

WHAT MAKES A CHURCH A BETH-EL.

A SERMON,

DELIVERED TO THE

PRESBYTERIAN CONGREGATION

AT

KINGSTON, PENN.

AT THE

DEDICATION OF THEIR NEW HOUSE OF WORSHIP,

NOVEMBER 13, 1842.

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SERMON.

And he called the name of that place Beth-el.—GEN. xxviii. 19.

THE narrative with which this text stands connected, is one of the most instructive and interesting in all the scriptures; and is crowded with incidents designed to place in shadowy perspective the coming events of the days of the Messiah.

With the calling of Abraham, one of the most interesting facts in the moral history of our race, you are all familiar. By the appointment of God, he became the founder of the most remarkable people the world has ever seen, and the father of the faithful. In his family were laid the foundations of the church of God. With him that covenant first was made which secures to his spiritual seed for ever blessings even unto the utmost bounds of the everlasting hills. And to him those promises first were made which have been the lights of the church along the many ages of darkness through which it has lived.

His seed was to be as the stars of heaven in number; and, after many years of anxious expectation, Isaac, the son of promise, is born. With him also the divine promise moves slowly on to its fulfilment. At length, two sons are born to him, who prove entirely opposite in their disposition and character, and who finally become the parents of two hostile people. Between these sons a fierce controversy rises, which embitters the life of their aged parents, and which compels Jacob, the more quiet and domestic of the two, to flee his parental home in order to save his life.

Leaving his father's house at Beersheba, he commences his solitary journey towards Haran. As the sun of his first day's

exile from home is declining in the sky, he stops at a point where he takes up his abode for the night. He declines entering the city of Luz, which is just at hand, preferring to sleep in the open air, with the earth for his couch and the heavens for his canopy. "And he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows; and lay down in that place to sleep." How different his bed from that so often spread for him by the kind and soft hand of his mother. But yet he sleeps. And during the night he had a very extraordinary dream. "He dreamed, and behold a ladder set upon the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold, the angels of God ascending and descending upon it." And from the top of the ladder God speaks to the sleeping exile, renewing with him the covenant which he had previously made with Abraham and Isaac, and promising not to leave him until he had fulfilled all that he had promised. Who would not be willing to sleep on Jacob's pillow, provided he could have Jacob's dream! He sleeps, but his heart wakes. And where he little expected the ordinary comforts of religion, there the very angels were his ministering spirits, and the Lord confirmed to him the covenant made with his fathers.

The vision ends with the night, and Jacob awakes. So singular was the dream, and so grand and impressive were its attending circumstances, that he immediately and justly concluded it was from heaven. And he exclaims, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not! And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! This is none other than the house of God." And to record the events of the night in such characters as his situation afforded, he sets up the stones on which his head reposed in the form of a rustic altar, and solemnly consecrates it to God by the name of Beth-el, which signifies the house of God. And having thus dedicated the altar, he then makes a solemn dedication of himself to God; vowing to commit himself with filial confidence to the protection of his gracious providence, and to acknowledge, serve and worship none but himself.

We are assembled, my friends, on this occasion, to dedicate to the worship of the Triune Jehovah, Father, Son and Holy

Ghost, this beautiful and commodious house, which reflects so much credit on the liberality and enterprise of this congregation. And, agreeably to the object of our assemblage, we do now Dedicate and Consecrate this House to the worship and service of the Triune God. This Pulpit we dedicate to the proclamation and defence of the ever-glorious gospel. May it never be occupied but by men called into the ministry as was Aaron ; and who will preach the truth in the love of it, whether men will hear or forbear. And may all who hereafter shall occupy it as the pastors and teachers of the people who shall here assemble, be men after God's own heart. May these Pews, as long as this ample roof shelters them, on each returning sabbath, be crowded with devout worshippers, who will hear, receive and inwardly digest the truths that may be spoken, and who will manifest their love of heart for the truth by its fruit in their lives. To every prayer that here may be offered in all coming years, may God bow a listening ear, and for his own name's sake grant a gracious answer. May all who at this Altar shall consecrate themselves, or be consecrated by their parents to God in baptism, be sanctified by the Holy Ghost, and be living members of Christ's living body. And may all who shall here receive the blessed sacrament of the body and blood of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, receive it with true faith, love and repentance, and manifest by their lives of godliness and charity that they are worthy receivers. And on each returning sacramental sabbath may the fruitfulness of God's word and ordinances, as here administered, be manifested by numerous additions to the church, and of those who shall finally be saved. May holiness to the Lord be written upon this pulpit and these pews, and on these pillars and doors. May this be to the present, and to generations yet unborn, none other than the house of God, and the gate of heaven.

