

**HISTORICAL DISCOURSE, DELIVERED
BEFORE THE FIRST CHURCH AND
SOCIETY OF WINDHAM, CONN.,
DECEMBER 10TH, 1850: BEING THE ONE
HUNDRED AND FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY
OF THE FORMATION OF THE CHURCH**

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Historical discourse, delivered before the First Church and Society of Windham, Conn.,
December 10th, 1850: being the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the formation of the
church by John E. Tyler

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JOHN E. TYLER

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BY JOHN E. TYLER,
PASTOR.

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HISTORICAL DISCOURSE.

"REMEMBER HIS MARVELLOUS WORKS THAT HE HATH DONE; HIS WONDERS, AND THE JUDGMENTS OF HIS MOUTH."—Psalm cv. 5; also 1st Chron. xvi. 12.

THE words of my text are a portion of a Psalm prepared by David, and delivered into the hands of Asaph and his brethren, to be sung before the Lord, on a memorable day in Israel.

The Psalm is mainly a review of God's dealings with his ancient people. It recalls his marvellous works from an early period in their history, and frequently exhorts them to bring these displays of power and mercy into grateful remembrance. The purport of the Psalm generally, and the language of the text, particularly, inculcate a duty which commends itself to every enlightened understanding, and to every pious heart.

God is honored by his people in a suitable remembrance of his dealings with them; and the exercise of recalling, and considering the ways in which he has led them as individuals, as families, as churches, as communities, is calculated to promote their spiritual welfare by awakening a sense of dependence on God, confidence in his character and government, and gratitude for his unmerited goodness.

Fifty years ago this day, the people composing this church and religious society assembled in their place of public worship to call to remembrance the works of the Lord toward *themselves and their fathers*, for the period of ONE HUNDRED YEARS of their history. We have assembled this day, the same church, the same society, but a different people, to call to remembrance the works of the Lord toward *us and our fathers*, for the period of ONE HUNDRED AND FIFTY YEARS. A century and a half has passed since the organization of this church, in a wilderness

portion of the Colony of Connecticut, which has become the parent of other churches, on the north, on the east, and on the west, whose representatives here with us to-day we welcome, as entitled to participate in commemorating the hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the birth-day of their mother.

It is hoped that it may not be without profit to us to look over the history of God's providence relating to this church and people, from the early beginnings till the present time.

The first English habitation in the territory now known as the town of Windham, was erected in 1689, by Lieut. John Cates, a Puritan, supposed to have been a member of Cromwell's army, who fled from England on the accession of Charles II. to the crown of Great Britain.* The name by which he is known may not have been his original name. It is possible that it was assumed for security against British spies, who were ready to seize in any place, any and all persons who had rendered themselves obnoxious to the despotism of the Stuarts. He came first to Virginia, but not regarding himself as sufficiently secure, he procured a servant and came to New York, then to Norwich, and then to the retired plantation of Windham. The name of John Cates, whether a true or fictitious name, deserves to be remembered with honor by us and by our posterity, as it has been by our fathers before us. This town, and other towns in our neighborhood that once constituted a part of this, even now enjoy the benefit of an annual appropriation of money for the support of common schools, the product of his liberality. A portion of the small vested fund possessed by this church, was his gift. Also, a portion of the communion plate, which we still make use of in commemorating the Saviour's dying love.

Lieut. Cates was evidently a man of property; and his works testify that he was a man of intelligence, enlarged generosity, and true puritan enterprize. From the time when the first habitation was erected, it would appear that the settlement of the

* The land which embraces the town was given in 1675 to a certain number of gentlemen named as legatees in his last will, by Joshua, Sachem of Mohegan. It was partially surveyed in 1676, and the main street was laid out. Purchases were made for settlement in the two following years.

place increased with great rapidity; for in three years, that is, in 1692, (May 12,) the settlers obtained from the Assembly the grant of *Town privileges*. It was in advance of all the other towns of this county in the date of its settlement; and for a considerable period was one of the most prominent towns in the eastern part of the state.

At the first town meeting holden after town privileges had been conferred, (June 11th, 1692,) among other proceedings, this important vote was adopted:—"Voted to apply to Mr. Samuel Whiting for the purpose of carrying on the work of the ministry." Mr. Samuel Whiting was the son of Rev. John Whiting, of Hartford. He is supposed to have come to Windham at the beginning of the year 1693; and tradition declares that *he preached his first sermon on the first day of the year, the first day of the week, from the first chapter of the Bible, and from the first verse*. There is good reason to believe that this tradition is well-founded. Mr. Whiting is represented to have been a man of excellent abilities, rendering him highly useful in the civil transactions of the town; and he is known to have assisted in gathering many of the churches in the county.

