

**ADDRESSES DELIVERED AT THE
DEDICATION OF THE TOWN HALL,
MEDFIELD, SEPTEMBER 2, 1872,
AND AT ITS RE-DEDICATION,
NOVEMBER 10, 1874**

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Addresses delivered at the dedication of the town hall, Medfield, September 2, 1872, and at its re-dedication, November 10, 1874 by Robert R. Bishop

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ROBERT R. BISHOP

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DELIVERED AT THE DEDICATION OF THE TOWN HALL, MEDFIELD,

SEPTEMBER ¹⁰2, 1872,

AND AT ITS RE-DEDICATION, NOVEMBER ²⁷10, 1874.

BY

Roberts

ROBERT R. BISHOP.

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1875.

ADDRESS.

[SEPTEMBER 10, 1872.]

I ACCEPT with grateful pleasure the task of speaking to-day ; for which of her children can come back again to a town having the history and the memories of this town, — can come back on a festival day, — with other emotions than those of joy and love ? We come, the sons and the daughters of Medfield, to devote to its uses in a formal manner this building, the gift of a son of Medfield. We come up to the old street, we come under the shadow of the old trees, but into this new hall which his munificence has provided for future generations. If you were to visit Medfield coming from Newton or Needham, and should cross the high land near Mr. Franklin Shumway's house, or coming from Sherburne should pass over the hill by Mr. Charles Howe's, or if you came from Walpole across that beautiful plain, near which sixty years ago lived the beloved physician of Medfield, Dr. Elias Mann, whose house, to his credit be it said, the present owner preserves in all its fine old form, — from either of these spots, looking toward this place, you would see to-day, and you would have seen for years, a picture, I venture to say, unsurpassed in its kind. Seated here in the midst of its embowering trees, every line proportionate, every figure harmonious, this place realizes Goldsmith's line,

" Loveliest village of the plain."

But I have been struck during the past summer — have you not? — to see how that picture is rounded out, and filled, and made complete by the outline and the form of this building appearing in the midst. As you look, it seems natural, and yet it is new; it seems familiar, and yet you have never seen it before; and you cannot tell whether by its proportion, its comeliness, and its fitness to the place, it adorns the spot more, or whether the ancient trees, and the surrounding buildings, and the spot adorn the building more. And let me congratulate you, friends, at the outset, upon what, possibly, is the chief characteristic of this new building; namely, that it is fitted to this old town. I have not forgotten that a new broom breaks the handles of all the old ones, nor the sad story of the man who, persuaded by his daughter, bought a pair of new brass andirons; how the brightness of the andirons put to shame the dullness of the old shovel and tongs, so that a new pair of shovel and tongs had to be bought; then the brightness of the new shovel and tongs was a great discomfort to the old table and chairs, until a new table and chairs were obtained; and they, in turn, distressed the carpet, and that had to go and a new one take its place; and so on until the man was ruined. But the principle to be derived from such examples rightly apprehended does not apply to this case. If you introduce something that is new into the midst of that which is old, it does destroy the harmony of it, it does disarrange the symmetry of it, it does spoil the arrangement of it, if it is not fitted for it; but it adds a beauty to it, it discloses a charm which you did not suppose existed, it develops a perfection which was not dreamed of before, if it is fitted to it. And just here, in my opinion, — pardon me for saying it, — is where the skill of an architect, if he has skill, and the good sense of a building committee, if they have good sense, come into play. It is not by the extravagant expenditure of money, it is not by building the largest house, or the

most elegant house, that an architect shows his skill, or a building committee their wisdom ; but it is by building a house fitted to its purposes, and to its place. I care not whether the house was built two hundred years ago, or built to-day, whether it is large or small, whether it is elegant or economical, — show me a house which is fitted to the uses to which it is to be put, and to the spot on which it stands, and I will show you a house built in good taste, and with good sense. Try this house by that standard. Consider the problem the Trustees were to solve ; the germ of it, the substance of it, is contained in apt language in the will of the donor, when he requires the Trustees to erect a building, such for " materials, form, and beauty of finish," as a judicious expenditure of the bequest would admit. Beauty of finish! that is one requirement. Who are they who dislike beauty? Where is he who is not better for the beauty of flowers? Where is he who is not happier for the beauty there is in the faces of little children? The difficulty is to determine what is beauty, for it consists as much in the absence of those things which offend the taste, as in the presence of those which gratify it. It consists in the chasteness and rigidity of exclusion as much as in the amplitude of admission. But surely those things which are beautiful only are of no service, and therefore should be discarded ; and he who says that will point us to a score of things about this building which should have been omitted because they are beautiful only. And I think if he were to come up from the North End, and round the corner, and take a full view of this building, the first thing he would put in his catalogue would be the graceful and airy railing which runs along the ridge-pole and mounts the turret. That, surely, is of no service. It is graceful, it is beautiful, it makes you better for looking at it ; but it is of no service, and therefore it should have been omitted ; of no more service, friend, than the two buttons on the back of your coat, and therefore should have been omitted.