Then, King of glory, come,
 And with thy favor crown,
 This temple as thy dome,
 This people as thy own ;
 Beneath this roof, O deign to show,
 How God can dwell with men below.

Here may our unborn sons
 And daughters sound thy praise;
 And shine like polished stones
 Through long succeeding days;
 Here, Lord, display thy saving power,
 While temples stand, and men adore.

Thus dedicating and consecrating this house to the service of the only living and true God, our object in the remainder of this discourse, is to place before you, **WHAT IS NECESSARY TRULY TO ENTITLE IT TO THE NAME OF BETH-EL, OR HOUSE OF GOD.**

Places erected for, and dedicated to, the worship of God, have been common to both the dispensations of our most holy religion. As long as the Jews were a migratory and unsettled people, they had the Tabernacle, which was a moveable tent, and which they could readily remove from place to place. When they became settled in Canaan, the splendid Temple of Solomon was erected, whither the people resorted for sacrifice and prayer. They had their Synagogues, too, to which they resorted on ordinary occasions for public worship, very much as we do to our churches on the sabbath. And whilst the splendid Temple has been lying in ruins for eighteen hundred years, and the streaming blood of the sacrifice has ceased to flow, the Jews in all their wanderings erect the synagogue, in which to worship the God of Abraham, and where they meet on the sabbath for the reading of the word and for prayer.

The first converts to Christianity were Jews, who, on professing their faith in the despised Nazarine, were soon cast out of the synagogue, and given over to suffer all the terrible curses of the Anathema. Being thus excluded from all places of worship, they must resort for that purpose to private houses. Such, we believe, although the authority of Mede and Bingham is against us, were the houses where the Apostles were assembled when the Holy Ghost came upon them, and where the Saviour instituted the Supper, and where the seven deacons were elected and ordained, and where the first synod was held in Jerusalem. In process of

time it became necessary that these sacred assemblies should be held at one fixed place, which must be enlarged and constructed for the convenience of the increasing number of the disciples. And, thus, what was at first a private house, in process of time became the property of the whole church. Gibbon, whose authority on merely historical matters is unquestioned, states, that until the death of Severus, Christians "held their assemblies in private houses and sequestered places. They were now permitted to erect and consecrate convenient edifices for the purpose of religious worship, and to purchase land at Rome itself for the good of the community." These few remarks go far to settle the question which has been often and tediously debated, "Whether or not the first Christians had churches?" and prove beyond all controversy that this thing of consecrating churches, so as to make brick, mortar and wood holy, is a remnant of a dead superstition, unworthy of being entertained in a Christian church.

There is another historical idea connected with churches, of some importance. At first the buildings erected for the worship of God were very simple in their structure. But soon the congregations in the large cities became ambitious that their churches should excel in splendor the heathen temples. And thus primitive simplicity was superseded by splendid and gorgeous superstructures. And during some of the centuries embraced in that historic period usually known as the "dark ages," the piety of christendom expended its zeal and its energies in building, repairing and adorning their churches. The whole Christian world was laid under contribution for these objects. And in the proportion the fires of devotion died away upon their altars, were the magnificence and splendor of their churches increased. And down to the present day are York Minster, and the Cathedral at Rheims, and St. Peter's at Rome, models of architectural taste and the wonder of the world. But yet they are wanting in the great essentials which entitle them to the name of Beth-el. The spirit of piety, like the angel of Manoah's sacrifice, has gone up from their altars. And is there not in some quarters, at the present day, a greater zeal for magnificent temples than for doctrinal purity? Is it not to be regretted, that even in our own

church, which has signalized itself for its unyielding opposition to every thing meretricious connected with the worship and the house of God, that more is expended in building some of our churches than is contributed annually to sustain all our Foreign Missionary operations; and that the cost of the marble and granite pillars that support and adorn their porticos, would erect many a neat house of worship amid the wildernesses of the West, where multitudes, famishing for the bread of life, might well exclaim, in the language of the solitary wanderer of Juan Fernandez:

