

**A HISTORICAL DISCOURSE
PREACHED OCTOBER 27,
1895, IN THE MEETING-HOUSE
ON CANTERBURY GREEN**

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by Andrew J. Hetrick

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ANDREW J. HETRICK

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The Congregational meeting-house (before renovation) which was erected on Canterbury Green in 1804-5.

A

HISTORICAL DISCOURSE

71864

Preached October 27, 1895,

IN

THE MEETING-HOUSE ON CANTERBURY GREEN

In Recognition of its Renovation,

BY

REV. ANDREW J. ^{Jackson}HETRICK, A. M.,

Acting Pastor of the First Congregational Church,

CANTERBURY, CONN.

NORWICH:
RECORD JOB PRINT,
1895.

NOTE.

As many persons have expressed the opinion that this discourse ought to be published, and have requested a copy of it, I have deemed it expedient to revise it and place it in the hands of the printer. The division descriptive of the work done on the meeting-house, etc., was omitted in the delivery, mainly because of the great length of the discourse, and, for the same reason, Prudence Crandall's school of colored girls, which was located in this parish, was not discussed. That famous institution has been much talked and written about from a partisan standpoint, but there is another side to it which would form an interesting chapter and which may be given to the public some day in a separate article.

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HISTORICAL SERMON.

Blessed be the Lord, the God of our fathers, which hath put such a thing as this in the King's heart, to beautify the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem.—[*Ezra* vii: 27.

This Scripture carries us back to a period subsequent to the return of the Jews from their Babylonian captivity. They were taken down to Babylon in different deportations, and, while some were there longer than others, the captivity of all was brought to a close by the decree of Cyrus in the year 536 B. C.; and the return under this decree, like the carrying down, was made at various times. Some returned under Zerubbabel in 535 B. C.; some under Ezra in 458 B. C.; and some under Nehemiah in 445 B. C. Those who returned first rebuilt the temple at Jerusalem, and the house of the Lord spoken of in the text of this afternoon is the building they erected, the second Jerusalem temple, which is known in history as "the temple of Zerubbabel," because it was put up under his immediate superintendence. This temple, of course, succeeded that of Solomon which, you know, was the first and which was destroyed by the Assyrian army in 586 B. C., in the war that resulted in the Babylonian captivity; and it was perpetuated in what was afterwards called "the temple of Herod," who had it repaired just a short time before the beginning of the Christian era. Three Jerusalem temples are thus spoken of, but there were really only two, the third being but the second repaired and improved.

This building was begun in 534 B. C., "amid the songs of the priests and Levites, the tears of the old men and the shouts of the young," and solemnly dedicated to the service of Jehovah in 516 B. C. It was larger than Solomon's temple, but probably inferior in architectural splendor; and 58 years after its construction, Ezra with a picked band of 1777 persons was sent by Artaxerxes, king of Persia, to add to its adornments. For the accomplishment of

this work, he was entrusted with valuable offerings which he faithfully applied; and it is no doubt with reference to it that he says in our text: "*Blessed be the Lord, the God of our fathers, which hath put such a thing as this in the king's heart, to beautify the house of the Lord which is in Jerusalem.*"

It seemed to need beautifying greatly in the eyes of the elders who had seen the first temple, for Haggai, who wrote 70 years after its destruction, asks: "Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do you see it now? Is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?" No doubt, considering the gold and silver, the rich carvings and other ornaments of Solomon's temple, there was a vast difference between it and the temple of Zerubbabel, and it was well regarded a cause for devout thankfulness that the latter was made more beautiful, more attractive in appearance.

Even so is the beautifying of any religious structure a cause for similar thankfulness, whether it be a grand cathedral with a magnificent dome and vaulted roof, with fretted ceilings, ornamented columns and storied aisles, or a plain village chapel with a modest spire that points to heaven and a sweet-toned bell that stately summons to worship within its walls: and in speaking to you further, this afternoon, I may turn now from the temple of Zerubbabel, with its numerous chambers, its beautiful arches, its sacred altars and mystic furniture, and accommodating the text of this occasion to a building more familiar to us all, exclaim: '*Blessed be the God of our fathers, who hath put such a thing as this in our hearts to beautify the house of the Lord which is in Canterbury.*' It is our own meeting-house, then, that shall have our attention largely today. Like the second Jerusalem temple, it, too, as you well know, has been repaired and beautified and made very much more attractive than it was before, and all that is involved in what has been thus accomplished should evoke our grateful feelings to the Great Head of the Church. But not undertaking now to emphasize this thought, let us dwell simply on what is implied in the work that has been recently done here. No doubt, several things are implied in that, which are of more than ordinary interest to the members and friends of this parish, and if you will bear with me, I will endeavor to show what they are.

