

**A SERMON, DELIVERED ON SABBATH
MORNING, JAN. 4, 1846, CONTAINING
SKETCHES OF THE HISTORY OF THE SECOND
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH AND
CONGREGATION, ALBANY,
DURING THIRTY YEARS FROM THE PERIOD OF
THEIR ORGANIZATION**

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A Sermon, Delivered on Sabbath Morning, Jan. 4, 1846, Containing Sketches of the History of the second presbyterian church and congregation, Albany, during thirty years from the period of their organization by William B. Sprague

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WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE

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BY THEIR PASTOR,
WILLIAM B. SPRAGUE, D. D.

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1846.

HISTORICAL SERMON.

I. SAMUEL, VII., 12.

Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it EBENEZER, saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us.

The occasion of this incident, as you will doubtless remember, was the signal victory which the people of Israel, under the direction of Samuel, gained over the Philistines. Samuel, who was the last of the judges, stood forth, at a time of great declension, an eminent reformer. Having charged the people to put away all their idols, and return to the worship and service of the true God, he commanded them to assemble at a place called Mizpeh, supposed to have been about eighteen miles northwest of Jerusalem, with a view to make public confession of their sins, and, with appropriate expressions of humiliation,

to seek the divine forgiveness. This gathering, though it was strictly for a religious purpose, awakened the apprehensions of the Philistines, that it might be a rendezvous for war; and forthwith they put themselves into a hostile attitude, and marched forth against Israel in all the pomp and terror of an invading army. The Israelites, alarmed at their approach, earnestly implored Samuel to intercede with the Lord their God, that he would save them out of the hand of their enemies. And while Samuel, agreeably to their request, was engaged in this pious act, at the same time offering up a lamb for a burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to battle; and scarcely had the prayer passed from his lips, when "the Lord thundered with a great thunder upon the Philistines," to their complete discomfiture; the consequence of which was that they fell an easy prey into the hands of the Israelites. Samuel deeply felt that the victory was from God; and our text records the manner in which he acknowledged it. "Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it EBENZER, saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us."

This devout recognition by Samuel of God's paternal care and goodness toward the Israelites, is but a faithful expression of the feelings of every good man in the review of his own personal experience. In the recollection of the duties he has been enabled to discharge, of the trials he has been enabled to endure, of the temptations he has been enabled to overcome, of the perils he has been enabled to survive, he is deeply conscious of having been under the guidance and guardianship of an all-wise, almighty and all-gracious God. "Hitherto hath the Lord helped me: to him be rendered the gratitude of my heart, the praise of my lips, the obedience of my life."

This language is as appropriate to communities as to individuals; for, while a community is nothing else than a collection of individuals, these individuals are the subjects of many common mercies, for which a common tribute of thanksgiving should be rendered. Indeed it was in reference to a community—to the people of Israel at large, that this expression was originally uttered by Samuel: when he looked around and saw their enemies fallen and scattered, as in a moment, it led

him to consider that, not on that occasion only, but through their whole previous course, the hand of the Lord had been upon them for good; and hence the retrospective bearing of the declaration, "*Hitherto* hath the Lord helped us." It will surely be no forced application of the passage, to use it as introductory to the brief history of our own church, which I design this morning to bring before you; for, while the most general view of our experience as a Christian society cannot fail to supply materials for fervent gratitude to God, we shall, if I mistake not, find that these materials thicken upon us, the more closely and minutely our history is contemplated.

It may possibly occur to some, that this church is still too much in its infancy to furnish a legitimate subject for historical detail; and, therefore, that the whole matter should be left at least to the next generation. But in reply to this I would say, that much the larger portion of those who now constitute the congregation, have joined it long since the establishment of the church; and they, of course, will be glad to be informed in respect to its early history. And as for the original mem-

bers who still remain, it surely cannot fail to interest *them* to have their thoughts directed back to the good providence of God, as they have seen it manifested toward the church from the beginning to the present hour. The time allotted to this service will not allow of any thing beyond a mere outline of our history; but *that* I trust will be found a faithful one, the materials having been supplied either by written records, or by the recollection of many of our older members.

As the original settlers of this city, whose descendants, for a long time, held a nearly exclusive possession of it, were from Holland, it happened, as might have been expected, that the only religious denomination that existed here for much more than a century, was the Reformed Dutch. By the close of the French war in 1763, however, there was a sufficient number of Presbyterians here to justify the project of establishing a Presbyterian church; and such a church was actually established in the latter part of that year, and the Rev. William Hanna was chosen its first pastor. Their first place of worship was on a lot bounded on the east by William street, on

the north by Beaver street, on the south by Hudson street, and on the west by Grand street. It was a building of considerable size, with a tall steeple, and fronting to the east; and it continued to be occupied by the church till 1796, when their present place of worship in Beaver street was erected. Their first minister, Mr. Hanna, continued with them but about two years, and was succeeded by the Rev. Andrew Bay, who remained five years; and from that period till after the close of the revolution, the church seems to have been without a pastor. In 1785 the Rev. John McDonald took the pastoral charge of the church, and after him successively, the Rev. Eliphalet Nott, the Rev. John B. Romeyn, and the Rev. William Neill, the latter of whom held the place when the colony came out of which our own church was originally formed.*

The immediate occasion of the establishment of this church, was the increase of the number of Presbyterians in the city, beyond the capacity of the only building that existed for their accommodation. For a considerable

* For the above facts I am indebted to the Rev. Dr. J. N. Campbell, the present pastor of the first church.