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**DR. SPRAGUE'S SERMON**

**ON THE**

**TWENTY-FIFTH ANNIVERSARY**

**OF HIS**

**INSTALLATION AT ALBANY.**

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# SERMON

ADDRESSED TO THE

SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CONGREGATION IN ALBANY,

Sunday Morning, August 27, 1854,

ON THE COMPLETION OF

## A QUARTER OF A CENTURY

FROM THE COMMENCEMENT OF

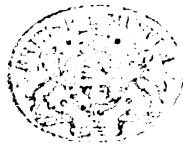
THE AUTHOR'S MINISTRY AMONG THEM.

BY WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D. D. *K.*

ALBANY:

CHARLES VAN BENTHUYSEN, PRINTER

1854.



## CORRESPONDENCE.

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ALBANY, 28th August, 1854.

REV. DR. SPRAGUE :

*Dear Sir*—As one of your congregation, I was present yesterday morning at the delivery of your Sermon on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of your settlement with your present charge. In common with many who heard it, I am desirous that it should be published; and I venture to anticipate any other request that might be made for it, by saying that it will give me great pleasure, if you will send me the manuscript, to furnish the requisite number of printed copies for the members of your congregation, and other friends.

In your discourse you speak of many that have passed away. As illustrative of this, permit me to refer to the fact that my father was one of the partners in the concern of PACKARD & VAN BENTHUYSEN, that published your Introductory Sermons in 1829; both of whom are now deceased, leaving me as their successor. Indeed, I may myself claim some connection with the printing of those Sermons; for I well remember that the first time I ever saw you was when, as a boy in the office, I was sent to you with the proof sheets.

Hoping that you may be spared yet many years in the position you so worthily occupy,

I remain, Dear Sir, truly yours,

CHARLES VAN BENTHUYSEN.

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ALBANY, August 29, 1854.

C. VAN BENTHUYSEN, Esq. :

*My Dear Sir*—The circumstance to which your note refers—the printing of my Introductory Sermons—first brought me acquainted with your honoured father, and from that time to the day of his death, he treated me with uniform and extraordinary kindness. You will pardon me for saying that I have found the kindness of the father fully reproduced in the son. I send you my last Sunday morning's Sermon, agreeably to your suggestion; and if, as you seem to think, my friends will value it as marking an occasion in which they are deeply interested, I am sure their interest in it will be not a little increased, by their being permitted to recognize in it a fresh testimony of your good will and public spirit.

I am, My Dear Sir, with every good and affectionate wish for your present and future well being,

Faithfully and gratefully yours,

W. B. SPRAGUE.

# S E R M O N .

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ACTS XXVI. 22.

HAVING THEREFORE OBTAINED HELP OF GOD, I CONTINUE UNTO THIS DAY.

TWENTY-FIVE years ago, last evening, there was an assembly convened here, that filled the house to its utmost capacity. The leading services of the hour were performed by one of the fathers of the Presbyterian Church—a man whom all delighted to honour, and whose very presence was a benediction.\* Those services constituted me your pastor. For the ten preceding years, reaching back to the beginning of my ministry, I had had the charge of an ancient congregation in New England, of Puritan faith and habits, with whom I always lived in perfect harmony, and for whom I still cherish a warm affection.

\* REV. SAMUEL MILLER, D. D.

When death extinguished the light that was first fixed in this candlestick,\* you were pleased to ask me to occupy the vacant place; and though I answered you in the affirmative, I can truly say that I came among you “in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.” I came a stranger, not merely to the people who had called me, but to the peculiar activities, vexations and trials incident to a city pastorate. I came with but a moderate share of health; and doubtful whether my physical energies would be adequate to the increased amount of labour. You met me with a cordial welcome—a pledge of what was to be through many coming years; and *that* helped to give me courage. And now, at the close of a quarter of a century, I am still here, labouring with as much comfort, and perhaps I may say, with as much activity, as during the first year of my ministry. But no minister in the city remains, who was here to greet me as a fellow labourer, when I came. Not another church here of any communion, but has changed its pastor at least once, and some of them several times, while the number

\* Rev. JOHN CHESTER, D. D., died January, 1829.

of churches and ministers has, within the same period, more than doubled. I feel constrained to pause at this interesting epoch in my ministry, and gratefully recognize the "help of God" by which "I continue unto this day." And I know you will heartily join me in thanksgiving; for whatever of blessing has been vouchsafed to me as a minister, has been shared equally by you as the people of my charge. Let this hour then be sacred to grateful and hallowed remembrances. Let it be sacred to a devout recognition and faithful improvement of the providence of God.

