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# HISTORICAL DISCOURSE,

COMMEMORATIVE OF THE ORGANIZATION OF THE

## First Presbyterian Church,

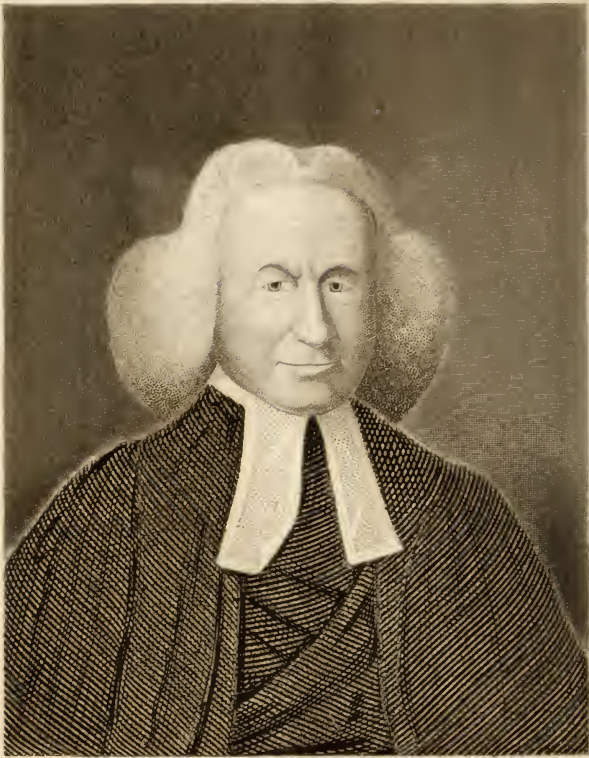
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IN NEWBURYPORT,

DELIVERED AT THE

FIRST CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION, JAN. 7, 1846.

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BY JONATHAN F. STEARNS, PASTOR.  
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NEWBURYPORT:  
PUBLISHED BY JOHN G. TILTON.  
1846.



WILLIAM JOHNSON, ESQ. M.P.

*Portrait of the Hon. William Johnson  
by Sir James O'Neil  
1794*

NEWBURYPORT, JAN. 15, 1846.

REV. AND DEAR SIR:

The undersigned, a Committee of the First Presbyterian Society, would express to you their sincere thanks for the very interesting and instructive Discourse, delivered by you on the recent Centennial Anniversary, and would respectfully request a copy of the same for publication.

Hoping that you may accede to our wishes, we are, Dear Sir, with sentiments of respect,

Truly Yours,

MOSES PETTINGELL, }  
EZRA LUNT, } *Committee.*  
ROGER S. HOWARD, }

THE dates, uniformly given in the following narrative, prior to 1752, are, as respect the month and day of the month, in the Old Style. This was thought to be, on the whole, the preferable method, as the dates could, in this way, be seen at once to correspond to those of the documents from which they are taken. It will be very easy, however, for the reader to reduce them to the present mode of reckoning, by adding, in each instance, eleven days to the date given. Thus the date of the organization of the Church is given, in the Church Records, and in the present narrative, as the 3d of January. According to the present reckoning, the true anniversary of that event is on the fourteenth. The same reduction must be applied to the events which follow.

In preparing this discourse the authorities relied upon have been, 1st, the Records and files of the Church. 2d, a manuscript statement, supposed to have been presented to the Legislature of the State, containing copies of votes of the First Church in Newbury, and correspondence between the aggrieved of that Church and the pastor, with the result of the exparte council, called by the aggrieved. 3d, a copy of the result of the exparte council, subsequently called by the Church and pastor. 4th, the ecclesiastical files of the State, containing petitions and remonstrances from the different parties, and the originals of a somewhat extended correspondence between the aggrieved of the third Church in Newbury and their pastor. 5th, the Records of the First and Third Churches. 6th, the manuscript journal of the Rev. Jonathan Parsons. 7th, a manuscript collection of letters written by Mr. Parsons, and now in the possession of some of his descendants. 8th, Prince's Christian History, Tucker's "Brief Account," and a variety of miscellaneous pamphlets and volumes.

The author would tender his sincere thanks to the Clerks of the First Church in Newbury and the First Church in Newburyport, for their politeness in allowing him the use of their Records. Also, to Joshua Coffin, Esq. and others, for valuable documents furnished by them.

# DISCOURSE.

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PSALM lxxviii: 2—7.

I will utter dark sayings of old, which we have heard and known and our fathers have told us; we will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the Lord and his strength and the wonderful works that he hath done; for he established a testimony in Jacob and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children; that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born, who should arise and declare them to their children; that they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments.

THE passage of Scripture just recited, no less than the present occasion, invites us to review and remember, that we may transmit to those who come after us, the history of God's goodness to us as a people.

The planting of a Church and the gathering of a religious society, are among the most important events in the history of any community. What influences for good or for evil, will be shed abroad from the fruit and leaves of that tree! If a true Church, established upon true principles, maintaining the faith of the Lord Jesus, and built on him, as its chief corner-stone, how salutary will be the effects of its existence. If a false or corrupt Church—a Church designed to inculcate false doctrine, or maintain the forms without the substance of the Gospel, how deplorable will be the

consequences to multitudes! Such as the Churches are, in a given community, such, as a general rule, will be the character of the people at large.

The Church, whose first centennial anniversary we now celebrate, (App. 1.) had its origin at a period of no common interest. The "Great Awakening," which commenced about the year seventeen hundred and forty, is deservedly regarded as an era in the history of the Churches in New England. Then a change was begun in their character which is felt, far and wide, to this day,—a change which, we trust in God, will not cease to be admired and honored, till the dawning of the glory of the latter day shall dim, by its excess of brightness, all former communications of the light of heaven. As this Church was emphatically, and perhaps beyond almost any other in this region, the child of that remarkable impulse, it seems proper before proceeding to its own particular history, to take a hasty glance at the general features of the crisis at which it originated.

The first Churches of New England were established on the most strictly evangelical foundation. They believed and professed the great principles of the protestant reformation, with remarkable affection and strictness. Their corner-stone was the doctrine of justification by faith only, good works being the necessary fruits of faith, and thereby its evidence, but by no means the meritorious cause of salvation. They believed, as fully, in the necessity of a renovation of the sinner's heart, by which its whole character and tendencies might be changed, the dominion of sin broken, the life of God in the soul enkindled, and the whole spiritual man created anew in God's likeness. This change, they ascribed wholly to the Divine spirit, working indeed, ordinarily, not without means, but at the same time so employing these, as to impart to them no share in the glory of the great result. True piety, in their estimation,

was a product of regeneration, and consisted, not in any outward performances, nor even in the most blameless outward morality, but in that inward conformity of the heart to God, that love to him and communion with him, of which outward goodness is but the necessary manifestation. Under the influence of these doctrines, preached earnestly by such men as Shepard, and Cotton, and Norton, and Mitchell, and Hooker, and Stone, "the word of God grew and multiplied;" and the preachers, themselves, full of the spirit of their divine message, could rejoice that they seldom preached, without some visibly good effect upon the hearts and consciences of their hearers, and without finding some, who had before been careless, beginning to inquire, "What shall I do to be saved?"

But this happy and very promising commencement was not destined to perpetuate its influence. The spirituality of the Churches began at an early day visibly to decline, and when the first century closed, there was great occasion, as the eye of Christian love looked abroad over the land, to exclaim, "How has the gold become dim and the most fine gold changed." First, there was manifested a great decline of spiritual vitality. Religion became more a matter of profession, and form, and less an experience of the heart. Then the boundaries between the Church and the world became less distinct. Multitudes became members of the Church, who gave no evidence that they were truly regenerate. Church discipline was neglected. Immorality invaded the sacred enclosure. The preaching became less discriminating and pungent. The doctrines of the ancient faith, long neglected, and reduced in the minds of the people to a dead letter, were fast gliding away from the popular creed, and were on the eve of being displaced for another system.

Such was the condition of a large portion of the Churches

of New England, when the great change to which I have alluded broke upon them in its power. Already had the morning star shone forth, in the great revival at Northampton, five years previous, under the faithful preaching of the old doctrines\* by the celebrated Jonathan Edwards. But the whole horizon began now to be illuminated. The whole land soon glowed beneath the brightness of the risen sun. Under the preaching of such men as Whitefield and Tennent, men evidently raised up to perform a special work, the impulse spread like electric flame. It stirred to its inmost depths the compact population of the larger commercial towns. It penetrated the interior villages. Churches which had long since "settled upon their lees" now began to feel within them a strange fermentation. Old respectability, proud of its decent forms, began to find the sceptre of its influence loosening in its grasp, and the legitimacy of its long dominion boldly questioned, by a race, professing to have been just now turned from darkness unto marvellous light.

The effect of this new impulse fell, as might have been expected, most heavily on the pastors of the churches. Secure of their support by the aid of the civil law, pledging all the real and personal estate, within certain geographical limits, for the fulfilment of their pecuniary contracts; and ministering to a people, not desirous of great pastoral fidelity, to the disturbance of their slumbering consciences, a large part of them had settled down into a dull routine of Sabbath day performances, and were spending their week day hours, when not employed in the preparation of their

\*It is a fact worthy of special attention, that the same doctrine of justification by faith only, which in the hands of Luther was the life and soul of the Protestant Reformation, was, in the hands of Edwards, the means of imparting the first impulse to that great awakening, which revived to new life the decayed and slumbering Churches of this Country.



hasty discourses, in the improvement of their parsonage lands, the indulgence of their literary tastes, or in friendly correspondence and social intercourse with each other, and with those distinguished men in civil life who courted their society and respected their respectability, or sought to avail themselves, for their own purposes, of their unbounded influence. Many of the ministers of that day, it is supposed, were men who had never experienced, in their own hearts, the power of the faith which they professed to teach. Many had become very sceptical in regard to its fundamental doctrines. And even those who were at heart faithful men, and desired sincerely the spiritual welfare of their flocks, infected to a great extent with the surrounding atmosphere, had become over cautious, in regard to every thing like excitement in religion, and, to avoid offence, dwelt chiefly on those vague generalities, which at best play round the head but come not near the heart.

Upon a clergy so secure and slumberous, the great awakening burst forth like the shock of an earthquake. Some aroused themselves, like the five wiser virgins when the bridegroom came, and made haste to welcome the wonderful guest. Some at first acted the prudent part of bending to the storm, thinking to let it pass over them unresisted, and blow by. Others, really friendly to whatever was good and genuine in the work of grace, were yet alarmed by the evils which attended it, and, perhaps too much influenced by the opinion of some whom they deemed wise and judicious, run well for a little season and then were hindered.

It was not long, however, before the party lines among the pastors of the Churches became quite prominent. When the famous Whitefield first came to Boston, all the clergy there, and in the neighboring towns, with scarce an exception, welcomed him with open arms. A few years

passed, and a considerable party among them had taken an entirely different view of his character and influence. His faults were magnified, his good depreciated. Pulpits were shut against him, and pamphlets warned the public to beware of his fanatical influence.

But it is not easy to stop an earthquake when it has commenced its motion, nor to stay the progress of a hurricane by the rebuke of human authority. The popular mind had been roused, and the excitement could be quelled only by the voice of truth. Unfortunately for those who would restore the calm, truth was mainly on the side of their opponents. The people saw that the new doctrines, were, after all, only those which the fathers of New England taught, which were acknowledged in the confessions of faith of their own Churches, and in which, in childhood, they themselves had been instructed from the Assembly's Catechism. They saw, too, that the effects produced by them, were, in the main, the legitimate results of those principles. And why then should the respected pastors of the churches wish to oppose the preaching of those doctrines, and the production of those effects?