“ Religion ! what treasure untold
 Resides in that heavenly word ;
 More precious than silver or gold,
 Or all that this earth can afford.
 But the sound of a church-going bell
 These vallies and rocks never heard ;
 Never sighed at the sound of a knell,
 Or smiled when a sabbath appeared.”

We wish by no means to be considered as sanctioning the penuriousness and irreligion of those who can dwell in ceiled houses whilst the house of the Lord lies desolate. On the contrary, we feel that a comfortable and commodious house of worship, which is cool enough in the summer, and warm enough in the winter, is a means of grace ; and that the care, or the want of it, which a church indicates, is an index to the character of the people that worship there. But in vain do we erect houses for the worship of God unless they are Beth-els indeed.

I. THAT THIS CHURCH MAY BE A BETH-EL, THE ORDER AND THE WORSHIP OF GOD'S HOUSE MUST BE HERE MAINTAINED IN THEIR PURITY.

Whilst the throne of grace is accessible to every individual of our race, and all are invited to come to it with boldness in private; yet when we meet for the worship of God in public, we must adhere to the laws divinely instituted to regulate its acceptable performance. In the tabernacle in the wilderness, in the temple, in the synagogue, there were priests to offer up sacrifice, and to lead the devotions of the people, and officers to regulate

all things concerning the public worship of God. In the churches founded by the Apostles there were ministers, who are sometimes called Elders, sometimes Presbyters, sometimes Bishops—words designating the same officer—who led the devotions of each congregation; and Ruling Elders, who assisted the pastor or bishop in the government of the church; and when the office was rendered necessary, and not before, Deacons were appointed to take care of the poor. These were the only permanent officers left by the Apostles in the churches; and these are the only officers who have any right or title to apostolical succession. Whilst we by no means consider all these officers necessary to the existence of a church of Christ; making its existence to depend, as we do, not on its external organization, but upon the truth which it maintains; yet we must say that the whole history of the church proves, that they can neither be omitted nor corrupted without producing the most desolating effects upon the truth. Diocesan Episcopacy destroys the parity of the ministry, and soon corrupts it; and generally makes the least worthy to be lords in God's heritage. And the arguments which are adduced to prove the necessity of a diocesan bishop in the church, prove with equal clearness the need of a pope; and the need of a king in the state. And that page of history has yet to be written, which proves that prelacy and purity of Christian doctrine have long coexisted in the church. And, with some honorable and glorious exceptions, diocesan bishops, whether existing in the Catholic or Reformed church, have been the greatest persecutors of the pious, and the most notorious corrupters of the simplicity of the gospel. Nothing have they esteemed too sacred to sacrifice to maintain their usurped dominion in the house of God. The omission of the order of Elders, commits the whole spiritual government of the church into the hands of one man, or otherwise converts it into a purely democratic body, extremes equally to be avoided. And the omission of the order of Deacon, or the corrupting of it into an order of the ministry, leaves no officer of apostolical origin to provide for the poor. The three orders of Bishop, Elder and Deacon, our church maintains in their purity. And here may they ever be ably maintained and defended, and

transmitted without a taint of corruption, from generation to generation.

If God has appointed orders of men in his church for its instruction and government, he has also appointed an order of worship. All the essentials of that order are clearly revealed in the scriptures. These are prayer—singing—the reading and exposition of the word—exhortation, and the administration of the sacraments. This order, like that of the ministry, was soon corrupted. Forms of prayer were early introduced, to supply the lack of those who had neither the spirit nor the gift of prayer. The reading, exposition and preaching of the word, were soon superseded by a round of ceremonies, as unmeaning as they were unchristian; and soon the coming in of transubstantiation changed the simple and expressive sacrament of the Lord's supper into a sacrifice worse than that of the heathen, but without their excuse. And for centuries together, all the essentials of the worship of God were excluded from the churches called by his name. The ever blessed and glorious Reformation restored them to the people of God, and every church in our world should be a fortress for their defence and protection.

