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A Semi-Centennial Discourse before the First Congregational Society in Bridgewater, Delivered on Lord's Day, 17th September 1871

Richard Manning Hodges

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A

Semi-Centennial Discourse

BEFORE THE

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL SOCIETY
IN BRIDGEWATER,

DELIVERED ON LORD'S DAY, 17TH SEPTEMBER, 1871.

BY

RICHARD MANNING HODGES,

A FORMER MINISTER OF THE SOCIETY.

WITH HISTORICAL NOTES.

CAMBRIDGE:

PRESS OF JOHN WILSON AND SON.

MDCCCLXXI.

A SEMI-CENTENNIAL DISCOURSE.

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DEAR SIR,

In behalf of the members of the First Congregational Society in Bridgewater, I have the pleasure of tendering you their thanks for your very highly interesting Discourse, delivered on the Sunday following the fiftieth anniversary of your ordination as Pastor of that Society, and of requesting a copy of the Discourse for publication.

Very respectfully, I am, dear Sir,

Yours, most truly,

ARTEMAS HALE.

BRIDGEWATER, September 23, 1871.

To Rev. RICHARD M. HODGES, Cambridge, Mass.

TO HON. ARTEMAS HALE.

MY DEAR SIR, — *The spirit that prompted the preparation of the Discourse which you, and those whom you so fitly represent, ask to have put into a permanent form, will, I trust, outlive appointed times and special occasions, and therefore I comply with your request.*

As in youth, so in age,

Your friend,

R. M. HODGES.

CAMBRIDGE, October 20, 1871.

THIS DISCOURSE,
WITH ITS
MEMORIES, AFFECTIONS, AND HOPES,
IS DEDICATED TO THE
First Congregational Society in Bridgewater,
BY ITS FOURTH MINISTER,

RICHARD MANNING HODGES.

CAMBRIDGE, 1871.

The day on which these proceedings took place was one of the most pleasant in the gift of Autumn, and the pulpit was decorated with flowers, the beautiful emblems of purity and love.

Order of Services.

VOLUNTARY BY ORGANIST.

ANTHEM.

PSALM XXIII.

H Y M N.

ADDISON.

WHEN all thy mercies, O my God!
My rising soul surveys,
Transported with the view, I'm lost
In wonder, love, and praise.

Unnumbered comforts on my soul
Thy tender care bestowed,
Before my infant heart conceived
From whom those comforts flowed.

Ten thousand thousand precious gifts
 My daily thanks employ ;
 Nor is the least a cheerful heart
 That tastes those gifts with joy.

Through every period of my life,
 Thy goodness I'll pursue ;
 And after death, in distant worlds,
 The glorious theme renew.



SELECTION FROM THE NEW TESTAMENT.

BUT the hour cometh and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth : for the Father seeketh such to worship him.

God is a Spirit : and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.

Ye believe in God, believe also in me.

Now ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints and of the household of God ;

And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone.

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me.

Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me ; for I am meek and lowly in heart : and ye shall find rest unto your souls.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he taketh away : and every branch that beareth fruit, he pruneth it that it may bring forth more fruit.

For the tree is known by his fruit.

A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.

Wherefore by their fruits shall ye know them. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another, as I have loved you that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

In my Father's house are many mansions. I am going to prepare a place for you. And when I have been and prepared a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.

Jesus said, I am the resurrection and the life : he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live ; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me, shall never die.

For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

So then when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

O Death, where is thy sting? O Grave, where is thy victory?

But thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

And I heard a voice from heaven, saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them.

And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds, through Christ Jesus.



PRAYER.

O THOU who wast our Father's God! we worship Thee as our God. We thank Thee that from age to age Thou hast manifested Thyself as unchangeable in Thy perfections, as wise and righteous and paternal in Thy government.

We praise and bless Thee, God of mercy and God of love, for the mission and work of Thy dearly beloved Son, in enlightening, regenerating, and blessing the world. We thank Thee for the sacred influences and beneficent results which the Gospel of Jesus Christ has exerted and accomplished in the ages that are past.

We pray that its elevating and transforming power may continue to be felt more and more, until the supremacy of truth and righteousness, of peace and love, shall be established on the earth.

O Thou, the God of our youth and the God of our age! we thank Thee for this hour. We thank Thee that Thy providence accompanies every moment of our existence. We thank Thee that every hour of life, if hallowed to holy ends, is associated with memories that never die, — memories that are the blessed harbingers of immortality. May the remembrances connected with this house of prayer, and these hearts elevated and expanded by the love of Thee and the spirit of Thy Son, be sanctified to us.

O Thou Sovereign Arbiter of life and of death! we adore the providence that has ordained that many whom we knew and loved, fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, dear to our homes and to our hearts, should be summoned to go the way whence they shall no more return for ever, while the same providence has vouchsafed that we should live here yet longer, rejoicing in the light of each other's countenances, in the affections of each other's hearts, in the means of grace and in the hope of glory. Help us to be faithful to all the obligations which Thy mercy and love apportion to us. Help us wisely and well to improve all our opportunities. Help us faithfully and gratefully to use all our privileges.

May the children of the fathers, who here worshipped from one sacred season to another, gather around this altar in humble and devout homage, praising Thee, the God and Father of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. May they be united by the bond of a true and fervent

faith, and by affections, aspirations, and hopes that, living in Thee, will never die.

And may he, our brother, who is the ordained teacher and friend of this Christian communion, be a faithful servant of the true Master, earnestly desiring to be baptized with a baptism that shall receive the seal of the Holy Spirit. Here may he live, and here may he die, having finished a work over which the angels in heaven will rejoice, and leaving a memory that shall be sacred and sanctifying.

May all who love our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, show by their spirit of charity and their works of beneficence the sincerity and strength of their love.

May we learn from the study of Thy word, from the lessons of Thy providence, from communion with Thee, with continually increasing trust, and with an ever brightening hope, to say, Father, Thy will be done!

In the full assurance of faith in Thy dear Son, and of gratitude for the teachings, the consolations and hopes of His religion, we offer to Thee our prayers and praises, ascribing to Thee, the only God, supreme worship and glory everlasting. *Amen.*



ANTHEM.