The result was such as might have easily been anticipated. The coldness, which so many Christian ministers exhibited amidst the general fervor, led many to doubt the reality of their own conversion, and the sincerity of their professed attachment to the ancient faith; and what was doubtless true of many, soon began to be asserted boldly of the whole. The cord that bound the religious community together was now broken. The old decencies were despised as sheer hypocrisy. The influence of the pastors was no longer heeded, because the people had lost confidence in their sincere attachment to the cause of piety. Men of more zeal than knowledge now became, in many instances, the leaders of public opinion, and in the

anarchy which must necessarily have ensued, all sorts of wild fire, mingling with the flame of newly kindled piety, burned unchecked till it became uncontrollable.\*

Far be it from me to approve the disorders and irregularities which attended that wonderful excitement. There was unquestionably much everywhere which the serious Christian must and ought to deplore. But what is the chaff to the wheat? The legitimate leaders in the sacramental host of God's elect had declined their trust. The battle was for the inheritance, transmitted from the worthiest of fathers,—the inheritance of puritan faith, dearest of all others to the genuine New Englander. It was not so much a revolution, as a restoration, that they were now

\* The evils likely to result from the encouragement of ignorant laymen and youth destitute of all proper experience, to usurp the functions of the Christian ministry, were early foreseen and predicted by some of the most eminent promoters of the revival. But they had greater evils of an opposite character to contend with, and this fact neutralized, in a great degree, the influence of their admonitions. It is well known to all who are familiar with those times, that a prominent subject of controversy was the necessity of an educated ministry. The revival party insisted that grace in the heart is of more importance than learning in the head; and their opposers, on the other hand, so magnified the importance of human learning, as to cast into the shade that of personal piety. Both were partly right and partly wrong. It must be said, however, in favor of those who seemed to despise education in their zeal for personal religion, that, of the two, they were contending for by far the more important point. It was the point likewise which, for a considerable time previous, had been most neglected. Had all the educated ministers of the community possessed the spirit of COLMAN, and EDWARDS, and SEWALL, and PRINCE, no outcry would have been made, we may be sure, against human learning in the ministry—certainly no disposition would have been manifested to undervalue it, as an important collateral qualification. But the great dearth of such men at that important crisis, and on the other hand the violent opposition which the revival encountered from some, eminent for their intellectual attainments, produced, in many hasty minds, the impression, that great learning is unfavorable to ardent piety. Hence their confidence was transferred to another class, and the unskilfulness of their guides often led them lamentably astray.

to contend for, not a conquest, but a recovery, of what had been insidiously stolen away, in an hour of forgetfulness. And should the people hesitate? In the absence of their regular leaders, they must lead themselves. In all their ignorance, they must march on, with such a degree of regularity as mere soldiers of the rank and file were able to secure. Who can wonder that there was little discipline among them? Who can wonder that the lawless mingled in their ranks, and obtained at times a temporary ascendancy? Who can wonder that the best disposed among them were chargeable with many things, which their posterity must censure, and which they themselves, when they had time for calm review, had occasion to deplore?

The prevailing spirit of that movement, was, we may not doubt, that of living Christianity. There was, truly, as those engaged in it believed, a glorious work of divine grace upon the hearts of individuals, and a glorious reformation accomplished in the Church at large. Great principles, long withdrawn from notice, and almost sunk into oblivion, were restored to their ancient supremacy. The faith, practice and experience of the puritans was revived. Religion flourished again. And as for the disorders, which unhappily attended its resuscitation, these were soon made to disappear before the power of intelligent and sober piety.

In the general excitement, the people of Newbury, it appears, largely participated. How far the Churches here, with their pastors, had become infected with the prevailing degeneracy, it may not be easy at the present day exactly to determine. Within the bounds of what is now included in the towns of Newbury and Newburyport, there were then existing two Congregational parishes, called the first and third parishes in Newbury; now the first in Newbury and the first in Newburyport.

The pastor of the first Church in Newbury was then advanced in life, and of a peculiar temperament. He set his face, from the beginning, sternly against the new movement. The promoters of it, he did not hesitate to address by the opprobrious epithet of "Schemers," and "New Schemers," which their adversaries had applied to them. He told them to their face, that he *presumed*, they had been inventing falsehoods against him, for said he, "I never yet knew a schemer that would not lie." The name of "new light men," sometimes given them, he admitted might be applicable, for he continued, "Satan being now especially transformed into an angel of light, hath transformed his followers into his likeness, in regard of the new light they pretend unto." He even suffered himself, it is said, on one occasion, to become so excited, as to arm himself with a whip, under his cloak, when he went into the house of God, to scourge out the enthusiasts, as he called them, from the sacred precincts.\*

The other Church had been gathered only about fifteen years, when the work began, and was supplied with a pastor, learned, mild, serious, and evidently disposed to be faithful, beyond the ordinary practice of his day, in the promotion of serious piety. A single note, inserted in the Church records, may serve to illustrate his spirit. After recording a vote of the Church, the design of which was to adopt measures for the advancement of their own piety and religious influence, he gives vent to his own feelings in the following devout ejaculation: "God grant success to us in this affair, and by his holy spirit lift up a standard against

\* It seems proper, to observe here, that the Rev. Christopher Toppan, above referred to, was supposed to be laboring, at times, under a partial derangement of intellect. The peculiar turn, however, which his insanity seems to have taken, in the above instances, is significant of the state of the times, and of the difficulties under which those who afterwards separated from his Church were compelled to labor.

vice and profaneness, and revive dying religion among us.”\*

At what precise time the new impulse communicated itself to the people here, and by what means, I am not able to state confidently. Before the arrival, however, of the first itinerant preacher in this place, the records of the third Church, now the first in Newburyport, give evidence of an unusual interest in religious matters, in the admission to its communion in one year, of forty-four persons, a greater number, as the pastor himself then supposed, than was ever known to have been received in any Church in the province, in the same space of time.†

In the autumn of the year seventeen hundred and forty, George Whitefield made his first visit to New England. He arrived in Boston on Thursday evening, September the eighteenth, at eight o'clock, and remained there, preaching in the various Churches, about ten days, when he set out on an excursion to the Eastward. He reached Newbury in the afternoon of September the thirtieth,‡ and preached once in the house of worship belonging to the third parish,

\* The measures above alluded to, were the annual appointment of seven brethren of the Church, to be “joined with the pastor and the honored justices belonging to it,” to meet once a month and “consider what might be done for the good of the town in general, and the Churches in it,” or, as the object is expressed in another place, “to consider what may be done to revive dying religion among us, suppress vice, and promote the peace and welfare of the Church.” At the same meeting, the Church voted to meet once a quarter “and renew their covenant with God and one another.”

† This is stated on the authority of Mr. Lowell, himself, in a letter to the aggrieved, now on file in the State House. But the Church records show that, during the year immediately succeeding the great earthquake in 1727, which excited so much terror every where in this region, one hundred and forty-one persons were admitted to the same Church.

‡ Coffin states, in his history of Newbury, on the authority of Mr. Williams' historical sermon, that Whitefield first came to this town September 10th. This is a mistake. He had not then reached Boston on his way from the South.

the Rev. Mr. Lowell's, then situated on what is now called Market Square. His own notice of the event is as follows: "The Lord accompanied the word with power. The meeting-house was very large, many ministers were present, and the people were greatly affected. Blessed be God. His divine power attends us more and more." Whitefield proceeded on his journey as far as York, Maine; and returning, preached at Newbury again, on Saturday, October the fourth; when a collection amounting to eighty pounds and nine shillings, was taken up in behalf of the orphan house which he was then establishing in Georgia. In the course of the next winter, the hardly less famous Gilbert Tennent paid a visit to Newbury. On the seventh of January, as appears from a note by Mr. Lowell in the records of the third Church, he preached once in private, and on the next day once in public. A week later, namely, on the sixteenth of the same month, he was here again, and preached in public three times.

During this period, and for a considerable space of time afterwards, Mr. Lowell appears to have been regarded as a friend to the new movement. He made no opposition to it. He admitted freely to his pulpit, or allowed the people who desired it, to admit such itinerant and neighboring ministers as were considered specially active in the promotion of it. He became more zealous than usual in his own pastoral duties, and for a time maintained two weekly lectures, in addition to his other exertions. The result was that, during the space of one year and six months from the preaching of Whitefield in this place, one hundred and forty-three persons were added to his Church, and of these, fifty-nine were admitted on one particular occasion, and twenty-seven on another, both within the space of one month. The Church under the care of Mr. Lowell became indeed the resort of some, from the other parish, who were

disaffected towards their own pastor, on account of his opposition to the work.

Up to to this time, namely, the last of March, seventeen hundred forty-two, we find no evidence of a disposition among the friends of the revival to establish separate worship. But the causes of dissatisfaction were at work. During the course of the very next month, signs of misunderstanding begin to appear, between them and the Rev. Mr. Lowell. The Messrs. Rogers, of Ipswich, were among its most ardent supporters, and being men of high standing in the ministry, had probably found a welcome reception here, as well as others of a similar stamp. Near the close of April, Mr. Buel,\* a young preacher who had been laboring with much success at Northampton, under the eye and with the approbation of Jonathan Edwards, came to Ipswich, and, in company with Rev. Nathaniel Rogers, and his brother, Daniel Rogers, then a candidate for the ministry, visited Newbury. Mr. Lowell was absent, and some of his parishioners, desirous of hearing these gentlemen preach, took the responsibility of introducing them into the meeting-house for that purpose. Great excitement was produced by this act, and great offence

\* Mr. Buel was a classmate of Rev. Samuel Hopkins, and a graduate of Yale College at the commencement in the preceding September. As was not uncommon at that day, he commenced preaching very soon after he left College, and in the latter part of the following winter was employed to preach at Northampton, in the absence of Rev. Jonathan Edwards. Edwards himself thus speaks of him in a letter to a clergyman in Boston: "About the beginning of February, 1742, Mr. Buel came to this town. I was then absent from home, and continued so till about a fortnight after. Mr. Buel preached from day to day, almost every day, in the meeting-house. I had left him the free use of my pulpit, having heard of his designed visit before I left home. There were very extraordinary effects of Mr. Buel's labors," &c. Hopkins, who was then residing in the family of Edwards, speaks of him as "a zealous preacher of the Gospel, and the means of greatly reviving the people to zeal in religion."



taken, in which the pastor himself seems to have participated. Shortly after, a communication was inserted in a Boston paper, representing the transaction in a very reproachful light; as if Mr. Rogers and his associates, had formed a party, and taken violent possession of the meeting-house, in the pastor's absence. This the friends of those gentlemen denied. The pastor, with his own signature, confirmed the statement. The result of the misunderstanding was, that the next day Mr. Rogers preached in the town-house, being now excluded, as it appears, from both the meeting-houses, and a numerous audience there attended on his preaching.

What direct influence this event may have had on the succeeding movements does not now appear. One fact is evident, however; that the pastor had, by this time, seen occasion to change his views of the propriety of the measures in operation. He had complied with the wishes of those who were attached to them, till the matter seemed, in his judgment, to be going too far. Evening meetings, which he had before allowed, he now began to regard as of a dangerous tendency, and therefore stopped them. Itinerant preachers, he had permitted those of the people who desired to hear them, to introduce into his pulpit; until, to use his own words, "it was plain that any itinerant, of whatever character for capacity and conduct, was preferred," then he excluded them. Meanwhile, the views of that portion of his people were *not* changed. Hence they became discontented. The transaction just related, it seems probable, was the means of bringing matters to a crisis. Shortly after, we find that measures were in operation for the erection of a new place of worship. The building stood upon the North-east side of High Street, between Federal and Lime, and was probably completed before the middle of February in the following winter.

Meanwhile, a young man from the neighboring parish of Byfield, Joseph Adams, a graduate of the same year at Harvard University, and a very recent convert, began to exhort and hold meetings in this vicinity. He was a man of great fervor and zeal, and having entered upon the work he had undertaken with all the earnestness of sincerity, and the freshness of youthful devotion, he charmed and melted by his preaching the hearts of multitudes, who regarded him, in the language of one of his adversaries, as "some great one, the mighty power of God." The imprudent zeal of the young preacher led him to commit some indiscretions. He fixed his eye upon the pastor of a neighboring Church,—a man whom he appears to have regarded as peculiarly deficient in ministerial qualifications,—and with the view of dealing faithfully with his soul, addressed a letter to him, full of severe reproof, plainly intimating that he had never been converted, calling him "an opposer of this blessed reformation," and ending with the hope, that "God would either convert him or turn him out of the ministry," and the prayer, "O that God would bless this letter to your conviction." This letter, which appears to have been intended as a private one, the receiver immediately published, together with a long answer, in which the "arrogant young man" is chastised with no little severity. Notwithstanding this, however, the confidence of the friends of the young preacher appears to have remained unabated, and when the new meeting-house was completed, which was about the beginning of the year seventeen hundred and forty-three, Mr. Adams was employed as the stated preacher.

A large number from each of the two parishes now withdrew from their former places of worship, and attended on Mr. Adams' ministrations. He continued to officiate for this collection of "separatists," as they now began to

be called, with more or less constancy, more than two years, until a Church was formed, as we shall presently have occasion to notice.\*

It seems proper, that we should pause here, and inquire for what *reasons* the separation just referred to was made. Fortunately we have the parties' own statements, which will furnish the best exposition of their views.

The separatists from the first Church, of whom, there were, in the first instance, about thirty male members, complained of their pastor, the Rev. Christopher Toppan, that he had departed from the ancient faith in several important particulars, and especially, that he had strenuously opposed himself, to what they regarded as "the glorious work of God in convincing and converting great numbers in our land, of late, and especially among us," and had called it "all a delusion of Satan."

