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To the Rev Drs Miller & Alexander
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Princeton
New Jersey.

THE

PATRIARCH'S VISION:

DISCOURSE DELIVERED AT THE DEDICATION

OF

THE CENTRAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, WASHINGTON.

BY REV. T. B. BALCH.

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DELIVERED AT THE DEDICATION

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THE CENTRAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,

WASHINGTON CITY,

SABBATH MORNING, MAY 31, 1846.

BY REV. T. B. BALCH.

T.B.

WASHINGTON:
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1846.



AT a meeting of the Session of the Central Presbyterian Church, Washington city, held on the 2d of June, 1846, the following resolutions were unanimously adopted, viz :

Resolved, That the thanks of this Session be presented to the Rev. THOMAS B. BALCH, of Virginia, for his eloquent and appropriate discourse preached on Sabbath last, at the *Dedication of the Central Church, Washington City.*

Resolved, That Mr. BALCH be respectfully requested to furnish a copy of said discourse for publication ; and that the avails thereof be appropriated to the benefit of the church.

By order of the Session :

WM. THOMPSON, *Secretary.*

WASHINGTON, *June 10th, 1846.*

To the Session of the Central Presbyterian Church :

THE discourse delivered at the dedication of the Central Presbyterian Church, was prepared at the request of your esteemed and respected pastor, the Rev. Mr. TUSTIN. He has since communicated to me your resolution calling for a copy, with a view to publication. It gives me pleasure to comply with your request, sincerely hoping that its circulation may aid somewhat in enabling you to liquidate a portion of the expense incurred by the erection of an edifice so ornamental to that portion of the city in which it is located.

With sincere and Christian respect, I remain, &c.,

T. B. BALCH.

NOTE.

To those who are acquainted with our respected and esteemed Pastor, no testimonial of his zeal and devotion to the Saviour's cause is necessary. But as this discourse may fall into the hands of some to whom he is not personally known, we deem it proper to record our testimony in favor of his indefatigable and successful efforts in advancing the cause of the Redeemer, not only in this city but elsewhere. This is the second church-edifice which has been erected expressly for him; and wherever his lot has been cast, during a ministry of more than twenty years, the evidences of his usefulness are visible. In Virginia he sustained the pastoral relation to one church with great acceptance for more than nine years, and relinquished a warmly-attached congregation only to accept the responsible place of Chaplain to the University of Virginia. Before he became a resident of this city he was elected, by perhaps the largest vote ever given for that officer, as Chaplain to the House of Representatives; and since his residence in Washington he has been chosen six or seven times successively to the office of Chaplain to the Senate of the United States. As Mr. Tustin is engaged in building up an entirely new congregation, we have thought it proper to bring these facts, without comment from us, before the public mind. It is proper to add, that the Central Church has been regularly organized by the Presbytery of Baltimore, and Mr. Tustin has been installed its Pastor.

By order of the Session :

WM. THOMPSON, *Secretary.*

THE PATRIARCH'S VISION.

GEN. XXVIII: 17: FOR THIS IS NONE OTHER BUT THE HOUSE OF GOD, AND
THIS IS THE GATE OF HEAVEN.

A Patriarch was on his way from Beersheba to Haran, and between those oriental settlements, he became the witness of a remarkable vision. He travelled on foot and was overtaken by night. The sun had become buried in his western sepulchre: but not till he had suspended over the head of our Pilgrim those stars which are the symbols of his temporary absence, and which serve as pointers to his anticipated resurrection. Probably no human home was in sight, not even the tent of a shepherd. The flocks had all found their folds and the camel bells had ceased to animate the footstep of our pedestrian traveller. Confiding himself, however, to Divine protection, he lay down on the cold earth for his bed, whilst his temples rested on a mound of stones. At that time revelation was given to men by angels, by dreams and visions; and the vision of a ladder, crowded with angels, was vouchsafed on that night to Jacob. We can form no adequate conception of this appearance, nor will we be daring enough to describe the fiery rounds of that ladder; nor the upward and downward marching and countermarching of the angels; nor the robes in which those

spirits were arrayed ; nor the heavenly recorders which rolled in their melody on the ear of the wanderer as he lay steeped in dew. But the moral of the vision is quite plain, for it was intended to teach us, that though sin had annihilated all intercourse between Heaven and earth, that intercourse is reöpened through our Lord Jesus Christ. The vision of Jacob had its fulfilment in the Saviour, towards whom angels descended and from whom they returned to Heaven. Therefore the patriarch could not restrain his emotions, and he gave utterance to them in the words of the text : “ How dreadful is this place ! It is none other than the gate to Heaven ;” and he thus speaks, although no sanctuary had been reared at the place from which he had discerned the vision.