DISCOURSE.



LORD'S PRAYER.

HYMN.

WATTS.

WHEN I can read my title clear
 To mansions in the skies,
 I bid farewell to every fear,
 And wipe my weeping eyes.

Let cares like a wild deluge come,
 And storms of sorrow fall,
 May I but safely reach my home,
 My God, my heaven, my all!

There shall I bathe my weary soul
 In seas of heavenly rest,
 And not a wave of trouble roll
 Across my peaceful breast.



BENEDICTION.

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.
Amen.



At public worship in the evening, the pastor of the Society Rev. GEORGE HERBERT HOSMER, presented, in the light of Christianity, and in the benignity of Providence, the memorial event of the day.

DISCOURSE.

"And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year."

LEVITICUS XXV. 10.

"I remember the days of old."—PSALM cxliii. 5.

"Having obtained help from GOD, I continue to this day." —
ACTS xxvi. 22.

ON this occasion, which I dedicate to a public recognition of the fiftieth anniversary of my ordination to the Christian ministry, my first thought is due, and it is gratefully paid, to the Giver and Preserver of my life, for the providence, always full of tenderness and compassion, which has crowned my days. Although long since separated in official relation from the people whose spiritual interests were, on the 12th of September, 1821, committed to my charge, I have never been separated from them, or their successors, in the exercise of a true and sacred sympathy and love. Here, and to-day, in the presence of those who fitly represent the earnest men and women of the South Parish in Bridgewater of nearly two generations ago, I would review the way as it has been marked out and consecrated by the hand of God,

and revive the lessons of His administration, teaching with explicitness the laws of development, and presenting encouragements and hopes that look to the honor of humanity and to the glory of the Divine Kingdom. I am sure it is not needful for me, my hearers, to make any apology for the position which I this day assume, or to call up any other affections than those that already exist, to produce a hearty fellow-feeling in the service of this hour.

In looking back upon the past, it is natural to remark upon the speed of time. Surely, firmly, uninterruptedly, days and weeks, months and years, roll on with unvarying motion, and in orderly succession. The revolutions of the planets are governed by established and positive laws. Were it not for the activities of the mind energized by its own inherent powers, and by the operations of the external world, we could have no conception of the meaning of time. In proportion as the mind is diligently occupied in its legitimate sphere, and events in history take place in quick succession, there will be, apparently, an accelerated lapse of time. For this reason, the years that have past seem to have glided away with an almost imperceptible motion; and the distance between any two eras, as measured from the earlier one, appears to be shorter than its actual measurement

indicates. The opposite phenomenon, for corresponding reasons, takes place in looking forward to the future. The mind is not crowded with results of its own creation, or with the unforeseen occurrences of the world. The laws of Providence and the laws of Nature, we know, in the years to come, will not annul or cease their action; but, while we can foresee with certainty that the former will fulfil their beneficent function, it is not given us to know beforehand how often, or when, or to what extent, consequences will ensue, resulting from the observance or violation of the latter. Hence the mind, because of the want of frequent and specific resting-places, as it were, in measuring the future, is inclined to give that future a tedious length. I suppose that this is the reason that the young look upon the years as tardy in their passage, and as delaying the period, so ardently anticipated, of unbounded freedom and of the fruition of cherished hopes. But let them wait till life's experiences, both of joy and of sorrow, in long succession, have made their impressions upon the mind; and then will it be seen that the years, however impatiently their lapse has been watched, have faithfully conformed to the established laws of motion, and that the advancing years, by reason of the accumulation of mental possessions, seem to move with increased velocity. The last sands of the

hour-glass fall not more rapidly than the first, but how swiftly, almost imperceptibly, do the grains follow one another, till, in a moment, the last grain falls, the measure is reached, their purpose is accomplished! Fifty years; how short in the past! how long in the future! and yet, measured by scientific laws, of equal length.

The Church of this Parish was organized July 18th, 1716, one hundred and fifty-five years ago last July. It was the second in the order of time, the first church having been instituted in the West Parish in 1681, thirty-five years previously. The establishment of a ministry, however, was not effected in that Parish until thirteen or fourteen years afterward.

The first Minister in whom you, my hearers, as constituting now "The First Congregational Society" in Bridgewater, are interested, was Rev. BENJAMIN ALLEN, a native of Tisbury, Martha's Vineyard, and a graduate of Yale College in 1708, of a class of three members, and the seventh that had received the honors of that Seminary, then in its infancy. His official relation embraced the period between August, 1717, and October, 1730, a little more than thirteen years. He died at Cape Elizabeth, in Cumberland County, Maine, while holding the pastoral office there, in 1754, at the age of sixty-five.

The second Minister was Rev. JOHN SHAW. His life began and ended amidst the early scenes of these hill-sides and meadows, and the quiet labors of the tillers and reapers of these harvest-fields. His birth-place was within the east precinct of the old town. He honored the home of his early days, and of his sacred office, by the purity of his mind and the warmth of his Christian affections. His memory is associated with the most precious annals of this Church. He was graduated at Harvard College, in 1729, at the age of twenty-one. His pastoral relation began on the 17th of November, 1731, and ended on the 29th of April, 1791, at the age of eighty-two, after a protracted period of nearly sixty years. Before the death of this venerable man, his declining years were made hopeful and happy by the efficient and zealous services of a colleague in office.

The Rev. ZEDECHIAH SANGER, the third Minister of the second Church founded in this ancient town, came hither with a mind richly endowed, and with high promise of great usefulness in his work. There are those now living to whom his memory is dear as that of a father; and others, not a few, who have been taught to think of him with honor as an advocate of peace, a patron of learning, a man of sanctity, and of unaffected modesty. It was not my happiness to know him

in the vigor of his intellect, and in the maturity of his usefulness; but his reputation, sealed by integrity and purity, will not soon be lost to my mind, or to any mind to which it is equally sacred. Dr. Sanger, having previously been settled in Duxbury, was installed the 17th of December, 1788. He died 17th November, 1820, aged seventy-three years, having held the pastorate thirty-two years. He was a native of Sherborn, and a graduate of Harvard College in 1771. The average length of the ministry of the first three ministers was just thirty-five years.

