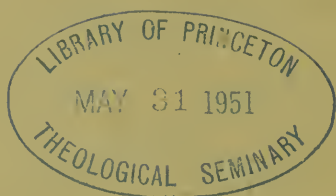


Talbot W. Chambers

The Review of a Generation

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The Review of a Generation;

A SERMON,

By Calbot W. Chambers, D.D.

December 7th, 1879.



THE REVIEW OF A GENERATION;

A Sermon,

Delivered in the Middle Dutch Church, Lafayette Place,

BY TALBOT W. CHAMBERS, D.D.,

DECEMBER 7th, 1879.

Being the thirtieth anniversary of his installation
as one of the Pastors of the Reformed
Protestant Dutch Church in the
City of New York.



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This discourse, prepared at the request of the Consistory, was repeated in the Church on 29th Street and 5th Avenue, on the evening of the 21st of December, and in the Church on 48th Street and 5th Avenue on the evening of the following Lord's day, and is now published under the direction of those at whose instance it was written.

THE REVIEW OF A GENERATION.

One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh : but the earth abideth forever. Ecclesiastes I : 4.

THE statement here made, like the others that follow in the chapter, seems designed only to express the universality and permanence of natural sequences in the world. The same phenomena in air and earth and sea constantly repeat themselves. The thing that hath been is that which shall be. This uniformity gives validity to the lessons of experience, and enables us to reason effectively from the past to the future. But the text viewed apart from its connection suggests what is a very trite and yet very affecting truth. The earth abides from age to age, yet man, for whom it was made, flits like a shadow across its surface. The race survives, but the component parts are a perpetual succession. As the Son of Sirach says (Ecclesiasticus XIV : 18) : "As of the green leaves on a thick tree some fall and some grow ; so is the generation of flesh and blood, one cometh to an end and another is born." The same comparison was used by Homer ages before.

“ Like the race of leaves
Is that of humankind. Upon the ground
The winds strew one year’s leaves ; the sprouting grove
Puts forth another brood that shoot and grow
In the Spring season. So it is with man :
One generation grows while one decays.”

(*Il. VI : 186. Bryant’s Version.*)

The same thought was expressed in a different form by the Apostle when he reminded the Corinthians, that “the fashion of this world passeth away.” The allusion is to the shifting scenes of a theatre. But the scenes shift because the action of the play advances. In the vegetable creation the leaves

fall to-day in the same way and for the same reason that they did in the time of Homer and the Son of Sirach. If the oak now shown at Hebron as the identical tree under which Abraham pitched his tent, were really the same, the spring and the decay of its vegetation would show no difference in character or result. But in the world of mind there is no such unchanging uniformity. Each generation, though in its turn it passes away like all that have gone before, does not do so after the same fashion or with the same results. There is a march in human events. There is a continuous life and a growing development in the history of the race. There is a divine plan which works out its own fulfillment amid the jarring discords and selfish antagonisms of individuals and communities. The actors in the scene are rarely conscious of the "divinity which shapes our ends," but it is none the less certain that such a divinity exists and exercises its sovereign, controlling will. One generation goeth and another cometh, but something more has taken place than simply the replacement of one set of men by another. The new generation does not find things *where* and *as* the old one found them, but specifically different. In some places and at some periods, there may be such a stagnation of heart and soul, such a stereotype phase of character, that one generation is simply the reproduction of its predecessor, just as the Bedaween of the desert are, to all intents and purposes, the same now that they were before the Christian era. But in the general the play of life and freedom, the exercise of reason and will, men's virtues and their vices, the arts of war and of peace, discoveries, inventions and theories, all concur to introduce changes, sometimes so great, as for instance in the closing years of the last century, that the newcomers seem to be almost in a different world from that in which their fathers first saw the light.

It is worth while, then, to stop at intervals in the rapid current of present interests and review what has gone before, to consider the course of our immediate predecessors, and estimate its character, or causes or results, that we may find

reason for thankfulness, or encouragement or warning, as the case may be. And this is what is proposed on the present occasion so far as circumstances permit. It is now thirty years since, in this house, I was installed as one of the pastors of the Collegiate Church. We were then just completing the first half of the nineteenth century, and not a few discourses were soon afterwards preached and printed in reference to that particular juncture, looking backward as well as forward from what was called "the noon of the century." Since then the period usually counted to a generation has rolled away. Almost all the men who were at that time prominent on the world's broad stage in whatever particular sphere, have either finished their course, or are soon expecting the summons which one day or another comes to all. It is quite possible, then, to review the period as a whole and mark its salient features, glancing at the connection of events, and tracing as we may the hand of divine providence. This may be done in reference to three points: the nation, the denomination, and our own particular church.

I. THE NATION.

Here one may safely begin with the remark that never in the whole history of the country was there a more eventful, a more epoch-making period than that of the generation just passed. Not even the men who a century ago saw the birth of National Independence lived at a more critical or influential juncture. They simply hastened what in any event could not have been long delayed. That one Anglo-Saxon people could safely and continuously govern another of the same training, character and institutions at a distance of three thousand miles without representation, was an obvious impossibility. While, therefore, we owe a very great debt to our Revolutionary Fathers, it is not one of incalculable proportions. They precipitated events, and their sore and prolonged struggle stimulated patriotism and cemented union as perhaps nothing else could have done. Still this great continent, peopled as

it was, could not have long continued a mere dependence of a trans-Atlantic monarchy. The trial which the recent generation had to endure was much greater, on a wider scale, more costly in blood and treasure, and farther reaching in its influence and results. It made the country one continuous battle-field from the Potomac to the Rio Grande. It put men under arms by the million. It heaped up the public debt by hundreds, even thousands of millions. It strained the powers of constitutional government in a way and to an extent which every statesman prays may never be repeated. And it determined the question as to the social, civil and political rights of more than four millions of colored people. Scarcely anything in all the records of the race parallels this extraordinary conflict. It was a civil war, a social war and a war of principles. It was fought with desperate courage and unyielding devotion, nor was it terminated except by the absolute exhaustion of the unsuccessful party. When the last man had been enlisted and the last dollar expended in vain, the flag must needs be struck. And though peace has reigned for well nigh fifteen years, the gaping wounds of the fight have not yet closed, and another term of fifteen years must pass before its waste and havoc shall be fully repaired, even under the smiles of a benignant Providence.

