

Historical Discourse.

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A NEW YEAR'S SERMON:

DELIVERED IN THE

CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH,

JEWETT CITY, CONN.,

January 13, 1856.

BY THOMAS L. SHIPMAN.

Published by Request of the Church.

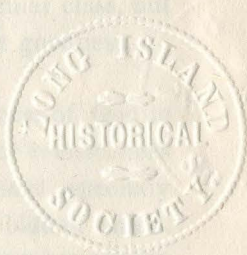
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Historical Dictionary

A NEW SERIES

CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH

THE CITY OF

28000

BY THOMAS SHIMMA



NOTICE



## DISCOURSE.

PSALM CXLV : 7.—“THEY SHALL ABUNDANTLY UTTER THE MEMORY OF THY  
GREAT GOODNESS.”

We have been accustomed to devote a half hour, on the first Sabbath of the year to retrospection, and to gather from the past lessons of wisdom for the future. That duty if performed at all this year, was fulfilled at the fireside;\* but perhaps it was not so carefully and thoroughly done as to make any thing further in the way of reminiscence at the present time, a work of supererogation. The text invites us to a specific office of retrospection, viz: *Calling to grateful remembrance the goodness of God.* As individuals, and as a people, a church and congregation, we have abundant occasion to utter the memory of God's great goodness. The Psalmist says that “they”—not any particular class, but the *people*, shall utter the memory of thy great goodness.

Let us then bring to remembrance the goodness of God to us personally, and as a people, not confining our remiscences however, to the past year, though noticing more especially the scenes of the year to which we have just bidden adieu.

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\* The delivery of the discourse on the first Sabbath was prevented by a violent snow storm which proved the commencement of eight weeks of memorably cold weather.

# I. *The goodness of God to us as individuals.*

We have enjoyed another year — life with its blessings, health, hope, happiness—life with its privileges; its opportunities of mental and moral improvement; its opportunities of contributing to the happiness of others, of serving our generation according to the will of God—life with its escapes, its deliverances from danger, its succors in temptation—life with its discipline, sometimes indeed sharp, but always salutary; its lessons of toil and trial, its wholesome restraints, its profitable corrections. To all before me life has been sweet, and they have enjoyed it. Childhood has enjoyed life. Free from care and full of health and spirits, the hours have sped merrily away. Youth has had much to enjoy, has enjoyed much, and might have enjoyed more if pleasure had never been spoiled by sin. Manhood, though often oppressed by cares and anxieties, has had much to enjoy, and if the hours have not always flowed smoothly, they have for the most part passed cheerfully along; and old age though its earthly joys have been more of memory than of hope, has had a stock of pleasant memories, and has renewed its youth in living over and over again the scenes of former years.

I dispose of my first topic in this summary manner that more time may be left for my second, viz: *Calling to grateful remembrance the goodness of God to us as a people, a Church, and congregation.*

It is now nearly a third of a century that this Church and congregation have existed in their present organization, and it has occurred to me that it might be neither an uninteresting nor unprofitable employment of a half hour to take a retrospect of some of the principal events in your ecclesiastical history. It will not be expected that I can gather around the



subject the interest which attaches to the ancient and venerable—to reminiscences evoked from the dim and shadowy past ; but while the facts are familiar to some before me, so fluctuating is the population of this village, that they will be as new to many as if they had transpired in years long gone by. I must anticipate several years the date of your organization, in order to include the history of your present place of worship, from the laying of the corner stone, in September, 1814. This house was erected, as some before me may not know, for the accommodation of an Episcopal Church, which had an existence in this village from 1814 to 1818. The first notice in the records of its brief history runs thus : " Preston, October 20, 1813. Whereas, it is proposed to engage and employ the Rev. Ammi Rogers to perform divine service, and to preach in Jewett City, in this town twenty-six Sundays, and to begin about the 1st of December next, now, therefore, we, the subscribers, promise to pay to the said Rev. Ammi Rogers, or bearer, the sum or sums which we hereunto subscribe, for each Sunday that said Rev. Ammi Rogers shall perform divine service and preach in this place, for the said term of twenty-six Sundays ; that is, we subscribe so much for each Sunday as we here affix to our names," thirty-five men subscribing from fifty to twelve and a half cents.