The fourth Minister of the Church here gathered and consecrated,—the present speaker,—was ordained on the 12th of September, 1821. His connection with his people, though voluntarily on his part, yet not without the pang of severed affections, was dissolved on the 27th of May, 1833, after a union of nearly twelve years.

In preparing for this occasion, my friends, my affections have overflowed in your behalf; and, in giving expression to them, I trustingly bespeak, in corresponding measure, the indulgence of your patience and attention.

The scenery that the hills and plains of Plymouth County, in its retired villages and isolated dwellings, presented half a century ago, has undergone a change such as always takes place under the

spirit of an enlightened industry and a refined and refining civilization. The people who travelled these highways, cultivated these farms, met in social intercourse, or assembled for the worship of God, when the oldest of my hearers were young, are not, for the most part, the same people that constitute society as it exists now, with its exciting interests, its aspirations, its hopes. "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh." "Instead of the fathers are the children."

All the ministers who officiated at my ordination, except two, after long years of fidelity and labor in the cause and work of their Lord and Master, sleep in honored graves. The two who still live, by a remarkable coincidence which I am happy to notice, were my college class-mates; Mr. Briggs, who gave me the right hand of fellowship, then of the First Church in Lexington, now of Roxbury, in the municipality of Boston; and Mr. Palfrey, then of the Church in Brattle Square, Boston, now of Cambridge; men, who, when they depart hence, will leave no uncertain or insignificant tokens of their interest in humanity or of their fidelity to God.

With the exception of one, whose long life at this moment is giving sign of its approaching end,*

* Rev. Joseph Richardson, of Hingham, died Sept. 25, 1871, in the xcivth year of his age.

all the clergymen in Plymouth County, whose theological theories and Christian faith rested on the only sure foundations, the Word and works of God, independently of all synods and reformers, and who, fifty years ago, were active in professional duty and in cordial co-operation in behalf of the Redeemer's kingdom, live now only in grateful memory, tenderly associated with the Pilgrim Fathers, whose graves hallow these consecrated shores. Nearly, or quite two hundred brethren who were allied to me by the ties of sacred studies and professional labors, and whose views were in accordance with my own in regard to the teachings, the affections, and the hopes of the Gospel, have, within the years in review, gone from the living and loving on earth to join the general assembly of immortal spirits in heaven.

The Christian community, or, rather let me say, the theological world, half a century ago, was agitated, as it has not been since, by a doctrinal controversy that called into being passions and actions derogatory to the teachings of the Divine Messenger, and subversive of the spirit of His message. The tenderness of Jesus, the brightest glory of his character, and the love with which His word would inspire the heart of humanity, were set aside and unheeded amidst the excitements engendered by sectarian interests. Let it

be conceded that the arguments on this side and on that were presented with a courtesy, an ability, and a candor, that did honor to the minds and hearts of the disputants, more especially of the prominent disputants : still it was not possible in the community at large, easily wrought upon, and less under the influence of generous motives, to prevent the spread and effect of an intolerant and irreligious spirit. The tumult of the controversy that had thus disturbed the heart of society had hardly subsided, when I was invited to take charge of the sacred interests of the Church and congregation connected with the South Parish of Bridgewater, at that time standing alone in the precinct as a Congregational body.

My earlier and recent education had taught me most of all to value the loving spirit of the Gospel. I had not been trained to, I had no desire to be engaged in, sectarian warfare. Strife I did not conceive to be an element of the life that springs from, and centres in, the only true Life, the true Life itself, the beloved Son of God. To my mind, the regenerated soul, in the kingdom that is everlasting, is a soul that lives and moves and has its being in a world of truth and purity, of peace and love ; and to the illustration and establishment of these primal virtues, all its energies, acted upon by influences from within and from without, having

received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, will be directed.

I came hither not as the champion of any sect, other than that which acknowledges Christ as its head, and His spirit as the beginning and end of its life. I came hither to be the exponent of no doctrines but those which Jesus taught. If there was any thing that I desired above all else in my public relations, it was to be known and esteemed as a disciple and servant of Jesus Christ, and as the true shepherd of a Christian flock. I cannot conceive of a higher honor that can be bestowed upon man. How much, in evidence of its true deserving, does it imply! What a spirit of humility, what a deep sense of responsibility, does it call forth! How different is the honor that springs from allegiance to any master of a less authoritative origin! How does the honor that comes from a source that reaches no higher than man's wisdom pale before that which is divinely bestowed! "For he whom God hath sent speaketh the words of God: for God giveth not the Spirit by measure unto him." Accordingly, when I was invested with the office of a Christian Minister, I determined and desired to exercise simply and solely that office, and to make it appear that it was in my heart to serve my Lord and Master, by drawing, with the aid that cometh from God,

subjects into the true kingdom ; to persuade men that the highest interests of humanity are wrapped up in the immortal soul ; and that all that is needed is the development of that soul, under the kindly direction of its Creator, to bring all those interests into true and beautiful action. The ethics of the Gospel, and not the polemics of the schools, occupied my studies and engaged my affections. The means of religion sanctioned by Jesus Christ, opportunities which Providence furnished, I sought to commend to my people as instruments under God of bringing them to a true knowledge of themselves, and of securing their highest and purest happiness, in a word, the consummation of their being. I was aware that, at the period of my induction to office, I was recognized as belonging to a distinctive denomination of Christians. My consecration to the Christian ministry was not, however, with a view to gaining proselytes to a particular creed, nor for any partisan end ; but solely, as it became my sacred trust, for the purpose of saving immortal souls,—so far as it is given to man to do so,—in the way that our Heavenly Father, in His wisdom and love, has ordained ; the way that Jesus Christ has pointed out by His teachings, and hallowed by His Godlike life, thus making it plain and beautiful to those who choose to become His followers.

In acknowledging myself to be a Unitarian, I do not suppose that I make a declaration that is peculiar, least of all one that is objectionable. I take it for granted that all Protestants believe in the Unity of God. "The one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in us all," claims, with absolute authority, an undivided homage. The least remove from such homage is an approach to idolatry, and not only scants, but corrupts, the worship that is due only to the Creator of the universe, who is supreme in heaven and in earth. I am not about to disturb any one's prejudices, least of all would I do aught to cool the ardor of devotion in any heart by entering upon a discussion that would seem to divest the doctrine of the Trinity of any of its imputed glory. I desire only in the spirit of charity, and yet without the least wavering of confidence, to speak of the positive Unity of God as it exists in my own mind.