And we must here be permitted to say, that in our own beloved church, the devotional part of our public worship is too great a degree considered as but secondary to the preaching of the word. Here our bishops and people are equally in fault. If any parts of our public worship should be made more prominent than others, these should be the reading and exposition of the word, and prayer. But at this day, with us, preaching is the main thing. However well read in the scriptures, however able in prayer, however wise to win and lead the inquiring to the cross, a pastor may be, all is of too little avail, unless he is an eloquent preacher. Other portions of the service are curtailed, in order to make way for the sermon. This growing error needs correction. Whilst it is to be desired that all our ministers should be popular preachers, there are other and higher qualifications necessary to constitute a workman that needs not be ashamed. And may this church, that we this day consecrate to Jehovah, be ever worthy the name of Beth-el, because here the order and

worship of God's house will be ever maintained in their right proportions and purity.

II. THAT THIS HOUSE MAY BE A BETH-EL, THE DOCTRINES OF GOD'S WORD MUST BE PREACHED IN THEIR PURITY.

After all, here is to be laid the great stress, as to our connexion with the church, and its glorified Head. It is not whether we can go up the stream rendered so muddy and filthy by the offals of the man of sin, and trace up our ministry, step by step, to the Apostles; it is not whether Parker was consecrated at Lambeth, or at Nags-head tavern; it is not whether Luther and Calvin and Knox received orders only as presbyters; it is, WHETHER WE RECEIVE THE GREAT DOCTRINES OF THE GOSPEL. The unity of the church consists, not in standing within a circle which superstition or fanaticism may describe in the air or draw in the sand; it consists in unity in the truth. Only let a man hold the truth as it is in Jesus, and give evidence that it has changed his heart and his life, and we can receive him as a brother, and as a co-heir to the glory, and honor, and immortality for which we hope, by whatever name he may call himself, and to whatever communion he may belong. The existence of the church of Christ upon earth is suspended on the existence of the great truths of the gospel. Nor can we admit that to be a church, however ancient may be its history, however splendid may be its ritual, however imposing may be its ceremonies, however numerous may be its adherents, however exclusive may be its claims, that rejects the truth as it is in Jesus. It is only a synagogue of satan. We repeat it, and the signs of the times call for its frequent repetition, the unity of the church consists in unity in the truth.

And hence, as a denomination, whilst others have been contending about the warrant of the ministry, and the efficacy of sacraments, and ceremonies, we have ever and only contended for the maintenance of the great doctrines of the gospel. We cast no man out of the church of Christ, nor out of our hearts, if we can only believe that he receives sufficient gospel truth to place him on the Rock of Ages. We desire to keep our own church and ministry pure, making our venerable and scriptural

standards the test of purity ; but we yet entertain brighter and higher hopes of many that walk not with us, than of many that do. And God in his providence has placed the seal of his approbation on this course. For whilst those who confine the church to certain forms of external organization, are as a languishing vine, we have greatly flourished. Our vine has sent its branches over our mountains, and through our dense forests, and across our extended prairies and mighty rivers ; and the breezes that occasionally disturb it, only shake off its rotten branches, without in the least degree injuring the noble trunk which they incumbered.

These things being so, is it not obvious that the doctrines of the cross must be here preached in order to make this house a Beth-el ? To make it the house of God, it must be devoted to the advocacy of the truth of God. But what are the doctrines of the cross ? They are, the entire ruin of our race—a Trinity in unity—regeneration by the Spirit—justification solely through the imputed righteousness of Christ—the inability of man to do any thing of himself acceptable to God—his entire dependence upon divine influence—God's sovereignty—election—the final perseverance of the saints—and the eternity of future rewards and punishments. These are the great doctrines which humble man and exalt Christ—which make Christ all in all. These doctrines are to be preached, not in the way of controversy, but as simple verities of revelation which every man is bound to believe. These are the doctrines which were preached by Paul all over the Roman empire, and which subverted the hoary and venerable mythologies of Greece and Rome. These were the great doctrines of the Reformation, and which continued in all branches of the protestant church until the days of the corrupt and persecuting Laud. These were the doctrines preached by the Huguenots of France, and by the Puritans of England, and by our pilgrim fathers ; and by the fathers of our own church in Continental Europe, Britain, and in our own country. These are the doctrines under whose preaching, by the Whitefields, the Edwardses, the Dickinsons, and the Davies, those great revivals of religion have occurred which have made our land the glory of all

