

## Dedicatory Service of the First Congregational Church.

The affairs of the First Congregational Society seem, just now, to be making up a large part of the news of our town. Last week, a portion of the paper was taken up with a description of the farewell services, in their old building, reared in 1732. Then the last words were said, the last looks taken at the old familiar seats and aisles. Now we are called upon to note their entrance into their new, finely located, imposing and commodious edifice.

The corner stone of this building was laid October 7th., 1873. Its length is 90 feet, its width 55 feet. The tower rises to the height of 100 from the ground, the spire rises fifty feet above the belfry. In the tower hangs the old bell that has been "ringing out the old and in the new" for many a year, pealing merrily the marriage bell, and tolling slowly, as if it were an unpleasant task, the funeral hours, for many a townsman. The church is located at the head of Middle street, fronting the town house and the soldiers monument. The main entrance is from the southeast, side entrances on the north and west. Passing from the southeast, the vestibule stretches imposing lengths and widths away. Crossing this, you enter by two doors the vestry, lying just beneath you, three or four bannistered steps leading down. Sliding doors on each side of the platform separate this from the dining room that stretches the width of the

building; and back of this are, on the west side, the kitchen and pantry, in the centre the ladies parlor, large and well lighted, with an exceedingly convenient cloak room at its side, on the north, is the entrance to the flight of stairs leading to the audience chamber above and the choir.

Going back again to the vestibule, we see leading up, right and left a broad stately sweep of stairs, which, connecting with a wide landing above, that goes the width of the church, forms the main passageway to the audience room of the church. Four doors opening inward from the landing make the entrance ways. The room itself is filled with seats arrayed in circular form, almost surrounding the pulpit which is at the northwest end, six chandeliers hang over two aisles. Back of the pulpit and some 12 or 15 feet from the floor is the gallery of the choir, with a fine organ in the recess planned for its reception. At the southeast end of the church immediately opposite the organ and gallery for the choir is another gallery twenty feet in depth. The seating capacity of the church is about six hundred. Looking at the church as a whole, at its pulpit, pews and rooms, it must be recognized as a model of taste and beauty, of comfort and elegance.

The dedication of this beautiful church to the worship of God took place on Thursday of last week. The services were announced to begin at 2 P. M., but long before that time the road was thronged with people, some in carriages, some on foot, but all eagerly pressing toward the main entrance. The scene within was indeed

beautiful and gladdening. The hands that had so often covered the nakedness of the walls and pillars and galleries of the old building, making "the desert to blossom as a rose," had an occasion and surroundings now, well worthy of their cunning. How truly they rose equal to their opportunity, let the following clipped from the letter of a friend on its way to the mail describe. "No words can describe the beauty of a single flower. Not one of the miracles Christ wrought on earth, not even the sacred mystery of our Saviour's birth is more wonderful than the smallest leaf or blossom that grows. How then shall we describe the charm, the glory of the many that were brought to grace the church this day! The shining twining smilax hung its wreaths from vase and basket; Creamy calla-lilies and drooping ferns filled gilded urns on either side of the pulpit; and carnations glowed, and rose-petals opened and their perfume, floating out on the warm air gave us a sense of their loveliness past all telling."

The exercises began with a voluntary on the organ, whose majestic tones rolling through the house, prepared the audience for the fine rendering, by the united choirs, of the opening chorus, "Mighty Jehovah." And certainly the skill, the accuracy and the power, with which these choirs performed their part of the programme must not pass unnoticed in your columns; for there seemed but one voice in the audience, and that was one of praise.

The invocation was given by Rev. E. T. Lyford of the Baptist Church. A hymn

of N. P. Willis, number 938 in the Plymouth collection followed, when Rev. D. D. Marsh of the Memorial Church read the Scriptures from 1. Kings VI. chap. where at the raising of Solomon's temple the sound of axe, hammer or any metal instrument, was not heard.

