

**A SEMI-CENTENNIAL ADDRESS DELIVERED IN
THE UNIVERSALIST CHURCH, SALEM, MASS.,
THURSDAY, AUGUST 4, 1859, ON THE
OCCASION OF CELEBRATING THE FIFTIETH
ANNIVERSARY OF THE
DEDICATION OF THE CHURCH, AND THE
INSTALLATION OF REV. EDWARD TURNER**

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A Semi-centennial Address Delivered in the Universalist Church, Salem, Mass., Thursday, August 4, 1859, on the occasion of celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the dedication of the church, and the installation of rev. Edward Turner by Lemuel Willis

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LEMUEL WILLIS

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ON THE OCCASION OF CELEBRATING THE

FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY

OF THE

DEDICATION OF THE CHURCH,

AND THE

INSTALLATION OF REV. EDWARD TURNER,

BOTH OF WHICH TOOK PLACE JUNE 22, 1809.

BY REV. LEMUEL WILLIS,
OF WARREN, N. H.

WITH AN APPENDIX.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST OF THE COMMITTEE.

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Received
of the
Charles W. Swasey

SALEM, Aug. 10, 1859.

REV. LEMUEL WILLIS:

Dear Sir,—At the final meeting of the Committee of Arrangements for celebrating the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Dedication of our House of Worship, and of the Installation of our First Pastor, held last evening, it was unanimously and very cordially

Voted, That the thanks of this Committee be tendered to Rev. LEMUEL WILLIS, for his interesting, instructive and valuable Semi-Centennial Address, delivered in the Universalist Church in Salem, on Thursday last; and that we respectfully request a copy thereof for publication.

Attest,

CHARLES W. SWASEY, CLERK.

WARREN, N. H., Aug. 15th, 1859.

TO CHARLES W. SWASEY:

Dear Sir,—If the hastily prepared and quite imperfect Discourse, delivered by me at your late Semi-Centennial Celebration, is thought worthy of being preserved, I cheerfully grant a copy of the same for publication.

LEMUEL WILLIS.

DISCOURSE.

MY CHRISTIAN FRIENDS :

A Half Century has passed away since this noble Church Edifice was erected and dedicated to the worship of the Divine Father ; and since he, who first ministered at this altar, was here inducted into the sacred office.

And, to-day, in the good providence of God, some of the descendants of them who assembled within these walls for the first time fifty years ago, to participate in the unusual joy of that great occasion, are now come to this hallowed shrine, with many others—a few of whom were then also present—to join in the appropriate service of a Semi-Centennial Celebration of the glad events of that day, and to enjoy a pleasant and profitable re-union.

It seems fitting that the children, and children's children, of the Fathers and Mothers in our Israel, should commemorate the praiseworthy zeal and Christian firmness which distinguished them in their devotion to the cause of a true but unpopular religion, and their earnest endeavors after the Christian life.

It is suitable—it is well—that we sometimes pause on our life-journey, and, in retrospect, survey the landmarks we have passed, recalling to mind some of the many incidents of our sojourn, that our spirits may be refreshed with a recollection of the virtues and graces of our fellow-travellers,

and those who have preceded us; being won to imitate their excellences, and to follow them in so far as they have followed the great Exemplar of Christians.

Hence, great events and important epochs in the history of nations, peoples, and individuals, have been commemorated, in all ages, by centennial, semi-centennial, and anniversary celebrations.

It seemed a duty devolved upon you not to let the period of the half century* of your existence, as a religious Society, pass unnoticed by some public act on your part. And, consequently, you, in your wisdom, have judged it expedient to adopt measures by which the leading facts of the history of the origin, growth, and present condition of your Society might be gathered up, so that your children, and contemporaries, and generations to come, might know what your predecessors have done, and what yourselves have accomplished, for the promotion of a faith worthy the love and honor of mankind, and for which we should be willing to labor and wait.

But, really, I could have wished that some one better qualified than myself for the discharge of the duty, had been designated to address you, here and now. And in view of the imperfections that may appear in this Address — and no doubt they are many — it may be due to your speaker to say that since he received, from your Committee of Arrangements, a communication of your wishes in regard to the part assigned him on this occasion, a great press of business and many cares have given him but slight opportunity to be prepared for the service of this hour. But, as in former years, when, as your pastor, he was disposed to respond to your calls to serve you, as best he could, so has he now done.