In the review on which I am about to enter, you will expect little from me that is not familiar to most of you, for I must take you over ground that we have trodden together. And you will allow me to dispense with even the ordinary formalities of the pulpit, giving utterance to what has occurred to my thoughts, without referring it rigidly to any particular standard. I confess I am disposed to look upon our meeting to-day, somewhat in the light of a great family gathering; and I shall be glad if a review of the way by which our Heavenly Father has led us, shall serve to

quicken our zeal in his service, and unite us more closely in the bonds of Christian brotherhood.

I know of no way in which I can better fall in with the spirit of the occasion, or reach the object I have in view, than by detailing some of the manifold changes, by which our history, during this period, has been marked; for the life of communities as well as of individuals, is made up, in a great measure, of changes. Of course I can present the subject to you only in outline; but I may safely leave the filling up to your own personal recollections.

I. Let me ask you, then, in the first place, to contemplate the changes which have passed upon this congregation, during the last quarter of a century, in respect to its *constituent elements*.

At the time of my induction here, the *congregation* was small in comparison with what it had been before, and with what it has generally been since. The secession which had then just formed the nucleus of another church, had made a perceptible chasm here;



and well do I remember, when I first entered the pulpit, to have been struck with the fact that most of the pews beyond the middle of the church, were nearly, or entirely, vacant. One feature of the congregation that impressed me more than any other, was its remarkably youthful appearance; or rather, the almost entire absence of persons far advanced in life. The reason of this was, that it was originally composed chiefly of young men; and sufficient time had not then elapsed to cover many of them with gray hairs. I may say too that its pecuniary ability and intellectual and social influence greatly exceeded its numerical strength—there were men here then, and before, as there have always been since, whose names and doings are interwoven with the history of both the State and the Nation. The congregation quickly recovered from the shock occasioned by a withdrawal of a part of its members, and their places were gradually filled up by the accession of new families; and indeed, in the advance of our population, it soon became larger than it had ever been before. Its numbers have never since fallen much short of the extent of its accommoda-

tions; and I believe it has never been more difficult to procure an advantageous sitting in the house than at the present time.

The number of those who have served as *Trustees* during this period is twenty-one; five of whom are no longer among the living, and one is at this very hour lying dressed for the grave.\* I am thankful to be permitted to say that among those who survive is the venerable President of the Board,† who has been identified with the history of the church from its commencement, and who now, in his ninetieth year, is as deeply interested, and I might almost say, as vigorously engaged, for its prosperity, as ever.

I have not been able to ascertain precisely the number of families that composed the congregation at the date of my installation; but in the somewhat more than two hundred families that compose it now, thirty-four only whom I found here, are still represented by either of the heads; while large numbers, in the mean time, have joined us for a season, and then withdrawn in consequence of their removal from the city. If the older members

\* HON. JOHN TOWNSEND.

† JOSEPH ALEXANDER, Esq.

will task their memories a little, I think it will occur forcibly to them that, during the last twenty-five years, this congregation has sent forth a larger number of active, influential men into different parts of the country, than perhaps any other within their knowledge.

Is it so then that the congregation which I now address, is by no means identical with that which received me as its pastor; and that many who have since formed part of my charge, are here no longer? And whither have these missing ones fled? Part of them are scattered in the East, and the West, and the North, and the South; and many, we trust, faithfully fulfilling the great end of life in their several spheres of action; but perhaps the larger part have gone the way whence they shall not return. I have seen the flood bearing along upon its bosom the wrecks of noble structures that have not been able to resist its force; and they have lodged for a while against some obstruction, and remained till perhaps some other agency has put them afloat again, and they have been carried forward towards the ocean; and such, I have often thought, has been the transitory

character of this congregation. It has been always stable, vigorous, and yet always changing.