A little girl who was born and had spent all her childhood in India, was sent at the proper time to her aunt, in New England, to be educated. On the morning after her arrival her aunt dressed her in a new gown made purposely of very plain stuff, because she knew the little girl had not been accustomed to finery, and the only ornaments there were on the dress were two simple bows, one at the elbow and the other at the shoulder. The little girl came down to breakfast, and, after "Good morning," looking at the bows with a pleased but puzzled expression said, "Auntie, I am glad you put these bows upon my dress, they are so comfortable and convenient." She had not the vocabulary of fashion, but she knew that they made her comfortable and happy. She instinctively knew that, like all proper adornment, they marked the difference between civilized enjoyments and barbarous pleasures.

The other requirement is as to form and materials: and what should these be but of the most permanent and enduring character,—for this building is not built for a day, but for your children and their children's children. A house, like matrimony, like wedlock, should endure. And how much thought there was in the language of him who said: "This has been a good house to live in; it shall be a good house to die in." And if that is true, friends, of your house and of mine, how much truer is it of the house of the town, built, and to stand, in memorial of her son. Looking, then, friends, into the future, thinking of the days which shall be when we are not, shall we not pronounce this a work well done, and done forever?

And thinking of the future, we come naturally to think of the past, of that long succession of years, that long procession of events, which have transpired since Medfield became a town. Medfield became a town in 1650.¹ Think how long ago that was!

1. For this and succeeding references, see NOTES appended.

Then Oliver Cromwell was at the head of the State in England, and John Milton was his secretary. King Charles the First had been beheaded about one year, and Hampden had been dead about seven years. In the province of Massachusetts there were, I believe, about forty towns.² The spirit of intolerance and oppression against the Quakers and other heretics was rising to its full height. The next year John Clarke preached to a handful of Baptists at Lynn, and he was publicly tried by a court, and sentenced to pay a fine, and one of his associates publicly whipped; and the law previously passed, perhaps designed originally to prevent such civil disorders as had prevailed in Europe, was set in force with intent to banish forever all Baptists from the soil of Massachusetts.³ In the same year a law was passed prohibiting gentlemen from wearing top-boots, and gold and silver lace, and prohibiting ladies from wearing, among other things, Tiffany hoods, and requiring that the selectmen should see to the fulfillment of these requirements.⁴ If, as I suspect, Tiffany hoods bore some relation to modern bonnets, I have no doubt the selectmen had an agreeable duty in enforcing the part of the law which applied to them. In the same year a war of conquest on the part of the United Colonies of New England, for the subjugation and annexation of New York, was prevented by the sober common sense of Massachusetts.

Among the towns most remarkable, in some respects, of that colony was the town of—Contentment. Yes, that was the name; for when the first settlers of Dedham had built their houses, and marked out their lots, they petitioned the General Court to be incorporated as a town under the name of Contentment, because they said they had observed the strifes which were prevalent in the other towns of the province, and had observed how good men could dip their hands in each other's blood for the sake of religious opinions; therefore, they, being peaceably disposed, of one

mind and heart, inclined to live together in unity and the fear of God, prayed to be incorporated as a town, and that their sentiments might be embodied in its name. But the General Court thought otherwise, and incorporated the town under the name of Dedham. This was in 1635. Shortly afterward many of the inhabitants, allured by the fertility of the soil, the beauty of this spreading plain, and the luxuriance of the meadows, came to what is now Medfield, and settled what was then called Meadfield and Bogastow, and in the years 1650 and 1651 this was established as a distinct town, the first offshoot from Dedham.⁴

In the year 1651, John Eliot undertook to form his settlement of Indians at South Natick. He built three long streets on the banks of the Charles River, and drew the Indians into habitations, and clothed them with raiment, and put over them the laws which Jethro recommended to Moses,—one ruler for a hundred, two rulers for fifties, ten rulers for tens. Dedham complained of being deprived of that territory, and accordingly commissioners were appointed to go out and inspect, and provide other land for Dedham in the place of that taken at South Natick for the Indians. The commissioners went to Ashburnham and the district comprising what are now the other towns on the border of Massachusetts near the southern line of New Hampshire. If you should take the Clinton and Fitchburg Railroad and go to that vicinity, even if you should go no further than Fitchburg, and look out upon the Rollstone Hill, which is opposite, I think you would make the same report which the commissioners made when they came back; they said that it seemed to be the backbone of the province, and they did not think it was fit for agricultural purposes.

Meanwhile reports of the great fertility of the Connecticut Valley had come to the East, and other commissioners were appointed who went to what is now the beautiful town of Deerfield.