Yet, in the judgment of most thinking men, the results have been worth all that they cost. They have settled forever some issues which it was of the last importance to determine, and especially to determine rightly. The great peculiarity of our country is that it consists of a number of commonwealths called states, which are sovereign in all local and domestic matters, while in others they are subordinate to what is called the general or federal government. The legitimate exercise of the powers of both governments is essential to the well-being of the whole, and neither can be sacrificed to the other without loss; just as in the solar system the centrifugal and the centripetal forces reciprocally balance each other, and so preserve the equilibrium of the mighty organism. But from the very beginning there was a wide difference of opinion

as to the just metes and bounds of these forces, some being disposed to emphasize the sovereignty of the general government, others that of the individual states. This difference of opinion, within appropriate limits, was rather beneficial than harmful, serving as it did for a barrier against consolidation on the one side and disintegration on the other. But sometimes it was urged beyond its due limits. During the administration of General Jackson it was claimed that a State could nullify a law of Congress regularly passed—a claim which, if allowed, would necessarily overthrow the general government. It was therefore resisted, and but for the interposition of a compromise touching the policy at issue, the point would then have been decided by a resort to force. Many wise and patriotic men have contended that it would have been far better to have fought out the question at that time when the struggle would not have been so severe and costly as it afterwards became. But it did not so please the Lord. He seems to have intended to delay the appeal to arms until it could issue in a reconstruction of the civil status of nearly the whole people. That time came about twenty years ago.

Its origin was on this wise. For a long time after the formation of the federal constitution the North and the South, the free states and the slave, lived in harmony because the Senate of the United States was equally divided between them, and there was, therefore, no danger of adverse legislation to either. But in process of time new states were formed, and that more rapidly in the northern section, threatening at no distant day to give a decided preponderance to the latter. This fact awakened great apprehension and led to serious efforts to counteract or ward off the threatened evil. The conflicts thus occasioned were averted by compromises, once about the year 1820, and again about the year 1850. And the public mind of the entire North was settled upon two points: 1. That the guarantees of the constitution under which slavery existed in the Southern states as a domestic institution, should never be disturbed; and 2. That those guarantees should never be extended so as to protect the introduction of slavery into new

states. But the leaders of the South were not satisfied with this. They insisted that the limitation of the territorial limits of slavery was equivalent to a decree for its extinction, for the preponderance of the free States would ultimately become so great that the others would be wholly in their power.

They accordingly determined to force a conflict before the odds became greater than they then were. They seceded and set up a separate and independent government, and presently the whole land was aflame with civil war. How it ended and what followed I need not repeat. But one result was vast and irreversible. The very institution, the preservation of which gave rise to the struggle, perished forever. Of late there have been many discussions about the agency of individuals and associations at the North in securing this result. To me it seems clear that they had no agency whatsoever. At the hour when the first gun was fired against Fort Sumter, the constitutional guarantees of the domestic institutions at the South stood as firm and strong as they had ever done. They had not even begun to give way. Nor had the legislature of even a single Northern State been persuaded to take any step interfering with the permanence of those guarantees. Nor was there any reason to fear that in the future, near or remote, they would take such a step. On the contrary, such was the horror of disunion, such was the dread of what might result from an armed collision, that the great body of the people were disposed to push concessions to the furthest point, rather than wound the sensibilities of the South. Individuals, and many of them, were indeed otherwise minded, but they found no sympathy in the body of the people. It follows, then, that slavery perished at the hands of its own friends. They put its continuance at the hazard of war, and it followed the fate of its advocates. That it has ceased is a matter of joy to nine-tenths of all the people, North and South. However tolerable the institution may once have been, its existence at this day in this land would be an anachronism. For all civil, social, religious and economic interests, it is better that capital should hire labor than own it. To deny this is to deny the

testimony of all experience and the conclusions of all just reasoning. Freedom is best for every rational being. Subjugation is necessary for brutes; but if man, made in the image of God, is to achieve a position worthy of his origin, it must be in the development of his own powers restricted only by reason and law. To put him in servitude is, as was seen as long ago as in the days of Homer, to take half his worth away.