If we look to the *church*, in distinction from the congregation, we shall find that corresponding changes have been going on there. The number of communicants in 1829, as appears from the record, was 335. Since that time, 452 have been received to the communion on a profession of their faith, and 257 by certificates from sister churches—228 have been dismissed to join other churches, and 117 have died. The present number of communicants, as it appears on our revised list, is 466. This, you perceive, does not correspond with the statistics I have now given you. The reason is that, of the multitude who have been but sojourners with us, not a small number have failed, on their removal to other places, to transfer their relation to churches within their reach; and through this culpable delinquency on their part, we have gradually come to lose sight of them, and in many instances have been unable to ascertain whether they were still alive. Under these circumstances, it was

thought best, in order that our printed catalogue might serve as an actual guide to us, to drop from it the names of all those, of whom, after diligent inquiry, we could find no trace. Notwithstanding our "Book of Discipline" makes no provision for a case like this, we felt ourselves constrained to such a course, rather than to grope blindly through a wilderness of names with which we had no ascertained connexion. I cannot forbear to say that the neglect in which such a necessity originates is highly reprehensible, though I believe, in our city churches, lamentably common; and every member who is chargeable with it, unless under some very peculiar circumstances, not only does great injustice to himself, but trifles with his obligations to the church with which he is connected.

If we limit our view to the *officers* of the church, here too we shall find that there has been a succession of changes. At the time of my installation, JOHN L. WINNE, JOHN BOARDMAN, CHESTER BULKLEY, and NATHANIEL DAVIS, were Elders; and DANIEL P. CLARK, Deacon. In 1832 were added to the Eldership ARCHIBALD CAMPBELL, LEMUEL JENKINS and

**JAMES BROWN.** In 1841 there was the further addition of **DANIEL P. CLARK**, **GALEN BATCHELDER**, **JOHN WINNE**, and **ARCHIBALD McCLURE**; and **JOHN KELSO** was, at the same time, chosen Deacon. In 1853 **JOHN KELSO**, **GEORGE H. COOK** and **JOHN NEWLAND**, were chosen Elders, and **ROSWELL S. MEACHAM** and **ROBERT H. WELLS**, Deacons. Of these, **Mr. CAMPBELL**, many years since, resigned his office and became connected with another church in the city; **Mr. COOK** and **Mr. NEWLAND** have recently resigned, on account of having changed their residence; **Mr. CLARK** is prevented from active service by bodily infirmity; and **Mr. BROWN**, **Mr. BULKLEY**, **Mr. WINNE** and **Mr. BOARDMAN** have died.

I should do injustice to the occasion as well as to my own feelings, if I were not, in mentioning the names of these departed fathers and brethren, to pay a passing tribute to their memories. **Mr. BROWN**, who died early, was a young man of excellent judgment, of quiet and unobtrusive manners, of generous dispositions, and of earnest, active piety. I never knew that he had an enemy; and if he had, I am quite sure that it was

without just cause. He left the city and returned to his friends in Vermont, on account of ill health; but as it turned out, he went away to die. Mr. BULKLEY was distinguished for great kindness of temper and manner, for a deeply devotional spirit, for a blameless and consistent life, and for being ready to every good word and work. Several years previous to his death, he returned to Wethersfield, his native place, where he made himself eminently useful, until he was overtaken by a wasting disease, which terminated in death. Mr. WINNE was by nature and habit a remarkable man. With a mind naturally quick, bold and comprehensive, he united an indomitable decision of purpose, and the benefit of considerable intercourse with the world. I have always understood that few, if any, had more to do than he in originating this church; and I think I am justified in saying that, during the years of his greatest activity, and while he sustained the double relation of Elder and Trustee, no man exerted more influence than he in giving direction to the *concerns* of the church. The one last departed was the venerable Mr.