lands, and which, in these latter days, have given such an impetus to the church of Jesus Christ. And these are the doctrines which, as preached and expounded by the Scotts and the Newtons of the English establishment, keep glowing upon her altars nearly all the fires of devotion that warm and illumine her people. The maintenance of these great truths we deem essential to the maintenance of the life of piety in the church. Let these doctrines be banished from our pulpits, and soon we shall have merely a body without the spirit, an altar without a sacrifice, a temple without the shekinah. The cherubic forms may stand on either end of our altars and overshadow them with their wings, but no cloud symbolical of the divine presence will rise up between them. And may this house be ever worthy the name of Beth-el, because here from age to age the great doctrines of the cross and of the reformation, will be preached in the demonstration of the spirit and with power.

The form of church government which we have intimated above, and the synopsis of doctrine which we have now given, is that which in the Christian world is called Presbyterianism. And the historical argument in its favor should strongly recommend it, at least to all lovers of civil liberty, even when we omit altogether the evidences which prove that Presbyterianism is in strict accordance with the word of God. Let us glance at this argument for a moment.

There exists a very intimate connexion between the religious faith and the political institutions of a nation. As there is no principle known to the human bosom so powerful or so abiding as faith in God, the mode which that faith assumes exerts a moulding influence upon the character of the man; and when it becomes national, gives character to the nation. There is no doubt but that the splendid mythology of the Greeks and Romans was the frame-work of cunning politicians, to enable them to govern the more readily the people through those religious instincts which are easily perverted, but which can never be suppressed. And we can readily conceive that it was the same motive which led a Roman emperor to seek the situation of Pontifex Maximus, and Henry the VIII. to place himself at the head of the Anglican

church. It was, that from the highest seat of ecclesiastical power, they might the more readily subdue the people to their will. Whilst Christianity is designed and adapted to live under all forms of political organization, from the purest democracy to the purest despotism, it must be obvious that certain forms of doctrine and of church order are better adapted to some forms of civil government than of others. Who does not see that Popery, being itself a religious despotism, is best suited to civil governments of the same description, and actually produces them? Who does not know that diocesan episcopacy in the church, and monarchy in the state, stand related to each other as cause and effect? Where on earth is the English adage unknown, "no bishop, no king?" Who does not know that during the long conflict in England, extending from the time of Elizabeth to the revolution, that as Prelacy, Presbytery or Independency prevailed in the church, monarchy or republicanism prevailed in the state? And he must be a stranger in Israel, who does not know that the faith which we profess has ever been in conflict with despotic power, whether civil or ecclesiastical, and never its advocate. It has never cringed to crowns, nor laid down the cross at the foot of thrones. It has never surrendered its doctrines to win the favor of monarchs; it has ever preferred the dens and caves of the earth with a good conscience, to splendor and palaces obtained by a surrender of the faith. And hence, whilst we can boast of no royal martyrs like the perfidious Charles, we can point to thousands of whom the world was not worthy, who have shed their blood like water in defence of the faith which we profess. Our form of government, because of its tendencies to freedom, and our doctrines, because of their tendency to humble the pride of man, have met with but little favor from the rulers of the earth. Through all their existence, they have been in conflict with despotism; and their course through the world may be traced by the blood of their adherents. It was the faith which we profess which gave freedom to Switzerland, and the degree of liberty which she possesses to Great Britain. In Scotland it quenched with its best blood the fires kindled by prelacy to consume it. In England it opposed the despotism of the Stuarts on the one hand, and the