The separatists from the third Church, thirty-eight male members with their families, expressly disavowed the design of fixing upon their pastor, the Rev. John Lowell, the charge "of false doctrine, or what is generally called an immoral life." They admit that his *preaching* was not displeasing to them, "in a time of great deadness in religion, a time when (as we think)" say they, "both the wise and foolish virgins were slumbering and sleeping." But since the great work of divine grace had commenced among them, many, especially of those who had shared in it, had

\* Mr. Adams was afterwards settled in Stratham, N. H., where he died at an advanced age, leaving behind him, as a friend informs me, the reputation of a "remarkably good man." The evidence that he remained here as long as above stated, is to be found in a letter from Mr. Parsons, then at Lyme, addressed to Charles Pierce, Esq., and Dr. Sawyer. He says, in the postscript, "I hope you will treat dear Mr. Adams, *your present preacher*, with respect and confidence. He is a man whom I love in the Lord, and I believe he has been very serviceable to the cause of Christ among you." This letter is dated April 18, 1745.

become dissatisfied. They complain that he had of late shown himself "cold and strange" towards the promoters of the late happy "reformation in the land,"—"at this day as you are pleased to express it (to our sorrow) only of 'temptation.' But we think, in honor to the Holy Spirit, it deserves to be called a day of illumination as well as temptation." Meanwhile, they complain, your own preaching was "not so suitable to our experience as we wished and longed for." His discourses seemed to them not sufficiently explicit and frequent, on the subject of man's native depravity, and inability," "the way of salvation by the merits of Christ," "the work of the Holy Spirit," and "the bringing the sinner off from his own righteousness, to rely entirely on Christ's righteousness." They wished the terrors of the law to be set forth in a more lively manner, and the sermons to be "pressed home and pungent," and the preacher himself to be "more zealous, constant, and fervent, in this weighty cause of gaining souls to the kingdom of God." They do not complain, indeed, that they have had nothing of this class of instructions, but they think they have had far too little of it, "especially considering the present day." "And then," they continue, "when you were upon such subjects as fairly led you to speak close, and clear, and distinct, to our case, you seemed to us to glance over or but hint at them, in such generals, as did not reach our case." "And then the improvement, which we consider the life and soul of a sermon, seemed to us to go all over, without touching us." Could they have had such preaching, as in their view was essential to their spiritual welfare, in season and out of season, either by the pastor himself, or by his heartily admitting and forwarding the efforts of such other Orthodox ministers as would preach in that manner, accompanied by corresponding pastoral efforts on his part, they would never

have thought, they say, of separating from him. The want of these, and the like privileges, led them to withdraw.

The irregularity of the proceedings of these "aggrieved brethren," in withdrawing from public worship and ordinances in their own Churches, and establishing for themselves separate worship, without first obtaining a regular dismission, demands, in justice to them, an attentive and discriminating consideration. They had had, as they affirm, repeated conferences with their pastors on the subject, until one of these "declared he would talk no more with them," and the other, though often appraised of their desire to withdraw, and their wish for a Church meeting in the case, had sufficiently indicated his unwillingness to do anything to forward their wishes. Indeed the policy of the pastors, at that period, seems to have been, to call no Church meetings, and have no Church action on the subject of existing difficulties. One of them states explicitly, that he should have called such a meeting, were it not that he "had abundant reason to fear, the heats and animosities among us might prevent our acting, at the meeting of the Church, with wisdom and for the honor of Christ." Of course, the power of calling Church meetings being then considered as lodged exclusively in the hands of the pastors, it was impossible for the aggrieved brethren, in existing circumstances, to obtain a regular hearing.

As to building the meeting-house, and commencing public worship in it before asking a formal leave so to do; which was sometimes alleged as an irregularity; they supposed they had the best of precedents in their favor. The house in which Mr. Lowell officiated, had been built, it seems, without any such leave given by the first Church and parish, and the persons afterwards organized as the third Church, had not been dismissed for that purpose,

until a considerable time after the house was built, and there was stated preaching in it. And yet no offence had been taken,—none regarded it as an irregularity.

It is plain however, that the aggrieved earnestly desired, and were determined to secure, if possible, some distinct action of their own Churches on the case in hand. When they separated, it was evidently with the earnest hope, that, by a decisive stroke, the Churches would be brought to a direct and regular cognizance of their affairs.

But the pastor of the third Church, though for the sake of peace, he would call no regular meeting, does not seem to have been unmindful of the exigencies of that trying crisis. On the first day of May, say the Church records, “after the administration of the Lord’s supper, just before the blessing was pronounced, the pastor read to the Church what follows: “Brethren, you are all sensible of the great schism that has been made in this Church, and that a considerable number of persons, under the watch and care of this Church, have withdrawn from our communion in the word and ordinances, in breach of their solemn vows and covenant engagements; and I think it my duty, as your pastor, to move to you that we keep a day of fasting and prayer upon this sad occasion, and seek God’s special direction for the healing of our divisions.” The day was agreed upon and observed accordingly. “The same day,” records the pastor, somewhat mournfully, “the separatists held a public assembly in Mr. John Brown’s barn, in Mr. Toppan’s parish, at which deacon Beck,” one of his own deacons, “was present.”

The aggrieved brethren, now perceiving no probability that the Church intended to take any steps towards a regular hearing of their case, by calling them to an account for their withdrawing, began themselves to move, by a *formal application*, for a Church meeting.

On the thirty-first day of October, those belonging to the third Church addressed their pastor, in the following communication: "We, the subscribers, brethren of the third Church in Newbury, beg your compliance with this our desire in calling a Church meeting, that we might lay before them the reasons of our withdraw, and also our desire of a dismissal from your particular Church, in order to be gathered into a Congregational Church agreeable to the word of God." This was signed by the names of thirty-two male members of the Church. The pastor replied, expressing his regret, that "in this day of temptation," they had been so unmindful of their covenant vows as to have separated from the communion of the Church. He declines calling the Church meeting, until they are more explicit in stating their grievances; for, says he, "they may be such, for aught I know, as to contain some charges against me (though I fear none) or some other particular person,"—in which event he would have them pursue private measures,—"or they may be such as I ought not, as pastor, to lead the Church to consider of."

The aggrieved next addressed a communication to the pastor and Church jointly. It commences with the following frank and honorable confession: "We, the subscribers, having withdrawn from communion with this Church, are convinced, that in not laying before you the reasons of our withdrawing before we actually did withdraw, we have erred, we heartily acknowledge it, and ask your forgiveness therefor." They then proceed to state, generally, that they are not edified by the pastor's ministrations, and again they earnestly desire to be dismissed, peaceably and amicably, to be formed into a Congregational Church. To prevent mistakes, about their views of religious truth, they take care to add: "To your satisfaction, we think, we can heartily and unreservedly subscribe and

concur with the well known body of Divinity among you called the Assembly's Catechism."

Instead of laying this communication before the Church, according to its obvious intent, the pastor proceeded to answer it. His reply is (in some parts of it) a little pungent. "Whether my preaching," he says, "be as much for your soul's benefit and spiritual edification as that of others, and particularly Mr. Adams's, whom you generally hear, would be somewhat odd for me to determine." He still hopes, however, that he can satisfy them, if they will give him a more full and explicit account of their grievances, intimates that the Church will not be willing to dismiss them, while they are not in charity with the pastor, and have not given him the reasons, and finally proposes to have another day of fasting and prayer in reference to the matter.

The aggrieved brethren now took their turn to be severe. "As to breach of vows," they say, "and all that respects that on our part, we think we have sufficiently acknowledged, and asked your forgiveness therefor." They *retort* the charge. The Church is bound, they say, to call offenders to an account. And if they were regarded as offenders, it was a breach of covenant vows to neglect to take cognizance of their case. They repeat their request for a Church meeting. They see no probability of removing the difficulties by private conference, for they have repeatedly waited upon the pastor, both as committees and as private persons, and without success. They complain, that they have been ill-treated in the matter. They think they shall not make many more attempts of a like nature, unless they have a better prospect of success. In this letter, the aggrieved set forth, in detail, the reasons of their dissatisfaction, and request particularly that the whole should be read to the Church. The pastor replied in a



long letter, going over the whole ground and intimating, that "the Church will not be likely to receive their acknowledgement, while they still refuse to hold communion with them."\*

At length, however, the Church met. The result was such as the pastor had anticipated. Having heard the request of aggrieved brethren, and their reasons, the Church voted, "1st, That the separate brethren did, by their withdraw, so long before they offered any reasons, give the Church just cause to be offended. 2d, That the Church had not received satisfaction." At an adjourned meeting it was farther voted,—“1st, That the separating brethren had no right to vote in the case then pending. 2d, That the reasons given by the brethren withdrawn from communion, were not sufficient to justify their separation, or for this Church to grant them a dismissal. 3d, That a Committee be appointed to prepare, in the name of the Church, an admonition to the brethren of the separation. 4th, That if the separate brethren shall slight the admonition, which shall be given them, to return to communion, this Church will, in due time, proceed to such further censure, as is directed in the Gospel.” The votes were

\* The above intimation, unquestionably, contains the real reason why the truly manly and Christian confession of the aggrieved brethren was not received as an ample reparation of all past irregularities. The true head and front of their offending, was their determination not to return to the Church and parish. The acknowledgement was never made a matter of Church record. The legal disabilities under which that society afterwards suffered, requiring them to lay before the Legislature of the Commonwealth the original documents of their early transactions, was, in the providence of God, the only means of preserving it from oblivion. Many years afterwards, however, when the heat of party feeling had subsided, this very confession, retained in the memory only of certain of the members, was accepted by the Church as a sufficient ground on which to receive back into its fellowship one of those who had signed it, and was now disposed to return to his old relations.

passed by a very small majority, sixty-nine voting against sixty-five, the latter, however, including the aggrieved themselves. This took place on the 14th of February, 1744. Shortly afterwards, the Committee having prepared the admonition, the Church summoned the offending brethren to appear on a given Lord's day, at the close of divine service, to receive it. As might naturally have been expected from men who had conscientiously maintained separate worship more than two years, the accused were not found in attendance on the Lord's day, at the close of divine service in the third parish. And the Church not thinking it proper to proceed farther, at this time, left the whole matter, without any farther action, nearly two years.

Meanwhile, the disaffected in the other parish had not remained idle. Having been repulsed in their attempts at private conference with the pastor, with the declaration, that he would talk no more with them, they proceeded, according to his suggestion, to prepare a written statement of their grievances, among which, besides the points already mentioned, is the neglect to call *the complainants themselves to an account* for withdrawing from communion with the Church.\* The letter, containing this statement, was read to the Church on the Lord's day, but no action was had on the subject. After waiting, between four or five weeks, the aggrieved addressed a second letter to the pastor, assuring him that the matters complained of were matters of great grief to themselves, and earnestly

\* This written statement being prepared, and not yet presented, a copy of it was demanded by the pastor, that he might lay the charges contained in it before the Superior Court, then about to hold its session at York. Perhaps the intimation or threat here given, may serve to account, in part, for the backwardness sometimes manifested by the complainants to prepare written statements of their grievances.

entreating him seriously to consider them, and give the complainants reasonable satisfaction; or otherwise to concur with them, in calling a council of the Churches, to hear their grievances, that so an end might be put to the unhappy controversy. This communication met the same fate with its predecessor. Again the aggrieved addressed the *brethren of the Church*, and entreated them to take the matter into serious consideration. The letter was read, as the others had been, on the Lord's day, together with the pastor's answer. But no vote was taken, no meeting for business appointed, and no copy of the answer sent to the aggrieved. Application for a copy of it was made, but the request was refused. The pastor also distinctly refused to call a meeting of the Church. Once more, an attempt was made to bring the brethren of the Church together, for a personal conference, but the attempt failed.

The aggrieved now resorted to a Council. It was convened on the eighth day of November, seventeen hundred and forty-three. On the third day of its session, the pastor, with the advice of some of the principal members of the Church, addressed a letter to the moderator, in reply to a communication from him, assuring him that it had been, and still was his intention, as soon as it might conveniently be done, to call the Church together, if the aggrieved desired it; and that if the matter could not otherwise be settled, he was ready, with the Church, to join with the aggrieved, in calling a Council, mutually chosen, to hear and advise upon their difficulties. Aware of the evils attending all *ex parte* decisions in ecclesiastical matters, the Council advised the aggrieved to accept the overture of their pastor, and if after suitable efforts they were unable to obtain satisfaction, then to unite with him in calling a mutual Council. And thereupon the first Council dispersed.