Contemplating the rapid diffusion of the benign principles of the Gospel, and the progress liberal Christianity has made during the last fifty years, the language of the prophet Isaiah

*See Note A.

was suggested to my mind, recorded in the 60th chapter and 22d verse of his prophecy :

"A LITTLE ONE SHALL BECOME A THOUSAND, AND A SMALL ONE A STRONG NATION."

Rapt into scenes of future time, the old prophet beheld the triumphs and glory of the kingdom of God among men ; and, by this emphatic utterance, has expressed a law of Divine Providence, having effect alike in the domain of matter and of mind, viz. : the principle of the process of Growth.

Nothing is more true than that vast results and surprisingly great consequences often flow from, or grow out of, what appear to be insignificant and inadequate causes. These great results and consequences often have small beginnings. But such is the will of God. He who causes the lordly oak to be evolved from the tiny acorn, and the magnificent Amazon to take its rise away up among the tall crags and rugged steepes of the mighty Andes, — where it is only a little rill, flowing from a diamond-sparkling spring, — has so arranged the affairs of His kingdom that the weak things of the world shall confound the things that are mighty ; that "a little one shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation."

Would we look abroad in community for illustrations of this principle, we should find every department of life thronged with them.

For example ; among the many who have adorned the walks of science in this city, your own BOWDITCH stands nobly forth ; and among your merchant princes, you delight to honor the memory of your FORRESTER, DERBY, GRAY, and PEABODY. Moreover, in other walks of life we might instance many noble examples of such as have arisen, by their own earnest endeavors and the blessing of God, from an inconspicuous and lowly condition, to high position, great power, and extensive usefulness. So true it is that

from small beginnings, and under unpromising circumstances, we yet see magnificent results achieved.

How small a thing, in itself considered, gave a timely hint to the comprehensive mind of the great Sir Isaac Newton, and helped him to form a true conception of the law of gravitation and the sublime science of Astronomy! or how trifling a matter suggested, to the quick perception of the illustrious George Stevenson, that amazing power which is turning so many wheels upon land and water all over the world, to aid man in his labors and travels!

And how small a thing, when a few words, uttered by an intelligent, earnest minded woman — whom he went to convert from what he then regarded as her great error—prepared the way for JOHN MURRAY to see his theological mistake, and finally to become a steadfast believer in the ultimate salvation of the entire race of man. And what amazing consequences have ensued, and shall yet ensue to the world, from the result of that interview!

But equally small was the circumstance, and alike wonderful in its results, that caused the great and good ELHANAN WINCHESTER to “come to marvellous light.” It was while he was an eloquent and successful preacher of the Baptist denomination in the city of Philadelphia, near the close of the last century, that a small volume, entitled “The Everlasting Gospel,” by Paul Seigvolck, a German theologian and Universalist, was put into his hands. The argument of that little book had the same effect upon his mind that the falling of the apple is said to have had upon the mind of Newton. It induced a new train of thought and reasoning, and led the understanding to rest in new and surprising views. Winchester, by his great learning, piety and eloquence, caused, in a few years, many thousands, by his preaching and writings, to come to rest in the soul-satisfying belief of the final universal Restoration of all fallen intelligences.

The doctrine of the law of growth, as taught by the prophet, was strikingly verified in the history of the rise, growth, and ultimate greatness, of the Hebrew Commonwealth; and even more so, in the commencement, progress and diffusion of Christianity. Its Divine Author fitly represented his kingdom — his religion — in its beginning, growth, and final greatness, by the mustard seed, — the smallest of seeds when sown, but, when grown, it is the greatest among herbs and becomes a tree, so that even the birds of heaven may come and lodge in its branches.

Several Protestant sects have arisen into existence and power, whose history further illustrates our subject. Among these, I will instance the Methodist denomination, and our own.

It is but about one hundred and twenty-five years since the renowned founders of this sect commenced, what we may justly denominate, that great movement in establishing and spreading abroad, very widely, the faith that distinguishes this numerous Christian people. By their eloquence, zeal and perseverance, they won many converts to their religion; still, in our day, we see how a little one has become a thousand — nay, millions. This vast body of believers, like every other sect that has arisen, has, no doubt, had an important mission in behalf of the moral and spiritual advancement of the Redeemer's kingdom in the world. Whitfield and Wesley were providential men. The same is true of Murray, Winchester, and Ballou. These seem to have been God-sent, and hence their preaching was attended by the spirit's power in a high degree.

But these workmen are dead, whilst their work remains and speaks to us and the world. Their memory will be blest; and though these our Fathers were persecuted and charged with being the enemies of true religion, they were really as honest, as truly sincere, and loved their Master's religion as well, as any others who have claimed to be called