But the wonder of wonders in our late conflict was that when over four millions of slaves were converted into freemen, not by the intentional act of their masters, but as a result of war, there were no social disorders whatever; none of the deeds of rapine and bloodshed, which in other lands have invariably followed such a change. It was a mighty revolution, and when it occurred men were well warranted in standing still in silent awe to see whereunto it would lead. It was not a single island of the sea or some remote colony, but fourteen stately commonwealths, in the heart of a continent, whose whole system of labor was thus instantaneously subjected to entire abrogation. Yet such was the docility of the subject race, such their amazing forbearance, and I may add, such the influence of the Christian teachings, which in some form or degree all had enjoyed, that the transition was made without the slightest jar—so that the manner of the change was equal to the change itself. The great blot upon our escutcheon was erased, the great reproach of our institutions removed, the sharp contrast between the freedom of one class and the bondage of another taken away, and yet there were no garments rolled in blood nor any confused noise. Millions of fetters melted away like snow beneath the sun, and a whole race sprang from serfdom into manhood, without even a single breach of the peace or a solitary act of revenge for real or fancied wrongs of old. The disbandment of over a million of men, and their quiet return to the ordinary employments of life, was justly considered a very remarkable thing—one, however, which was due to the character of the American people, as trained by all the traditions and influences of the

past to obey rightful laws and to renounce the camp as soon as the end was gained for which the camp had been entered. But the colored people had been not citizens but slaves, and were called to a course in which they had no precedent to guide them, and as having been before controlled only by force, might have been expected to run riot in their new-found liberty. Yet they bore the transition with peculiar self-restraint. It may be added that when afterwards political franchises were added to their civil rights, and our favorite notion of universal suffrage received an unparalleled expansion, the result was far from being as injurious as men had previously supposed. It is true that the freedmen were at times fearfully cajoled and hoodwinked, yet it hardly becomes the inhabitants of our city to reflect harshly upon them, when we remember the frightful robberies and gross political immoralities perpetrated among us for a series of years by officers chosen by the people. Yet our colored brethren have grown rapidly in political sense, and there seems no reason now to doubt that they will learn the proper exercise of suffrage as soon and as readily as the hosts of immigrants whom each year brings to our shores, and possibly sooner.

Such then was the great public, secular event of the last generation. There were others indeed of no small importance, such as the ocean telegraph with its world-wide diffusion, the phonograph and the audiphone, the immense development of mining interests all over the country, railroads across the entire continent, the discovery of petroleum, the increase of labor-saving inventions in every department of industry; in like manner the changes in the map of Europe, the transformation of Germany from a geographical expression into a real and most important political body, the overthrow of the Pope's temporal power and the yet greater changes wrought by the Vatican Council and its decrees, the unification of Italy, the restoration of France to a republican government, the abolition of serfdom in Russia, the dismemberment of Turkey; the changes in Asia by which India has become a direct appanage of the British crown, and China and Japan have been

brought into political fellowship with the family of nations; the progress of discovery in intertropical Africa, and the canal through the Isthmus of Suez, which has revolutionized the course of the world's commerce; the confederation of the British colonies on our northern border, and the establishment of religious liberty in the republic south of us: all these and other events of the like kind will worthily fill an important place in the pages of those who hereafter shall write the history of our times; but to us the one great transcendent fact of the last thirty years is the war for the Union, with its causes and its consequences. This tested the question whether the nation was able to preserve its own life. This showed that patriotism, loyalty and self-sacrifice were not mere names but things. This determined whether America was to be a reproduction of Europe, with its miserable jealousies and boundary quarrels, or a great federal state, the imperial, but impartial protector of all its parts and constituencies. Nay, it solved the problem whether a self-governed community could deal with and conquer the most formidable sedition known in history, and yet come out of the conflict with every essential principle of its constitution unharmed. These questions have been settled, and they will not need to be reopened in your life time, or that of your children, or your children's children. And if any people on the face of the earth are or ever were bound to the service of the Most High by gratitude for unspeakable national mercies, it is the American people.

II. THE DENOMINATION.

The review of the last thirty years shows a very great progress and expansion in our branch of Zion, together with one or two serious drawbacks. The number of ministers and churches has nearly doubled, and the number of members in full communion has much more than doubled, (rising from 33,980 to 80,228), while the Classes have increased from twenty-four to thirty-three, and the two Particular Synods have become four, thus showing an increase equal to that of the entire country as indicated by the census. This growth

has not come up to that of some of our sister churches, and yet, perhaps, it is large enough, if one considers that in all moral and spiritual interests quality is of far more importance than quantity, and that in every living organism the addition of new material is of value only so far as it is assimilated. An overgrown body, that is, one in which the increase of bulk is not balanced by the coherence of the parts, is always in danger of disintegration and decay. Our enlargement has been owing partly to the natural increase of population in well-ordered and flourishing communities, but more to an extensive immigration from the mother country. In the years 1846-7, many thousands of Hollanders, led not only by the hope of improving their temporal condition, but also by the desire of greater religious liberty and development than they could attain in their own country, sought new homes within the western portion of the United States, bringing with them not much material wealth, but a wealth of character and habits which rendered them a most desirable accession to any community. Some of these affiliated with other denominations, but the most of them, as was natural, entered in the course of a few years into the fellowship of that body which bore the ancestral name, and retained the standards, the liturgy and the usages of "the church under the cross." And although on some subjects there is not entire oneness of opinion between the eastern and the western portions of our church, yet there seems no reason to doubt that in due time agreement as to faith and doctrine, and all the essentials of spiritual life will be followed by agreement as to certain details of administration and discipline. Meanwhile there has been a development of intellectual vigor, of holy consecration and generous self-sacrifice among our brethren at the West, which has justly excited the admiration and praise of all who know them. They are every way worthy to be descendants of the men who for centuries made Holland illustrious by their heroism, their constancy, their unyielding devotion to the claims of God and the rights of man. And the time may not be far distant when the centre of our church will be found not on the seaboard but near the great lakes.