fanaticism of Cromwell on the other. It was the blood of Presbyterians that flowed in France on the revocation of the edict of Nantz. And Presbyterians have defended with equal power and nearly with equal success, the civil rights of man and the sacred liberties of the church. And when driven from the old world, they sought an asylum in the new—where they have done much, very much, to give the present form and character to the institutions of our country, because best calculated to secure the great objects for which they have ever contended. If ever the great principles which led to our revolution are fairly canvassed, and the causes which, amid so many discouragements, led us on to triumph, are fairly stated, it will be found that our faith, and its teachers, had much to do in obtaining our liberty. The blood of our people has stained, and their bones have bleached, on every battle-field of our country. If papacy or prelacy had prevailed in our land, our now free states would be provinces of Great Britain to the present hour. Withdraw from this land all the civil benefits which it has derived from our Pilgrim and Presbyterian fathers, and the remainder would be scarcely worth the possessing. Let the influence which the Presbyterian family and their faith is now exerting all over the earth be withdrawn, and the cause of human liberty would receive a mighty impulse backward; and the genius of freedom would again shriek from her watch-tower as she did when Kosciusko fell.

And what other form of faith has prompted, to the same extent, to the education of the public mind? Calvinism, as our faith is not unfrequently called, has done more to educate and stimulate the public mind of the country, than all other systems of faith put together. With very few exceptions, the Congregational and Presbyterian churches have laid the foundations of all the colleges and seminaries of this land. And to the ministry of those churches, in this respect, the whole country owes a debt, which posterity may acknowledge but which it can never repay.

And what other form of faith has sustained at so elevated a point the standard of ministerial education? Regarding an uneducated ministry as unfit to instruct the people—as unfit to obtain for the gospel the attention and respect of the intelligent—and as

very liable to become either the dupes of error, or the promoters of fanaticism and folly, our church has from the first insisted on an educated ministry. And who does not know and confess the power of an educated ministry in correcting the public morals? A well educated, devoted minister, will do more, in this respect, than all the laws that can be framed against vice, than all the vigilance committees that can be appointed to detect crime. The instructions and warnings of such a man are heard, not as the word of man, but as the word of God. Mere piety will exert an influence; but it requires an alliance with talents and education to arrest the attention of the vicious, and to reform public morals.

And the superior moral influence of our faith is to be seen by a comparison of those communities where its influence has been long felt, with those communities which have been equally long under the influence of other and opposing systems. Compare protestant Switzerland, Holland, Scotland, the North of Ireland, the English Nonconformists, the New-England States, and our Presbyterian communities here and there scattered through this land—all Calvinistic in their faith—with any other states or communities on earth where a different form of faith prevails, and their superior morality and intelligence must be apparent. Where upon earth are communities to be found of more active virtue? And into whatsoever age we look for the best models of pure and active religion, we find them, with but few exceptions, believers in the doctrines which constitute our faith. The Essenes of the Jews, and the Jansenists of the Romish church, who were the teachers and the models of severe morals, were Calvinists. And at the present day, among the Neological clergy of Germany, and the Arminian and secular clergy of the English establishment, the first symptoms of a return to pure morality and piety, is a giving up of loose Arminian, and Pelagian, and Pantheistic notions, and a return to the faith of Paul and of Calvin.

And what form of faith has sustained with equal power, as our's, evangelical religion? Every observer of men and things in our country must see two strong tendencies as to religion, each equally fatal to it. The one is a tendency to cold formality, and the substitution of forms for the reality of religion. The other is

a tendency to fanaticism. There are sects amongst us of which these are the characteristics : the religion of one is the religion of authority, and forms, and sacraments, and white muslin ; the religion of the other consists in feeling and excitement, caring but little as to the doctrines that should control and direct them. The one is so cold as to repel the heart—the other is so hot, and so prone to folly, as to repel the mind. The one stands as a mountain of ice in the garden of the Lord, freezing up the fountains of benevolence, and chilling all the Christian charities, nipping the blossoms of every tree within its influence, and preventing their setting in fruit ;—the other, breaking out like volcanic eruptions in different parts of the garden, gives a wilderness aspect to every thing within the scorching heat of its burning lava. Nor are we ourselves entirely free from these tendencies. And their effects are wide spread and disastrous—the one every where producing the other. But our church, taking her course between the frigid zone of formality, and the torrid zone of fanaticism, has so well connected form and feeling, zeal and sound discretion, and has so directed her instruction to enlighten the mind and correct the heart, that she has spread around her every where the fertility, foliage, and fruit of the temperate zone. She has kept up evangelical religion and a sound Christian experience to the respect of the world. And hence the cry of errorists, and fanatics, and paltry politicians, and infidels, against Presbyterians ! No robber ever fell in love with the iron door that arrested his progress ; nor kissed the herculean arm that snatched his weapons from his hands. And could we subtract from our country all in the way of holy influence and pure religion which she possesses through the agency of the Calvinistic brotherhood, the effect would be like unto that ascribed in the Apocalypse to the pouring out of the seventh vial into the air.