After waiting a few weeks, and perceiving no movement on the part of the pastor, the aggrieved again applied to him, requesting the fulfilment of his promise. Then they learned, to their surprise, that, of the mutual Council which had been promised them, they themselves were to choose not a single member; but the Church must choose the whole.\* Not reckoning at a very high rate the *mutuality* of a Council so constituted, the brethren made several further attempts. The pastor, at one time, proposed to leave the whole matter to the Governor and Council. But this the brethren did not seem to think quite ecclesiastical. Again he offered to refer it to seven ministers. But this reference, they perhaps thought too exclusively clerical. Once more, he proposed a Council of Churches. But the pastor was to choose one third of the members, the Church one third, and the aggrieved the remainder. And as the majority of the Church was now well understood to be on the pastor's side, in the matter in controversy, the aggrieved regarded this plan likewise, as not likely to produce an impartial result.

Wearied and disgusted to find themselves so repeatedly balked, they now resorted a second time to an *exparte* Council. But again, perceiving some ground of encouragement to pursue further negotiations, they sent to stay the Council from assembling until further notice should be given. (a†) Failing in this, they once more sum-

\* As far as I am able to judge of the facts by a comparison of counter statements, I am led to conclude that the method proposed here was this: that the pastor and the aggrieved were to *nominate*, each one half of the Council, but the Church would then be free to accept or reject the nominations. The objections to this method may be easily seen. The Church was understood to be a party with the pastor. If they were allowed to choose all the members of the Council, it would be an easy matter to exclude from it every one of those Churches and ministers, (for they were not numerous,) who were in full sympathy with the aggrieved in their views.

† The letters refer to the Appendix.

moned the Council. It consisted of eight Churches, and was convened on the twenty-fourth of July, seventeen hundred and forty-four. The Church and pastor resolved not to acknowledge nor notice it. The complainants made their own representations. The Council obtained a copy of the pastor's answer to the complaints alleged, which has already been alluded to, and determined to give it all due consideration. In the result, the complaints were sustained, the pastor censured, and the complainants advised, in case all proper efforts to obtain satisfaction should fail, "then to seek more wholesome food for their souls, and put themselves under the care of a shepherd, in whom they could with more reason confide."

The Church now proceeded, on their own part, to summon a Council. Having selected the members, they proposed, with great appearance of fairness, that the aggrieved should select an equal number to be joined with them, and make it a mutual Council. But in this number none of those Churches which had been before invited, could be chosen. And as these were nearly all the Churches in the neighborhood, in whom the aggrieved had confidence, they very prudently declined the proposal.

Another *ex parte* investigation was of course the consequence, and the result, as might have been expected, was exactly the reverse of the other.

One further hope now remained to the dissatisfied. The pastor being aged and infirm, measures were about to be taken for the settlement of another minister. But the candidate, whom the parish preferred, being no nearer to their own views, than his predecessor, they at length determined to avail themselves of the decision of their own Council, and formally withdraw from the Church.

Accordingly, on the twentieth day of December, seventeen hundred and and forty-five, about four weeks after the

ordination of the new pastor, they addressed a communication to the Church, recapitulating past transactions, and concluding as follows :

“ Wherefore, Brethren, on these considerations, for the peace of our consciences, our spiritual edification, and the honor and interest of religion, as we think, we do now withdraw communion from you, and shall look upon ourselves as no longer subjected to your watch and discipline, but shall, agreeable to the advice given us, speedily as we may, seek us a pastor who is likely to feed us with knowledge and understanding, and in whom we can with more reason confide.”

“ And now, brethren, that the God of all light and truth would lead both you and us into the knowledge of all truth, as it is in Jesus, is and shall be the desire and prayer of your Brethren,” &c. Signed by twenty-three male members of the Church.

I have been particular in detailing these transactions, because the separatists from both the two Churches have been charged with a disorderly separation. It will be seen, I think, from what has been presented, that whatever irregularity may have attended their earlier movements, sufficient evidence was presented, afterwards, of a disposition to atone for past errors, and obtain, if possible, a regular and orderly dismissal. Those belonging to the first Church had the decision of a Council in their favor,—an *exparte* Council it is true, but one which was not resorted to, till repeated efforts for a mutual one had been made in vain. Those from the third Church, perceiving that they had acted hastily in the first instance, made a frank and cordial acknowledgement. And though their urgent requests to be dismissed peaceably, in order to be formed into a new Church, had been continually neglected, they still delayed taking the final step, in hopes that, what

they looked upon as their most sacred rights, would yet be conceded by their brethren. That there was, by this time at least, a serious, settled and conscientious difference of opinion between the two parties, demanding separate worship, few I think, at this day, would be disposed to question. What the dissatisfied brethren, in the first Church, called "the glorious work of God," the pastor of that Church felt compelled to denounce as "a delusion of Satan." What the brethren in the third Church thought a "day of illumination," their pastor assured them he must still call "a day of temptation." In these circumstances, what was to be done? Had there been a regular mode of relief open to them, all must admit that they ought to have pursued it. But the important doctrine of religious freedom was, at that time, but poorly understood by the Congregational Churches in this region.

The members thus withdrawn from the first Church, now considered themselves at liberty to form other ecclesiastical connexions. Accordingly, on the third day of January, seventeen hundred and forty-six, nineteen of the twenty-three brethren who had signed the declaration of separation, were embodied into a Church, by affixing their names to the following mutual covenant:

"We, the subscribers, who were members of the first Church in Newbury, and have thought it our duty to withdraw therefrom, do also look upon it as our duty to enter into a Church estate, especially as we apprehend this may be for the glory of God, and the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom, and our own mutual edification and comfort. We do, therefore, as we trust, in the fear of God, mutually covenant and agree to walk together as a Church of Christ, according to the rules and order of the Gospel. In testimony whereof, we have hereunto set our hands this third day of January, Anno Domini, seventeen hundred and forty-six."

Such, my brethren, was the origin of this Church. Such the motives which led to its formation, and such the circumstances under which it was established. There had been, unquestionably, a glorious work of divine grace in the community. Along with it, there had been a large developement of the devices of Satan,—much disorder and enthusiasm,—much uncharitableness and wild fanaticism. But the chaff was now becoming separated from the wheat. The prevalence of sober and correct views, over false heat, was fast becoming apparent. The faults of the past had been acknowledged and renounced. Due efforts had been made to obtain an orderly release from former ecclesiastical relations. In the establishment of the new Church, the foundations were laid firm and deep in the essential principles of that faith and order which had been professed and practised by the earliest Churches of New England.

Meanwhile, the providence and grace of God was raising up, and preparing for the work to be assigned him, a pastor eminently qualified for the exigencies of the times, and the wants of this particular people.

The Rev. Jonathan Parsons was born in Springfield, Mass., Nov. 30, 1705. He was the child of Christian parents, and in his early years was carefully educated in the principles of faith and piety.

He entered Yale College at the age of twenty, and was ordained over a Congregational Church in Lyme, Conn., a little more than a year after he took his first degree. The first two years of his ministry he preached Arminian principles, and, as he afterwards had reason to fear, was a stranger to regenerating grace. But it pleased God to carry him through a severe mental conflict, by which his religious views were greatly changed, and his heart, as he ever afterwards believed, created anew in Christ Jesus.

Parsons was a minister at Lyme, during the whole of



that remarkable period, already designated as the "Great awakening." He was a close friend of Whitefield, and often entertained him at his house. Perhaps no man, if we except Whitefield, and Tennent, and Jonathan Edwards, was more completely identified with that wonderful movement, than he.

He had suffered severe trials in consequence. Five or six influential members of his own Church, violently opposed his ministry. Efforts were made to malign his character, and the opposition at length rose to such a height that he thought it his duty to retire from the sacred office, among that people, and seek for himself another place of usefulness.

It was just at this period, in the life of Parsons, that the new Church here was about to be organized. The advice of Whitefield turned the attention of the people towards him as a suitable person to become their pastor. Accordingly, a few days after they had embodied themselves into a Church, namely, on the seventh of January, seventeen hundred and forty-six, they invited him to take the oversight of them.

Vigorous efforts now began to be made to prevent the consummation of the contemplated connexion. The first Church passed a vote that it was disorderly to officiate as a minister on the Lord's day, to persons withdrawn from the neighboring Churches. (b) They also voted, in case he did not desist, they would send to Lyme and ascertain what misconduct he might be found to be chargeable with. A letter from one of his most violent opposers, in his former parish, was obtained and exhibited in various ways to his disadvantage. Even the mild and prudent Lowell went so far as to read, publicly from the pulpit, certain slanderous charges, which had chanced to come into his possession, with the express design of warning the people against him.

But the people were not so to be discouraged. They had listened to his defence and explanations. They had read the full and explicit recommendation given him by the Council which dismissed him from his former charge. (c) They believed him to be, as the event proved, eminently qualified for their peculiar exigencies. They therefore, still persisted in their determination to install him over them.

Accordingly, on the nineteenth of March, the installation took place. There was no Council called, for it was thought best, by the most judicious friends of the new Church, that it should remain, for the present, entirely independent. (d) The people assembled in the house of worship, and the pastor elect preached to them from 1 Peter 5 : 9. "Steadfast in the faith." After singing a hymn, he reminded the congregation of the efforts, which had been made, since his call to become their pastor, to traduce his ministerial character; and having presented his testimonials for their consideration, proposed to them once more to decide whether it was still their wish that he should be their minister. The vote was taken by the clerk, and passed unanimously in the affirmative. (e) The pastor elect then said, "In the presence of God and these witnesses, I take this people to be my people," and the clerk replied, speaking in the name of the rest, "In the presence of God and these witnesses, we take this man to be our minister."

Meanwhile, they had agreed upon a platform of Church government and discipline, and adopted a confession of faith. The form of government was, at first, one which might properly be called independant Presbyterian. The difficulties which they had encountered in obtaining a release from the old Church, had made them greatly averse to Congregationalism. Their original platform, however,

was not intended to be permanent, but only to be observed for the present, until they could see their way clear to form other relations. It maintained, distinctly, that the power of privilege resides in the brotherhood at large, but, as the scripture has not explicitly bound them as to the mode in which it should be exercised, they are at liberty to do it through a representative body if they see fit. Such a body, therefore, it required the Church annually to appoint; and with them all the power of discipline was to be lodged, with this provision, that if the elders so appointed should be unable to reclaim an offender, they should at last bring the case before the brotherhood at large, to advise what should be done further in the case.

On the seventh of April following, the organization of the Church was completed by the choice of six ruling elders, and shortly after, negociations were commenced which at length resulted in a connexion with the presbytery of Boston,—(*f*) the Church reserving one feature of her original constitution only, viz: the right to choose her elders annually,—a right which she has steadily maintained, through all changes, to the present day.

The Church had now become, in the full sense of the word, a Presbyterian Church. The motives which led to this were partly an aversion to the old system, for the reason just mentioned, and partly a necessity which was laid upon them to become another denomination, in order to escape the absolute oppression of the Congregational discipline, as then conducted. Strange as it may seem to some, who are in the habit of regarding Presbyterianism as too rigid, and unfriendly to popular rights, it was expressly for the purpose of avoiding undue rigidity, and in defence of popular rights, that the founders of this Church adopted that form of government.

The only exclusive principle, which this Church set up,

was that which respected Christian character and soundness in the faith. They often protested, that by becoming Presbyterians they had no intention to withdraw from free intercourse with their Congregational brethren. All Churches who adhered to the principles set forth in the Assembly's catechism, they stood ready at all times to welcome as brethren. (*g*)

The Church being thus organized and established, and provided with an able pastor, the brethren in the third Church, who were in sympathy with them, sought once more for a dismissal, in order to join them. This request was decisively denied, and the Church voted that they could not acknowledge the new Church as a regular Church of Christ.