Not more than one year has elapsed, my brethren, since the spot on which this building stands was lonely and uncultivated. On this very ground the sheep might have browsed, the bird might have reared its nest, or even a patriarch might have encamped. But lo, what a change ! An edifice, which displays the charms of a simple architecture and the beauties of unpretending taste, has risen as by the power of enchantment ! This is none other than the house of the Lord. It is not a Lyceum—it is not a hall for legislation or the culture of letters—it is not a depository for the mechanical inventions of the age—but a Church, a place for the rites of homage to our blessed Saviour, and a footstool for the Most High. Before we enter, however, into the spiritual nature of our text, permit me to speak of those who have been benefactors to this church. Perhaps some of them may now be present, to behold the work which their munificence has brought from nothing into a thriving existence. Their presence alone prevents me from speaking forth our emotions of gratitude as the only recompense

we can make them for their enterprise, diligence, and disinterestedness. To those who planned this building; who contrived pecuniary ways of annihilating its debts; and to those noble and generous artisans who wrought out its completion, we return the thanks of this congregation and vicinity; of this city, and of the whole Presbyterian Church in the United States. We would say more in the way of gratitude if we knew in what terms that gratitude could be expressed. But there is one of the benefactors to this enterprise, who has been called out of this life since the enterprise was commenced: we mean the late General Van Ness, who enjoyed the confidence of his fellow-citizens to a high degree, and whose life was distinguished by many generous acts. He took a deep interest in the improvements of this city, and his decease was much lamented by its inhabitants. He gave this ground, and of course furnished the basis on which the superstructure rests. Nor will we do violence to the feelings of any if we recall on this day the memory of his consort, whose good works are conspicuous in this city. It is true she belonged to a denomination of Christians differing from our own; but we are as willing as they to associate her name with those of Lady Glenorchy, the Countess of Huntingdon, and Isabella Graham. It is a fable that the ring of Gyges made him invisible to mortal sight; but it was a reality that she possessed more than the ring of Gyges, for in communion with her Saviour she was indeed unseen by men, but she became visible in this city, by the good fruits which that communion inspired. There is one, however, whose acts of generosity and benevolence are well known among this people: but she has been prevented, by a call to a better world, from participating in the solemnities of this day. Less favored, perhaps, than Mrs. Van Ness by what we call fortune, she had a mind equally

noble. Each successive week is bringing to light her many acts of kindness, and they will long be remembered, even though she be sleeping in the silent dust. Conjugal affection has reared the memorials of love upon her grave; but her highest eulogium is found in the enduring gratitude of the poor and the destitute, to whose wants she so liberally contributed. Her generous deeds, though unknown among men, are recorded in Heaven, and will be published to her credit "in that day" when even "a cup of cold water" given for the refreshing of suffering humanity shall be acknowledged and rewarded. The influence of her name still falls like the gentle dew of heaven upon the unfolding rose, gilding the gloomy scenes of adversity, and softening the miseries of human poverty and want. This congregation need not be told that my allusion is to Mrs. Mary Ann Coltman.

Permit me now, brethren, to call your attention to the subject of our discourse. The occasion is one of the highest interest, if not in a national sense, certainly it is in a sense local and ecclesiastical. One more sanctuary has been completed, and one more gate to Heaven has been opened. The church universal, which consists of all who truly repent and sincerely believe the Gospel, has been enlarged by one more edifice for the reception of penitents and believers. Here our Gospel will be successfully planted and faithfully preached. Here children will be taught the elements of the Christian religion—the hum of the Sabbath school will be heard—the Divine statutes will be observed—the Word will be read—the Scriptures will be interpreted, and their injunctions enforced—prayer will be continually offered—the promises will be presented—duties will be illustrated—the doctrines of Grace defended—the rite of baptism administered, and the Redeemer's death often commemorated.