The force of early education is as persistent as the force of habit; and it is with difficulty that either can be withstood or counteracted. In the case of the former, inasmuch as it originates in the mind,—that faculty which constitutes man to be man,—the results of its exercise may be of a totally different character, and consequently to be deprecated or commended, in proportion as it is guided by the power of truth or misguided by the

agency of error; whereas habit, or any particular habit, has reference, originally, to the action of some one of the functions of the bodily organization, involving consequences of less moment to essential principles. In the early direction of the mind, moreover, it is to be observed there are various influences at work, such as affection, sympathy, union of interests, which may or may not have the sanction of coming from an exalted source; that is to say, from the Fountain of Truth. We may say, and say it emphatically, that it is of the highest importance that authority should be especially heeded in the spring-time of the mind's culture, especially in relation to its religious growth. But as society is now constituted, in the interdependence of mind upon mind, I suppose it is in vain to look for an entire freedom from extraneous motives, or to expect that there will generally be unbiassed study of the primitive principles of truth, or of truth as it exists in and of itself. Still, the axiom is none the less well founded, that the stream will partake of the peculiar qualities, whatever they may be, of the source whence it springs; or, to speak without a figure, that the action of truth, so far as it is in the power of the human mind to acquire truth, to be possessed of positive efficacy, should be independent of all extraneous influences, save the one of paramount importance, that of the

Holy Spirit. How essential is it that educators themselves be truthfully educated! Of what supreme moment is it that those who would teach on the authority of Jesus Christ should know whereof they teach, in its simplicity and purity, its beauty and power!

This digression, for such it may seem, on the subtle and controlling power of education, in its earliest stages, with reference to religion, has a significant meaning in its connection with this discourse.

Take two children of equal capacities and of open affections: let one of them be taught the Assembly's Catechism; let him attend a Sunday school in which the creeds of the leaders of sects are made the exponents of the Word of God; let the counsels and devotions of the pulpit and of the family, so far as they are within his comprehension, attended too by the sympathies they inspire, be marked as proceeding from the same sources of assumed sacred learning; and can it for a moment be doubted what will be the prejudices, or, if you please, opinions, of that child on the subject of religion in after life? Let it be noted that the credibility of these opinions is not now within the province of our consideration. It is only the almost indissoluble adherence of them to the mind, under the circumstances which

gave them being, with which we are at present concerned.

Take the other child, and let him never have known of such a Catechism as that of the Westminster Divines, in its larger or smaller form; let him be entirely ignorant of creeds and sects and parties, the creations of ambitious leaders and bold theorists; let him be taught at his mother's knee, under the holy influence of a mother's love, the truths which Jesus Christ taught, in the simple language of the New Testament; let the sermon on the mount be made, by parental care, to interest his young mind and to engage his innocent affections; let the Lord's Day come to him not as a day of unwelcome study, or of irksome restraint, but as a day of calm enjoyment, springing from family endearments and from associations of high and immortal thought connected with the hallowed time: now, I am confident that, to a mind so trained and disciplined, the opposing teachings of contending theologians, in the maturity of life, would be strangely in conflict with its established convictions of Christian truth and Christian hope. Here, again, I wish to concede that the course of thought has no reference directly to the truth of doctrines, but only to the strong power of education. It is, however, to be remarked that, in the case of the first child whose early experiences were

noted, his opinions of what he deemed to be revelations of the Gospel were primarily derived from the fallible creeds of men. Whereas, in the case of the second child, his thoughts of divine truth rested primarily on the word of God, without any knowledge of confessions of faith originating in human authority.

The preceding remarks have been introduced for a specific purpose. They rest on something more solid than the exterior of rhetoric. My own experience confirms them.

I was brought up by a mother, whose memory is deeply and tenderly sealed in my heart, to read the Scriptures diligently with the view of establishing myself on the true foundation of being. The precepts of the Great Teacher, as embodied in the entire sermon on the mount, were early committed to memory. In the ethics of the Gospel I saw a beauty that reflected the glory of their Author. With regard to the metaphysics of the schools of theology, I did not even know of their existence. The little Catechism that was put in my hands contained a simple declaration of the primitive truths of Christianity, unaccompanied by commentary and unburdened by proof-texts. The Fatherhood of God, the Sonship of Christ, the presence and influence of the Holy Spirit or of God, the brotherhood of man, the divinity of virtue, the

curse of vice; revelations involving promises, aids, hopes, aspirations, that concerned man both as a mortal and an immortal being, were revelations that met the deep wants of the soul. They needed no extraneous support. They were truths that found a ready reception in my youthful mind. All the institutions that are considered as sacred were held in reverence by me theoretically and practically. With such an education of the mind and the heart, and with a desire, associated with my earliest recollections, that God in his providence would constitute me a Minister and Servant in the kingdom and service of His Son, I was matriculated a student of Harvard College. Soon after entering upon my collegiate course, a dear friend who was then studying with a view to the Christian ministry, but whose studies, in his early manhood, were brought to an end by an insidious and fatal disease,—Friend of my heart; it cannot but be that memory is a revealer of immortality!—this friend sent me a published sermon of Rev. Samuel Worcester, D.D., of Salem, “On the Doctrine of the Trinity.” I had not before so much as heard that this doctrine held a place in the creed of the Christian Church. I read the pamphlet with intense interest. The arguments upon which the doctrine was based appeared to me to be entirely inconsistent, one disproving another,

and the whole at variance with my established ideas of the teachings of the Christian Scriptures. In the spirit of an inquirer after the truth, I wrote a review of the sermon, based on the authority of the New Testament, in which, to my own mind, I invalidated the theory advanced in the publication. This review was in the form of a letter to my friend, and constituted part of a correspondence that was continued until death interrupted the intercourse.