Going forward to February 8, 1814, we meet the following record : " We, the subscribers, sincerely desirous of promoting the public worship of Almighty God, and the temporal and spiritual good of mankind, do hereby unite and enrol ourselves as belonging to the Protestant Episcopal Church, in the United States, in that part of the town of Preston called Jewett City, in the County of New London, and State of Connecticut, and we hereby certify that we choose to be-



long to that denomination of Christians, availing ourselves of all the rights and privileges secured by an act of the Legislature of the State of Connecticut, entitled an act securing equal rights and privileges to every denomination in this State, enacted in October, A. D., 1791." Signed by twenty-three names. The next record of special interest is as follows: "At a meeting of the Rector, Church Wardens and Vestry men of *St. George's Church*, in Jewett City, lawfully convened, and in their place of public worship, the 3d day of September, 1814, Voted that the Rector, Church Wardens, and Vestrymen of the Episcopal Church in Norwich, and the Wardens and Vestrymen of the Episcopal Church in New London, and their families be respectfully invited to attend at the laying of the corner stone of *St. George's Church* in Jewett City, in the town of Preston, on the 14th day of September, inst., and that the Clerk of this Parish be directed to enclose to them a copy of this Note. Perry M. Herskell, S. Clerk."

I find no record of the laying of the corner stone, but there are those present who can testify from their own recollection, that it was laid as proposed, amid a large concourse of spectators, for the erection of an Episcopal Church, in such an old Puritan town as Preston\* was a novel occurrence. Passing on, we come to the following record: "March 23, 1818. Voted, that Messrs. Enoch Baker, Nathan Rose, and Peleg Fry, be a Committee to confer with the other parishes in the care of the Rev. Ammi Rogers, and to state his case, &c., and to apply to the next Convention for him in our behalf." The character of Mr. Rogers having become the subject of not a little scandal, his ministry soon ceased in this place. We have no desire to refresh your recol-

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\* That part of Preston in which Jewett City is situated, was made a town, by the name of Griswold, after the late Gov. Roger Griswold, in 1815.



lection of his subsequent history. It is an ungrateful task to trace the annals of blighted hope and ruined reputation. Suffice to say, that after leaving this place he led many years an unsettled life, and at length died in Milton, Saratoga Co., N. Y., aged 80 years.

The next and last notice is a sudden and rather violent transition, reading thus :

“ At a meeting of *St. George's Church* so called, in Jewett City, legally warned and convened in *Johnson's Hotel*, in said City, on the 30th day of March, 1824, Voted, that Elder Amos Read, be Moderator of said meeting, and Daniel Wight, Clerk; John Johnson, S. C. Morgan, and Daniel Wight, Committee to take charge of said Church, and do necessary repairs ; Daniel Wight, Key-keeper and Treasurer.

Adjourned without day.

Attest,

D. WIGHT, Clerk.”

You will observe an interregnum from 1818 to 1824. During this period the house accommodated various denominations particularly the Baptist—Elder Amos Read often occupying the pulpit.

On the 18th of February, 1825, a meeting was held to take measures for organizing a Congregational Society in Jewett City, to be known and called “ the 2d Congregational Society of Griswold.” At an adjourned meeting held March 14th, the Society was fully organized, and the proper officers appointed. It consisted at its organization of forty-five members, a large proportion of whom are now numbered with the dead. On consulting the town records, I find under date April 22, 1828, a document which is interesting as showing the tenure by which you hold this house. I extract from it as follows : “ Whereas, the 2d Congregational



Society in the town of Griswold, in New London Co., is destitute of a house of public worship, and are at this time unable to defray the expense of erecting one, and whereas, the undersigned are the owners and legal proprietors of the majority of the shares, or of the common and undivided rights in St. George's Church, so called, and in the land appertaining and belonging thereto, situated and being in said town of Griswold, in the village of Jewett City, and influenced by a desire to furnish said Society a house for public worship, on the conditions hereafter named, and to perpetuate in said Society the regular administration of the Gospel in all its ordinances of the orthodox Congregational denomination—orthodox according to the doctrines and precepts inculcated in the Westminster Catechism—now to this end and for this specific object, we, the undersigned, do, by these presents, hereby release and quit-claim to said Society all our undivided interest in and to said Church, and in and to all the land belonging thereto bounded Northwardly by land of Enoch Baker, Eastwardly by the road leading to said Baker's house, and Westwardly by the turnpike,—said lot lies in the form of a triangle, making an acute angle where said roads meet,—to be had, held, used, and occupied, and improved by said Society, so long, and on condition that said Society shall improve said house for a house of religious worship, according to the doctrines and precepts aforesaid, and for the denomination of Christians aforesaid, and no longer; and whenever said Society shall occupy or improve said house, or suffer the same to be occupied or improved contrary to the conditions or intendment of this grant, the grantors reserve to themselves the right and privilege of re-entering and taking possession of said Church, with all the improvements made thereon, and said property shall revert and revest in the grantors in the same manner and in the same proportions as it is