"In May, 1693, as an inducement to tarry with them four years, the settlers offered him fifty pounds a year, an allotment through all the division lots, and to build him an house two stories high, and eighteen feet square. In 1697, they gave him a call to ordination. In 1697 the call was repeated, and eighty loads of wood added to his salary. December 4th, 1700, he was ordained; and on the 10th of December, 1700, the church was gathered, and he was gathered with it as pastor. His salary was afterwards raised to 100 pounds and his wood."

Fifteen male persons became members of this church in its organization. Of these, eleven have been recovered from the defaced records left by Mr. Whiting. They are as follows: Rev. Samuel Whiting, Deacon Thomas Bingham, Deacon Joseph Carey, Joshua Ripley, Thomas Huntington, Joseph Huntington, John Backus, Jeremiah Ripley, Jonathan Crane, Joseph Hebard, and Samuel Abbe. These are therefore the names of some of the very early and prominent inhabitants of the town. If a letter may be presumed to have been conveyed from Wen-

ham, Mass. to this place, in the time intervening from October 29th, to December 10th, the following persons should also be reckoned among the number gathered with the church at its organization, viz: John Abbe and Robert Hebard, with their wives, Hannah Abbe and Mary Hebard; for there is a letter of antique dimensions preserved on the cover of the church records, dated "Wenham, October 29th, 1700," dismissing these persons from the church in the aforesaid place, and recommending them as suitable individuals to "join with others in gathering and erecting a church at Windham." This letter concludes with this language, "We commend you all, with your pious and Christian design, to the guidance and conduct of the blessed and effectually quickening spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ, praying he would be with you in that weighty worke; helping you to build up, and to be further built up in the kingdom of his grace here, being preserved blameless and brought to his kingdom of glory hereafter: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all, Amen.

Yours in the Lord, Joseph Gerrish, Pastor, with the consent of the Brethren of the Church of Christ at Wenham."

Mr. Whiting labored as a minister in this place thirty-two years, and was pastor of the church twenty-five years. He married the sister of Rev. Eliphalet Adams, of New London, by whom he had thirteen children,—eight sons, and five daughters. He died of the pleurisy, at Enfield, while on a visit to his friends, September 27th, 1725, in the fifty-sixth year of his age. It is said that on his death-bed, he made two *special prayers*, one for his family, and one for the continuance and prosperity of his church.

During the latter part of Mr. Whiting's ministry, it pleased the Lord to pour out his spirit upon the people of this place, and a very interesting and distinguishing revival of religion was enjoyed. Perhaps there is no record of any revival in our country at that early day, which equalled this in extent and power. In the space of six months, eighty individuals were added to the church, as the joyful fruits of this spiritual refreshing.

President Clap, in a letter to Rev. Mr. Pierce, of Boston, having remarked on the event, that so large a number were

brought into communion with the church in so short a period, says that it was "without extraordinary apparent occasion, but through the secret operation of the spirit of God upon their hearts." He meant, doubtless, that it was in connection with the faithful use of only the *ordinary* means of grace.

In acknowledgment of the goodness of God, the church set apart a day of thanksgiving, and Mr. Whiting delivered a sermon from 1st Thess. iii. 8. *For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord.* The sermon was published at the time, in New London, with an introduction by Rev. Mr. Adams. It confirms the opinion naturally derived from the history of his ministry here, that he was an able, faithful, and zealous preacher of the gospel. The doctrine he deduces, supports, and improves from the text, is thus quaintly expressed: "*All godly persons, and especially they that have taken pains with people for their good, will be much refreshed and comforted, and it will help to balance the trouble they meet with, when they that have been brought over to the acknowledgment of the truth, do stand fast in the Lord.*"

Mr. Adams makes the following observations in the introduction to this sermon:

"It seems to be something necessary that some account should be given of the occasion of the ensuing discourse, and it may, (through the blessing of God,) be useful unto many, when they shall hear of the grace of God unto others, and how he hath been mercifully pleased to visit his people. Windham is a town of about some thirty years standing, where the Rev. Mr. Samuel Whiting hath been improved in the work of the ministry, even from their beginning. God hath been pleased to make him a very rich blessing among them, and doubtless many will have reason to bless God forever, in that their lot hath been cast to dwell under his ministry. Not only hath he seen the town flourishing to that degree in this short space of time, as that two other societies have sprung out therefrom, but he hath had the comfort to observe that many living and serious Christians have been born there, and that his labor hath not been in vain in the Lord.

But of late there has been a greater stirring than ordinary among the dry bones. Many have been awakened to consider and inquire with a great deal of earnestness, *what they should do to be saved.* Persons of all ages and some of whom there was but little expectation, have come together weeping to seek the Lord their God, so that within the compass of about half a year, there have been four score persons joined to their communion, and more are still dropping in, so mightily doth the word of God grow and prevail among them. Could their revered pastor have been prevailed upon so far to have gratified the