From this incident in my life, — why should I not signalize it as an event in the providence of God? — I infer, and infer with a good deal of confidence, that the doctrine of the Trinity is not a doctrine of the Scriptures, but a doctrine of education, and that it is mainly, if not entirely, dependent upon the almost irresistible power of education for the prominent place it holds in the Christian world. Were it within the scope of this discourse to treat with fulness of the doctrine, I should have something to say of its being a doctrine of inference, and also a doctrine of adaptation, to make it coincide with the theories that controversialists, in their limited wisdom, have set up.

It is apposite in this connection to remark, that the doctrine of the Trinity, I believe, is not held so strictly now as formerly; and, so far as it is received, it is held with various modifications. To

easy minds I can imagine that, in some one of the many forms it is made to assume, it might be entertained with ready homage. I use the word "easy" in no dishonorable sense. For in the dilemma supposed to exist, are not the questions apposite and of great comfort? Is the consummation of being under God, or the soul's final victory, to depend upon an undefined position of the mind, fallible, though it be pre-eminent? Is there any saving grace in an intellectual faith or a ceremonial creed? Is there any innate morality in the hard deductions of metaphysics? Is not the heart with its true affections, in the Divine account, of more value than the mind and its theories? And, again, the potency of numbers and the charm of antiquity, together with the air of obscurity that surrounds the doctrine, may be sufficient, as in several cases they are known to have been sufficient, to justify the faith of its supporters. Confirmed by my personal experience, I am satisfied that the word of God impartially examined affords no solid ground for such a faith. The undivided Unity of God appears to me to be everywhere written on its pages. And if here and there a text seems contradictory of this revelation, it may be made without violence to coincide with it by just and established laws of Biblical criticism. As it regards antiquity, the undivided and unparticipated oneness

of the Divine Being, as a sublime reality, is fixed to no point of time within the comprehension of the finite mind. It dates back to that which had no beginning, Eternity. I may here remark, that I never was in favor of teaching any positive philosophy in relation to the "deep things of God;" that in the course of my preaching I never but once used the word "Unitarian," a word that has no significance, except in relation to the ecclesiastical doctrine of the Trinity; that I disavowed all sectarianism; and that the only appellation, in connection with any communion that worshipped God and honored His Son, which met, or could meet my approbation, was the distinctive one of Christian.

Among a people enjoying the revelations that come from a Divine Source, Unitarianism, in its true meaning, giving animation to the faculties, the aspirations, the hopes of the human soul, is the distinctive faith of no one class of rational and immortal beings doing daily and devout homage to their high and responsible privileges and opportunities; privileges and opportunities baptized by the Spirit of a loving Father, in the gracious mission of His beloved Son to be the Saviour of the world. Unitarianism, as I define it, in this Scriptural sense, is identical with Christianity.

By Christianity, I hardly need say, I mean that system of theology and divine philosophy, of which

Christ, in whom God Himself vouchsafed to dwell, was the Author. I have not yet learned to merge, in the influences that are harmonizing with the designs delineated by a Divine Hand in the ultimate glory of the universe, that influence which rested upon and abode in Him who gave full and sufficient testimony that He was the Son of God, therein holding a relation which no other being ever did or ever will hold to the Source of all temporal and of all spiritual life.

Although civilization is but a partial exponent of Christianity, yet I know not how adequately to speak of the power of Christianity in elevating and refining the condition of humanity. I believe that the Gospel in the fulness of its light and love has still brighter revelations to make, by which the world will be brought to see new avenues to prosperity, new auxiliaries of social elevation, and in so far new sources of delight. It is one of my happiest thoughts in relation to Christianity, that it is not bound, that it is not made, and will not be made, to shut itself in by fragile creeds of to-day or of any day, but that it is to manifest its wisdom and its power with continually increasing beauty and strength from age to age.

Science and Christianity harmonize each with the other. It cannot but be that they should do so, inasmuch as they originate in the same Divine

Source. But I apprehend that science affects more immediately the outward relations of life, while Christianity affects rather those that are inward and spiritual. Social organization is acted upon by science. Civilization, involving the finer properties of social organization, is acted upon by Christianity.

The achievements of science in various directions, within the last half century, have given additional proofs of the versatility and comprehensive grasp of the human mind. All the interests of life, commercial and industrial, educational and domestic, have been ameliorated and enlarged, by the discovery and subjection to skilful control of some of the hidden forces in the realm of Nature. The solar rays, in combination with chemical agencies, are made the means of producing pictures that satisfy the love of the grand and beautiful in Nature and Art, and the higher claims of a refined love springing from the heart. The traveller from a cherished home may now carry with him portraits of those who, in their absence, will live intensely in his affections, and on returning may bring with him graphic memorials of beautiful scenes, or of the works of celebrated masters in architecture, painting, and sculpture. Electricity has given wings, on which, in calm and in storm, are borne from land to land, and from continent to continent,

over mountains and under waves, thoughts affecting the interests of the civil, social, literary, and religious economies, indeed whatever appertains to the government of life. The power of steam in the direction and adaptation of material industries, and in the facilities of social intercourse which it affords, has been discovered and made subject to the laws of scientific mechanism, within the period of time now in review. The discovery of the anæsthetic properties of ether, by which the surgeon's office is greatly assisted, and the patient's comfort essentially promoted, will not only form a prominent event in the history of recent years, but will frequently occasion the outpouring of devout gratitude to the beneficent Giver of all good for such a transcendent blessing. Men of science, until a recent period, in their studies, have regarded the forces in the material world, — such as light, heat, electricity, cohesion, gravitation, — as unrelated to, and independent of one another. The opinion is now tending to unanimity, that there is but one force in the mechanism of the external world. This would seem to be in accordance with the harmony of design, which is everywhere apparent to the critical scholar. It affords, too, a new and interesting proof of the Unity of the Divine Being and government.

It is impossible but that the activities resulting from such liberal and enlightened sources as those

just enumerated should tend to enlarge the public mind and to expand the public heart. And, accordingly, it is with great pleasure that I testify that asperities which entered largely into social life, in generations not long antecedent to this, have given place to amenities more becoming beings alike dependent and alike provided for.