In the matter of denominational agencies, the last generation has witnessed a very marked change. I begin with Foreign Missions. For many years these had been conducted in close co-operation with that noble institution, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. And although no fault was or could be found with this ancient corporation, either as to its aims or its methods, yet it was felt that so long as there was no direct connection between our church and its missionaries, it would be impossible to awaken any *esprit de corps* among our people or to bring out either their means or their interest to the proper degree. After careful consideration it was determined with great, nearly absolute, unanimity to institute separate action and carry on the mission work independently. The impression upon the church was like that of an electric shock. The whole body sprang to its feet at once. Not only were the old missions to China and India continued with enlarged means, but a new one was begun in the interesting region which had just been opened to intercourse with Christendom. As the United States was the first government which, by its wisdom and skill, unlocked the doors of Japan, our church was the first body of Christians to enter those doors with the lamp of life. And taking these three mission fields, as a whole, it has been truly said that nowhere in the heathen world has better or more successful work been done under like circumstances, whether one consult the records of ancient times or modern. It is true that the glowing zeal of the first few years of independent action did not continue, and the embarrassments caused by the high price of exchange during and after the war became of a very threatening nature, extrication from which once occurred almost by miracle, and even now the carrying of a heavy debt seems to have become chronic. Yet, I think, upon the whole, I am justified in saying that in the last twenty-two years our church has contributed to the foreign work more money in proportion than any other; that a less percentage of the contributions has been consumed in office or home expenses; and that the actual results in souls hopefully saved, churches

formed, and regions brought under Christian influence, have not been in any populations of like character surpassed, if they have been equaled.

In Domestic Missions the growth has been in the way of normal development. Four times as much money was contributed for this cause by churches and individuals last year as there was thirty years ago, while the number of missionary stations and missionaries has doubled. But not only is more work done than formerly, but it is better done. Experience has taught how to guard against errors, to adapt men and measures to their intended places, to call in the best executive talent of our church, to make full proof of our system of polity, to take large views of the whole field, and thus to secure with God's blessing the wisest and most economical application of the church's gifts. The steady shower of criticism, sometimes reasonable and often very unreasonable, to which Boards and Secretaries in our small church are exposed, while occasionally very annoying yet has certainly done good in compelling constant care and watchfulness in administration. The labors of the Domestic Board were very much increased by the Holland immigrants, already referred to, who now amount to about one-eighth of the membership. These, although as in the case of one of the Apostolic churches, their "deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality," were yet quite unable to overtake their own needs, and required to be aided both in getting houses of worship and in supporting their ministers. With many of them ready money was almost an unknown quantity. Under these circumstances the Board, as the church's almoner, came to the rescue and was the means under God of supplying with the ordinances of worship many a feeble congregation, which but for this aid would have greatly suffered and languished, and might indeed have been wholly dissipated. And even there, as all over the East, churches can be pointed out which once feeble and struggling have long outgrown the need of help and have been transformed from beneficiaries to benefactors. To this Board was entrusted in 1854 the

work of providing a Church Building Fund, designed to aid feeble organizations in securing houses of worship. The plans adopted in the first instance were crude, and progress was slow. But under the teachings of experience the proper modifications were made, and the institution became successful. Money is given only when it will put a church out of debt; and proper security is taken so that in the event of an unforeseen failure the amount may be recovered for the use of the denomination. The Fund now amounts to \$60,000, and to it we owe the prosperity, if not the very existence, of some of our most important congregations both in the East and in the West. Two other Funds indicate equal progress. One, the Widow's Fund, although suggested a century ago, hardly took shape until the year 1837, and even then was retarded, by the immaturity of its provisions. But these in the course of time were amended and perfected, and now the capital which thirty years ago was under \$5,000 has been increased ten-fold. And to-day its blessed ministrations are making the heart of many a widow and orphan sing for joy. Similar to this is the other institution, the Disabled Ministers' Fund, the object of which is expressed by its title. Originated twenty-four years ago, it now has a capital of about \$20,000, and by the interest on investments and the offerings of the churches, has been enabled to relieve in a substantial yet delicate way many distressing cases of need.

In the matter of Education for the Gospel ministry the advance has been truly remarkable. The number of endowed scholarships has more than doubled, the invested funds have trebled (rising from \$31,000 to \$99,000), and the annual contributions of individuals and churches have quadrupled. In consequence of the well-known bequest of the late Rev. Elias Van Bunschoten, truly magnificent for his day, (1814), and some others of smaller amount, there had gradually grown up in a large portion of the church the conviction that enough had been done in this regard, and further effort would be superfluous. The honor of overcoming this mistaken and unworthy

feeling and supplanting it by a new and lively interest in the whole subject is due to the Rev. Dr. James A. H. Cornell, who became Secretary of the Board in 1855, and devoted himself with characteristic zeal and energy to a thorough canvass of the denomination, removing objections, explaining difficulties, stimulating faith and zeal, in short, doing all that needed to be done to bring the mind of the church up to a sense of its duty and responsibility. The results of this faithful effort continue to this day, and the more as these labors have been well supplemented by the able and faithful man who followed Dr. Cornell in the same field. It is fashionable nowadays to depreciate beneficiary education as wholly bad. I cannot stop to argue the question at length; but it is enough to say that in all ages in which the church has had ministers trained and apt to teach, very many of them required pecuniary aid in their preparation, and that of our ministry to-day one-third have received such aid, and yet that third is not a whit behind the other two-thirds in any mental or spiritual gift or in the degree in which the divine blessing crowns their labors. But the progress in ministerial education is not to be measured merely by the resources of the Board constituted for that purpose. Rutgers College, (once called Queen's, as Columbia was King's), and the Theological Seminary at New Brunswick, are both to be taken into the account. The former was founded before the Revolution chiefly, if not solely, for the purpose of educating a properly qualified ministry. It struggled for a long time with a narrow income, but although even now under some embarrassments, its situation has been altered immensely for the better. Its endowments, its number of students, its buildings, its apparatus, its reputation and its usefulness are double what they were thirty years ago. Still greater is the change in the Theological Seminary. Formerly it had no edifices for its exclusive use, but shared the use of one building with the college. Now it has a separate dwelling for each of the four professors, a commodious hall for the use of the students, an admirable building for lecture rooms and a museum, and a companion structure which