BOARDMAN; than whom, if there is a man of more simplicity of purpose, or depth of devotion, or purity of life, to be found, I know not where to look for him. Whoever else wearied or faltered in the Christian course, he seemed always to be renewing his strength. Even in his old age, and when he was bowed under manifold infirmities, there was no waning of his love or zeal, or scarcely of his activity; and he never seemed walking in a brighter light than when he was walking down into the valley of death. Let the memories of the just be honoured, and their bright examples imitated, while their spirits rejoice in Heaven.

II. Let us notice, in the second place, the changes which the last twenty-five years have witnessed in respect to our *external accommodations and pecuniary resources*.

At the commencement of this period, we had no place in which to hold any public religious service, but this house. Here we had our Wednesday evening lecture; and here we observed the monthly concert of prayer; though this latter meeting, in those



days, passed by rotation, through the several Presbyterian and Reformed Dutch churches. The Saturday evening prayer meeting was held in private families, and as the place was appointed from one week to another, it was often the occasion of some embarrassment to ascertain where it was to be ; though I am constrained to say, from my recollection of those meetings, that their interest was not the less, but the greater, for their taking on so quiet, I had almost said, so domestic, a character. We had our Sabbath school in an upper room near the corner of State and Eagle streets, which I believe was used as a common school room during the week. This state of things involved so much inconvenience to the congregation, that it very naturally suggested the idea of increasing their facilities by the erection of a building designed especially for our less public religious services ; and the result was that in 1833, *the lecture room*, which forms almost a part of the church, was built. This left us nothing to desire, at that time, in respect to church accommodations.

When this house was completed in 1815, it was regarded as one of the most beautiful, as well as most commodious, church edifices in the United States. No expense was spared to render it both stable and attractive; it was worthy of the band of enterprising young men with whom it originated. But "time that doth all things else impair," had begun at length to make its finger prints on the interior of the house; and that which, thirty years before, had been admired for not only its convenience but its architectural grace and finish, now, in the light of modern improvements, revealed defects and inconveniences which called loudly for a general renovation. Accordingly, in the autumn of 1846, the project of *giving to the house a more modern form* was framed and entered upon; and it was not till April of the next year, making in the whole about seven months, that the improvements were completed; though our friends of the First and Third churches greatly diminished the discomfort of our temporary exile, by generously inviting us to share with them their places of worship. We came back to a house in every

respect what we could desire ; insomuch that it is hardly probable that the present generation will ever attempt or propose any further modification, either as a matter of taste or of comfort.

Another change proper to be noticed under this head has respect to our *church music*. The first singing that I heard here was started by Mr. BULKLEY'S tremulous voice, from beneath the pulpit, and sustained by voices all over the congregation ; and I leave it to you who are better judges than I am, to say how much has been gained to *devotion* by a departure from this primitive usage. But whether for better or for worse, a change took place in the course of two or three years, in the formation of a choir, which has continued ever since not only to take the lead in this part of our service, but I fear I must add, to perform it almost exclusively. I only do justice to them, however, when I say that they have taken great pains to render the music generally attractive ; and that the congregation is well satisfied with the result of their efforts. I found here, when I came, an organ which had been set up, not without

much opposition, some few years before, and which even then was understood to give out no very pleasant sounds to some members of the congregation. The prejudice, however, I believe, gradually died away; and for many years past, I have not been aware that there was an individual here who entertained it. That organ performed good service during a period of nearly thirty years; but it became manifest at length that it was losing its power, and was sometimes a hindrance rather than a help to our public devotions. Just as the necessity of having a better instrument had come to be generally felt, a gentleman who joined us a few years ago, from not only another congregation but another denomination, came forward in the spirit of a noble liberality, and offered to remedy the evil complained of, by furnishing a new organ at his own expense.\* His generous proposal was thankfully accepted, and has since taken effect; and now, within a few months, we have had this beautiful structure placed here, in which I understand it is difficult even for the most critical to detect an imperfection.

\* ANDREW WHITE, Esq.