Calvinism is not preached now as it was fifty years ago. It has almost ceased to be a word of party distinction. It is a system admirably held together by bonds of metaphysical invention. The premises that it lays down give support to its conclusions, or, rather, its conclusions coincide with its premises according to the laws of logical deduction. But it has been found that its premises are at variance with the teachings of Nature and of revelation. Truth, having its origin in God, and not in the mind of a fallible reformer, has set the system aside as derogatory to the most sacred philosophy. The sons of fathers who were, in their day, the sturdy advocates of the doctrine inculcated by the Genevan teacher, would hardly now be considered as the representatives of their progenitors in the same school of theological culture. And a similar transformation, it must be confessed, is witnessed in minds disenthralled by creeds, and earnest for the earliest revelation.

I have learned, in my somewhat protracted study

of life, to place little confidence in the efficacy of creeds and forms of worship in bringing man to a true knowledge of himself, and of his relation to his Maker. Means are valuable as means, but they can never be substituted for the end which they were intended to subserve. The soul must receive a baptism which owes its essence to something that partakes not of humanity. "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty;" not temporal liberty alone, but, in a large and triumphant sense, spiritual liberty, "the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free."

All denominations have had representative men and representative women to do honor to their respective communions, men and women who have illustrated the principles of Christianity in the spirit of an enlightened liberality. And the sooner, I believe, the shibboleths of party are made to yield to the doctrines of the Great Teacher, who spake as the Spirit of God gave Him utterance, the sooner will the regeneration of the world be consummated, and the kingdom of truth, peace, and love be established.

Experience and observation are sometimes the sources of valuable thoughts and of useful counsels. Wisdom, it may be, is slow in adding to what it has already accumulated; but it is in the power of every enlightened mind, if not to increase, at least

to attest its wealth. Care, however, should be had that to the contributions of learning, and of its immediate results, the seal of truth should be affixed. I would not seem to impugn the purity or sincerity of mental effort or of mental acquirement. I would not be thought to question the soundness of motive in maintaining independence of opinion in opposition to the general sentiment. But it is possible, I suppose, that some incentive in the interests of selfishness or of ambition, or, perchance, of some far-off truth, may tempt or prompt to the promulgation of doctrines, seemingly at least, in discordance with the results of philosophical inquiry. There is no path of life, whether humble or exalted, that is entirely free from the temptations that are meant to test the excellence of virtue. And in no path of life should there be greater freedom from unworthy motives than in that which is pursued or supposed to be pursued in the love of truth and goodness, of humanity and of God.

One thought which has never left me, and which increase of years has tended to confirm, is the necessity of co-operation ; not in word only, but in deed ; not apparently, but really, on the part of those who have in hand, and who, it is to be presumed, have at heart, the consummation of the world's happiness,—the establishment of the kingdom of Christ on earth. Individualism is selfish-

ness. God did not intend that we should live an isolated life, insensible to others' wants, unmoved by others' woes. He has endowed us with powers and affections which ally us to the suffering and unfortunate, and also to the good and noble. The State shows itself to be actuated by the highest Christian principles in endowing hospitals for the deaf and dumb, the blind, the insane, the idiotic, and caring with an open hand and generous heart for those who cannot care for themselves. In this regard it imitates the benignity and universality of Providence. Christ himself went about doing good. If we would be His followers, we must make Him, so far as we can, our Guide. If we would be His disciples, we must learn of Him as our Teacher. The spirit of love was pre-eminently in Him: it should be predominant in us. The Apostle Paul gave an illustration of the full meaning of Christianity in the precept, "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ."

The miracles that Jesus wrought involved benefits and blessings to the indigent and wretched. They never had reference to His own preferment, or to any ostentatious end. We who are disciples of Christ and votaries of His cause have something to *do*. The whole is not already done for us. We must *take up* the cross each for himself, each for herself, and not wait to have it taken up for us.

Vicarious suffering is an obsolete doctrine of a by-gone generation of ecclesiastical sectarians. It is well, for the honor of God, for the honor of Christ, for the honor of humanity, that personal piety and benevolent activity are recognized as the constituent principles of the Christian religion. Let them be personally and heartily recognized. They are the guarantees, the sure guarantees, of happiness, of true happiness in this and in every world. Heaven, to be heaven at all, must be begun on earth. The facilities for Christian education, and the opportunities of Christian improvement, enlarge and expand from age to age and from generation to generation. The advantages of culture of all kinds are superior now to what they were a century or a half century ago. And the truth of the same observation will be confirmed by a comparison with still earlier periods. In the progress of years it is applicable from one age to another. The sons of farmers have greater facilities than their fathers for the pursuits of agriculture. All classes of people have more and better facilities for industry and thrift than their predecessors had ; the mechanic at his anvil or his bench, the merchant in his counting-room, the teacher in his lecture-room. So ministers of the present day should do better and accomplish more because of their better means and greater advantages. The same law,

both in its meaning and application, applies as well to the people or charge of ministers. Accountability will always be in proportion to advantages. And improvement will always be in proportion to the eagerness with which advantages are made availing.

The law of development, everywhere in motion, is continually demanding a higher grade of power for immediate and successful action.

I have no distrust with regard to the future of Christianity. That there will be some changes in its ministrations, it is very probable. I suppose, and the supposition is founded on an ardent hope, that intelligent and pure-minded laymen will speak eloquently and earnestly in defence and in honor of the Son of God. The earnest voice and the warm heart, trained and disciplined by study and prayer, and not written sermons, I apprehend, will be the practical sources of religious instruction. The manifestations of Christianity will be more in the life inspired by benevolence, and less through appointed means ; or, rather, means will be regarded more as instruments and less as ends. At all events, I have a firm belief that the law of progress will have full scope, and that the all holy and loving Father will be glorified by greater and nobler deeds and higher aspirations of his children. The prayer, "Thy kingdom come," will have a pro-

founder meaning in saintly minds, and a deeper place in saintly hearts. It will be gradually fulfilled.