is entirely fire-proof, containing a library which, for the number and value of its contents, is surpassed by that of no other theological institution in the country. The permanent funds of the seminary are at least three-fold what they were. This growth is matter of especial satisfaction to us, because the traditions of our fathers both beyond the sea and amid all the fearful struggles of the colonial era in this country, have been inseparably bound up with the school of the prophets, and because so large a portion of the gifts for this purpose were made by members of the Collegiate church, especially by two whose names are worthily connected with the fruits of their bounty, of whom one * has gone to his reward, while the other † still lives to serve the church by his counsels and his toils as well as by his gifts. It is well to remember that in these days of haste and sciolism and shallowness, the church has gone on steadily laying broader and deeper foundations for the most thorough and complete training of those who are to minister at her altars.

Nor should I here omit to mention what has been done in this direction at the West. An excellent academy ripened into a college, to which was added a theological seminary. But it was found that this last step was in advance of the time, and under the pressure of recent trouble in the commercial world theological instruction has been discontinued. But the college remains, and the past is a pledge of the church's convictions and interests. A hard struggle is to be carried on for the present, but success will sooner or later come, and then it will be seen that the self-denials and trials of the formative period were all essential to the final result. In the meanwhile the work already done in Hope College and Seminary is a grand compensation for all that it cost.

In 1855 there was commenced a Board of Publication, to perform the same office among us as similar boards in other churches. Its advance was much hindered by the want of cordial support from a portion of the denomination and by lack of practical wisdom in its management, so that at one

* Mr. James Suydam.

† Mr. Gardner A. Sage.

time it passed into the hands of a receiver. But it was soon extricated, and is now under such an administration as guarantees us against any like difficulties in the future. And notwithstanding all its drawbacks it has been the means of publishing and circulating a number of tracts and volumes which without its aid would never have seen the light, and which have set forth the doctrines of God's word in all their integrity and fullness, and so were adapted not only to make men Christians, but the best style of Christians, intelligent, well-grounded in the truth, able to contend vigorously for the faith, not carried away by every wind of teaching or sleight of men, but knowing what they believe and why they believe it. And if the experience of the last generation teaches anything, it teaches that the faith once given to the saints, the doctrine that is according to godliness, must be proclaimed and defended not only by the pulpit but by the press. It is true, preaching comes first, but the printed page is not far behind it. And it will never do for the church to forego the use of so mighty an agent in shaping and directing popular feeling and opinion.

But while the review of the generation past shows a rapid and gratifying advance, there are two drawbacks which we cannot leave unnoticed. One of these is the decline of our church in this city. True, it is one that is shared by all our sister denominations, but it is none the less disagreeable for that reason. The configuration of our island and the increase of wealth and luxury have gradually forced away nearly the whole of what is called the middle class of society, so that well-to-do people spread themselves along the central ridge while the outlying portions on either side are given up to those who are too poor to sustain the institutions of the Gospel. This explains the certain but melancholy fact that while we have grown everywhere else, we have not grown here, but rather have receded. In 1849 there were ten self-supporting Dutch churches south of Twenty-third Street, while now there are but seven south of the Central Park, and some of these, through no fault of their own, greatly need help. And

on the whole island our congregations are fewer in all than they were at the time specified. The other drawback is the change of name. A dozen years ago it was proposed to drop out the word "Dutch" from the style which the Church had adopted in the case of its first incorporation. The measure was vigorously opposed, but was ultimately carried by an overwhelming majority. The change was advocated on the ground that it would remove obstacles and greatly facilitate the enlargement of the Church. I have never heard of any one who supposes that this expectation has been realized, while I have heard of not a few who acknowledge that it was a great mistake. The change was opposed on the grounds that it was not called for by circumstances; that it would lead to constant confusion if the German Reformed Church made the same change, which they proposed to do; that it would facilitate propositions to merge the Church in another body; and that it would wound and dishearten many old and tried friends of the Church whose good will was of great importance. All of these forebodings came to pass. To speak of any man or measure as belonging to the Reformed Church teaches nothing, for the words do not inform the hearer whether it is the "Dutch" or the "German" church that is referred to. Scarcely five years passed before a determined attempt was made to unite our communion with the Northern Presbyterian in such a way that our identity would have been wholly lost. And although it did not succeed, untold injury was done by the discussions which it caused. And then, further, many of those who had shown their fidelity to the cause by long years of service, were so hurt by the proceeding that their interest and activity were greatly diminished and never wholly recovered. The change was one of those things which once done cannot be undone, and though I look back with pleasure upon my own steadfast and vehement opposition to it, I would not recur to the matter now were it not necessary to be stated in any fair review of the past. Still, notwithstanding these drawbacks, our Church has vindicated its right to live, and may reasonably address itself with redoubled vigor to the

performance of its mission—to maintain on this soil a representative of the best type of the Reformed Churches of the Continent; to exemplify the true use of a liturgy; to uphold, at all costs and hazards, soundness in the faith; to insist upon the necessity of a learned ministry, and spare no pains to secure it; to furnish the needful aid for the assimilation of Hollandish immigrants; and, finally, to do its part in carrying the Gospel to the ends of the earth. From the denomination at large I turn now to our own particular communion.

