary."—The same year saw this town represented by a delegation of its own appointment in a Convention, made up of delegates from neighbouring towns, and held in Boston for the purpose of devising and recommending such measures as the existing state of things demanded.—In 1770, it was resolved, in town-meeting, to purchase no European goods of certain *importers*, whose names were posted for public information.—In 1773, the town passed a formal resolution in favour of a communication, addressed to its inhabitants, setting forth the rights of the colonies, and the infringement of them by the British nation. The year following, it was represented in a "County Congress," held at Concord. And in the same year, it formally prohibited the sale, or consumption of *East India*

Teas.—On the 9th of Jan. 1775, the town voted “to adhere to the advice and association of the Continental Congress;” and in March following, previously to the annual election of town officers, it was thus resolved; “that no man shall serve in any town office or place whatsoever the ensuing year, who shall refuse or neglect to subscribe his consent to, and compliance with the advice and association of the last Continental Congress; and that such individual shall be treated with neglect.”

—The Constitution, which had been framed for this State, was, in 1780, subjected to the inspection of the several towns for their approval; and after much consideration, was approved by this town, with the exception of a few articles to which amendments were proposed. On the 4th of Sept. of this year, the town met to elect a Governour and other officers of the State government for the first time; when it was found, that 39 votes had been given in for John Hancock, and only 2 for the opposing candidate, James Bowdoin;—so great was the unanimity which at that period prevailed upon political subjects.—I have been more particular, in relating the doings of our forefathers in matters connected with the early and most interesting part of our national history, than I should have been, did I not feel it due to their memory to exhibit the prompt, decisive, energetick, and manly spirit, with which they seconded every measure devised for resisting the oppressions of the mother country; and with which they stood forth for the maintenance of civil and religious liberty in those “times, which

tried men's souls." During the whole of that glorious struggle, which resulted in the establishment of our independence, they bore a decided and honorable part. They sacrificed their property and hazarded their lives in the cause of liberty ; and their reward is in the grateful remembrance of their posterity. May their posterity never forfeit, by their ingratitude and degeneracy, the inestimable blessings they purchased for them at the price of blood.

The second part of this discourse, we proposed to devote to the ecclesiastical history of the town.

It was an object of first importance, in the estimation of our worthy progenitors, to make provision for the worship of God, and for the regular dispensation of the ordinances of the gospel. And accordingly, we find they had no sooner assumed the form and functions of a corporate body, than they set themselves, without delay, to "find out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob." Their second town meeting was called for this express purpose ; and was held on the 4th of January, 1725,—within about a month from the time of the first meeting;—when they resolved upon the erection of a House of Worship. To accomplish this object, they raised by tax one hundred pounds Old Tenour, as it was called, being about \$44,45 Federal money ; allowing to each individual assessed the privilege of bestowing labour to half the amount of his tax. The dimensions of the contemplated house were fixed at about forty feet in length by thirty-two feet in breadth, with posts

of twenty feet in height. It was located upon land, containing about three acres and a half, given to this town by Col. William Brown, of Salem, Massachusetts—to be perpetually occupied as a site for a Meeting-house and Burying-ground. In 1728, the people saw the House of the Lord completed, and commenced occupying it for his worship; after it had cost them more than double the sum originally levied. They were not, however, previous to this event, destitute of preaching. *This* they had formally adopted measures for procuring during the first year of their existence as a town; and on the 26th of June 1727, a meeting was held for the election and call of a minister. The second article in the warrant for that meeting contains something so peculiarly characteristick of the people, that I cannot consent to its omission. It reads thus; “to choose an *orthodox*, learned, and pious person to dispense the word of God as a minister of the gospel in the said town.” I doubt whether, if the children were not half ashamed of the stern principles, and honest deeds of their fathers, they would not think *their* example upon this subject worthy of imitation. At any rate, the fathers thought,—and so might their children think,—that in such plain and honest methods of procedure they would likely save themselves much difficulty, and great hazard in their religious concerns. The result of the meeting just named was an invitation to the Rev. James Stone to undertake the work of the ministry in this town. For some unknown reason, however, he was not ordained until the 20th of November of the fol-

lowing year, 1728. The same day which witnessed the consecration of Mr. Stone to the service of God at the altar, witnessed also the organization of a Church consisting of eight members, of whom the pastor elect was one. Previous to the solemn and interesting occasion, which was to constitute a church, and give it a shepherd, a day of fasting and prayer was observed, a practice which is still followed, for the purpose of devoutly seeking the divine blessing to accompany those transactions.*