Here for ages to come will champions of the Cross successively appear, planting themselves in this pulpit, and the light of the Bible will be radiated over thousands in this gay Metropolis. Some future Brainard, fresh from the smoke of Indian wigwams, may officiate in this desk, or some transatlantic Chalmers may here wield his unrivalled logic among senators and representatives, jurists and lawgivers. Its pastor, and pastors in time to come, will welcome all the defenders of the Christian Faith, whether they come from prairies, or savannas, or everglades—from tropics, zones, or poles. It is the house of the Lord, and prepared for a portion at least of the household of faith. Though the faith of the Presbyterian church will doubtless be here illustrated and enforced, yet we hope this will never be done to the injury of that charity which is recommended in the Bible.

The language of the text is certainly figurative. There was no building where the Patriarch stood; and yet so powerful was the Divine presence that his faith figured a dwelling around him filled with the Divine glory. There was no literal gate; and yet Heaven stood open to his view, as if some massive gate had been shut upon him, and he detained as an enraptured captive gazing on the vision. It was not a sight of these exterior clouds and stars, and suns and systems, but of the interior Heaven. He saw the Divine Holiness, and the Mediator standing on the summit of the ladder, and the blessed angels, who moved in obedience to the Redeemer's voice. Allow me now to show in what sense the building which we dedicate this day is the Lord's house.

We recognise this building, then, as a fruit of Divine goodness, and as a production of the Divine Will. Had our Maker frowned on the undertaking, the whole scheme would have been a failure. Could this house have risen here, if He

had said it shall not rise? It is true, we have given thanks to those who designed it, to those who contributed, and to all who wrought on it from the morning light to the evening shade; but they were all simple instruments and agents in the Divine hand. Has any heart given cheerfully: the Lord opened that heart. Has any hand labored indefatigably: He strengthened that hand. Have any been moved to more than common efforts: He supplied the motives. It was a sin of no ordinary grade, which a Chaldean king committed, when he said: "Is not this Great Babylon which I have builded?" And the same sin precisely may be committed by ascribing to ourselves the glory of erecting a church. Let us, my brethren, rather be humble and lowly. Let our language be, "Lord, thou hast by thy providence given us a spiritual home, a place where parents and children, wives and husbands, masters and servants, pastor and people, may convene. Thou hast marked out a central point to which the rich and poor, the rude and polite, the obscure and celebrated, may converge. Thou hast given us a hive where spiritual honey may be made, or a garden where the fruits of Zion may be pulled, or a treasury where we may always check for the pearl of great price—nor will those checks be protested, nor will their number lessen the pearl whose value is infinite. Thou hast reared for us moral altars, where penitents may weep and where suppliants may kneel, and where convicted publicans may stand and smite upon their breasts, and where the pardoned may rejoice, and salvation be proclaimed."

This is the Lord's house, because to all structures of the kind he has promised his special presence, and his peculiar blessing. In all places, says Jehovah, where I record my name, to those places will I return with a blessing. Our Saviour has promised the manifestation of himself, even to

two or three disciples gathered together in his name and by his authority. It is true, that our Lord, in the fourth chapter of John, cast off the temple of Gerizzim, because the Samaritans had disfigured Revelation, and rejected the prophetic writings; and he announces the discontinuance of worship in Solomon's Temple, because the Jews had striven to merge the light which he brought into the shadows of Judaism, instead of permitting the shadows of Judaism to disperse themselves as so much incense in that light. He by no means discountenances public worship; but he expands its privileges, and enlarges the area on which it is spiritually to be performed. The Tabernacle set up by Moses in the wilderness had answered its purposes, and then it was taken down and succeeded by the Temple; and the Temple was nothing more than a typical vestibule to a vast, moral, and interior spirituality, intended for the Gentile, as well as the Jewish world. We have said, that both the Tabernacle and the Temple were built by the Divine order, and the platform of each minutely arranged by Inspiration. The Lord presided over the worship of his chosen people; and much more will he be present at the simple rites which prevail in his New Testament church. How many passages may be read in the Psalms descriptive of the charm connected with the Divine presence, even in earthly sanctuaries: "I was glad when they said to me, Let us go into the house of the Lord. Our feet, after long travel, shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem. As the heart panteth after the waterbrooks, so panteth my soul after the living God. When shall I come and appear before God. One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may behold his beauty, and inquire at his Temple. I will wash my hands in innocency, and so will I encompass thine holy altars. Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of