III.—THE COLLEGIATE CHURCH.

In looking back over the history of our own Church the first thing which suggests itself is the *personnel* of ministers and consistory. Of the elders and deacons by whom I was called, fifteen have died and two have removed from New York, while of the rest only two now remain in office, viz: Mr. John Van Nest and Mr. Robert Buck. Dr. W. C. Brownlee, whose place I was chosen to fill, remained for some years in full mental vigor but incapacitated by bodily ailments from rendering the public service which had for so many years been a blessing to the Church and the world. It is a mistake to think of him only as a master in the Roman controversy, and one who drove every antagonist before him. He was also a Boanerges in the pulpit, and all the old men who remember him as he was in his best days bear cheerful witness to his unusual power in popular address. The other colleagues, Drs. Knox, DeWitt and Vermilye were in their prime, and together wielding an influence in this city wholly unequalled elsewhere. Of these now only one remains, the present senior pastor, whose bow abides in full strength notwithstanding his advanced years. Of the other two, one, Dr. Knox died by accident in 1858, the other, Dr. DeWitt, continued in service until 1874, when he, too, was called up higher. Never were two men more unlike each other in natural constitution so closely and happily associated together—one, sound, well-read and judicious, simple and

straightforward in pulpit utterance, a profound judge of human nature, full of executive skill and a genius in all matters of administration: the other, a child of nature, dowered with an exuberant imagination, master of an unstudied eloquence which held audiences spell-bound, and possessed of a spiritual insight which no windings of the natural heart could baffle. In both cases an unusually close walk with God sanctified their original gifts, and thus the two pastors stood side by side, each the complement of the other, and by their joint activity and influence, proved such a blessing to our Church as rendered its prosperity at least equal to that of any previous period of its long history. It is a happy thing that the names of these two eminent men are preserved in connection with places of public worship: one, the Knox Memorial Chapel in Ninth Avenue; the other, the DeWitt Mission in West Twenty-ninth Street.

Thirty years ago the edifices in use by our people were the North, then in its decline; this house, which had been opened for worship in 1839, and some years after was formally designated as the Middle; and the building in Ninth Street, which stood on the ground now occupied by the great establishment of A. T. Stewart & Co. In the year 1854 the elegant structure on Twenty-ninth Street and Fifth Avenue was dedicated, in consequence of which the Ninth Street Church was relinquished. Then the Middle Church, reinforced by the families which had left Ninth Street, reached its highest degree of prosperity—it being difficult for a time to secure seats either on the ground floor or in the galleries. But the migration of households, which seems to be a chronic and unchangeable feature of our New York life, began almost immediately to make itself felt, and now for twenty years there has been a constant diminution in the number of worshippers. In some cases families died out, in others they removed, but in either event their successors were not of the church-going population, but usually and increasingly of a foreign nationality, so that this Church has gone through the same experience which marked the later history of the old Middle Church in Nassau

Street and the North. It is an illustration of the excellent judgment and foresight of Dr. Knox, that just after the Twenty-ninth Street Church was opened, he suggested to the Consistory the propriety of securing the fee of the plot of ground on the corner of which the Forty-eighth Street Church was afterwards built, and by his influence with the corporation of Columbia College, of which he was a member, he secured the consummation of the purchase. No more wise and timely expenditure of money has ever been made. A chapel was erected upon the rear of the plot, and opened on Christmas Day, 1864, and the nucleus of a congregation was soon gathered. A few years afterward the foundations of a church were laid, and in 1872 the completed edifice was thrown open for worship, being the costliest, and in several respects the finest specimen of ecclesiastical architecture the Consistory have ever built. Of the three church edifices erected within the last forty years it may be truly said, that for solidity, convenience and taste they do honor to their builders and worthily represent the spirit of our venerable church, shunning as they do meanness and misplaced economy on one hand, and ostentatious extravagance and gaudy ornamentation on the other.

It should be added, while on the subject of buildings, that the parochial school of the church, now in the third century of its existence, changed its habitation during this period. When I came here it had scanty and inconvenient apartments in Fourth Street near Sixth Avenue, but in 1861 removed to the commodious edifice in Twenty-ninth Street near Seventh Avenue, where it has continued its useful labors under the direction of the accomplished principal, Mr. Henry W. Dunshee, who has spent the best part of his life in this useful and honorable service, and can point to graduates in all the learned professions as well as in the various walks of mechanical or mercantile life, who reflect credit upon the institution where they received their first scholastic training. Not a few of their companions served their country in the war for the Union, and those who died in that sore conflict could justly

bear on their tombstones the inscription placed by the Swiss on the monument to the patriotic martyrs who fell on the field of St. Jacob at Basle: "Our souls to God, our bodies to the foe."

One of the wisest and most far-reaching of the measures of the Consistory, during the period of which I speak, was the institution of a lay agency in connection with the usual ministrations in the North Dutch Church, then occupying the entire front on William Street, between Fulton and Ann Streets, with a consistory room in the rear. The layman employed was Mr. J. C. Lanphier, who still lives to carry on his work. He was led in the Providence of God to commence in September, 1857, a prayer-meeting, to be held every day precisely at noon, which proved to be just what was needed to foster and bring out the increased interest in religion which accompanied or followed the financial disasters of that year. The record of that meeting and of its great usefulness in this city, throughout our land and even beyond the sea, is on high, and will never be fully known in this world. Opinions may differ as to the present need of such a service, but there can be no doubt as to the past. For years that meeting met a pressing want and was the means of incalculable good. It was a rallying point for the friends of Christ of every name and from every quarter, and a place where many a distressed soul, too timid to apply elsewhere, went and was pointed to the one Saviour. The conservative character of the Consistory, who maintained the meeting, held it rigidly to its original purpose, and hindered it from being turned aside to any personal, partizan or sectarian end. Such attempts were frequently made, as was indeed to be expected, but they were always foiled.