Mr. Stone was born in Newton, Mass. in 1703. His father was one of four brothers, who emigrated to this country from England. Of his early life we know nothing; except that he was graduated at Harvard University in 1724; being at that time, twenty-one years of age. And the only information, I have been enabled to obtain, of his life and character as the minister of this people, is contained in the preface to one of his Sermons, which was published after his decease, and said to be the last he ever composed. It was published, as a valuable relick of its author, under the direction of the Rev. Oliver Peabody of Natick, and the Rev. Samuel Porter of Sherburne,—who, in their preface to it, thus speak of Mr. Stone. “The great esteem which his own people, as well as those in the neighbouring towns, had of the author for his great sweetness

* Mr Stone's salary was fixed at 75*l.* or \$33,33; which was to be raised to 80*l.* when the town had received an increase of ten families; and to 85*l.* when there should be an addition of ten more. He was also to receive a settlement of 100*l.* or a little more than \$44.—His salary was finally raised in 1742 to 150*l.* or about \$67.

of temper, his good humour, his instructive conversation, his exemplary piety, his great diligence and faithfulness in the work of the ministry, his prudence in all his conduct, his uncommon and excelling gift in prayer, and his *orthodox*, judicious, and fervent preaching,—all which, and many more desirable qualifications were well known to shine in him,—has caused many in Holliston, and some in other towns, to urge the publication of this sermon.”* From the same source, we also learn, that when this sermon was written, “it was an uncommonly sickly time among his people; and that he was almost constantly, night and day, visiting and praying with the sick, sometimes for whole nights together; *“being, as he said, willing to spend and be spent in the service of the souls of his people.”* Mr. Stone departed this life July 19th 1742, in the 39th year of his age, and in the 14th of his ministry. Three children survived him.

The first and only candidate, whom the people employed after the decease of Mr. Stone, was the Rev. Joshua Prentiss, who was ordained, and installed their pastor on the 18th of May 1743.† Mr. Prentiss was born in Cambridge Mass. in 1718.

* The text of that Sermon is contained in John 17. 4. I have glorified thee on the earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.

† Mr. Prentiss’ salary was 140*l.* annually, Old Tenour; or about \$62,43;—with a settlement of 200*l.* or about \$89. After the first two years of settlement, his salary was to be increased,—by an addition of 100*l.* per year,—until it should amount to 200*l.* annually. His wood was also furnished him, as was that of his predecessor.

He was the oldest son of an intelligent and pious father. From a letter addressed to him by his father, a few days previous to his ordination, containing most affectionate and faithful advice, we learn, that when seven years of age he was visited with a violent fever, which reduced him so low as to leave little hope of his recovery. Under the anxiety and distress produced by the forbidding prospect of losing a child upon whom he doted, his father writes; “retiring from the bed to another chamber, I spread my case before the great God, and prayed earnestly for the life of the child,—yet with submission,—that if it might be consistent with his holy will to spare his life, and to bring him back from the grave’s mouth, and restore him to health, I would then according as he should enable me, give him up, and devote him to his service; and by his grace, I have been enabled, in some measure, to perform those vows which my lips uttered, and mouth spake when I was in trouble.” In addition to his baptismal dedication to God in infancy; his father says, “you have been, by a more particular and renewed promise of your father, given and devoted to God’s service.” And there is no inconsiderable ground for believing, that the prayers, and vows, and pious efforts of the father, in regard to this son, were not unavailing. In early life, he professed faith in Christ, and publicly assumed the obligations of his parents in his baptism, and devoted *himself* to the service of God. He was graduated at Harvard University in 1738; being at that time only twenty years of age. His religious sentiments were Calvi-