I must not omit, in this connexion, to refer to an important change that has been recently accomplished in regard to our *financial condition*. The rents of the pews being fixed nearly forty years ago, and accommodated to the comparatively light expenses of that period, were found inadequate to meet the increased expenses of advancing years; and voluntary subscriptions for five years were several times made to supply the deficiency. The Trustees had too much wisdom not to perceive that such a state of things, besides occasioning much present embarrassment, promised any thing but good to those who should come after us. As the most efficient and only certain way of remedying the evil, it was proposed to request the pew-holders to surrender their original leases, in exchange for others based on a fair estimate of the present expenditures. The suggestion ultimately met with general approval; and through the perseverance and energy chiefly of two or three gentlemen, who deserve to be held in grateful remembrance, as benefactors of the church, the plan was very happily and harmoniously

carried into effect; and the consequence is, not only that no church debt now oppresses us, but that, with ordinary prudence, and an ordinary blessing, we may consider ourselves secure from such an evil for a long time to come.

III. Innumerable changes have overtaken individuals and families, during this period, in respect to their *temporal condition*.

If we confine ourselves to the natural results of *the flight of time*, we shall find that this, independently of all other agencies, has wrought changes equally uniform and irresistible. The men who were in middle life, when they received me as their pastor, and on whom the general direction of things then mainly devolved, now occupy the places which the older generation vacated when they passed off the stage. Those whose recollections of my installation are obscure and shadowy, because among their very earliest, have since passed through the periods of childhood and youth, and have now entered upon the engagements and assumed the responsibilities of mature life.

Meanwhile, many have set out on life's journey, some of whom are rejoicing in the days of their youth, while others have but just passed the threshold of existence. If it were possible that all who belonged to the congregation at the time of my settlement here, and who, by help obtained of God, continue to this day, could pass in review, one moment as they were then, and the next as they are now, what an impression would such an exhibition give us of the power of time! We take little note of these changes, because they are so gradual; but they are just as real and just as important, as if the results of a quarter of a century had been accomplished in a single moment.

There have been great changes, during this period, in regard to the *worldly fortunes* of many of this congregation. Some who, at the beginning, had fair prospects not only of a competence, but of opulence, have perhaps failed to realize their expectations, and have never risen permanently above a state of humble mediocrity. These, however, are the exceptions—the larger portion have been prospered in their worldly callings, and not a

few have acquired what the world calls a large fortune. And I am happy to be able to connect with this statement, another—namely, that the spirit of liberality has generally prevailed here in proportion as the means of it have increased; and there are not wanting those whose offerings to the cause of Christian beneficence render them conspicuous examples to the church and to the world. I am far from saying or from believing that every man among you gives according as the Lord has prospered him; or that the aggregate of our contributions does not fall far short of the extent of our obligations; but I still deem it proper to say, as a just occasion for gratitude, that there is a goodly number here who have right views of the worth of money, and who admit, not merely as an article of their creed, but as a principle of their conduct, the doctrine that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

Moreover, what changes have been effected in almost every dwelling, by means of *sickness* and *bereavement*! How few among you are there, who have not, at some time, been obliged to withdraw from your accustomed



labours, by reason of some malady which it required medical skill to control or dislodge! How many who have had protracted seasons of bodily suffering, and have passed so near the gate of death, that they expected to enter it, and could almost realize the scenes of the next world, who yet have been restored to their wonted vigour, and now bear no traces of the disease that prostrated them! Where, I had almost said, is the habitation among us, which has not echoed to death's footsteps; or if a few such are to be found, it may reasonably be doubted whether there is a solitary family here, that has existed during this period, or even the greater part of it, that has not, at some time, put on funereal badges. Yes, my friends, I am a witness that there has been mourning in the dwellings of most of you. And yet there is one circumstance that occurs to me in this connexion, as a remarkable illustration of God's preserving care and goodness—I refer to the fact that, though the pestilence has been here during four different seasons, and sometimes has done fearful execution, yet but three of the members of this congre-

gation, so far as I know, have fallen victims to it. One of these was an interesting young wife and mother, who died in the summer of 1849, and who had joined our communion but a short time before.\* I need not refer to the other two, for their departure is so recent that we have but just begun our mourning for them.† If the inroads which the pestilence hath made upon us are to be estimated by numbers, few congregations equally numerous, and equally exposed, have been favoured so highly; but if the estimate have respect to the character of the victims, the desolation has been terrible.