Were I to entertain a doubt of the consummation of the will of God in the emancipation of man from sin, and in his elevation to absolute freedom ; in other words, were I to doubt of the coming of the kingdom of Christ, I should mistrust the benevolence of God. I see everywhere in Nature evidences and tokens of infinite goodness and of infinite love. I see not only beneficent means adapted to beneficent ends, but those ends accomplished. I see in the moral world beautiful examples of self-dedication and self-sacrifice that must have received a baptism from the Spirit of God. The teachings of Nature, the teachings of a pure life, all in accordance with the teachings of Christ, tell me that there is a Divine Being who is all in all that is true and beautiful and good, and that the emanation is as eternal as the Source whence it emanates. Are you troubled about the meaning of Christianity ? The simplicity of its meaning is an evidence of its divinity. Christianity means a true life. Jesus said, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." "Christ, our Life," is the emphatic declaration of St. Paul. There is no discrepancy between a true life and

Christianity. They coincide each with the other. A true life, the first characteristic of which is benevolence, has its spring in God, through the Spirit of Christ. It is the highest honor to which humanity can aspire. It is an honor attainable here only with many imperfections, and to be consummated in eternity alone.

My friends, I greet you gladly on the present occasion. You are, except in a very few instances, but the children and grand-children of those who saw me, in my youth, dedicate myself to the service of God, in the Kingdom of His beloved Son ; a service which I never for one moment desired to relinquish. I can look back upon the scenes and duties of my ministry, and think with gratitude that, amidst the contending elements of party strife, I never, in any one instance, gave occasion for alienation of heart from me ; and, moreover, I am happy in the reflection that my affection for all the people of Bridgewater, whatever may have been their opinions in regard to theological theories, has been sincerely reciprocated by them. Memories crowd upon my mind ; memories suggestive of lessons which are not even now without their instruction. The signs of thrift and happiness that meet the eye in these streets and these homes show, in a marked manner, the steps of progress

since fifty years ago. The fathers and mothers who here joined with me in the worship of God, though lost to sight, are yet to memory dear. Their virtues, as depicted in my own mind, if they were portrayed in the minds of some of you as the virtues of those whom you fondly loved, would, I apprehend, touch affections of a heavenly origin and of a heavenly end.

Vain were it, my friends, that this opportunity of reviving recollections of the tenderest character was given to me and to you, if it fail to impart new animation and brightness to the principles and hopes of the Christian life. Oh, friends! whatever else fail you, let not the hope of heaven fail you, because of your negligence or indifference. As mortal and immortal beings, your duty and your happiness are involved each in the other. A beneficent God requires nothing of you but what your own highest interests, as beings having mental and affectional capacities, would demand. How much greater are your obligations as beings born for immortality !

My brother, I greet you cordially as one of my successors in the ministry here. May the Holy Spirit be richly vouchsafed to you. Guard this Church that it may live the true life. And, that it may so live, see to it that it draws its life from the

Fountain of Truth. A servant of the Divine Master, a Church, the life of which "is hid with Christ in God," each reflecting the light of the other, and mutually giving and receiving vitality, may these be ever open sources of vigor and zeal in the exercise of your sacred office. And may the record which the years to come shall make be a record of progress and of prosperity, over which they, in future generations, who shall be permitted to read it, will rejoice with exceeding joy. God speed thee, my brother!

Brethren, the grave awaits me. It is not probable that Providence has in charge for me a greater or more grateful labor than that which I have now performed. It will be a pleasant reflection, in the closing hours of my life, that the latest words I was permitted to utter in my official capacity were words of Christian counsel and of Christian cheer to the people of my early charge, the First Church of Christ in Bridgewater. Dear friends, God bless you; God bless you all. Farewell.

HISTORICAL NOTES.

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BRIDGEWATER, as originally constituted, was a large township, embracing an area of some sixty or seventy square miles. It was divided into four parishes, taking the distinctive names of the cardinal points. The action of the town in relation to its civil interests took place annually, and as often as might be necessary, at meetings of the people legally assembled in the West Parish, the oldest in the possession of corporate rights.

In August, 1820, according to the Assistant Marshal's return of the census, — including Titicut Parish, which numbered 322, — the entire population of the Bridgewater Parishes was 5,662. The State census in 1865 gave the number of inhabitants as 15,333. The official census of the United States in 1870 gave the number as 16,490.

Ineffectual attempts, at various times, were made by all the parishes, except the West, prior to 1821, to be incorporated as independent towns. On the 15th of January, 1821, the Legislature gave to the North Parish the name of "North Bridgewater," with the right of managing its public affairs. On the 16th of February, 1822, a similar right, with the name of "West Bridgewater," was granted to the West Parish; and in the year following, 1823, on the 14th of June, the East Parish, adopting

the name of "East Bridgewater," was legally permitted to assume the privileges and responsibilities of a free corporation. The original charter was thus left in the possession of the South Parish, with the ancestral name of "Bridgewater."

The number of inhabitants in the "South Parish" in 1820 was 1,692. An official record of 1830 gives the number as 1,855. In 1865, the State census reported the number of inhabitants in "Bridgewater" to be 4,196. The United States census of 1870 gives 3,660, a diminished number. There were 18 public schools in 1870, with an average attendance of 521 scholars in winter, and 496 in summer.

My first visit to Bridgewater, in reference to its religious interests, was in February, 1820. It was the custom, supported by law, at that remote period, for the town-clerk publicly to announce in the meeting-house, after the people and minister were assembled on the Lord's day, the intention of marriage by parties whom it concerned. This was always a matter of peculiar interest.

Another custom was, — a custom of courtesy, — for the occupants of pews on the centre aisle of the church, while the minister was passing in, to rise, and to remain in that position until he had ascended the pulpit. The same ceremony recurred at the close of public worship, on his departure from the church. This custom, however, was abolished soon after I came into office, at my request.

Another custom that prevailed at the time under review, but which is now, I believe, not generally observed, was that of having written notes publicly read from the pulpit, asking for special prayers for individuals or families in affliction; or imploring the interposition of a

beneficent Providence in behalf of the sick. Occasionally thank-offerings were presented for restoration to health, or the opening of a new source of domestic happiness. Departures on long journeys, and safe returns to loved homes, called for intercession and invited thanksgiving in the worship of God. At the present day it is deemed more in accordance with a delicate sensibility, and more in the spirit of a true Christian sympathy, to embrace in our devotional affections at the public altar all who, whether in joy or in sorrow, in anxiety, or in relief from danger, have particularly come under the discipline of Divine Providence. I regard this remembrance, at the Throne of Grace, of dependent, suffering, rejoicing humanity, as one of the most beautiful offices of prayer, and one of the blessed incidents of communion with God. There, at that Throne, which is everywhere, the baptized of the Father and of the Son may meet and be spiritually one, partakers of the true life.