nistick; and his preaching was plain, instructive, and evangelical. For about five years before his death, his health was so greatly impaired as to render him unable to preach only occasionally. And perhaps it was owing wholly to this circumstance, that the congregation was induced to procure, in 1784, a dissolution of the pastoral connection subsisting between him and them. But the fact, which seems the most unpleasant upon this subject, is, that having fallen behind in the payment of his salary, the people should refuse his pecuniary claims, and compel him to the ungrateful task of a civil prosecution. The demand was, however, ultimately discharged without a legal process; greatly to the credit of the people, and the satisfaction of the pastor. From the time of this settlement to his death, peace and good feeling prevailed; as is evident from the fact, that after his dismissal the town exempted his estate from taxation, and appropriated, for the use of his family, a seat in the Meeting-house. Mr. Prentiss finished his earthly course April 24th 1788, having attained the age of man—his threescore years and ten; forty-two of which he employed in the ministry* among this people. He had been thrice married. His first wife was one among the many, who died during the prevalence of the dreadful malady, which we shall notice hereafter. His third, he left a widow. He had nine children; one of whom was for many years the

* The last text from which Mr. Prentiss preached is contained in Psalm 37, 37. Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace.

minister of Medfield Mass. and was distinguished in his profession; and three of whom are now living.

It was during the ministry of Mr. Prentiss, and in the year 1748, that a number of families, living remote from the place of worship, and contiguous to Medway, were, for the sake of better accommodation, set off from the congregation of Holliston by an act of the General Court, and comprised as a component part of the West Parish in Medway, at its original incorporation. The number of families belonging to the religious society of this town was at that time stated to be about ninety.

After the dismissal of Mr. Prentiss, this people heard thirteen successive candidates; and were destitute of preaching one hundred and five sabbaths. But notwithstanding the evils which might be supposed to result from so long a period of vacancy, and from the unusual number of candidates heard, there was a perfect unanimity in the call given November 13th 1778, to the Rev. Timothy Dickinson. Having accepted the invitation, he was solemnly set apart to the work of the ministry* in this place on the 18th of February 1789. Mr. Dickinson was born of respectable and pious parents, at Amherst in this State, the 25th of June 1761. The traits of character which, more than any other, marked the opening period of his existence were the mildness and amiableness of his natural disposition. He was also noted in early childhood for a great fondness for literary pursuits. So that, "although his con-

* Mr. Dickinson's Salary was fixed at 80*l.* Sterling per annum; with a settlement of 200*l.*

stitution was naturally slender, and his health feeble and interrupted," a very considerable portion of the hours, which were not employed in manual labour, were devoted to study. "He lived with his parents, and laboured upon a farm until sixteen years of age;" when, beholding his country engaged in a common and dubious struggle for independence, the deep interest excited in his bosom for her welfare roused his youthful ardour, and would not suffer him to be dissuaded from espousing her cause, and enlisting, as a private soldier, in the militia. In this capacity he continued to serve in the army about fifteen months. Upon leaving this post of suffering and danger, his health having been enfeebled by the exposures and hardships to which he was unaccustomed, he commenced fitting for College under the tuition of the Rev. Dr. Dwight, late President of Yale College, who was then engaged in the instruction of a private school at Northampton. "It is believed, on good authority, that Mr. Dickinson was principally induced to seek a liberal education in consequence of his witnessing so much depravity and wickedness in the army. This depravity and licentiousness which he found to be more or less acted out by mankind generally, he felt determined to combat; and that he might do it the more effectually, he sought the aid of a publick education." Having completed the preparatory course of study, he was admitted at the age of about eighteen, a member of Dartmouth College. During the first year of his collegiate life, the Institution and vicinity were together visited with a "special and re-

markable revival of religion," in which he became a hopeful subject of renewing grace; and subsequently made a publick profession of the religion of the gospel. "While at College, Mr. Dickinson was diligent and persevering in the prosecution of his studies; appeared to advantage at recitations and all the literary exhibitions of his class; and acquired the reputation of a correct, classical scholar." He was graduated in 1785; and was immediately after appointed Preceptor of Moore's Charity School, which is connected with the College. In the instruction of this school, he continued one year; when, for the more advantageous prosecution of his theological studies, he put himself under the private instruction of the Rev. Dr. Tappan, then minister of Newbury Mass.—and afterwards Professor of Divinity in Harvard University. Previous to his settlement in this place, he preached at Exeter and Hopkinton in New-Hampshire, and in several vacant parishes in the northern part of this State.—On the 20th of November succeeding his ordination, he was married to the eldest daughter of his venerable predecessor, with whom he lived till his death. He had seven children; five of whom are now living.