One form of Christian activity peculiar to the last generation, as compared with those that went before, is the City Mission Work. There was, indeed, when I came here, a very strong and active association called the City Missionary Society of the Reformed Protestant Dutch Church, auxiliary to the Board of Domestic Missions. But this had for its

aim the forming and aiding of new churches until they reached a self-sustaining basis. And in this way it rendered a very useful service. But as years rolled on, and the peculiarities of our New York population already referred to became more fixed and general—peculiarities not to be found in any other city of the world so far as I know—the field of its operation became so contracted that its labors were discontinued. Then a new problem arose. This was to meet the spiritual wants of the large bodies of people on the eastern and western sides of the island, who were not likely ever to be able to maintain the Gospel from their own resources. The first efforts in this direction were in the way of Mission Sunday Schools. These were sustained by a committee of the congregation, and met in such premises as could be conveniently hired. But as it was hard to obtain suitable rooms in this way, it was determined to buy or build. And so it came to pass that the Consistory provided the requisite buildings in Twenty-ninth Street, in Ninth Avenue and in Seventh Avenue, while the congregations attended to all other expenses. At first strenuous effort was made not only to win the children, but to induce their parents to attend church. But it was found impossible. The people could not be persuaded to go with any regularity to church edifices whose size and elegance seemed to put them to shame. They did not feel at home even in a corner of the gallery, and there was no way to correct this feeling. It is common for persons to urge that the rich and the poor should meet together in the house of God, and certainly it is very desirable, but if the poor will not come, what are we to do? The only answer to this inquiry so far given, is the appointment of pastors to labor among these people in edifices which though neat and comfortable yet will form no glaring contrast to their usual residences. The peculiarity of this enterprise is that it is a finality. It is not simply a preparation for something better and does not contemplate a new denominational centre. It merely meets present wants, taking the Gospel to those who otherwise would live and die without

it. This is not a pleasant prospect, and there is no one that I know who is satisfied with the existing posture of this work in our city, but it is the best we can do. Our four missions are in very competent hands, God's word is faithfully preached and the discipline of the house is carefully maintained, nor has the gracious Saviour left himself without witness in the hopeful conversion of souls.

Here I ought to make mention of the work done among our German population, in which the Collegiate Church has always taken a deep interest, and which it has largely aided both by the action of the corporate body and by the labors of individual members. One of the German churches is especially worthy of notice—that in Houston Street. It enjoyed the services of three successive pastors—Rudy, Guldin and Geyer—men of apostolic zeal and character, under whose administrations it some years ago reached a degree of strength which took it off the list of beneficiary churches. Now it gives instead of receiving, and promises to be the mother of other organizations of similar excellence. Indeed, one of the most gratifying things in the retrospect of the last generation is the series of efforts made in behalf of immigrants from Germany. The field was a very trying one, and the success desired was not in all respects reached, but there has been no lack of faithful effort, and it is much to be able to say of those who bore the heat and burden of the day that they have done what they could.

I have spoken of the pastors who preceded me in service, but there are four who were called after me. The first of these was the Rev. Dr. Joseph T. Duryea, a man of very remarkable gifts, who began his labors here in 1862 and terminated them by resignation in 1867, having in those years accomplished a very fruitful ministry. He was succeeded in 1868 by the Rev. James M. Ludlow, D. D., who continued in the pastorship until 1877, when he resigned this charge and accepted a call to the Westminster Church in Brooklyn, where it is understood that he has met with eminent and deserved success both as preacher and pastor. In 1870 the

Rev. William Ormiston, D. D., was installed and still continues, abundantly fulfilling all the expectations which led to his call. Within a few months yet another has been added, the Rev. E. B. Coe, in regard to whom I will only say that no one of his predecessors has been settled under circumstances which gave brighter promise of a happy and prosperous ministry. Within the last ten years a very great change has been wrought in the mutual relation of the ministers. From the beginning of the past century, indeed ever since there was a plurality of ministers, the custom was, as it still is in Amsterdam, that all should preach in rotation to all the congregations and be held to pastoral service indiscriminately toward the whole. This custom was defended in the charge given to me by Dr. Knox when I was installed, on the ground that it promoted the unity of the church, gave to the people the benefit of a variety of pulpit talent, lightened the labor of each minister and at the same time added to his personal influence that of all his colleagues. These reasons gained increased force with me from the lessons of observation and experience, and I am still of the opinion that the change which set aside the rotation was a serious error. But it was made, and the ministers now are just as widely separated and distinguished in their respective charges as if they belonged to so many independent churches. All that is left for those who think as I do is to hope and pray that the same gracious Providence which has watched over the church for two centuries and a half will still continue its kind care, and render the new regime quite as prosperous as the old, and even more so.