owned by them ; and it is understood by the grantors and grantees that, should there hereafter arise any question as to the improvement of said house, the orthodoxy of the Society or of the officiating clergyman, the same shall be submitted to a board composed of the Rev. Clergy belonging to the Consociation of New London Co., whose decision shall be conclusive as to the subject matter laid before them." Signed by sixteen grantors, of whom but five are now living, viz : S. C. Morgan, Daniel Wight, John W. Fanning, John C. Tibbits and Charles Johnson. The house thus deeded to the Society was dedicated September 3d, 1828.

Should the population of this village considerably increase, as it must whenever the valuable water privileges in the vicinity which have never hitherto fairly come into the market, shall be taken up, you will need a larger edifice ; meantime, this house with slight expense, could be remodeled inside, greatly to the improvement of its appearance, and the accommodation of the worshippers.

The Church was organized April 14, 1825, and consisted at its organization of twenty-three members. Their names are, Stephen Johnson, Lydia Johnson, Daniel Wight, Roxana Wight, Thomas H. Wilson, Lucy E. Wilson, Alfred A. Young, Lucy P. Young, Thomas Jackson, Esther Jackson, Mary Wilson, Lydia Johnson, Maria P. Morgan, Abby C. Wilbur, Heppy Fanning, Elizabeth Barstow, Eunice Cutter, Olive Phillips, Sarah P. Phillips, Mary W. Fanning, Anson S. Cobb, John Francis, and Esther Francis. Of the original members twenty were by letter from the 1st Church in Griswold.

Mr. SETH BLISS was the first minister invited to take the oversight of this Church and people. After preaching a short time as a candidate, he received a unanimous call to settle,



which he was pleased to accept, and was ordained June 15, 1825. The ordination services were performed in the following order: Introductory Prayer, by Dr. Osgood, of Springfield, Mass., Sermon by Prof. Fitch, of Yale College, from Colossians, i. 28; Consecrating Prayer by Dr. Nott, of Franklin; Charge to the Pastor by Dr. Strong, of Norwich; Right Hand of Fellowship by Mr. Hyde, of Preston; Address to the People, and Concluding Prayer by Mr. Nelson, of Lisbon.

Mr. Bliss' ministry was a prosperous one. He came with the dew of his youth yet upon him; he threw his whole soul into his work, and God was pleased to make his ministry a blessing to many. Fifty-six were added to the Church under his pastorate—thirty-seven by profession, and nineteen by letter. Most of those added by profession were the fruits of a work of grace in the Spring of 1831. This people shared largely in the blessings of that year, so remarkable for revivals of religion. I have often heard Mr. Bliss speak of the anxiety he felt for the results of the protracted meeting held in May. There were certain things in the state of the Society, which seemed to make a protracted meeting a measure of doubtful expediency, but "in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling" they came to it, and as it progressed, the tokens of God's gracious presence were so manifest that all doubt as to the propriety of the step was removed; the Spirit came down with great power, and strangers from neighboring towns were deeply affected on entering the assembly of God's people, and believers were daily added to the Lord, "of whom the greater part remain to this present, but some are fallen asleep." Twenty-four were added to the Church in July, the first fruits of the work, four in September, and seven in November, making an aggregate of thirty-five.



About this time Mr. Bliss feeling that the salary was inadequate to the support of his family, asked for a dismission, and the people reluctantly yielding to his request, his relation to his first and only pastoral charge was dissolved April 23, 1832. Soon after, he was elected to the office of Corresponding Secretary of the American Tract Society, Boston, where he still continues laboring with an energy that knows no remission, and sharing with the friends of the Tract cause, the pleasure of witnessing the blessing with which God has from the beginning crowned that department of Christian charity. May he yet live to pray for a people who will never cease to remember him with warm affection as their first Pastor.