The christian and ministerial character of Mr. Dickinson I shall give in the language of his* Biographer, and of Dr. Emmons in his Funeral Sermon.—"As a preacher," says the former, "he was

* For the history of Mr. Dickinson's life, I acknowledge myself principally indebted to a biographical notice of him in the Number of the Panoplist for June 1814.

plain, faithful, and affectionate. And as he firmly believed in those doctrines, which are usually denominated *the doctrines of grace*, he felt it his duty often, plainly, and affectionately to state and illustrate them. The native and total depravity of sinners; the necessity of regeneration by the special operations of the Holy Spirit; the doctrine of personal election; the necessity of disinterested and holy affections towards God and men, in order to become interested in the atonement of the Saviour; the Deity of Christ, and the doctrine of a Trinity of persons in the Godhead, together with those doctrines, which naturally grow out of the preceding, are sentiments which he firmly believed, and which he considered as of the greatest importance. No considerations of popularity or self-interest could deter him from a plain and frequent exhibition of those truths which are so offensive to the carnal mind.” “He was very apparently,” is the language of Dr. Emmons, “a man of God, who exhibited the reality and beauty of religion in his private conversation, as well as in his more publick and official conduct. He gave convincing evidence, that he *loved* those doctrines which he taught to others, and taught them in love to their souls. The whole tenour of his preaching plainly indicated, that he sought to please God, rather than men; for he did not *shun* to exhibit the most essential, the most humiliating, and the most heart-searching truths, in terms too plain for any to misunderstand. He had a clear, strong, and pleasant voice, which enabled him to speak with peculiar propriety and energy;

and as he aimed to draw the attention of his hearers to his subject, rather than to himself, so he seldom failed of deeply impressing their hearts and consciences. He loved to converse upon religious subjects, and greatly excelled in private discourses with his people. He took heed to his ministry, and left no proper methods unemployed to promote the spiritual benefit of his people. He was among the most zealous ministers and christians to spread the gospel, and to extend the kingdom of Christ through the world.”*

Mr. Dickinson's ministry was attended with some peculiar and great trials. At one period of it, there was much uneasiness, animosity, and disturbance, which continued, in a greater or less degree, through several years; so that the parish twice refused to grant his salary. But in each of these instances the people were wise enough to discover their mistake, and rescind their votes. The origin and occasion of the difficulties which existed do not appear from any record either of the town, or the Church; but are commonly understood to be found in the offensiveness of the doctrines upon which he insisted. They, however, resulted in the calling of a Council by the Church, June 4th, 1804; which advised to the dissolution of the pastoral connection subsisting between him and the people of his charge, in the August following, should not an amicable adjust-

* Mr. Dickinson was one of the most zealous founders of the Massachusetts Missionary Society; was repeatedly elected a member of its Board of Trustees; and in 1811 delivered its Anniversary Sermon, which was published.

ment of difficulties previously take place.* Happily those difficulties were so far settled, that, on the 25th of the same month in which the Council sat, the parish passed a resolution in favour of the continuance of the connection. For about nine years subsequently, Mr. Dickinson continued, in peace and quietness,—for aught that appears,—to exercise the office of a gospel minister in this place. And on the 6th of July 1813, after a lingering and painful sickness, he calmly and peacefully expired; having numbered fifty-two years of age, and been the minister of this people twenty-four years and a few months.