At the beginning of the summer of 1821, I was again invited to supply the pulpit of the First Congregational Society in the South Parish of Bridgewater. On the 2d of July a call was extended to me to assume the official charge of the Church, and the pastoral care of the people. On Sunday, the 22d of July, my affirmative reply to this call was read to the congregation by the Rev. RICHARD BRIGGS of Mansfield.

Of the ten gentlemen who were appointed a committee in behalf of the Parish to invite me "to settle with them as their gospel minister," not one is now living. The Parish Clerk also, whose name appears in the official document, is numbered with the dead.

The following list is presented for the historical interest it may have :—

Deacon JAMES ALGER . .	Born 22 Oct., 1770, died 2 Nov., 1844.
Deacon CORNELIUS HOLMES „	3 Dec., 1754, „ 17 Oct., 1847.
NATHAN LAZELL, Esq. . . „	18 May, 1759, „ 20 June, 1832.
Dr. NOAH FEARING . . . „	28 Nov., 1769, „ 20 June, 1824.
Capt. BENJAMIN POPE . . „	13 May, 1765, „ 17 Mch., 1846.
SETH WASHBURN, Esq. . . „	23 Sep., 1776, „ 29 April, 1858.
NATHAN MITCHELL, Esq. . „	16 Oct., 1762, „ 10 June, 1845.
DANIEL MITCHELL, Esq. . „	13 June, 1767, „ 16 April, 1847.
SYLVANUS PRATT „	20 May, 1770, „ 11 Jan., 1833.
ALPHEUS FORBES „	30 June, 1756, „ 12 April, 1839.

Attest, HOLMES SPRAGUE, Clerk.

H. SPRAGUE Born 21 Dec., 1783, died 13 Oct., 1869.

The record may be here appropriately made that all the members of the Church, twenty-five males and thirty-eight females, who were active and acting at the time of my ordination, have deceased.

The council invited to solemnize my ordination was convened on the 12th of September, 1821, in the Academy building, then occupying a part of the present site of the hotel. Rev. JOHN REED, D.D., of the West Parish, was chosen Moderator; and Rev. JOHN GORHAM PALFREY, of the Church in Brattle Square, Boston, Scribe. After an explicit examination of the candidate as to his theological education, religious character, and motives for desiring the sacred office, and a presentation of a written summary of his Christian belief, it was voted to attend his ordination at the meeting-house. During a short recess, there was a meeting of the brethren of the Church, presided over, in accordance with a vote of the council, by Rev. JAMES KENDALL, of Plymouth, when

the candidate was admitted to full membership by the voice of the Church, and the new relation was presented to the Throne of Grace for consecration by the presiding clergyman. The candidate was robed in the clerical dress of the time, consisting of a cassock, belt, gown and bands. This rich and costly suit was the gift of the ladies of the Parish; an appropriate and pleasing expression of their interest in the occasion, and of their good hope of the ministry inaugurated. The procession, preceded by a band of music and the Executive Committee of the Parish, marched to the church, where the solemnities took place in the following order: Rev. RALPH SANGER, of Dover, offered the introductory prayer; Rev. CHARLES LOWELL, of the West Church, Boston, preached the sermon from Acts xx. 20; Rev. THADDEUS MASON HARRIS, D.D., of the First Parish in Dorchester, offered the ordaining prayer; Rev. JOHN PRINCE, LL.D., of the First Church in Salem, gave the charge; Rev. CHARLES BRIGGS, of the First Church in Lexington, presented the Right Hand of Fellowship, and Rev. JOHN GORHAM PALFREY, of the Church in Brattle Square, Boston, made the concluding prayer. The benediction was pronounced by the newly ordained pastor. The sermon and charge were printed. Notwithstanding unfavorable weather, the occasion had gathered a large and attentive audience. After the public services, the council and invited guests dined in the Academy hall, which was handsomely decorated. Rev. PETER WHITNEY, of the First Congregational Church in Quincy, asked the Divine blessing; and Rev. EDWARD RICHMOND, D.D., of the Third Congregational Church in Dorchester, returned thanks.

On the Lord's day following my ordination, I preached on the reciprocal duties of pastor and people. In the forenoon, the text was 2 Tim. iv. 5, which led my thoughts to self-admonition. In the afternoon, the text was 1 Thess. v. 12, 13, which suggested the duties of the Church and Society in view of the new relation that had been formed.

My parish register contains the names of one hundred and eighty families.

In 1822, April 9, I began a course of religious instruction specially for the improvement of children.

In 1823, July 6th, a Sunday School was organized.

In 1828, June 10th, a juvenile library was opened.

In 1831, May and June, there was an unusual interest in regard to religion; and many, by the blessing of God, through the teachings of His Son, were led to feel and to acknowledge their Christian obligations and privileges.

In 1832, January, February, March, scarlatina prevailed among children. A large number died.

In the course of my ministry I married eighty-four couples.

The average number of deaths annually was twenty.

The notes in this relation might be extended, but the object contemplated is answered at this point.

Early in 1822, a "Congregational Trinitarian Society" was organized, and a house of worship for its use erected in the southern part of the town. After a union of a few years, a portion of this parish, with

its minister, — still living, honored, and esteemed, though in the serene twilight of old age, — thought it proper to form themselves into a new body of Christians, and to establish a new place of worship in the central village.

In 1824, March 11th, a society, in accordance with the doctrines of Emmanuel Swedenborg, was instituted; and on the 20th September, 1871, a new and commodious house of worship was solemnly set apart for its use.

There is also a Roman Catholic Church in the town.

In 1821, besides the Congregational, there was one other, — the Protestant Episcopal Church, — in Bridgewater. Since that time there have been added four houses of public worship. May truth and hope, illumined by purity and love, be inscribed on their walls!