After an interval of a few months, Rev. GEORGE PERKINS, of Ashburnham, Mass., received and accepted an invitation to settle with this people. His installation took place August 8, 1832. Under his ministry, which continued but six years, fifteen were added to the Church, eleven by profession, and four by letter. Mr. Perkins, though plain and unimposing in his manners, was a man of sound mind and sterling worth: whilst lacking some elements of a popular speaker, his life was a continual sermon. This people lost not a little when they lost the presence and power of his example. His domestic affairs seeming to demand more attention than he could give them consistently with his continuing in his present place, he obtained a dismission, September 4, 1838, and removed his family to the residence of his late father-in-law, in Norwich Town, where he remained till his death. For several years after his removal to Norwich, he supplied the congregation at Bozrahville, but his declining health rendering this service onerous, he relinquished preaching altogether, and waited in patience his "CHANGE." For that change he was prepared by the discipline of sorrow; within the



lapse of a few years he was called to part with a second wife, an only daughter, and the eldest of his two sons.\* From the last sudden and stunning blow he never recovered, but body and mind both sank under the shock. He died September 17, 1852, aged 69 years. "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints."

Immediately upon the dismissal of Mr. Perkins, Mr. WILLIAM WRIGHT was called to preach as a candidate, and was ordained November 8, 1838. Under his ministry eighteen were added to the Church, eight by profession, ten by letter. Mr. Wright was dismissed at his own request, April 28, 1842. Though his ministry was brief, God was pleased to crown its close with a precious work of grace, part of the fruits of which it was my privilege to gather into the Church. He is now settled in South Windsor, in this State.

The speaker after laboring for several months as a stated supply, was installed April 5, 1843. Under my ministry, protracted, as a Pastor, and as a stated supply, already to nearly fourteen years, there have been added to the Church eighty-seven, thirty-six by profession, fifty-one by letter. We have enjoyed two or three seasons of more than special religious interest, the last, which occurred in the Winter and Spring of 1854, some before me will not be likely soon to forget. The whole number added to the Church since its organization, is one hundred and seventy-six, ninety-two by profession, and eighty-four by letter. The present number of the Church is sixty-nine; males twenty, females forty-nine. Added the last year, one by letter; four removed—one by death, three

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\* He had just entered Yale College when the failure of sight compelled him to abandon an education. He took a whaling voyage mainly for the benefit of his eyes, and while engaged in capturing a whale, was instantly killed by a stroke from the whale's fluke.



by dismissal. Of the present members forty-five are resident, twenty-four non-resident.

The Church has had but four Deacons. Dea. STEPHEN JOHNSON sustained the office alone from the organization of the Church until the Summer of 1848, at which time JOEL HYDE was chosen Deacon, and entered upon the duties of his office September 3, 1848. The office of Deacon having become vacant, by the death of both these venerable men, at a meeting of the Church holden July 21, 1854, HENRY L. JOHNSON, and NEHEMIAH T. ADAMS, were chosen Deacons, and these brethren having signified their acceptance of the appointment, were inducted into office by prayer and imposition of hands, September 3, 1854.

Since the pastoral office was last vacated, September 6, 1854, events deeply interesting to those concerned have transpired. Rev. HENRY T. CHEEVER, has with great unanimity been called to the pastoral work, and though he has not yet accepted the call, the probability is that if the people conclude to wait until he has completed an engagement with another people, he will then be ready to accept their call, and enter upon this new field of labor with the advantages of the experience he has already had in the sacred office.\* In connection with the calling of a Pastor, a fund of \$8,000 has been raised to place the support of the Gospel upon a permanent basis. The accomplishment of this object has cost some effort—I think I do not speak other than truly and soberly—but I presume I speak the sentiment of all who have

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\* Mr. C. has since accepted the call, and was installed May 29, 1856. The services of the occasion were as follows: Invocation and Reading of the Scriptures, by Rev. N. T. Allen, of the Baptist Church, Jewett City; Introductory Prayer by Rev. George Seale, of Hampton; Sermon by Prof. Shepard, of Bangor, Me., from Rom. i. 16; Installing Prayer by A. Bond, D. D., of Norwich; Charge to the Pastor by Rev. J. P. Gulliver, of Norwich; Right hand of Fellowship by Rev. H. P. Arms, of Norwich Town; Address to the People by Rev. T. L. Shipman, their late Pastor; Concluding Prayer by Rev. B. F. Northrop, of the 1st Church, Griswold.