After the decease of Mr. Dickinson, the congregation were destitute of a regular ministry only about a year and a half; during the most of which time they were supplied by candidates. Their

* The question submitted to the Council was simply, "In existing circumstances, is it duty, that my pastoral relation to this Church should be continued?"—It is perhaps due to the character of Mr. Dickinson, that the following paragraph, extracted from its declared result, should be here inserted. "The Council are deeply affected with the calamitous situation of this Church, and the divisions which subsist in this town. They tenderly reflect on the trying situation in which the Pastor, a brother *honoured in the Churches, and affectionately respected* by themselves, is placed. The *merits of the Controversy have not been submitted to this Council*. They, therefore, will not undertake to *approve or condemn*; but *recommend* it, with great solicitude for the present comfort, and highest spiritual interests of the Pastor, the Church, and the People, that they *respectively cultivate* that *unoffending and conciliating* spirit; that *attachment to truth and virtue*; and that *love to one another*, which reason so powerfully dictates; and the gospel, under so many motives, enjoins."

fourth minister was the Rev. Josephus Wheaton ; who, having received an unanimous invitation to take the pastoral charge of this Church and People, which he accepted, was ordained and installed on the 6th of December 1815.*

Mr. Wheaton was the son of Joseph Wheaton Esq.—and was born at Rehoboth, Mass. March 16th 1788. His natural disposition was amiable; his behaviour peaceable, condescending, and kind. He was uniformly, even in childhood, sober minded; and although not pious, he was, nevertheless, free from the many follies and vices peculiarly incident to that early period of life. “This was probably owing to religious instruction, seasonably and faithfully imparted; which, before it was the means of his conversion, operated as a strong moral restraint. Until about the age of seventeen, his opportunities of education were confined within the limits of our common winter schools. At this time, the native energy of his character, and his thirst for knowledge began to open his way to the means of obtaining a more finished education. By his own ingenuity and perseverance he obtained a trade, the avails of which were destined by Providence, to prepare him for his future usefulness in a profession, where it may be said of him, that *his feet* were shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.—He entered Brown University, a year in advance, in 1809. Here he prosecuted his studies with ardour, diligence and success. He was graduated in

* Mr. Wheaton's Salary was \$600 per annum; with a nominal settlement of \$600.

September 1812, one of the best scholars in his class; among whom was Kingsbury, the able and devoted missionary to the Indians; who was also his room-mate and endeared friend. Mr. Wheaton entertained a hope of reconciliation to God, before his entrance into College; but whether the hope was well or ill founded, he with that self-distrust, which was always peculiar to him, abandoned it. Near the close of his collegiate course, his mind was refreshed with peace in believing; and if it was not the time of his conversion, it was evidently of deepened seriousness, and more unreserved dedication of himself to God. He then united himself, by solemn covenant, with the visible church."

"In respect to the choice of a profession, he formed different designs and expectations at different periods of his preparatory and collegiate education. His first view was to the law; and for a considerable time, his habits of mind were forming under the influence of that expectation. But for what particular reason, it is not understood, he became afterwards inclined to the profession of medicine; and attended the various lectures of that department, under the expectation, that he was preparing for the business of life. When, however, his christian hope permitted him to turn his attention to the ministry, he abandoned all other prospects of life, and determined to consecrate all his powers and acquisitions to the work of preaching the gospel. His changes of purpose will not be imputed, by those who knew him, to any instability of character. They have been mentioned, un-

der the conviction, that they were, in this case, and have been in others, *providential*, and well calculated to enlarge the sphere of ministerial usefulness."

"After leaving the University, Mr. Wheaton was engaged as Preceptor of George-street Academy in Providence; but was soon invited to a tutorship in the University. He was a tutor more than two years; during which time, he was not merely gratifying his high relish for classical learning; but was devoting what time his office would allow to the study of Divinity. Previously to his resigning his office in the College, he was licensed to preach, and was invited to supply the desk in this place."

"In his intercourse with his people, Mr. Wheaton's wisdom was evangelical; first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated. His conciliating deportment, amiable temper, and dignified, yet unaffected manners won the affections of those who were not always pleased with his theological sentiments;" which closely resembled those of his worthy predecessor, and embraced the peculiarities of Calvinism to which the term Hopkinsian is applied by way of designation. He was completely successful in uniting and harmonizing this people at a time when they were found not a little discordant in opinion and feeling; and enjoyed, in an unusual degree, their respect, confidence, and affection from the commencement to the close of his ministerial life.

"Mr. Wheaton was a student as well as a pastor. What time the more active duties of his of-

fice would permit, he was with his book and his pen. He excelled in an intimate acquaintance with the classicks. His literary character, and eminent talents as an instructor of youth, made his house a favorite resort of young men fitting for College, or perfecting their education."

