

**A HISTORICAL ADDRESS, BEFORE
THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
IN SALISBURY, CONN., AT THEIR
FIRST CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION,
NOVEMBER 20, 1844**

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A Historical Address, Before the Congregational Church in Salisbury, Conn., at Their First Centennial Celebration, November 20, 1844 by Adam Reid

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IN

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AT THEIR FIRST

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November 20, 1844.

By ADAM REID,
PASTOR OF THE CHURCH.

Delivered by Request.

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A D D R E S S

ONE HUNDRED years ago a church of Christ was organized in this place, and Mr. Jonathan Lee ordained and installed their Pastor; and we are this day met to commemorate the event. To meditate on the past, to dwell on the deeds and the virtues of our ancestry, and to sanctify times and seasons for their more special remembrance and celebration, has ever been deemed a profitable and becoming employment. *It is sanctioned by scripture.* Once every year were the tribes of Israel commanded to assemble in Jerusalem, to commemorate the great event of the passover, when the angel of the Lord smote the first born of Egypt, and when in consequence, their fathers were led forth from that land of bondage with a high hand and an outstretched arm, and virtually began their national existence. *It is hallowed by custom.* Germany celebrates the birth day of Luther; Protestant Christendom unites with her in commemorating the rise of the Reformation; and we annually do honor to the day when our fathers forever renounced allegiance to the throne of England, declared themselves free and independent, and began to live as a nation. *It is dictated by the holiest yearnings of nature.* To venerate the memory of our fathers, to desire to dwell under the same old roof, to sit by the same old hearth-stone, to look on the same sights, and use the same household furniture, to drink water out of the same old well, drawn by the same old bucket, to stand under the shadow of the same old elm, and look out upon

the same old mountains, to worship in the same sanctuary, and at last to lay our bones in the same sepulchre;—what man owning a healthy and unsophisticated heart does not feel that this sentiment is a right and a proper one, honorable to our nature, and essential to true manhood;—and what is this but the feeling that prompts us to a more special commemoration.

“To be ignorant of what happened before we were born,” says an ancient sage, “is to be always a child.” History is but the tribute which the present pays to the past. If it be right to reverence old age, then is it right to reverence antiquity. It is simply the love of kindred and ancestry; and a nation or an individual without this feeling, must ever be heady and high-minded, rash and revolutionary. It is a *conservative* feeling—a sober, filial, submissive feeling; essential to a good mind—essential to peace, and good order, and wise thinking, and judicious advance;—and they who would hastily condemn or break away from the sentiments of their fathers, rejecting them because they are old, and for the mere sake of showing their independence and superiority, prove that they are lacking in the best elements of mental greatness. They are unwise men—men of conceit—proud, ambitious, self-sufficient, headlong; men whom we *cannot* love, and whom we *will not* trust.

We honor the principle that makes the descendant of a long illustrious line feel proud of his lineage, and love to dwell in the old baronial hall where his fathers have dwelt for a thousand years before him, and look with emotions of reverent delight on every grey turret and every antique, time-worn battlement. It is natural and instinctive, sacred and hallowing. There never has been, and never can be, a truly great and patriotic character without it; and every thing that tends to cherish this feeling in a nation—and especially a nation like ours, where from the very nature of our government, the tendencies to rashness and innovation are so strong—the famous battle-ground, the Thermopylae where fought and fell the assertors of its liberty, the home or the grave

of the illustrious patriot, the small sequestered graveyard with its lowly monuments and quaint epitaphs, the old rebellious Charter Oak, and the tottering antiquated building;—all ought to be guarded with a pious care and a filial veneration. They are sea marks in the tide of time, linking us with the days and deeds of the illustrious dead; and if this holy, reverential feeling could be spread throughout the land, and incorporated with the national mind, it would do more to restrain the spirit of lawlessness, to give stability to our government, and to check that headlong, revolutionary tendency, which is everywhere prevalent, than all the terrors of the magistrate and all the enactments of the statesman.