my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." And shall we, who live under a clearer dispensation, be regardless of the joy which springs from the moral presence of Jehovah? Pliny states, in his letter to Trajan, that the Christians of Bythynia were accustomed to sing hymns at midnight to our Lord Jesus Christ. The Apocalypse, or book of Revelation, is descriptive of that worship which the New Testament Church gives to the Lamb; and, compared to the homage of the old dispensation, was as the murmur of Siloa's brook, to the thunder of the sea, when its sublimity stands confessed, or when its mountain waves are reduced to blue slopes and green lawns, and myriads of rich and glowing shells work their way to its margin.

This is the Lord's house, because its founders have this day set it apart from all common uses to purposes of a most sacred kind. We do not expect that the Principia of Sir Isaac Newton will here be studied, nor the poems of Dante or Goethe recited. The people will not flock here as to a drama, but to hear serious things. Divine truth, as taught in the whole Bible, will here be made known. From this moral paradise error will be shut out, as by an angel's sword, and men will be established as antipodes to error by that gravitation which is inherent to the truth which the Bible proclaims. Here let the fall of the first Adam be loudly proclaimed, and the restoration of mankind by the Second Adam be more loudly made known. Here let the moral inability of man be preached, in a feeling of which he will repair to the Saviour with more than a giant's strength, and the speed of the dromedary, that pants for release from its burden. Here let regeneration be enforced, and salvation by grace, and grace alone, and the justifying righteousness of Jesus, and the sanctification of men by the agency of the Holy Spirit. Sin, in its bitterness, its wormwood and

gall, will here be announced; but its pardon at the same time, through the scheme of redemption. This is a fountain from which no milk-and-water theology will ever issue; but here babes will come for the sincere milk of truth. They who are hungry will find a repast of manna; they who are thirsty will find the stream of salvation; and they who are giants will here drink refreshing wine. Hell will here be portrayed, and Heaven will bend its arches for the reception of prayer, and set open its pavilions in which praise shall resound. It was said of Dante, as he walked along the streets of Florence, "Behold the man who has been to hell;" but this and more may be said of every faithful minister: "Behold the man who lives both in heaven and hell." He hears the roar of the one, and buries himself in its ashes, that he may rise from its depth and warn the impenitent; and he ascends into the other, that he may return from its interior glories and poise himself in moral grandeur around the feeble, the desponding, and the loitering, and near the smitten heart, and the raven garments of the widow, the orphan, and all the afflicted. Here will the map of Christian duty be frequently unrolled, and the straight and narrow way be repeatedly traced. The Vesuvian smoke of error, we trust, will never rise from this spot; but may it always be distinguished in this city by its cloud of moral incense on its swift and reverential ascension.

This is a place for the instruction of the ignorant—for the confirmation of the wavering—for the alarm of the impenitent—for the conviction of the sinful—for the healing of the morally sick, and blind, and halt, and withered. Its pastor will here arrange a kind of moral magnetic telegraph, which shall report even to angels tidings of converted sinners, and exulting believers, and triumphant saints; and display, even to a heavenly distance, pictures of Sabbath

repose, and green pastures, and quiet waters, and blessed feasts, and rejoicing Christians, and holy promises, and precious consolations; the tears of contrition, the vows of the pious, the resolutions of the doubtful; the flock at rest, or the bewildered sheep struggling in the defiles of the mountains. Here the tenets of Apostles will be dwelt on, and the principles of the Reformation discussed. And if it is to continue to be a house of the Lord, then the simple rites of the New Testament must be respected and observed. It is well known, my brethren, that, as a denomination, we are opposed to any complex forms or any gaudy ceremonial. This is no occasion, however, on which to attack the ritual of other churches; but we may defend our own, and its defence may be found in its Apostolic simplicity. Many are astonished that Presbyterians should be so fondly attached to a ceremonial which is so destitute of pomp and parade, and from which mitres, and croziers, and altars, and incense, and images, and pictures, and robes, are totally absent. It has nothing of which to boast in the way of fashion; but if the imagination of others be imposed on by such things, we, as Presbyterians, have learned to school our imagination to something less suited to the popular taste. We wish to be men, and not children, in our religion; and we leave others to play with their toys, whilst we wish to seek the essence of the Bible. There is quite enough in our history to entertain our imagination, without resorting to human inventions. Our churches, in all ages, have been simple. They have been so among the Scottish dales, and the Swiss and Italian Alps, and in Holland, where the broad ocean leans against the land.