"As a *preacher*, Mr. Wheaton was, what he principally aimed to be, *instructive*. Yet he was also an animated and animating preacher. His whole soul appeared in his work.—To be eloquent was not his object; and yet he was occasionally eloquent to a high degree. His style was worthy the man who wrote, and of the important subjects on which it was employed. He seemed to think with Addison, that good thoughts ought to be well dressed.—As it respects the *delivery* of his discourses, it was natural," though uncommonly rapid; "and his animation, united with the rich materials of his sermons, made him a highly acceptable speaker. And yet perhaps it may be said of him, as of most preachers in this part of our country, that he did not pay proportionate attention to the delivery of his compositions."

"His *piety* was ardent; and humility was a distinguishing feature of it. His trials with respect to his own piety, though not without example, were peculiarly severe. But his sun was not always overcast; he hoped in God; resigned himself with confidence to his disposal; and often had joy and peace in believing."

"Mr. Wheaton's health was declining for nearly three years before his death. And his disease,"

—which was of the pulmonary kind,—“was obstinate and peculiar; causing a frequent alternation of hope and fear, not only in him, but in his friends also.” During several months towards the close of his sickness, he was entirely deprived of sight, and exercised with great bodily pain. Yet “he was always patient, usually serene; and sometimes even joyful.” He left this earthly scene of his labours and sufferings on the 4th of February 1825; having nearly completed the 37th year of his age, and little more than commenced the 11th of his ministry. He was twice married; and had four children; three of whom, with his widow, remain to feel the loss occasioned by his early departure. He was peculiarly respected and beloved by his people, who will long retain him in affectionate remembrance.*

Before his decease, Mr. Wheaton had the pleasure of seeing a work accomplished, which he had long felt important to the interests of religion among his people; and to which his influence and efforts greatly contributed;—I mean the erection of a new Meeting-House. The first decisive step, towards the accomplishment of this object, was taken November 2d, 1818. And on the 3d of December, 1823,—one year precisely before the close of the century,—it was solemnly and joyfully dedicated to the worship of Almighty God. Mr. Wheaton delivered the Sermon on the interesting

* This biographical sketch of Mr. Wheaton is principally taken from a Memoir of him contained in the number of the Christian Magazine for July 1825.

occasion, which was published ;* and which stands as a lasting monument of the man, and the event, at the very close of his earthly labours.—The Meeting-house, which, thus dedicated, it is our privilege to occupy for the service of the Lord, has cost, with its appendages, and the necessary expenses attending its location, the sum of \$7353,35.†

The Church and Congregation of this town have continued for so long a period, remarkably united, harmonious, and peaceable. Difficulties there have been, it is true ; but they have soon passed away like the morning cloud, and have been succeeded by brighter days. It is presumed that few towns can present a parallel in this respect. And yet, though the external condition of the Society has been almost uniformly prosperous ; and though an orthodox, evangelical, and faithful ministry has been enjoyed with little interruption ; it is, nevertheless, a fact no less lamentable than true, that nothing in the form of a *general revival* of religion has ever been witnessed in this place. Such an event, the pious men, who here preached, prayed, and died ; with many of their pious people, whose

* Mr. Wheaton has left in print a work on School Education ; together with several Sermons ; one of which, “ On the Equality of Mankind, and the Evils of Slavery,” is particularly celebrated.

† The Meeting house, with the Blinds and Bell cost \$6092,20.—Preparing the ground, and the Cellar,—exclusive of the portion of land purchased, and of the Time-Piece, which was presented by Nathaniel Johnson, Esq.—makes an addition of \$1261,15 to complete the whole amount.

graces are with us, longed and prayed to see;—but they saw it not. We hope the privilege, of which they were denied, is yet in reserve for their favoured successors and posterity.

The largest number ever received into this Church, upon profession, any one year, is 20; who were added in 1742.—The whole number of Communicants that have belonged to it, from its organization to the close of the century, is 412; of which number 136 were males, and 276 females; and 333 were added by profession.—The Church has been favoured with a succession of eight Deacons.*—The whole number of Baptisms, up to the year 1825, is 1355.—This town contained in 1824, as nearly as can be ascertained, 221 Families; of which 23 belong to the West Parish in Medway; 1 to the East Parish; and 1 to the Congregational Society in Milford;—10 belong to the Society of Baptists; 9 to that of the Methodists; and 21 to that of the Universalists; leaving, with the addition of one family from Medway, 157 families of which this Congregation is composed.