Such, in brief, is the historical argument for Presbyterianism, which, in connexion with those other arguments which prove it to be in accordance with the lively oracles, both as to doctrine and order, induces us to adopt, to love, and to propagate it. Whilst we exclude neither from the church of Christ, nor from our Christian love, any evangelical denomination of God's peo-

ple ; yet we must be permitted to believe and to declare, that our own beloved church, in the order and beauty of her arrangements, and the chaste and graceful simplicity of her venerable forms of worship, and the purity of her faith and influence, is to her sister churches as charity is to faith and hope, the greatest of them all.

III. THAT THIS HOUSE MAY BE A BETH-EL, IT MUST BE A PLACE OF EDIFICATION TO THE LORD'S PEOPLE.

The first words of Jacob, when he awoke from his dream, were, "Surely the Lord is in this place." And it is not so much our dedication of it to his service, as his own rendering it holy by his presence, that will make this the house of God, and the gate of heaven.

The importance of a church for the public worship of God, where the saints can collect to keep holy the sabbath day, is great beyond description to every community. Its moral influences are incalculable. Its very spire points the wicked to an unerring tribunal ; and the deep-toned notes of its bell call to meditation on the things of eternity. And who, on the sabbath day, can turn away from the streams that meet at its open doors, that seem to invite and to welcome to worship, without at least a suggestion from conscience that his feet may be in the way that leads to death. It rises on the public green, or on the public highway, or sends up its spire amid the trees of the grove, as a beacon to warn every passer by that there is a God whom all are bound to worship and to serve.

But especially is it important to the Lord's people, where they can meet for his social worship, and to claim the promises ; as the central fountain in the parish, where the living waters rise. This is the spot where those waters are purest, and sweetest, and most abundant. And as the hunted hart in the desert pants after the water-brooks, so the Christian longs for the courts of the Lord. The labors of the week are ended, and the sabbath arrives. And the Lord's day, and the Lord's house, are indissolubly associated. The bell proclaims the hour of worship, and, going forth from all their dwellings, the saints direct their footsteps to the place of prayer. This is the day of their festivity ;

the day of all the week the best, and they enter their house with thanksgiving. Their own minister and Christ's ambassador conducts the services. They unite in the song of praise, and in the solemn prayer. And as they hear the word read and preached, they pray for a heart to understand his law. And if the Lord only meets with them, vouchsafing his gracious presence, their happiness is indescribable. They have a lively view of Christ by faith. Their repentings are kindled together. There is a sweet sense of reconciliation to God through Christ. Love, in all its holy and healthful exercises, is excited. Hope is strengthened, and its joys are multiplied. It becomes the anchor of the soul, and holds it in peace amid the storms and billows of this temporal state. And what was but hope and confidence, is strengthened into the assurance that neither death nor life can separate the soul from the love of God. These are the elements of Christian happiness; and they are such as are found in the house of God by the people of God. If only blessings like these are received here, they are such as Jacob received at Beth-el, and such as will make this house a Beth-el indeed. Let only God thus meet with his people in all their future assemblies within these walls, as we most humbly and sincerely pray that he may, and this will be indeed the house of God and the gate of heaven. You will have all reason to call it Beth-el.