This is the Lord's house, because it was built as a place in which its occupants will seek intercourse with Heaven. We are aware that, in speaking of intercourse with Heaven,

we subject ourselves to the charge of enthusiasm, if not of fanaticism. But mankind, in all ages, have believed that there are some links of connexion between Heaven and earth. They sought the resolution of their doubts from the oracles of Delphi and Dodona; and even Alexander the Great penetrated into Lybia to ascertain from an oracle his celestial descent. Even Deists have maintained public worship in London and Paris, and in New York. But what kind of intercommunion are we to look for between this house and Heaven? It would argue uncommon weakness in any one to expect miraculous interviews with the Lord—such as our Patriarch enjoyed on his way to Padanaram. We know that marvellous dreams have ceased; that angels descend not now as in patriarchal times; and that the canon of Revelation is closed. No one entertains a more contemptuous opinion than we of the hallucinations of Joanna Southcote, and the reveries of Emanuel Swedenbourg, or the visions of the French prophets, or of the raptures of Ignatius Loyola. We believe, however, in a moral and spiritual intercourse between Heaven and earth, even in the nineteenth century. This doctrine is taught in all the Bible, and this intercommunion is founded on the study of the Scriptures, and the Holy Spirit giving light and unction to the Revelation of Heaven. “Behold, I stand at the door of the church and knock; if any man in that church shall open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me.” The Holy Spirit, through the medium of revealed truth, still operates on the conscience of the sinner, and on the heart of the saint. He still gives life to his pastors, and unction to his people. He still binds up the heart of the mourner, and unravels the perplexities of the convicted. He still rolls out magnificent orbs of truth from the midst of his own infinite splendor, which guide the

bewildered through the mazes of a tangled wilderness. He still cheers, enlivens, cleanses, and purifies the souls of men. He still, by means, ordinances, sacraments, and privileges, opens the gates of his church, and shuts out the world, whilst he entertains his people with sweet views of Beulah, and sweet foretastes of the heavenly land. He still revives his church, and strengthens his drooping cause. He still extracts the sting of death. But especially at death will this church become the gate of Heaven. Its hinges will often turn and transmit souls to the upper world. Death, my brethren, is busy in our world ; but though, mounted on his pale horse, he carries dread and dismay even among Christians, yet is he nothing more than a kind of outrider to those chariots of fire in which saints are borne over the Jordan to the green fields, and ripened fruits, and superb flowers of Canaan. Piety is often found in connection with a feeble frame. Death may ruin the temple, and reduce the altar even to fragments ; but he cannot quench the fire of the sanctified soul. For thirty years did Baxter daily look for death, so tottering was his frame. In the reign of Queen Elizabeth, there was in the palace of Windsor, a harp made entirely of glass, except its chords. Equally brittle was the body of this holy man, and liable to be dashed in pieces ; but there were still chords in his heart, which death could not touch, and melody which death could not stop. He was the Demosthenes of the Puritan Divines, whilst the allegory of Bunyan has spread a kind of milky way over the sky of the Christian world.

But it is time to close : and if the views we have taken be correct, then a faithful attendance on this sanctuary is both our duty and our privilege. Let there be a place for every hearer, and every hearer in his place. Let no slight cause keep you away. Rather watch for opportunities to