The third part of this discourse is designed to comprise a Statistical view of Holliston, with such additional matter relating to the town as is not contained in the preceding parts of it.

From the defective nature of the town Records

* The names of the Deacons, and times of their election are as follows; Thomas Marshall and Timothy Leland, Dec. 25th, 1728;—Joseph Brown and James Russell, June 1748;—Aaron Phipps, May 2d, 1766;—Jesse Haven, May 1st, 1789;—Esek Marsh, June 3d, 1793;—and Asaph Leland, Feb. 27th, 1816.

during some of the first years of its existence, it is impossible to furnish a statement of Births, Marriages, and Deaths, which can be relied on as perfectly accurate. But so far as the materials would allow, the account I am about to present, may be depended upon as correct.—The whole number of persons born in this town, during its first century, is 2184; of whom 1146 were males, and 1038 females; making the average number of Births annually to be nearly 22.—The whole number of Marriages is 563; 11 being the average number for every two years.—The whole number of Deaths is 678; being somewhat more probably than half the present number of inhabitants; and making an average of about 7 annually. Until the year 1811, the *ages* of those who died were not inserted in the Records. From that time until the close of the century, the number of those, who died *under* 15 years of age, was 58; of whom 30 were males, and 28 females;—between the ages of 15 and 45, 53; of whom 26 were males, and 27 females;—between the ages of 45 and 70, 41; of whom 19 were males, and 22 females;—and *over* 70 years of age, 43; of whom 26 were males, and 17 females. The greatest age of which we have any account is that of a Mrs. Winchester, who lived to number 104 years.

The most remarkable, as well as the most mournful fact, which the history of this town furnishes, is that of the *Great Sickness*, as it is very appropriately called. This fatal sickness prevailed between the 18th of December, 1753, and the 30th of Jan-

uary, 1754. At the time of its appearance the town contained a population of about 400.—The symptoms, which peculiarly marked the disease, were violent and piercing pains in the breast or side; a high fever; and extreme difficulty of expectoration, which in some cases,—if not in most,—resulted in strangulation. Some, it is said, apparently in the last stages of the disease, were evidently relieved by administering oil, who eventually recovered. No derangement of mind usually accompanied the disease.—The sick generally survived their attack only from three to six days.—From notes taken, during the prevalence of the sickness, by the Rev. Joshua Prentiss; and which were found among his papers after his decease, we learn, that on the 31st of December, 7; and on the 4th of January, 10 lay unburied;—that during the week, on which the last date occurred, 17 died;—and that from 2 to 5 were buried in a day for many days successively. The whole number, who died of this fatal malady, is 53; more than one eighth of the population. Of this number 27 were heads of families—15 males, and 12 females;—12 were unmarried persons of adult age—8 males and 4 females;—7 were children;—and 7 were inhabitants of other towns, all of whom were males with one exception.—In the fearful desolations produced by this disease, the church of Christ was bereft of 15 of its members. Few families escaped; and four were entirely broken up by the removal of both the husband, and the wife.—For more than a month, there were not enough in health to attend

the sick, and bury the dead; though their whole time was employed in such services. The sick suffered, and the dead laid unburied; notwithstanding charitable assistance, and personal attendance were furnished by people in the vicinity. A most remarkable circumstance attending this sickness is its being almost wholly confined to a small town, without the smallest apparent natural cause for its existence at all; especially for its restriction within so narrow a compass. To those, however, who are disposed devoutly to trace whatever effects are discernable in the natural world back to the Great First Cause of all things; and to view every event as ordered and directed for some wise and righteous purpose, by *his* controuling hand; there will appear something, at least, remarkable in the facts,—of which there is little doubt,—that previous to the breaking out of this desolating sickness, the people were violently engaged in fierce law contentions, which seem to have originated in the proceedings of the town upon the subject of roads;—that two of the principal men in town were engaged, against each other, in a law-suit about a most trifling matter,* and were the first seized with the disease, while on their return from Court; both of whom fell its speedy victims—one of them *before* he could reach home; and the other soon *after*;—and that immediately upon the removal of the scourge with which the people had been most sorely visited,