IV. Changes of infinitely greater moment have been passing upon this congregation, in respect to its *spiritual interests*.

There are a considerable number here whose Christian profession dates at least as far back as the beginning of my ministry. If, as we trust, they have been Christians indeed and in truth, their course has, on the whole, been onward; and their salvation is

\* Mrs. ISRAEL SMITH, Jr.

† Mrs. LYMAN CHAPIN and Mrs. THOMAS LEE.

now much nearer than when they believed. But their experience has been, by no means, uniform. If they have sometimes been on the Mount, and well nigh transfigured in the conscious enjoyment of their Redeemer's presence, they have also sometimes had occasion to exclaim, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him, that I might come even to his seat." If they have been strong to resist temptation at one time, insomuch that the fiery furnace and the lion's den would scarcely appal them, at another they have perhaps had occasion to go into their closets and ask God to forgive them for having dishonoured their Christian profession, by ignobly yielding to the tempter's power. Here they have received the rod with the spirit of a gentle and loving child; and there God hath seen, and they have detected within themselves, the workings of a rebellious temper. Now they have given out a bright light, and no one could doubt that they walked with God; but alas! there have been seasons in which, if their example has not become absolutely dubious, it has lost much of its purity and power. These may

be said to be the ordinary changes incident to Christian experience; and though all do not share them alike, it is safe to say that none are entirely exempt from them. They always form a proper subject for Christian retrospection; and never more than on an occasion like this, which marks the completion of a period that covers a large part of the longest Christian life.

But there are others here, and not a small number, whose great change from sin to holiness, from death to life, has fallen within the period of my ministry. Time has been, within the last quarter of a century, when all their interests centered in the world; and they had no habitual aspirations for any thing beyond it. They heard the offers of the Gospel with more indifference than if they had been the reveries of some dreamer concerning another planet. But a change at length passed over them—the beginning of the change that has its issues in Heaven. Some word of warning fell upon their ear, which, unlike all other monitory words that had preceded it, worked its way to the heart. And now the mind is filled with troubled

thoughts, by means of the new objects with which it is brought in contact. The obligation and majesty of the divine law, the impossibility of meeting its demands, the alternative at once glorious and fearful, of an eternal Heaven or an eternal Hell—these and other kindred truths lodge themselves in the bosom as great and living principles; and under their influence, conscience wakes to the office of a fierce accuser. And now, why should not the sinner convinced of his need, thankfully avail himself of the proffered salvation? He does avail himself of it—the Spirit at the same time breathing a renovating influence through his soul; he bows to the authority and grace of God, and stands forth a new creature in Christ Jesus. I say again, and I would say it with devout gratitude to the Author of all good influences—there are numbers here who believe, and whose lives justify *us* in believing, that the experience which I have now described, has been substantially their own. But I am constrained to ask whether there are not others among us, whose course in its progress has sadly disappointed the expectations it awakened in

its beginning. To the former class I would say, Hold on your upward way, with an unflinching step, taking still firmer hold of the Lord your Strength. To the latter I would say, Take heed lest ye be of the number of those whose pleas at the judgment shall be answered with—"I never knew you."

There is yet another class, who neither made profession nor gave evidence of being the disciples of Christ, before my settlement here, nor have they done so since; and yet, during this long period, they have been regular attendants on the preaching of the Gospel. And has no spiritual change been passing upon *them*? Not indeed that kind of change which it is the design of the Gospel to produce; but a change—a momentous, terrible change, notwithstanding. It has consisted in a constant advance from one degree of spiritual insensibility to a greater; in a perpetual diminution of the power of conscience to do that silent but mighty work to which Heaven has commissioned it; in an ever increasing ability to be absorbed in the present, without the intrusion of dark fears in