The dissatisfied brethren now determined to retire without a dismissal; and, after long deliberation, and having taken the advice of such ministers as they thought worthy of confidence, the new Church voted to receive them. (*h*) Thus the scattered bands were at length united into one flock, and beneath the shelter of the sanctuary which then our hands had erected, they sat down together under the watch of the same spiritual shepherd. (*i*)

But the trials of this Church and congregation were but just begun. A long struggle ensued to obtain exemption from the exactions of the Congregational system, then by law established. Application was made to the Legislature to be released from taxation in the regular parishes. The parishes remonstrated, and the petition was denied. Again and again, was the subject brought before the General Court. Governor Shirley, in one instance, recommended the case to its special attention. But their neighbors insisted that they were a misguided band who ought not to be encouraged. They reminded the Legislature that they had

always been frowned upon by their predecessors in office, and that since being so treated, "they had sought shelter and relief under the Presbyterian form, but all in vain." They more than intimated the confident expectation, that they always would continue to be frowned upon. And so the case proved during many years. When the members of this congregation pleaded conscience against the exactions which were made upon them, they were told that what they called conscience, was but avarice. When they complained, that the burden was beyond their ability, they were taunted with the fact that they had assumed a voluntary burden, in the establishment of their own separate worship. When, in reliance on what seemed to them common justice, some of them refused to pay what was exacted, the officers of the law seized upon their persons and thrust them into prison. Repeated cases of this nature are to be found recorded in the private journal of the first pastor, in which, in the face of many indignities, he felt himself called upon to visit the prison to console his suffering brethren. The argument for these coercive measures was this, "the parish property is pledged for the support of the parish minister. The English dissenters are obliged to pay for the support of the established Church, and why should you be exempted?" True the law had already exempted Churchmen, Anabaptists, and Quakers. But the like privileges the poor Presbyterian must not look for. And why, forsooth? Because he ought not to *be* a Presbyterian. He should have never separated from the old Congregational parish. Strange as it may seem to us, with our present views of religious liberty, the third parish in Newbury earnestly remonstrated to the General Court, against granting the prayer of the petitioners, on the ground of the evil consequences likely to ensue "from the precedent of giving parish privileges to all the various sects in this province."

The oppression was so severely felt by this society, that they had taken the preliminary steps, at one time, to have their case particularly brought before the King in Council. They went so far as to obtain a written opinion of the Attorney General in England, respecting the best mode of procedure, and only desisted from their purpose because some judicious friends abroad thought such a representation as they would be obliged to make, might endanger the charter of the colony, and prove injurious to the interests of the English dissenters. About this time, however, some partial relief, but very inadequate, was granted them by the provincial Legislature.\* It was not till many years after this, that an application from the town of Newburyport procured for all denominations here, the right to conduct their own ecclesiastical affairs in their own way.

Ample evidence exists that the members of this society, with their pastor, were, for many years, subjected among their neighbors, to many indignities. The strong feeling, with which Parsons mentions, in his diary, that the town clerk, though not a member of his society, treated him kindly when he called upon him, shows how little he was in the habit of expecting, in the way of respect and friendship. The low and vulgar, in some instances, reviled him, and pelted him with stones in the street.

The subsequent history of this Church and society I must pass over in the most cursory manner, for want of time. During the ministry of Mr. Parsons, a period of about thirty years, the Church and society flourished and increased greatly. It enjoyed several very cheering

\* A comparison of dates shows that the partial relief above referred to, must have been wrung from the Legislature, under the fear that the case would otherwise be carried over to the government of the parent country. As it was, the relief was so stinted, and encumbered with so many conditions, that it proved rather the occasion of new lawsuits, than any very substantial benefit.

revivals of religion, during which many converts were added to the number of the professed followers of Christ. It was at one of these seasons, in the year 1756, that, the congregation having become too large for the place of meeting, the house where we now assemble was erected. (*j*) It was then supposed to be one of the largest in the country, yet so great was the increase of numbers that, about eleven years later, a plan was formed for erecting another house of worship, dividing the congregation into two parts, and inviting the Rev. James Sproat, afterwards of Philadelphia, to minister in one of them as colleague pastor with the Rev. Mr. Parsons. This plan, however, seems not to have been prosecuted. (*k*)

The communion seasons, during this period, were peculiarly animating and delightful. Parsons compares one of them to a similar season which he had enjoyed in Lyme, during his ministry there, and which, in his description of the work of grace given in the Christian history, he had called his Pentecost. He thought this even more delightful, in some respects, than that remarkable occasion. After the Church joined the Presbytery, the practice of the Scotch Churches was adopted, namely, that of having public religious exercises both the day before and the day succeeding the administration of the Lord's supper,—a practice which continued in the Church many years. So interesting were these seasons, that I have heard the aged people among us often say, that crowds flocked from the whole surrounding region to share in the pleasure and benefit of the exercises.

Mr. Parsons was a man eminently adapted to be at the head of such a people. A fervid revivalist of high repute, he was, of course, all they desired on that head. Experienced in the dangers which attend all religious excitements, he was prepared to furnish the most happy safe-guards.

Having once imbibed and preached the looser form of doctrine, then becoming prevalent in many of the Churches, he knew how to discriminate between truth and error, and raise the warning voice against the first beginnings of defection. The people, with some few exceptions, were, at that time, exceedingly ill-informed in respect to the Gospel system of religious truth, and Parsons' logical training and thorough scholarship, were eminently adapted to their instruction and establishment in the faith. It was a happy thing for this Church and society that it enjoyed, during so large a portion of its early trials and hazards, the services of such a man as Jonathan Parsons. (*l*)

During the ministry of Mr. Parsons, this Church and society enjoyed, in repeated instances, the services of the eloquent and devoted Whitefield, by whose counsels their early movements were in part directed, and were at length, in the providence of God, indulged the mournful privilege of laying his remains to rest beneath their own sanctuary, where they now slumber, awaiting the final resurrection, beside his, in whose hospitable dwelling, he so often, during his life-time, found a home.

The next minister was the Rev. John Murray. He was a native of Ireland, and received his education in the university of Edinburgh. When he came to this country, he was hardly twenty-one years of age, and shortly after was settled as a minister in the second Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. But he had been guilty of a very serious misdemeanor in respect to the signatures to his credentials, which having at length come to light, was the cause of his removal from that city. He was next settled in Boothbay, where a presbytery, was formed, called "the presbytery of the eastward," of which he became the most prominent member. (*m*) Mr. Parsons had known something of Mr. Murray from his first



arrival, and when the unfavorable reports came to be circulated, he took special pains to inquire into their foundation. The result was a decided conviction, that the faults committed, taken in connexion with his own humble acknowledgment, were not such as justly to debar him from Christian charity, or to disqualify him for the exercise of the ministry. The presbytery of Boston, however, refused fellowship with Mr. Murray, and it was partly on this account, that this Church, with their pastor, withdrew from that presbytery, and became connected with the presbytery of the eastward.

Mr. Murray was a remarkable preacher. No man drew such crowds to hear him, or held them in a listening attitude so long. He was active in the promotion of religion out of the bounds of his own parish. Many ministers were educated by the aid which they received from a society of which he was the chief supporter and guiding spirit. Many Churches, especially in the state of Maine, owed their origin to his influence and exertions. He had his faults, unquestionably, which marred his usefulness; and the censure under which he remained, in the eyes of many, deprived the Church and society of that free intercourse which they might otherwise have enjoyed with some of the neighboring Churches; but his ministry seems to have proved, on the whole, a great blessing, both in the conversion of sinners, and the edification of the Church of Christ.

Mr. Murray was first invited to become colleague pastor with Mr. Parsons, several years before his decease; but declined the application, among other reasons, on account of the cloud under which his reputation was suffering. After the death of Mr. Parsons the application was renewed, but, for various reasons, he still persisted in his refusal. It was not till after long waiting and many discouragements,

that he was obtained to be the minister of this people. He was settled here, without any formal installation, on the strength of a vote of presbytery to that effect, June fourth, 1781, about five years after the death of Mr. Parsons; and continued in office, till his own decease, March 13, 1793, a period of about twelve years.

The third pastor was the Rev. Daniel Dana. Previous to his settlement, however, two successive divisions had fallen off from the Church and society.

During the latter days of Mr. Murray, a young missionary from Nova Scotia came to Newburyport, at the invitation of the pastor of the Church, to assist him in the administration of the Lord's supper. His talents were peculiar and striking. A large portion of the Congregation were delighted with him; and as Mr. Murray was now aged and infirm, desired to retain him as their minister. The majority, however, thought otherwise. The result was that the adherents of the young candidate withdrew, to attend upon his ministrations. After the death of Mr. Murray, they formally renounced the government of this Church, and, having erected a new house of worship, and having embodied themselves into an independent Church, took the Rev. Charles W. Milton to be their minister. The result was the establishment of a new religious society, which soon became one of the largest in the town, and which, whatever irregularity may have attended its origin, has won for itself an honorable place among the Churches of the Lord Jesus.

The second separation took place in connexion with the settlement of Mr. Dana. A portion of the Church and society, dissatisfied with the candidate who had been chosen, withdrew and formed the second Presbyterian Church in this town, and settled over them the Rev. John Boddily. Here, however, as in the former case, division

proved to be but reduplication. The new Church having settled down upon the principles of the same faith and order with ourselves, took the earliest opportunity, after a course of years, to secure for itself the services of the very same man, whom, in the first instance, it had rejected; and for many years it has held sweet intercourse, in holy things, both with the parent Church, and with its elder sister. We rejoice to welcome here, to-day, our brethren of both these societies, and to greet them as the descendants of the same sires, whose worth we have assembled to celebrate.

Mr. Dana was ordained November 19, 1794, and continued in the ministry in this Church, till he was called to take the Presidency of Dartmouth College, in the autumn of the year 1820. Few pastors have enjoyed, so universally, the warmest affection of their people, as Dr. Dana, during his ministry in this Church. The parting scene was truly affecting. They yielded him up only at the call of duty, and wept as children, when a venerated and beloved parent is taken from their head. (*n*) It was during the ministry of Dr. Dana, in the year 1802, that the Church, by a formal vote, adopted the constitution of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, in the United States, reserving only its established practice of electing its elders annually.

Several other important changes were effected, likewise, during this ministry. The old practice of giving out the hymn, line by line, from the deacon's seat, was relinquished, for the more decent method of reading it connectedly, from the pulpit. The Church, also, laid aside the custom of a protracted series of services in connection with the administration of the Lord's supper, maintaining only a preparatory lecture on some week day, and a meeting for prayer on Saturday evening, before the communion. During this

ministry, the Church and society came into freer fellowship with the neighboring Churches, than had been enjoyed previously; the reasons of withholding such fellowship having now ceased to exist on both sides. (o) In the year 1811, the first chapel, for the accommodation of the Church and society in their less public religious exercises, was erected.

Dr. Dana's immediate successor was the Rev. Samuel Porter Williams. He was born in Weathersfield, Conn., February 22, 1779, entered Yale College in 1792, at the age of thirteen years, and was graduated in 1796. For a time he was engaged in mercantile employments, but, having at length given his heart to religion, he became a communicant, in March, 1803, and proceeded to prepare himself for the gospel ministry; first under the direction of Dr. Dwight, at New Haven, and then under that of Dr. Howard, of Springfield. He was first settled in Mansfield, Connecticut, where he remained several years. Two years, he labored, with much success, at Northampton. He was installed as pastor of this Church and society February 8, 1821, and died in the same office, Dec. 23, 1836.

Mr. Williams was a man of great energy, decision, and independence. What he thought, he said, and as his people always knew, it was said kindly, though it sometimes cut deep, they received it without taking offence. His preaching was eloquent, sometimes ornate, but instructive and adapted to impress the conscience and the heart. Some complained of his style as too involved and obscure; but he engaged the attention, awakened thought and enquiry, and was successful, it is believed, in turning many to righteousness. During the ministry of Mr. Williams, some ancient practices of the Church, good in their day, perhaps, but now grown obsolete, and to which some were disposed to adhere with almost superstitious veneration, were aban-

done. Among these, may be mentioned the practice of reading before the congregation a written account of the religious experience of candidates for admission to the Church.

The last public effort of Mr. Williams was on, Thanksgiving day, less than one month before his decease. His pallid countenance, and scarce supported form, gave a powerful effect to his performance, as he announced his text from Isaiah 38: 18, 19, 20. "The grave cannot praise thee; Death cannot celebrate thee," &c., and proceeded to discourse to his people on "the value of life." "He seemed," says the editor of his discourses, "like one lifting up his head from the grave, to tell his people what it is that makes life precious in the estimation of a dying Christian."

Mr. Williams was succeeded in the sacred office by the Rev. John Proudfit, ordained October 4, 1827, and dismissed, on account of impaired health, February, 1833,—an accomplished scholar, a devout Christian, and a successful minister of the Gospel. The present incumbent was ordained September 16, 1835.

During the ministry of Dr. Proudfit, in the year 1829, the house of worship was repaired and altered, and a cenotaph erected in the eastern corner to the memory of Whitefield, by Hon. William Bartlett, then a member of this congregation. In the year 1831, this society, in common with others in this town, enjoyed a remarkable revival of religion. During most of that period the pastor was absent on a tour in Europe, and the pulpit was supplied chiefly by Rev. Joseph Abbot, now of Beverly, and Rev. Dr. Cheever, now of New York.

In the summer of 1843, the old chapel, having become decayed, a new and commodious one was erected in the rear of the Church and connected with it.