* The subject of this contention, as stated by Capt. Samuel Bullard, who recollects to have heard the circumstances related by his grand-mother, a contemporary with the parties, was the value of a wig. A fact, which fully shows, that a previous enmity existed, which only needed an opportunity to exert itself.

their contentions ceased ; their tumults were hushed ; and peace and concord prevailed. Since that afflictive season, no town has been more noted probably for the little its inhabitants have troubled themselves with disputes in law. May the children continue to profit by the lesson, which the sorrowful experience of their fathers furnishes them.

I have now accomplished the design of this discourse. And in closing it, you will again suffer me to awaken your reflections upon the past by repeating the inquiry with which we started ;—Your Fathers—where are they ? And the Prophets—do they live forever ? They have accomplished, as a hireling, their day ; and have gone to the generations of their fathers. All that we know of them is obtained from their works, which are fast following them to decay, and to oblivion. And while we endeavour to rescue their works from immediate forgetfulness, and to preserve in our minds some faint remembrance of their authors ; it becomes us to remember also, that the soil we inhabit ; the freedom we enjoy ; and the social and religious privileges we possess are the rich inheritance they have bequeathed to us. In the quiet and full enjoyment of this inheritance, you, my respected friends, now live. It remains for you to say, by the use you make of it, how greatly you value it ; and how grateful to them and to the Author of all good, you are for its bestowment. And though I do, by no means, design to flatter, I am happy in being able, this day, to point my audience to evidence too palpable to be resisted, that the spirit of liberty, industry, peace, harmony, and improvement, so conspic-

uous in the fathers, is no less so in their children. Half a century since, and this goodly land of highly cultivated farms, and large and beautiful dwellings, was comparatively a dreary wilderness with some few cultivated spots; and with here and there a small and ill-constructed tenement concealed from distant view by the dense forest which encircled it. A few years since, and there stood, hard by, the temple of the Lord in such size, and form, and beauty as the infant, struggling into existence, was able to rear; but in the size, and form, and beauty of this second temple, in which we worship, we discern the wisdom, strength, and energy of the full grown man. A few years since, and our institutions of a civil, moral, and intellectual kind, which we now behold in complete and successful operation, were just rising into palpable existence, encumbered with a multitude of imperfections.—The century, which, at its commencement, saw this town an infant and feeble settlement; sees it, at its close, populous, wealthy, and respectable; and its inhabitants enjoying in quietness and harmony the possession which their fathers purchased them, and unitedly pursuing the things which make for peace, and things whereby one may edify another. May the century which has opened upon you so favourably,—in the beginning of which you have been unitedly engaged in the erection of a commodious building* for the transaction of your publick business, and in the promotion of the general interests of your town,—see you, through subsequent generations a united, holy, and happy people, whose God is the Lord!

* A Town-House was built in 1825.

But in the midst of the prosperity which now attends you, and of the still brightening prospects before you, forget not that you are mortal. One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh. When the present century shall have completed its revolution, other feet will tread the soil we now cultivate; other people will stand in the places we now occupy; and other voices will echo and re-echo through the vales, and the hills which have echoed and re-echoed ours. Where—oh! where shall we then be? With the nations sleeping under ground; waiting the last trump to wake our slumbers, and call us to the bar of God; where every one shall give account of himself, and receive according to that he hath done. And while we sleep with our fathers, the monumental marble may stand at our grave's head to tell to future generations that we have lived; but it is only the monument which our works shall erect, that shall assure posterity that we have lived and acted *well*. If therefore, we would leave behind us a blessed memory, we must live honestly, soberly, and godly. And if, moreover, we would leave behind us a virtuous and pious posterity, that shall honour their birth, and perpetuate the virtues of their parents, we must be virtuous and pious ourselves. And when we, and our ancestors, and our descendants shall together stand before God, may *we* be found prepared to join the full chorus of saints and angels in praise to *Him* that sitteth upon the throne, and to the Lamb forever and ever. Amen and Amen.