Communities are like individuals; they have their infancy, their youth, their manhood, and very often, though not necessarily, their old age; and to be able to form anything like a true estimate of their character, or a conjecture as to what, in all likelihood, will be their future destiny, we must study the earlier stages of their history. We must know the character of their ancestry, the principles of their early training, the perilous or prosperous passages of their course, on what rocks they were in danger of foundering, through what straits they with difficulty ran, to what causes are owing the more peculiar features of their moral being, the events that awakened their energies and developed their resources, and, in short, all the diversified experiences of their past life. By tracing the stream from its source downwards, by observing the occurrences that follow each other in regular sequence, we are able to discern those more recondite causes, and those more secret springs of action, whence have flowed events universally admitted it may be, yet hitherto unexplained, or but very partially understood.

The annals of a church in a country town like this must necessarily be limited; and yet in travelling over so wide a space as one hundred years, nothing more, it is obvious, than a mere sketch can be given, leaving many things entirely unnoticed, and

touching only on those events and features of the history which appear to be the more prominent and instructive.

Nothing is more remarkable in the character of our fathers, than the value which they attached to the public ordinances of religion. No sooner had the humble cottage been built to shelter themselves and their families, than efforts were made to obtain the establishment of the gospel ministry among them.— Their first want was a home to live in, their second a dwelling place for the God of Zion. They felt that, without the hallowing influences of christianity, life would be unsanctified and unblest, and their children would grow up in heathenism, under the power of principles and passions which would defeat all the grand purposes of existence; that the foundations of society would be insecure, unless laid upon the religion of Jesus Christ, as the chief corner stone; and that whatever their civil institutions might be, or the skill and policy with which they were administered, or the outward advantages of their lot, the elements of society would be ever loose and disjointed, and in danger of dislocation and anarchy, without the cementing bond, the strong conservative influence of the gospel. They knew nothing of the unhallowed disorganizing maxim of our day, that politics and religion must be kept wholly unconnected, that in seeking to promote the one we are at liberty to disregard all the obligations of the other, that what is morally wrong may after all be politically right. Such a principle they would have justly deemed infidel and atheistical, incompatible with the exercise of a good conscience, dangerous to the interests of public liberty, the inlet to all knavery and dishonesty, and palpably opposed to the commonest principles of piety and morality; and they would no more have thought of acting on it, than of attempting to overturn the government of God, or to breathe without his will and live without his bounty. Religion with them was a paramount principle; it shaped their laws, it governed them in the choice of their officers, it moulded their public speeches, it established

and regulated their schools, it governed the entire economy alike of their public and their private being. And we have yet to learn how or in what respects these sentiments of our noble ancestors were either unscriptural or impolitic; or that in soundness of mind, in natural sagacity, in sober sense, in nobility of intellect, in sterling scholarship, in true eloquence, and in all that goes to make able statesmen and a prosperous people, they were inferior to any of their unworthy descendants of this day who affect to despise them.

And they would have been unworthy of their descent, as well as unfaithful to their God, if they had acted otherwise. It is the glory of the Pilgrim fathers, that from the day of their landing on the rock of Plymouth, the establishment of the gospel ministry, and of all the institutions therewith connected, was an object of paramount solicitude—I ought rather to have said, before the day of their landing. While yet in the cabin of the *Mayflower*, they had made full provision for the public worship of God. They were christian men—sober, grave, solid, religious men—the winnowed wheat of old England—men who were willing to sacrifice their earthly all for the love of Christ and liberty of conscience;—and ere they had so much as looked on that rock-bound coast whither the hand of providence was leading them, or knew how or where they were to find a home to shelter themselves and their little ones from the unwonted rigors of an untried winter, they had entered into sacred compact; and every arrangement which piety and self denial and wise sagacity could dictate, had been made for the regular administration of gospel ordinances.

It is the fashion of the day to cast contempt on the character and institutions of these men—men to whom we owe everything of civil and religious liberty that exists in the land; but we have no sympathy with such a course; we pity it, and we despise it, as the offspring of a presumptuous ignorance or an unhallowed heart. We glory in these men—we glory in their characters—