The cooperation between the Church and society has always been, it is believed, harmonious and pleasant. Seldom have serious difficulties occurred to disturb the general peace among the members of either. The regular ministrations of a settled pastor have been enjoyed, with but short intervals from the beginning. No minister has been dismissed from his office on account of dissension among the people, or a dissatisfaction with him or his labors. A good degree of spiritual prosperity has been enjoyed. (*p*) From its commencement to the present day, the Church has discovered a commendable interest, in all departments of Christian benevolence. From the earliest date at which its records were regularly kept, an annual collection was, for many years, taken up for the benefit of the poor among its own people, and a quarterly collection for general purposes of charity. In the year 1760, 340 pounds, 4 shillings and 3 pence, was collected "for the distressed people of Boston, who have suffered," say the records, "by the late fire there." Similar collections were from time to time afforded to meet other similar wants. To a society for promoting the the education of young men for the Gospel ministry, this congregation contributed liberally, as early as the year 1783. It was also active, at that early day, in maintaining missionaries in the destitute portions of our country, and particularly in that portion of the State which was then the District of Maine. Since the organization of the present system of benevolent associations, it has been a steady contributor to all the more prominent among them, furnishing annually an aggregate little short of the salary of its own pastor. It is believed few Churches and congregations,—especially if we consider the heavy burdens which the people were compelled to bear, for many years after their organization, in contributing to the support of two ministers,—their own

and that of the old parish,—have discovered, throughout their whole history, a more ready and diffusive liberality.

The Church still retains her early form of government and discipline. Amidst all the changes which have taken place around her, she has continued to be, and still is, a Presbyterian Church, the only one in the State, as I suppose, now connected with any presbytery. Twice at least, she has been solicited to adopt the forms of the surrounding Churches,—once by the Rev. Dr. Dana,\* who, at the time of his settlement, had a preference for the Congregational form, and once by some of her own members. But in both instances she decided to remain, as her founders established her, Presbyterian. This Church has been connected, from time to time, with several presbyteries, and was, for many years previous to the great schism in the general assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, a constituent part of that body. Since that period, the presbytery of Newburyport, not being disposed to decide between the two bodies claiming the name and rights of that assembly, has remained separate.

This Church still maintains her original confession of faith. The Assembly's Catechism was at the beginning, ever has been, and still is, "for substance of doctrine," the exposition of her views of religious truth. Her six pastors have been men of various temperaments, and educated under a great variety of circumstances, but it is believed if they could all be gathered at this moment, they would see no occasion to disagree materially upon the points of doctrine, in which they have instructed their flock. Could the faithful dead, who have been its members, be assembled

\* It is due to Dr. Dana to observe here, that whatever may have been the predilections of his youth, he has since, though by no means rigorous in respect to forms of government, evinced a strong and constant attachment to the presbyterian constitution and discipline.

now, the fathers among them would unquestionably find us changed in many important particulars; in some respects, I trust, they would acknowledge that we have changed for the better; but I trust they would not find us to have departed, in any material points, from an adherence to those precious truths, for the sake of which they consented to all their sacrifices. They would acknowledge and feel, that, so far as we are what we profess to be, we and they have "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in us all."

The history of this Church seems to impose upon us some peculiar obligations.

1. First it teaches us to be valiant for the truth, and to guard, with jealous watchfulness, the faith once delivered to the saints. The period, in which this Church was formed, was not the only period in which the purity and soundness of Christian doctrine has been endangered. There are perils encompassing the Church, at the present day, of which the fathers dreamed not. The enemies are more, and stronger, and more various and subtil, than at almost any period known to us since the Saviour's advent. At such a period, it becomes us to study carefully the principles and the foundations of our faith,—that we may hold fast to the sacred truths which our fathers cherished, not with a blind attachment, but with an intelligent and reasonable conviction. Beware, my brethren, of that looseness of thought and opinion, which regards all sorts of notions on religious subjects as equally good and equally safe to the soul. It is not so. Truth is one and invariable. Truth alone is able to make the heart of man wise unto salvation. Yet I would not have you fall into bigotry, in your attachment to, and defence of the truth. Between bigotry and an intelligent and conscientious adherence to



the true faith, there is the widest possible distinction. Contend earnestly for the faith, but do not quarrel about it. Keep ever an open hand, in fellowship with all those who hold the fundamental principles of the Gospel, however they may differ from you in less important particulars. And even towards those who seem to have departed from the right standard in essential matters, maintain ever that kindness, courtesy and friendly fairness, which will convince them that your firmness is not obstinacy, nor your opposition bitterness.

2. In the second place the history of this Church teaches us to strive earnestly for the promotion of living piety. It is not a round of decent formalities, it is not regular attendance on the outward means of grace, it is not external blamelessness of life, that constitutes true religion. The heart must be right with God. The interior fountain of moral feeling and action must be sanctified. The spirit of man must hold constant communion with the Divine Spirit. Our conversation must be in heaven, while we sojourn below, and our whole character wear the ornaments of heaven. A dead orthodoxy is hardly less to be deplored than the worst heresy. Religious truth has but a precarious hold upon us, when the intellect alone receives and embraces it. Unless we receive the truth in the love of it, it will be of no benefit to us. Let us strive then, both to feel and act, and to make others feel and act in accordance with the doctrines which we maintain. And praying earnestly for the influences of the Divine Spirit, without which no human efforts can avail anything, let us strive to convince the world of sin, lead the wandering soul back to the Saviour of sinners, and make the Church what its divine founder intended it should be, a living exemplification of the truth as it is in Jesus, a living epistle of recommendation to it, known and read of all men. O! if this Church

should ever sink down in a lifeless form, without the power of Godliness, methinks the ashes of the dead beneath and around us, would cry shame on us, from their tombs, for our wicked apostacy. Was it for this that they endured reproach, and trial, and suffering? That their posterity might forget the very thing which was most dear to them? No, my brethren, as you honor the fathers, live the religion you profess. Their contest was for a living piety.

3. The history of this Church teaches us to value and promote genuine revivals of religion. I know well that there is an element of imperfection,—a manifest token of inadequacy implied in that very word *revival* of religion. Some have been accustomed to regard the subject of religious influence too much in the light of a series of revivals. Hence they pray for revivals, they strive for the promotion of revivals, and they forget to pray and strive for that constant, steady and enduring power of Godliness, which shall be as the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day. But the imperfection and sinfulness of man, under the best circumstances hitherto, teaches us that there *will* be seasons of the decline of piety. In such seasons a *revival* is the object to be aimed at. Had it not been for those special effusions of the divine spirit, where, in all human probability, would the Churches of our country be at the present time? Dead, thrice dead and plucked up by the roots! In a revival of religion, there will always be discovered much imperfection, which would not be exhibited, under a constant prevalence of the life of Godliness. The dead man, beginning to recover his lost vitality, may be expected to discover traces of painful agony, hardly less than distort the features of the dying. But what then? Should we prefer, therefore, that the placid calmness of death should never be disturbed? So, in the case before us. The attendant evils are real evils, and should be

checked, and watched against, and prayed against, but after all, what is the chaff to the wheat?

4. The history of our Church teaches us to be active and energetic, and self-sacrificing, and, at the same time, to beware of false zeal, and disorderly practices in the promotion of the faith which we love. The former was, under God, the cause of the success of its founders; the latter was their grand hindrance, and the source of their greatest discouragements. An apostle bids us watch and be sober,—watch; never suffer ourselves to fall asleep at our post,—be sober; avoid all false heat and unbecoming transports. They that sleep, he says, sleep in the night, and they that be drunken are drunken in the night, but let us who are of the day be sober. Were we always *sober*, in times of peculiar religious interest, we should not be exposed, as we now too often are, to the sudden decay and desertion of the sacred influence.

We have received this Church and society, my brethren and friends, as a precious legacy from your worthy ancestors. Their sacrifices demand of us that we preserve, improve and transmit it. Our posterity too, have a claim upon us; for the rich estate was meant for them no less than for us. God grant that we may not prove ourselves unmindful of our trust.

5. Again, the history of this Church teaches you, (I almost dread to say it, when I consider the imperfection of my own services, but I must not refrain,) the history of this Church teaches you, never to be satisfied with an unfaithful ministry. Be candid, always, towards those who have the watch over you, in their difficult work, knowing that the best of them, no less than yourselves, are compassed with infirmities. But, O, let not even friendship, and human sympathy, make you shrink from withdrawing your support and confidence from such as do not preach Christ

Jesus, and him crucified, with zeal and fervor, and labor in season and out of season to win souls to Christ.

In closing this discourse I feel that I am sealing up, for the final account, one century of this Church's history. Another century will roll by, and who will celebrate its close? We shall, none of us, be here. Where, O where! will our immortal souls then be? Our children, too, will have passed off from the stage of life. But will the Church live? It will, if we are faithful as our fathers were. Other voices will be heard in its songs, and speak the message of the Most High from the sacred pulpit. Other hands will break the bread of life. But if the Church still lives; if, having prepared our own souls, by divine grace, and those of our immediate descendants, for the Church on high, and done our duty faithfully, we and they shall have been gathered into rest; with what joy shall we look down from the heavenly mansions, as the sainted dead now, we trust, look down upon us, and see our children's children, here preparing, through the grace of God, to join the same general assembly and Church of the first born. AMEN!

## APPENDIX.

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(1) The anniversary was observed on the day mentioned in the title page. This was selected with reference to convenience. The weather was exceedingly stormy, yet a numerous audience were in attendance. The introductory devotional exercises in the morning, were conducted by Rev. WILLIAM A. STEARNS, of Cambridgeport, a brother of the pastor. After the sermon, the following Hymn was sung, composed for the occasion by Hon. GEORGE LUNT, a member of the society :

Thy temple stands, oh God of grace,  
Above our thought, beneath our tread,  
Its ample floor, unmeasured space,  
Its arch with worlds unnumbered spread.

Yet though not all creation's bound  
Thy power contains, thy glory tells,  
Within thy earthly courts are found  
The places where thy spirit dwells.

Thus on our sires, an honored race,  
Thy dews descended like the rain,  
While *here* they met to seek thy face,  
Nor sent a prayer to Heaven in vain.

Beneath these walls how oft they heard,  
From fervent heart and burning tongue,  
Thy sacred truth, thy holy word,  
Sustain the old and cheer the young !

This earthly temple of thy praise,  
How glorious and how dear its name !  
Thy blessing crowned its ancient days,  
Thy promised blessing stands the same.

Built on that Rock in Zion laid,  
May here thy Church forever rise,  
Thy truth its deep foundation made,  
Its hope eternal in the skies.

No gorgeous rites, nor shrines of gold,  
 Within these sacred precincts be ;  
 But grant the fervent faith of old  
 To bind us closer, Lord, to thee !

May here while ages roll away,  
 Our children's children all appear,  
 Here love to learn and praise and pray,  
 And find their God, their Savior here !

The services of the afternoon were commenced by reading a letter to the Church from one of their former pastors, Rev. Dr. PROUDFIT, of New Brunswick, N. J. Then a portion of the preamble to the original Constitution of the Church, setting forth the views of the founders, was read. After a prayer for a divine blessing upon the solemn transaction, the Church rose and publicly renewed their covenant with God and one another, in the words originally adopted by their fathers, and to which the names of all the successive members have been signed. Prayer was then offered by the Rev. JOHN MARCH, of Belleville, Newbury, formerly a member of the Church. After this the sacrament of the Lord's supper was administered by Rev. JONATHAN GREENLEAF, of Brooklyn, N. Y., a descendant both of the first pastor, and also of one of the first members, and Rev. DANIEL DANA, D. D., who had been its pastor during twenty-six years. Appropriate hymns were sung in the intervals of the other parts of the service.

The exercises were solemn and impressive, and the Church, we trust, will be found to have received from them new strength to enter upon the unknown events of another century.

(a) The encouragement referred to was a new proposal to refer the whole matter to a mutual Council, first made on the part of the aggrieved, and accepted by the pastor ; then made in a somewhat modified form, by the pastor ; and, as the aggrieved allege, accepted by them. The Committee of the Church, in their statement, to the Council subsequently called, represented the aggrieved as having refused this offer. The aggrieved, on the other hand, denied the representation, and declared that they offered in form the following written declaration : " June 6, 1744. In answer to a proposal made us by our Reverend pastor, at the last meeting, we now offer to leave all difficulties between our pastor and us to a Council of Churches, mutually chosen by our pastor and us ; or to a Council of Churches, half to be chosen by our pastor and the Church who adhere to him, and half by us ; or to a Council to be chosen half by the aggrieved, and half by the rest of the Church. And if either of these proposals be accepted of or consented to, we desire the time for such Council's meeting may now be appointed, and the Churches sent to as soon as may be.

Instead of acting directly upon this very explicit offer, the Church passed the following vote :

"At a legal Church meeting it was voted unanimously in the affirmative, June 6th, 1744,—That whereas, several of our brethren in the first Church in Newbury have separated themselves from communion with said Church, it is desired that said separated brethren would give in their reasons to said Church why or for what reasons they have separated, at the next meeting; every separate member to give in his reasons in particular by himself."