Here I might perhaps appropriately conclude this discourse, having accomplished that review of the salient points in the past which was proposed in the outset. But having looked back, it may be well to look forward—which at my time of life I can afford to do with a certain disinterestedness. Any minister who has labored in one sphere for ten years, and then in another for thirty, has done the most of his life work. Few or none can expect to emulate the great statesman of France, M. Thiers, who was enabled in the last seven years

of his life, when he was beyond threescore and ten, to render service to his native land, far surpassing in importance and value all the laborious achievements of his former years. Surely I have no such expectation. But the love I bear for the venerable church and the interest I take in its fortunes prompt and entitle me to speak freely of the future. It seems then to me that there is just as much reason for the existence of our denomination now as at any former day. The church on earth is the church militant. So the Apocalypse predicts on every page, and so the voice of history proclaims, ask the question where we will. The scene of conflict changes, but the battle is going on all the time. Sometimes the foe assumes one shape, and at other times another, but at bottom it is the same inherent, essential, inalienable difference between the world and Christ. The question at issue at any particular period may touch doctrine, or order, or life, but in any case the contending parties are substantially the same. Now in the century past our church had an important part to perform as a witness for doctrinal truth and against all forms of fanatical excess. The old foes have well nigh disappeared from the arena. Hopkinsianism, Taylorism, New Lightism which once were so active and formidable now seem like venerable fossils. They are gone, but the place they once occupied is by no means vacant. New questions have arisen which are even more serious. These do not refer simply to the parts of the Christian system or to its completeness, but to its very existence. Was there a creation? Are the Sacred Scriptures a final authority? Are miracles a burden or a help to the Christian apologist? Is sin an intrinsic and inherent evil? Is expiation a reality? Does retribution belong to the idea of Divine Justice? These and such as these are the points that are controverted now, and upon which it is required that the watchman upon Zion's walls gives no uncertain sound. The times require men who are not to be frightened by hard names, who are willing to bear the reproach of being called mere obstructives or stupid conservatives, yet who are able to give a reason of the faith that is

in them, and argue as well as contend for the truth. Now I think a small homogeneous body like our Dutch Church with the prestige of its past history, its central position, its union of eastern steadfastness and western energy, is eminently fitted to stand in the front rank in the time of trial. Even on occasion of the severest onset it may be able to maintain its serenity and say what Athanasius did at the time when Julian the Apostate seemed to be carrying all before him, *Nubecula est, transibit*. It is only a little cloud, it will pass.

And so in like manner of our Collegiate Church. As from the beginning it has kept pace with the population of the city, erecting its temples in the Fort, in Garden Street, in Nassau Street, in William Street, in Lafayette Place, and on Fifth Avenue at Twenty-ninth Street and at Forty-eighth Street, so is it to keep on following the direction of the community and furnishing new local centres, as they may be needed, for rallying the friends of orthodox doctrine and scriptural holiness. To sit still is to die. To build no new churches is to commit suicide. We may, indeed, take care of ourselves, but what is to become of those who come after us? Where would be our church now if the fathers fifty years ago had resolved not to break ground away from the lower part of the town? It may be said in reply that the Consistory and people could better employ their funds in building chapels and plain edifices in the destitute parts of our city. But then the question recurs who is to support the ministers who labor in these chapels? To do this and the other missionary work required among our own population between the two rivers—to say nothing of other meritorious works of Christian enterprise—we need strong and well organized congregations along the centre of the island. This is indispensable; otherwise there will be, there must be, in the natural course of events, a Consistory without a constituency, and when decay is seen both at the centre and at the extremities the end is not far off. But surely this cannot be the intention of Divine Providence. The oldest church on Manhattan Island has not been preserved through the quarter of a millenium only

to perish ingloriously just when it is most needed, alike for the defence of the Gospel and for aggressive action in the Lord's name. Oh, no! let us hope and pray and labor for better things. Let us recall the kindling words uttered but a year ago by an eminent divine* not of our communion, who after passing in rapid review the elements which entered into our constitution spoke of us as "the Church of the Future in America." In his view "the same faith in the Gospel, the same love for liberty and for learning, and the same hospitality toward other communions, which were the glory of this church in its earlier life and have been ever since, will keep" our city "pure and make it purer, and will give to the semi-millennial anniversary of the church a glory that we cannot prefigure and can only vaguely anticipate." He concluded his eloquent utterance with the fervid ejaculation "God grant it!" It is for you and me, my brethren, to do what in us lies toward the fulfillment of such bright anticipations. Let us each in our respective sphere, whether of counsel or of action or of both, perform the duty that comes before us with diligence and constancy, not out of sectarian pride or personal aggrandizement, but from affectionate loyalty to Christ and love to the church which He purchased with His blood. Then, in the exercise of that harmony, that oneness of feeling which shines out in the ancestral motto, (*eendracht maakt macht*), we may expect to draw down the divine blessing and see the coming generation excel the one that has just passed, in activity, in zeal, in self-denial, in consecration, and consequently in successful service for Christ and His cause. Not merely shall the children be in the place of the fathers, but they shall hold a higher position and wield a yet mightier influence in staying the progress of error and urging the diffusion of truth until the whole of society in our city and over this broad land is transformed into the kingdom of Christ.

* The Rev. R. S. Storrs, D. D.

MEMBERS OF THE CONSISTORY IN 1849.

Elders.

GILBERT ALLEN,
WILLIAM BLEAKLEY,
JACOB BROUWER,
DAVID I. DEMAREST,
SAMUEL DUNSHEE,
DAVID BOARD,
JAMES C. FAULKNER,
THOMAS JEREMIAH,
JOHN NEILSON,
JOSEPH SNYDER,
ABRAHAM VAN NEST,
JAMES VAN ANTWERP.

Deacons.

EDWARD ANTHONY,
EDWARD L. BEADLE,
WILLIAM BOGARDUS,
ROBERT BUCK,
CHARLES S. LITTLE,
JOHN L. SMITH,
GEORGE S. STITT,
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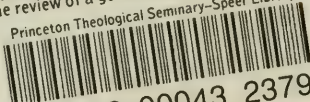


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