respect to the future — in a word, it has been an unceasing treasuring up of wrath against the day of wrath. Oh you are dreaming, my friends, if you imagine that the past quarter of a century has made no change in your spiritual state — it were bad enough indeed if it were really so; for in so long a period, you ought not only to have bowed to Christ's yoke, but to have reached great maturity in all the Christian graces. But even the poor comfort of having remained stationary is denied you — you have been every hour in a current that has been moving onward with constantly increasing force towards that world "where Hope never comes that comes to all." The corrupt inclinations which you have indulged, the temptations to which you have yielded, the warning voice from without and within which you have resisted, all the means of grace and all the influences of the Spirit, in the midst of which you have been thrown, have been, in one way or another, accomplishing within you a fearful work, which, for aught that man can tell, may even now mark you as vessels of wrath fitted for destruction. It is my privilege, even after

you have neglected the great salvation so many years, still to urge it upon you ; and I would fain do it to-day with unwonted earnestness and tenderness, reminded, as I am, by the flight of years, that it will be for me to warn, and for you to listen, but a little longer. What joy would be awakened in Heaven and on earth, if this hour, so consecrated in our grateful associations, should find you quitting the path to death, and casting in your lot with the travellers to Heaven! Silent indeed, but steady and fearful has been the change that you have been undergoing in the past—let the past more than suffice for having walked in this criminal and dangerous way. Henceforth let your course be in an opposite direction—safe, peaceful, and ever brightening, till it terminates in Heaven.

But this congregation has undergone important changes in its spiritual state, *collectively*, as well as in regard to its individual members. I think there has been but a single communion season in the twenty-five years, when none were added to the church ; though it must be acknowledged that we have had



protracted seasons of spiritual slumber, when I might well enough have taken up the Prophet's lamentation — "Who hath believed our report!" In several instances, the reigning lethargy has been broken up, the unreasonable claims of the world have been denied, and the paramount interests of the world to come exalted to their proper place; the voice of deep solicitude has mingled with the voice of devout thanksgiving; and Heaven and Earth have joined in a common jubilee in honour of redeeming grace. These changes, if they have not been frequent, have yet exerted a powerful and most benign influence on the character of this church. Considering the period in which they have occurred, I deem it due to truth and justice to say, that they have been brought about in connexion with the ordinary means of grace, and without even seeming to put in jeopardy any of the great principles of evangelical order.

V. Not a small number have, in the course of my ministry, made the momentous, irreversible change *from a world of probation to a world of retribution*. Some of them have died suddenly, and in their full strength, when we

expected many years of activity, and perhaps of Christian usefulness, to be added to their lives. Some have lingered through months of suffering, and the lamp of life has at last gone out so gradually that we have scarcely been able to mark the moment of its extinction. Some have died with the praises of Jesus upon their lips, and have seemed entranced as if with some Heavenly vision, before they were yet at the end of the dark valley. Some who had seemed to walk humbly with God, have moved tremblingly and doubtingly on the verge of life, because they were not sure that the Good Shepherd had them by the hand. Some, I am obliged to add, have died apparently in a state of profound unconcern, while a few have revealed the awful secret that they were dying without hope. But whatever may have been the circumstances in which they have died, and whatever their measure, or want, of preparation for death, each of them has made the crowning change of his whole existence; each of them has passed the veil beyond which all is retributive, and character never changes; each of them, while I speak, is a companion of seraphs or of fiends. Oh

what processes have here been going forward, issuing in eternal life or eternal death! How overwhelming the thought that so many immortals who used to sit, from sabbath to sabbath, within the sound of my voice, have passed into that world, where the truths which were here proclaimed to them, burn upon their spirits in a noon-tide of glory, or perform towards them a ministration of undying anguish.

What I have said may suffice to illustrate the more important changes that have occurred during my ministry. But I cannot forbear to say that, in respect to one feature in your character as a congregation, it is just cause for thankfulness that there has been so great uniformity—I refer to that spirit of harmony and mutual good will, the operations of which neither the accidental collisions of society, nor any of the disturbing controversies of the day, have availed to suspend. I found you indeed, on my first coming hither, just emerged from a violent conflict which had resulted in a considerable diminution of your numbers, and in the establishment of a new church. The agitation incident to that state of things of course did not subside with the passing hour; but I am happy to

say that it yielded to the lapse of years; and long since have you opened your hearts in goodly fellowship to the brethren who went out from you, and learned to be partakers of both their afflictions and their joys. Various questions of a social, moral and religious nature, have, during this period, urged themselves upon public attention, and in some instances, have swept through the community with the fury of a tempest; but, though you have, by no means, been agreed in your opinions concerning them, not one of them has ever fallen among you as a firebrand of contention. The Session and the Trustees, the Church and the Congregation, will bear separate and united testimony that no root of bitterness has sprung up here to trouble us.