At the next meeting, June 13th, several of the brethren appeared and gave their reasons, but the Church dissolved the meeting without passing a vote. The proposal of the pastor, so explicitly accepted and renewed by the aggrieved, was not acted on, yet the aggrieved were still held chargeable with having rejected it.

It was on the ground of a supposed rejection of this proposal that the Council, subsequently called by the Church and pastor, declared the conduct of the aggrieved and that of the exparte Council which had sanctioned their proceedings, irregular,—of course on the ground of facts which the aggrieved explicitly deny, and of which their own account is contained in the text. Of the result of the Church's Council the aggrieved say: "This Council justified the pastor further, we believe, than the Church expected, and no wonder, considering the foundation they proceeded on."

(b) The following account is copied from the records of the First Church in Newbury:

"At the same day, (Feb. 11, 1745-6,) the Church taking into consideration the conduct of the Rev. Mr. Jonathan Parsons, of Lyme, in Connecticut, in preaching to a number of the brethren withdrawn from this and the neighboring Churches, voted as follows:

"1. That they are of opinion it is disorderly and matter of offence to them for any minister to officiate as a minister on the Lord's day among those people that have withdrawn from this Church and the Churches in the neighborhood.

"2. That it is their duty to signify to the Reverend Mr. Jonathan Parsons, that as a Church of the Lord Jesus Christ they are offended with him for his officiating on Lord's day to any of the brethren of this and the neighboring Churches.

"3. That if he does not refrain it is their duty to exhibit a complaint against him, as walking disorderly, to the particular Church that he stands related to.

"4. That inasmuch as the brethren withdrawn from us, and other Churches in the neighborhood, seem disposed to have a minister set over them, and may possibly effect it under their present circumstances, though it be greatly contrary to the rule and order of the Gospel, and inasmuch as they seem to affect the said Mr. Parsons, who by reason of misconduct, as we understand, has rendered himself unacceptable to the people he has had the charge of, that it is their duty to inquire into the matter of his offence, and what he has to recommend him to the esteem and acceptance of any people as a minister of the Gospel."

(c) The course of proceedings at Lyme were exceedingly embarrassing and complicated. A pretty just view of the merits of the case may be obtained from manuscript documents preserved among the descendants of Mr. Parsons. One source of embarrassment in settling the difficulties, arose from the fact that Mr. Parsons, at the request of his people, as well as in conformity to his own judgment, explicitly renounced, at his ordination, the Saybrook platform, by which a large part of the neighboring Churches were governed. He thought that Constitution defective in several respects, but was especially averse to the right which it was understood to accord to the civil government of interfering in the affairs of the Church. The peculiarity of his position, however, gave rise to many misunderstandings.

The following testimony from two neighboring ministers, pastors of the two other parishes in the same place, who must have known thoroughly all the circumstances of the case, from the beginning, is sufficiently explicit and full. After recapitulating the result of the Council they proceed thus:

“Now we, the subscribers, ministers of Lyme, above said, do heartily join in the recommendation above mentioned, and freely declare that we verily believe, and that upon much acquaintance with the whole affairs of the long subsisting difficulties that have been in that Church and society, that our dear brother, Mr. Parsons, has been injuriously treated, and much wronged in his character, by some, and that there is no just bar, that we know of, in the way of his usefulness, nor in the way of his administering as a minister of Christ among any people that shall call him thereto, as he hath always been gladly received by us and our Churches, as often as we have had the opportunity of his occasional labors among us.

GEORGE GRISWOLD,  
GEORGE BECKWITH.

Lyme, October 24, 1745.”

(d) The following extract from Mr. Parsons' journal, will serve to throw light on the reasons of the position which this Church at first assumed:

Sept. 12, 1746. I spent most of the day with Mr. Jewett, of Rowley, and Mr. Daniel Rogers, of Ipswich. Had much discourse with them about the state of the Churches, and particularly about the state of this Church. I asked them what it was proper to do. Whether it was best to seek in a public way for the communion of the Churches by a Council, &c. Mr. Jewett replied, that he did not see any necessity for it, nor any advantage it would be to us on a temporal account, because, respecting being freed from rates, as long as the Court were of the same way of thinking as they be now, they will find means enough to deny any petition of this people, till they are forced to grant it; and then if we should call a Council and ministers should come, it would probably break their own Churches to pieces, and if they run such a risk and declared us a well established Church, it would give us the public communion of but few Churches. But if we were united to go forward as we were, a little while, we should find prejudices wear off. Mr. Rogers said he was of the same mind in the



main, but added that he thought it our bounden duty to continue as we were, independent of other Churches in Church discipline; for, said he, it is one principle that your Church went out upon, that they and many others were oppressed, and the discipline of the Churches so sunk, they could not have any further relief. Now, said he, there are many others that are oppressed, and stand in great need of relief, but are not likely to have it if you don't help them. But if you don't abide independent, in point of discipline, you can't relieve them; whereas if you continue as you are, you may soon have several Churches, round about, that may unite with yours in a consociation or presbytery, which will be much better than any other way.

(e) The following propositions were presented and severally acted upon:

Proposals respecting the Rev. Mr. Jonathan Parsons, offered to the new Church and Congregation in Newbury, at their meeting in the meeting-house, March 19, 1745, viz:

1. Whether the Church, notwithstanding all those representations, which have been spread abroad, tending to disserve Mr. Parson's character and hurt his usefulness, is in full charity with him, and from the judgment of the Council, now read, with the letters recommendatory, whether this Church is fully satisfied that his moral, religious and ministerial character is, or ought in justice to be esteemed, blameless and unsullied among the Churches of Christ. Voted in the affirmative.

2. Whether the Congregation that usually meets in this house to attend and uphold the worship of God here, are well satisfied from the judgment of Council, and letters recommendatory now read, that Mr. Parsons' moral character ought to be esteemed blameless and good, and whether they so account of him, as of a minister of Christ. Voted in the affirmative.

3. Whether the congregation that usually meets in this house, to attend and encourage the worship of God here, do desire Mr. Parsons to settle among them, and minister in holy things, as a minister of Christ to them, and whether they will, upon condition of his accepting the call of the Church and Congregation, submit themselves to his administrations in this place—the same being agreeable to the faith and constitution upon which this Church is settled. Voted in the affirmative.

4. Whether this Church is willing, from the acquaintance they have with Mr. Parsons, and the letters from the ministers and churches now read to them, to admit him to their communion, in all the special ordinances of the Gospel, to esteem him as one of the members of the body of Christ in a particular relation to this Church, as one in good standing, having an equal right, in all respects, to all privileges with any other member of the Church. Voted in the affirmative.

5. Whether this Church looks upon Mr. Parsons, already authorized by solemn separation to the work of the Gospel ministry, to do the whole work of a Gospel minister in any particular Church of Christ that desires the same of him, and are willing to put themselves under his pastoral care. Voted in the affirmative.

6. Whether this Church do now publicly renew their call to Mr. Parsons, desiring him to take the oversight of this part of Christ's flock in particular. Voted in the affirmative.

7. Whether upon consideration that Mr. Parsons does publicly accept of their call, this Church do submit to him under Christ, as their pastor,

vested with a Gospel right over this Church to read, expound, and teach the word, to administer the seals of the new covenant to them, and the ordinance of holy discipline, according to the constitution of this Church. Voted in the affirmative.

(f) The Church early entertained the design of uniting itself with a regular presbytery. On the fifth of April, 1746, a resolution was adopted to that effect; but for reasons not stated, the subject was at a subsequent meeting, postponed. In the month of September, 1748, the Church voted unanimously to unite with the Presbytery of Boston, of which Mr. Moorhead, of Boston, and Mr. McGregoire, were prominent members. The record of this vote is as follows:

“Sept. 15, 1748. At a meeting of the collective body of the Church, after sermon and prayers, it was debated whether all were freely willing to be annexed to Mr. Moorhead’s presbytery, and after discoursing, in love and calmness upon it, for more than an hour, a question was proposed and deliberately read over, three times, in the following words, viz: Whether upon mature deliberation this Church does consent to be annexed to Mr. Moorhead’s presbytery, in case said presbytery can satisfy the elders of the Church respecting their coming off from the presbytery to which they formerly belonged, appear really desirous of receiving us, make no difficulty about our choosing our elders annually, don’t bind any respecting the form of administering and receiving the sacraments, appear to be hearty friends to the great doctrines of Grace as contained in the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms, and hearty friends to the power of Godliness.”

The vote passed unanimously, and the next spring we find the elders of the Church appointing one of their number as a representative to the presbytery above named.

(g) In a petition to the general Court, dated October 29, 1748, they say as follows:

“Amongst other things it is alleged that the petitioners are of the Presbyterian persuasion. Your humble petitioners beg leave to suggest that they never intended because they were Presbyterians, which respects the form of Church government only, (according to the general understanding of the words,) that therefore they could not attend the worship of God in a Congregational Church; but their difficulties are of a higher nature and concern doctrinal points, which bind their consciences, otherwise, upon this first point, they had never troubled your excellencies and honors.”

In the preface to their platform of Government, the fathers of the Church declare, “We shall readily join with those Churches that explicitly declare they have not departed from the ancient faith.”

In the year 1794,

“The Church voted unanimously that we still adhere to the Constitution of this Church, and our connexion with the presbytery, and desire further to hold ministerial and Church communion with such other ministers and Churches as are united with us in the great fundamental

doctrines of the Gospel, in the same manner as heretofore practised by this Church."

In conformity with these principles, this Church has been accustomed to invite her sister Churches of the congregational denomination, to set in Council with the Presbytery, in the ordination of her ministers, and to reciprocate the same friendly aid in answer to invitations from them. She dismisses and recommends her members freely to all such of these Churches as are sound in the faith, and as freely receives members from them on their recommendation.

The old form of recommending a member was as follows :

"Voted to recommend ——— to the communion of the Church of Christ in sealing ordinances in any Christian assembly where God, in his providence, may call him, provided they adhere to the doctrines of the reformation, renouncing Arminianism on the one hand, and Antinomianism on the other."

(h) The application from the brethren from the third Church, was first presented June 9, 1746.

"The brethren chose to think of the affair a little while, and take more opportunity to ask advice of ministers. Therefore, it was desired that Elders John Brown and Benjamin Knight should go to Bradford, where a Council was to set the next week, and advise with some of the ministers about the matter. I hope the Lord will direct us in the right way, and make us all of one mind."—*Parsons' Journal*.

The request was not granted till the 16th of October following.

(i) The names of most of the men who were concerned in the first establishment of this religious society, may be ascertained, I presume, from the following subscription paper, copied, without the sums annexed, from the original, by John Brown, the first clerk :

"Upon the mature consideration of the many Difficultys we have long laboured under on Religious accounts, we look upon it, for many and weighty Reasons, our Duty, & not only so, but that it would be much for our Spiritual advantage & edification, and for the advancement of the Interest of the Redeemer's Kingdom among us to unite in a New Society for the Settlement of a Gospel Ministry among us, and it having pleased God in his Providence to give us an opportunity of Hearing the Rev. Mr. Jonathan Parsons whereby we have had some tastes of his Ministerial abilities and Qualifications, from which we can't but think if it should please God to incline him to settle among us in the Ministry, we have a prospect opened to us of obtaining these blessed Ends, looking upon it also our Duty to provide an handsome suitable Support for such a Ministry : Upon the Rev. Mr. Parsons accepting our Invitation, We the Subscribers do herèby for ourselves covenant engage & agree to pay for the Support of the said Rev'd Mr. Parsons yearly & every year while he continues in the Ministry among us : the several Sums which we have herein subscribed for, We also covenant and agree to pay towards his

Settlement the several Sums which we have subscribed for, as they are set in the following Lists which are both in the Old Tenor as witness our hands affixed thereto—

Newbury, Nov'r 25th, 1745.