borne a part in it, that they would not if they could, recall any portion of what they have given, be it more or be it less, to an object so dear to their hearts, and which promises such rich blessings to those who shall come after them. The day when the last dollar was subscribed is one of the days which will not be apt to slip from my memory. It was dark and stormy without, but it was very *sunny* within. A fund which shall make the preaching of the Gospel a gratuity is to be deprecated upon the principle that what costs us nothing, we value nothing ; but a fund which will lighten the burdens of a feeble Society, is greatly to be desired, and will make the memory of those who established it precious. I have been accustomed to state, at the opening of the year, the amount of our charitable collections for the past year. We have contributed to Home Missions, \$30 ; to the A. B. F. C. M., \$70 ; to the American Tract Society, \$35 95 ; to the Marquesas Mission, \$3 ; making an amount of \$138 95. The aggregate of our collections for thirteen years, dating from 1843, is about \$2,200. Of this, \$1,100 to the A. B. F. C. M. ; \$429 to the American Home Missionary ; \$444 56 to the American Tract Society ; \$200 to various other objects including the American Bible Society ; the American Seamen's Friend Society ; the American Protestant Society, (now merged in the American and Foreign Christian Union ; ) State Temperance Society ; for erecting Church edifices at the West ; \$30 contributed by the Sabbath School at different times for furnishing Libraries to Sabbath Schools at the West.

I know not how your minds are affected by these reminiscences, but for my own part, my heart has been greatly interested in looking back over the history of this Church and congregation, and I find abundant reason to utter to-day the memory of God's great goodness. We could not expect to speak of large additions, whether by profession or by letter,



to a Church located as this is, in a village so small, and where the greater part of the population belong and have all along belonged, to another religious denomination. We are not permitted to speak of princely donations to benevolent objects, where there are no merchant princes, where we can point to no millionaires; but when we take into view our position, and our mission as connected with our position, while we have no occasion for boasting we have abundant reason to speak to-day of the goodness of God—to praise Him for the past, and to trust him for the future. I have no doubt that this Church is destined to live and to grow stronger, and if they who now compose it are faithful, to share largely in the tokens of divine favor. It was my lot to labor with you in your weakness, and God knows how gladly I would have labored on with you, whether in your weakness or in your strength, if it had not been my deepest conviction that my health was not equal to the work. Perhaps there is no better place than this, when sorrow comes over the heart at the thought of the final sundering of ties which have been very strong and very tender, to speak of death's doings among you the past year; and not the past year only, but in years that are gone, but which come back to-day with the memory of the loved and the lost.

The number of deaths the past year has been twenty.\* The first on the the scroll of mortality is a patriarch of ninety-seven years—the oldest inhabitant† of the town; the second an infant of three days, thus bringing extreme age and very infancy side by side in death. Of the remaining eighteen, the first was a cherished female member‡ of this

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\* The record includes all the deaths which have occurred in the village, and the deaths in such families out of the village as are connected with the two congregations in the village.

† Mr. James Tyler

‡ Mrs. Nathan Johnson.



Church whose name I need not repeat, for it is in your hearts if not on your lips. The remaining seventeen include a variety of names, each of which, if spoken in the ears of this entire community would strike a tender chord in some heart. The proportion of the young among the dead of the last year has been unusually, if not unprecedentedly large. Of the twenty who have died, eleven—more than half—were under four years of age. Some of these little ones fell at the very touch of disease, and others struggled day after day, keeping hope even against hope alive in the bosoms of fond parents, till nature sank in the unequal conflict, leaving nothing to the bereaved parents but to say, though with streaming eyes: “It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth him good.” The aggregate number of deaths for the fourteen years during which I have kept a careful record is two hundred and twenty-six; the largest number in one year is twenty-four; the smallest eight; the average sixteen. Such a fact brings with it a very plain and very solemn lesson; it teaches us that death is not only among the *possible* events to us of the present year, but a measurably probable one, not indeed so *probable* as to make the expectation of living this year irrational, yet so probable as to make preparation for dying this year one of the plainest dictates of *prudence* and *wisdom*. Whatever it be which we would by all means do before we die, let us do that now. If we would become Christians before we die let us become Christians now; if as Christians we would live a higher life before we die, let us begin that life to-day.

We have employed the season of meditation this morning in reviewing the religious history of this congregation, and I am sure there is nothing in which I could have so interested you, as in your religious history. Religious associations are our strongest associations; religious recollections



are our most vivid recollections. It is a tribute which all pay, old and young, saints and sinners, spontaneously and involuntarily, to religion.

With gratitude, then, for the past, we commit the future to the All Good ; and may He who regardeth the cry of the humble, vouchsafe his presence to cheer our steps ; and after this life receive us to himself, that where He is there we may be also ; and all the praise we will render to His great name, both now and forever. Amen.