You will not expect me—not even the most fastidious of you all—to let such a moment as this pass, without referring to the uniformly happy relations that I have been privileged to sustain to you. In looking back through the whole twenty-five years, though my mind pauses at some bitter scenes, it pauses at no point where your confidence or your kindness has failed me; and I think it much to be able to say, at this late

period of my ministry, that, if there is an individual in my charge whom I am forbidden to reckon as my friend, I am so happy as not to know it. I thank God and I thank you, that it is even so. Let my right hand forget her cunning, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth, rather than that I should ever lose the grateful sense of that forbearance toward my infirmities, that sympathy in my sorrows, and that generous ministration to my comfort, that have fallen like a blessed light upon my path ever since I have been among you.

Curiosity loves to explore the future; but God in mercy has interposed a veil which mortal vision cannot penetrate. There is, however, some light reflected upon what is to be from what has been; and in that light we may see that sickness, sorrow and death will still be here, blighting fond hopes, inflicting fresh wounds, and creating new demands for the consolations of the Gospel. We can see too that generations will continue to pass here like shadows across the plain; that instead of the fathers will be the children, and instead of the children, the children's children, and so on in an indefinite succession; and that each generation will

here receive, in no small degree, its training for immortality. Hearers, friends, would you have consolation laid up in store for you against the evil days? Would you have an incorruptible inheritance in reserve for you against the day of Christ's appearing? Would you have an eye to the best interests of those who will remain behind after you are gone, or whose earthly existence will begin after yours has closed? Would you render due honour to the memories of the founders of this church, and especially to the memory of that venerable servant of God, its first pastor, who had so much to do in giving it its distinctive character? Would you throw a hedge around this vine that the right hand of the Lord hath planted, which no wild boar out of the wood shall be able to scale or break down? Let me tell you, you may hope to accomplish all these objects, by yielding to the life-giving power of the Gospel, and walking as Christ also walked. If my heart does not deceive me, I long to see you all independent of the world. It comes over me like a death-chill that many of you who have provided so well for the present, have seemed to take so little thought for the future; that while you are

not only just but generous towards others, you are practising a fatal cheat upon your own immortal spirits. I pray you to pause—I pray God to bring you to a pause, lest reflection should come too late. If I knew that I was standing before you for the last time, what better could I do than to throw all the energies of my soul into a prayer that every heart here might become a temple of the Holy Ghost; for then though I should not be here to see you suffer, I should know that the Comforter would be with you; though I should not be here to see you die, I should know that nothing could harm you on your passage through the dark valley, and that all beyond would be Heaven. What minister of Christ whose last moments could be cheered by such a vision of glory as this, would not love to linger—I had almost said—even amidst the agonies of death?

And now what remains but that we endeavour to gather all the solemn teachings of this hour into one great lesson, that shall quicken our sense of mutual obligation, and render the relation we have so long borne to each other as minister and people, a channel of richer and still richer blessings. I would

that all that has been tender and solemn and grateful in this occasion, might perpetuate itself in an indelible impression upon our spirits, so that the time shall never come, when we shall not have reason to revert to this day, as an epoch in our spiritual well-being. I would that the occasion might make of me a better minister, and of you a better flock; that my preaching and your hearing might henceforth be more under the influence of the powers of the world to come. The morning of the fiftieth anniversary of my installation will dawn upon the graves of many who now hear me; and long before that day shall come, will another shepherd feed you and lead you — God grant that the *Good Shepherd* may take to his Heavenly fold those who shall pass away, and be the Refuge and Strength and Consolation of those who remain.

24.10.68