First of all, then, a house of the Lord certainly existed here on which to perform this work. Indeed, one has existed here nearly

200 years, not all this time the same one to be sure, yet one that could be called a house of the Lord, because dedicated to his service. When the first house of this kind was built in Canterbury is uncertain. As you may know, the first book of the Society records has been lost or destroyed, while the first book of the Church records, which the Separatists carried off when they left, was sold some twenty-five years ago to Mr. James Terry, who took it to Hartford and, after holding it some time, put it in charge of the Connecticut Historical Society. The last-named as well as the first, if still in existence, ought to be in possession of this parish, and I hope will be some day. If they could be consulted, especially the Society's first book, some light might possibly be thrown on this point, but be that as it may, a meeting-house was built in Plainfield some twelve years after the first settlements in Canterbury, which were made about 1690. Canterbury was then still a part of Plainfield, and before the building of this house religious services were held probably in private houses on both sides of the Quinebaug. Rev. Joseph Coit, Plainfield's first minister, conducted public worship part of the time two Sundays on the east side to one on the west, and part of the time two Sundays on the west side to one on the east; but this was not satisfactory to the people, and, following the custom of that time, which was much to their credit, they hastened to make more fitting arrangements. In 1702, a site on Black Hill "near a common and convenient crossing place of the Quinebaug," was selected "as one that would best accommodate the inhabitants on both sides of the river," and on this, the same year, a meeting-house was erected. This was probably occupied for a short time jointly by the people east and west of the Quinebaug, but on account of the difficulty of crossing the river, an ecclesiastical council, convened in the autumn of 1702, "advised the people to follow the natural division of the territory" and to divide Plainfield into "two distinct societies, or townships." This advice was followed, and the next year, 1703, Canterbury was organized, and its inhabitants began to make preparations for the erection of a meeting-house on their side of the river. They made a model or plan, and got out some timber the same year, but did not immediately go forward with the work. Embarrassed by the slenderness of the means at their disposal, they wanted to enlarge these by the extension of the boundaries of the town "northward up to Captain

Blackwell's south line." They deemed this additional land indispensable to the erection of the house, yet afterwards found they could get along without it; but it is not known exactly when they completed the building. In 1705, they obtained an eligible site. That year, Robert Green conveyed for thirty shillings (a mere nominal sum) to the inhabitants of the town three and a half acres of land on a hill near his house, "to build and erect a meeting-house on, or for training, or any other use the said inhabitants of Canterbury shall see cause for;" and on this land, long known as Canterbury Green, and afterwards reduced by the sale of one and five-sixteenths acres in two tracts, they put up the building; but in so doing they did not make rapid progress. The labors, the self-denials, the struggles and hardships incident to pioneer life all tended to retard that. So, in 1706, it was said of the timber they had prepared, that it was "likely to lie and rot," and in 1708, it was probably still exposed to this likelihood or liability, for they were then released from the payment of country rate to the colony, provided that the money due "be improved by them for the building a meeting-house in their town within one year next coming." Perhaps, they were moved by this inducement to go forward, and so far complete the structure in 1709 that it could be occupied; but if so, it is certain that it was not entirely finished then, for in 1719, the selectmen were ordered to "get it glazed at the town's charge." It looks as though it was used, without windows, for divine service, ten years; but, however this was, and whenever it was completed, it was, probably, the first church building erected in Canterbury. I say *probably*, because William Kinne, who was elected clerk of the Church in 1837, says substantially that two meeting-houses had been erected on this Green already by 1711; but after a careful study of the subject, I have come to the conclusion that he was mistaken in making that statement.

I cannot stop to give the reasons, but it is morally certain that it was the first. As such it did not answer, many years, the purpose for which it was erected. It was either not good enough, or not large enough, more probably the latter, because of the rapidity of the settlement in those early times. At any rate, it was not satisfactory, and so, on Jan. 5, 1731, the town voted "that a new meeting-house should be built, 50 feet long, 45 wide, and sett on ye town land where or near where the old meeting-house now stands."