|                     |                         |                        |
|---------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| Thomas Pike,        | Benj. Norton,           | Samuel Hale,           |
| Timothy Toppan,     | Samuel Cresey,          | Moses Noyes,           |
| Moses Bradstreet,   | Jonathan Greenleaf,     | Daniel Gooden,         |
| Enoch Sawyer,       | Nehemiah Wheeler,       | Nathan Peabody,        |
| Enoch Titcomb,      | William Harris,         | John Lowden,           |
| Charles Peirce,     | Benj. Peirce,           | Ralph Cross,           |
| Daniel Noyes,       | Simon Noyes,            | John Norton,           |
| Richard Toppan,     | Samuel Toppan,          | John Harris,           |
| John Brown,         | Samuel Long,            | Joshua Combes,         |
| William Brown,      | Moses Coffin,           | Joshua Greenleaf, Jr., |
| Nathaniel Atkinson, | Jonathan Plumer,        | Nathan Brown,          |
| Joseph Atkinson,    | John Plumer, Jr.,       | Lemuel Jenkins,        |
| Edward Presbury,    | Samuel Harris,          | Nicholas Pettingle,    |
| Enoch Toppan,       | Silvanus Plumer,        | Daniel Woster,         |
| Joseph Hidden,      | John Poor,              | Joseph Couch Jr.,      |
| Ebenezer Little,    | Henry Titcomb,          | Daniel Lunt, Jr.,      |
| Jonathan Beck,      | John Berry,             | John Harbut,           |
| Benjamin Rogers,    | Philip Combes,          | Samuel Shackford,      |
| Spencer Bennett,    | Jacob Knight,           | Alexander Morrison,    |
| Benj. Moody,        | Moses Peirce,           | Henry Sewall,          |
| Stephen Kent,       | Nathaniel Knap,         | Edmund Morse,          |
| Parker Noyes,       | Moses Todd,             | Daniel Richards,       |
| Enoch Titcomb, Jr., | Eleazear Keazear,       | Daniel Wells,          |
| Joshua Greenleaf,   | John Fisher,            | Samuel Todd,           |
| John Greenleaf,     | Zechariah Nowell,       | Moses Ordway,          |
| Timothy Greenleaf,  | Joseph Bayley,          | Daniel Sanborn,        |
| Robert Mitchel,     | Joseph Cheney,          | Benj. Peirce, Jr.,     |
| Benj. Frothingham,  | James Safford,          | Joseph Russell,        |
| George Goodhue,     | Cutting Pettingle, Jr., | James Mackmillion,     |
| Joseph Goodhue,     | Henry Lunt, Jr.,        | Samuel Peirce,         |
| Isaac Johnson,      | Cutting Pettingle,      | Benj. Knight,          |
| Jonathan Knight,    | Samuel Pettingle,       | Bez'd Knight,          |
| William Noyes,      | Moses Pettingle,        | Robert Cole,           |
| Daniel Harris,      | Richard Hale,           | John Pike, Jr.         |

A true Copy from the Original. Taken this 16th of Dec'r, 1745.

*As Attest.*

JOHN BROWN, *Clerk.*

(j) In an almanac journal, kept by Mr. Caleb Greenleaf, are to be found the following entries :

1756. "July 5, we began to raise our meeting-house and finished it the 7th, and not one oath heard and nobody hurt." "On the 7th, the Rev. John Morehead, of Boston, preached the first sermon in it from 2d Chronicles, 7 : 12. The first sermon preached in our new meeting-house was on Aug. 15. The text was the whole of 122d Psalm." 1759. "Sept 10, Mr. Samuel Pettingell fell from the steeple of Mr. Parsons' meeting-house, which was this year erected, and was killed instantly."—*Coffin's History.*

(k) The following letter from Mr. Parsons to Mr. Sproat, contains the only account I have seen of this design :

“REV. AND DEAR BROTHER :

An late exchange has had a wonderful influence among many of our people, which has produced the following proposals, for the trial of the minds of the congregation, viz: ‘Proposals for calling and settling the Rev. Mr. James Sproat as colleague pastor with the Rev. Mr. Parsons, of Newburyport. Conditions.—That the building in Newbury first parish be finished with as many pews in proportion to its bigness, as are in Mr. Parsons’ meeting-house. The finishing to be by the sale of the pews under the conduct of that part of the congregation living in said parish. 2d, that the taxation of pews, polls and estates in said new building, or belonging to it, shall bear the same proportion with that in the other house. 3d, that said Messrs. Parsons and Sproat be esteemed as ministers equally belonging to both houses, they agreeing as to times of preaching in the one and the other. 4th, that the whole body be one particular Church, governed as Mr. Parsons’ has been heretofore, and that the proportionable part of the elders be always among those that belonged to said first parish, being chosen by the whole body. 5th, that those who do or may belong to either of said houses, do submit themselves to a taxation, as mentioned above, for an equal support of both the ministers. Dated Newburyport, October 26, 1767. The subscribers hereby declare their approbation of the proposal of such settlement, and of the condition above mentioned, and desire the affair may be prosecuted.’

The above is now prosecuting, and it is desired you would not engage with any other people for four weeks from the date of this letter. After all I can’t advise anything in my difficult situation, but can assure you no man would be more agreeable as colleague than you.”

From a comparison of dates, I am led to suppose that the new house referred to in this letter, was the one described by Coffin in his history, as having been raised and boarded July, 1766, opposite the old meeting-house in the first parish in Newbury, and which was never finished, but fell to the ground in a violent storm, February, 1771. Many of the movers in that project were, it seems, members of Mr. Parsons’ society, held to the support of a ministry in the First Parish, which they conscientiously disapproved. Mr. Parsons’ Journal shows that much disorder prevailed in the religious affairs of the two towns about this period.

(l) The character of Mr. Parsons had some marked faults as well as marked excellencies. Tradition says he was at times exceedingly passionate, but that when the first impulse was over, no man could be more penitent. An anecdote like this has been related of him. On one occasion a bill was presented him for payment, which at first struck him as exorbitant, and he very angrily and peremptorily refused. No sooner, however, had the claimant returned to his place of business than Mr. Parsons entered, and the following dialogue ensued: “Have you seen Mr. Parsons this morning?” “Yes, certainly, I saw you at your house, and presented your bill.” “It was n’t Mr. Parsons, it was the devil. I’ll settle the bill.” It is presumed that by

thus charging his excited feelings to Satanic agency, Mr. Parsons did not intend to excuse but rather to humble himself.

(m) The following extracts from Greenleaf's "Sketches of Ecclesiastical History," will serve to throw some light upon the early Presbyterian relations of this Church.

"The first Presbytery in New England, was constituted in Londonderry, April 16, 1745, by Rev. John Morehead of Boston, Rev. David M'Gregor of Londonderry, and Rev. Robert Abercrombie of Pelham, with James M'Kean, Alexander Conkey and James Heughs, elders. It was called the 'Boston Presbytery.'" In three years, they were joined by Rev. Jonathan Parsons of Newburyport, and after that, by one or two others, and so continued for nearly ten years. There were a considerable number of Presbyterian Churches, lying on both sides of the Merrimack, in Massachusetts and New Hampshire, and a few in Maine. The presbyterial records appear to have been regularly kept till 1751. A chasm then appears, and nothing is recorded in the original book until Oct. 24, 1770. The Presbytery at this time consisted of twelve congregations. Measures were taken for dividing it into three, and forming a Synod. After more than four years, during which some others were added to the number, at a meeting at Seabrook, May 31, 1775, a division was amicably agreed on as follows: that Messrs. Jonathan Parsons of Newburyport, Nathaniel Whitaker, D. D. of Salem, Samuel Perley of Seabrook, Alexander M'Lean of Bristol, Maine, and the congregation at Boston, then vacant by the death of Mr. Morehead, together with Rev. Benjamin Balch, and the vacancies within their bounds be the 'Eastern Presbytery,' called the 'Presbytery of Salem.' That Messrs. David M'Gregor of Londonderry, Daniel Mitchell of Pembroke, Simon Williams of Windham, and John Strickland of Oakham, with the congregation at Petersburgh, and the other vacancies within their bounds be the middle presbytery, called the Presbytery of Londonderry. That Messrs. John Houston and Moses Baldwin, with their congregations at Bedford and Kingston, the vacant congregations of Blandford, Pelham and Colrain, with Aaron Hutchinson, Nathan Merrill, George Gilmore, and Joseph Patrick, candidates, be the western presbytery, called the Presbytery of Palmer. The three presbyteries being thus organized were then formed into one body called the Synod of New England, and held their first meeting at Londonderry, September 4, 1776.

A few years previous to this, the Rev. John Murray had removed from Philadelphia and settled at Boothbay, and with Rev. Mr. Prince of Barrington, and Rev. Mr. M'Ewins of New Market, formed another Presbytery, but no connexion was ever formed between this body and the Synod of New-England."

The Presbytery last referred to, was called the Presbytery of the Eastward, and with this Mr. Parsons and his Church, having withdrawn from their connection with the former body, now became united.

(n) At the close of the first half century from his settlement, Rev. Dr. Dana, being then pastor of the Second Presbyterian Church in this town, delivered, in compliance with a special request, a very excellent and appro-

priate discourse, the following correspondence having previously passed between him and the pastor and session of his former charge :

NEWBURYPORT, Nov. 23, 1844.

THE REV. DANIEL DANA, D. D.

Dear Sir,—With the full concurrence, as we believe, of the First Presbyterian Church and Society, to whose service in the gospel, the energies of your youth were devoted, we present you our sincere thanks for the very appropriate and excellent discourse delivered at our place of worship, on the semi-centennial anniversary of your ordination.—Believing that its usefulness may be still further extended, we would also respectfully request a copy for publication.

J. F. STEARNS, Pastor of the Church.

THOMAS M. CLARK, } Committee of the Session.  
PAUL SIMPSON, }

To the Reverend Pastor, and the Session of the First Presbyterian Church.

MY DEAR BRETHREN,—As your cordial invitation, to preach a semi-centennial sermon in your house of worship, left me no choice, so your present request, though dictated, probably, by a too partial judgment, is equally decisive with me. I therefore submit the discourse, with all its imperfections, to your disposal.

Whether it shall, or shall not be found worthy of the public attention, it will at least signify to the beloved people of my *former* and my *present* charge, what were the first, the last, and the dearest wishes of their affectionate pastor, in their behalf.

Believe me, my dear brethren, very sincerely yours,

DANIEL DANA.

NEWBURYPORT, Nov. 25, 1844.

In the evening of the same day there was a delightful gathering, at the house of Dr. Dana, of friends from all religious societies and denominations among us, who thronged thither to pay him their respects and congratulations. Few, it is believed, went empty handed, and among the sons of Newburyport in other places, some who could not be present, claimed the privilege of sending their free will offering.

(o) The settlement of all difficulties previously existing between this Church and the First Church in Newbury is due chiefly to the efforts of the present pastor of that Church the Rev. Leonard Withington. Unwilling to take the charge of a people with whom any of the neighboring Churches were not in full charity, he insisted before calling the Council for his ordination, that an effort should be made to secure amicable relations between the two Churches. Accordingly committees were appointed on both sides, and after mutual conference and investigation the following transactions took place.

By The First Presbyterian Church in Newburyport,

“ Voted, that from a careful examination of the records, it does not appear that this Church has at any time, recent or remote, affixed any ecclesias-

tical censure to the First Church in Newbury, or to any individuals belonging to it."

Thereupon the First Church in Newbury,

"At a meeting of the Church, October 16, 1816, Voted, That all misunderstandings and infelicities whatever, which may have existed between this Church and the First Presbyterian Church in Newburyport, be from this time buried in perpetual oblivion, and we on our part cheerfully agree and engage that the two Churches shall mutually treat and be treated by each other as Christian Churches, agreeably to the principles of the gospel and the established usages of the Churches of New England."

On the same day the First Presbyterian Church in Newburyport passed the same vote unanimously in the same words, and communicated the fact to the First Church in Newbury by their committee as follows:

"NEWBURYPORT, OCT. 17, 1816.

DEAR SIR,—It is with much pleasure that I can inform you that I am entrusted by the First Presbyterian Church in this place to give you notice that said Church unanimously adopted the vote recommended to them by their committee relative to an amicable understanding with your Church, which I hope will be of long continuance and for the glory of God in the building up of his kingdom.

With sentiments of esteem and affection,

I am, dear Sir, your brother,

THOMAS M. CLARK.

Hon. EBEN MARCH, &c."

Since the adoption of this mutual agreement, no Churches have been more happy and undisturbed in their fellowship than this once rebellious daughter and offended parent.

(p) The number of names signed to the covenant at its first adoption, was 46, viz: 24 males and 22 females. The following statistical table will show the whole number who have been admitted during the ministry of each of the several pastors, with the annual average during each, omitting fractions.

| <i>Ministers.</i> | <i>No Yrs.</i> | <i>Whole No.</i> | <i>Ann. Ac.</i> |
|-------------------|----------------|------------------|-----------------|
| Parsons,          | 30             | 303              | 10              |
| Murray,           | 12             | 88               | 7               |
| Dana,             | 26             | 208              | 8               |
| Williams,         | 6              | 89               | 15              |
| Proudfit,         | 5 1-2          | 218              | 39              |
| Present Pastor,   | 10             | 161              | 16              |

The whole number, as far as can be ascertained, during the century, is 1160.