come. Do not come to be religiously amused, but seek for deep scriptural instruction. Distinguish the chaff from the wheat, and be satisfied with nothing short of the Gospel itself. Teach your children and your domestics to revere the Sabbath. Pray much for the peace of Jerusalem, for they who love its peace shall prosper. Let all wrath, bitterness, and evil-speaking, be put away. Be kind to one another, and courteous. "Behold how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." It is sweeter than Hermon's dew. Learn to feel for those who are without a sanctuary. Be advocates for church extension. As others have given to you, do not forget others when called on to give. In charity and kindness maintain your distinctive principles. Even die for them, and be like that Spartan band who perished at the Straits of Thermopylæ, and let not even one survive to tell the story of your martyrdom. Our creed is assailed far and wide. Even Brougham has been writing against Calvin; but this noble lord peradventure does not relish the heavenly atmosphere in which the Reformer lived, any more than he would relish the natural atmosphere of the top of Mont Blanc, which crowns what was once the home of the illustrious Genevese. Cultivate in your children a love for missions. Teach them to pray for the heathen. And let the impenitent be alarmed, seeing that they remain unconverted when means are daily multiplying for their conversion. They are something like the Moors, who would not yield their town to a Spanish army by which it was besieged. In their hunger they ascended the walls, and implored that provisions might be sent into the town; but instead of this, the Spaniards spread repasts in their sight all round the walls. Give us the town—unlock its gates—do you march out in submission, and let us enter in triumph, and then you may satiate your hunger on

our bread and water, and milk and wine, and honey and oil and spices.

We are not responsible for the length of this discourse ; but you are responsible, who have created an occasion so interesting as the present. We are not accustomed to preach after the fashion of a city. We meet a people in the woods, whose patience is not exhausted by the discourse of an hour. The history of Redemption has been often told them, but they are not yet wearied with its wonders. Calvary still possesses for them its wonted interest. Its declivities, its rocks, its cross, its crown of thorns, its reed, its spear, its victim, its darkness, its convulsions, its shrouded sun, its twilight, have still a tongue that speaks in power to their hearts. So may it ever be in this sanctuary, which we this day dedicate, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to the glory of the Triune Jehovah. Amen.

THE DEDICATION OF "THE CENTRAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH," WASHINGTON.

The dedication of this chaste and beautiful building took place on last Sabbath morning, in the presence of a large and deeply interested audience, among whom were the President of the United States, the Mayor of this city, the Hon. Mr. Dunlap, of Maine, the Hon. Mr. Collamer, of Vermont, the Hon. Mr. Yost, of Pennsylvania, and other distinguished citizens and strangers. The edifice stands on 8th street, immediately in the rear of the Patent Office, on the site generously given about a year since by the late General Van Ness. Its dimensions are fifty by seventy feet, and its neat and unpretending architecture reflects the highest credit on the taste and judgment of its enterprising and generous projector, Mr. C. L. Coltman, and on the skill and liberality of the artisans who were employed in its erection. So many of our worthy mechanics and other citizens have aided to a greater or less extent towards the erection of this edifice that it would be impracticable in a notice of this kind to mention all who have generously contributed of their labor and means. Their names, however, are registered upon "the memory of the heart," and will be long and gratefully cherished by the pastor and members of this infant congregation. We cannot, however, withhold the meed of deserved praise from our worthy fellow-citizen, Mr. James B. Phillips, plasterer, to whose skill and liberality the edifice is largely indebted for the chaste and elegant workmanship with which its interior is enriched and beautified. It is due to him to say that this portion of the building is the subject of universal admiration. *His unsolicited donation is estimated at six hundred dollars!*

The dedication sermon was preached by the Rev. Thomas B. Balch, of Virginia, from Genesis, 28th chapter and 17th verse: "*How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of Heaven.*" The discourse was rich, eloquent, and appropriate, and was listened to with marked attention. We are gratified to learn that the Session of the church have requested a copy for publication. In the afternoon the communion was administered to a large number of professors of religion from the different evangelical churches in the city, who beautifully illustrated the great principles of christian charity by uniting with members of "the Central Church" in commemorating the love and sufferings of their common Saviour.

The occasion altogether was one of profound interest, although the high gratification of those immediately interested in this enterprise was necessarily chastened by the heavy bereavement and deep affliction of one of the most lovely and interesting families connected with this congregation: we allude to the family of the lamented Colonel Cross.

As an appropriate appendix to the foregoing notice, it is proper to add, that at a meeting of the congregation, held on Monday afternoon, the Rev. SEPTIMUS TUSTIN, chaplain of the United States Senate, was unanimously chosen pastor of this congregation.

June 2, 1846.

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