After this came the anthem, "Make a joyful noise unto the Lord," and then the Dedicatory Prayer by Rev. Dr. Seeley of Haverhill, Mass. The blessing of God was called down upon the society erecting the edifice, whose history stretches back almost 150 years, and the Great Father was besought to accept the building, consecrated by their trials, their tears, their prayers, and come and dwell in the house, and make it a temple for the abiding place of His Spirit. An original hymn, composed by Mrs. Alfred B. Noyes, was then sung by the choir. Next came the sermon. It was preached by Rev. J. H. Ecob, of Augusta Maine. His text was taken from Matthews 21 :23. "By what authority doest thou these things, and who gave thee this authority?" He began with the pregnant statement that the dedication of a new church was an emphatic reassertion of the truth of Christianity; and passed on to the questioning of the source of the power of Christianity, of the source of the interest we all have in the saints and martyrs who have lived and died for Christ for more than a thousand years. He found that source in Christianity's possession of the truths, not of reason or logic, but of intuition, which are native to the soul,

which are fundamental and indestructible. And so he came to the announcement of his theme, "Christianity as an authoritative religion." For the definition of authority, he looked to Christ. He saw in him authority in the concrete. The simple rustic from Nazareth, distinguished for meekness and tenderness, with no learning of the schools, without rank, without fame, without party, "was known from the beginning as an authoritative preacher; for he planted himself on the fundamental truths, that have unfailing power over character.

The sermon on the mount is made up of these fundamental truths. "The Beatitudes are not prophecies: they are facts, laws." The first division of the sermon was that Christianity, interpreting nature, made it authoritative, made it a power over the soul. No other system makes nature authoritative. Materialism makes nature only a Sphinx perpetually propounding riddles and conundrums. But let Christianity take the man aside to explain the parable of Nature, and we find the meaning to be "God over all blessed forever."

In the second place, Christianity is authoritative in its direct dealings with the soul. It takes hold of the essential truths of the soul. It seizes and develops the spiritual intuitions whereby the soul is feeling after the things of God, unseen and eternal. "Christianity comes upon these native convictions, not to contradict them, not to arbitrarily substitute revealed truths; but to raise them in power, to rectify their vision, to give to their voice that indefinable quality which renders

their utterance authoritative. "For example it comes down on the universal sense of dependence on a Higher power, and changes its feeble wail into a voice of assurance." Calls it "to lean hard on" God for he careth for men. Again Christianity augments the power with which conscience acts, by showing the character of Him against whom all sin is committed; and meets the consequently greater demand for an atonement by pointing to the "Lamb of God slain from the foundation of the world." Once more Christianity takes hold of the innate longings for immortality and gives them definiteness and power. And again, Christianity lifts the soul towards God by the supernatural revelations it makes. Gather all these various effects of Christianity on the soul and nature; bring their total impression to bear on the soul; and see by what authority we build our churches. See that it is the authority not of creeds, nor theologies, nor schools, nor systems; but the authority of nature, the authority of the human soul, the authority of God. The attitude of Christianity towards men of science should be that of superiority. She should say all your facts come from God. Put God in them. Bring us facts. "Thousands for you facts, but not a copper for your theories." This should be her position, for "every fact is a clue to some deeper, more glorious discovery in God's character, and the knowledge of Him is only beginning to dawn upon our world." Such is a brief and hasty analysis of the sermon. But my pen cannot describe the power, the irresistible elo-

quence with which the delivery was marked. The attention of the large audience never flagged, and the interest rose as the sermon, progressed. We noticed many friends, and strangers not a few, pressing forward to congratulate the speaker at the close of the services.

The exercises proceeded by the choirs rendering of the Gloria from Mozarts 12th., Mass, and the congregation joining in the Long Metre Doxology which followed. The benediction was pronounced by the pastor and the vast assembly dispersed, all seemingly well pleased with the day and its services.

The Old South starts off in her new departure with the good wishes of all. May her record in the future be worthy of her past, is the best hope and prayer her friends can offer.

The following is the original hymn written for the Dedication:—

Lord, Thou hast taught us that Thine House  
Doth Holiness become;  
And Thou hast wisely set apart  
Church, State and Household-home,  
Each with its sphere, a Triune whole,  
To help the growth of man  
Reach toward its higher Destiny,  
Accomplishing Thy plan.

Faith in this Truth helped rear the House  
We dedicate to Thee;  
Let such faith keep the sacrifice  
From taint of vanity.

For lovingly we've tried to aid  
Thy cause; wilt Thou command  
A blessing on us now, that we  
Thy truth may understand;

And work, as every church should work,  
With all the soul's best powers,  
Till love and meekness come to be  
Thy answer to our prayers.

Thus soon will come within our midst  
A Pentecostal flame,  
Revealing how souls may be won  
In Jesus' blessed name.

The auction sale for the choice of Pews in the new church resulted in the receipt of some one hundred and fifty dollars, the highest bidder being Mr. Samuel Little, who paid ten dollars for the first choice.

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