IV. THAT THIS HOUSE MAY BE A BETH-EL, IT MUST BE BLESSED WITH THE REVIVING INFLUENCES OF GOD'S SPIRIT.

The great object of organizing believers into churches, and placing them under government, is to combine their energies and efforts for the good of others. Otherwise believers might pursue their course alone to heaven, without any connexion save with the invisible church. Union is power; and united action is powerful action. The notes which compose the thunder's peal, will not singly disturb the slumbers of an infant; but when united they fill all the air with their clamor, and cause the earth to tremble. The prayers of individuals for the conversion of men, connected with exertion, however feeble, are not lost. But yet they are solitary. They may be compared to the little streamlet,

which, without uniting with any other, pursues its course from the rock where it commences dripping to the ocean. But the prayers of a whole church are like rivulets, gliding and leaping from all the surrounding mountains into one broad and deep channel, where they form a mighty river, on whose bosom navies may ride in safety. So the object of church organization is to unite the prayers and the efforts of God's people for their mutual edification and for the salvation of sinners. And we obtain the end of our organization in the proportion our number is increased by true converts to the truth, and we ourselves grow in grace.

And for what purpose do we erect houses in which to worship God? Not, surely, to gratify our taste and vanity. Not, surely, to gratify any unholy feelings which we may possess towards others with whom we cannot in all things agree. If so, instead of being Beth-els, houses of God, they will be Beth-avens, houses of vanity. Nor is it simply that we and our families may be the more comfortably accommodated, and that we may worship God with less distraction of mind and feeling. Whilst these may be actuating motives, they must not be our only motives. We erect churches, when we erect them from right principles, for the purpose of opening another spring in our desolate world, whence may flow out the healing waters of life. We erect them for the purpose of placing another Moses in a position where he may smite the rock, that the refreshing waters may flow down to the famishing multitudes below; or where he may hold up higher the brazen serpent, that all infected by the poison of sin may look upon the shining remedy and live.

And are these, my brethren, the motives that have actuated you in the erection of this beautiful and commodious house for the worship of God? If so, see well to it that they are followed up and followed out with corresponding action. Be not satisfied when you yourselves are fed with living bread. Never for a moment remain satisfied with merely an external prosperity as a congregation. Our churches are usually put up amid much more noise and confusion than was the temple of Solomon; and the noise of dissension not unfrequently mingles with that of the

hammer, and the axe, and the tool of iron. And many are satisfied when they have a large and increasing congregation, pleasantly accommodated in their new edifice. Brethren, see to it that this prevalent and sad mistake is avoided by you. This building is a monument to your zeal and liberality ; now see to it that from the first hour of its occupancy it is devoted to true and scriptural revivals of religion. This very day bring your tithes into the storehouse, and try the Lord, that he may pour out a blessing upon you which you will not have room to receive. And as on the day that Solomon dedicated the temple "the cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priest could not stand to minister because of the cloud ; for the glory of the Lord had filled the house of the Lord ;" so may God, by his gracious presence, fill this house to-day, and send down his reviving and quickening spirit to abide here continually. And then may you call the name of this house Beth-el, for it will be the house of God and the gate of heaven.

This will ever be a memorable day in the history of this congregation ; a day to which the future worshippers here will ever recur with interest. What has been the subject of conversation for years, is at last completed ; a church rises for the worship of God on the beautiful plain crimsoned with the blood of your ancestry, and where their bones bleached in the sun. And where the war-whoop rung through the woods and was echoed from the mountains, the songs of salvation are hereafter to be sung, and the gospel of peace is to be proclaimed. The ark which your pilgrim fathers bore to Wyoming, and which has been carried here from place to place without a local habitation, has at last a house for its resting-place. And if your fathers, who braved the dangers of the wilderness, and cast out the heathen, and first planted the vine of whose fruits we are all the partakers, could only mingle their devotions with yours this morning, their voice of thanksgiving would be loudest of all, because you their children have not abandoned the faith which they received from their pilgrim sires, and which amid many perils and alarms they taught you ; and because God has put it into your hearts to erect this temple, where he is to be worshipped according to the pattern

shown in the mount. And if the saints who have gone to glory are acquainted with the transactions of earth, and take any interest in the progress of the church militant, we may readily conceive that the pious and godlike ones who first cast into this soil the seeds of truth, and who, after serving God in their generation, have gone to sleep, are looking with delight from their orbs on high, upon the solemnities with which we dedicate this house to the worship of the God of Beth-el.

This house is to be hereafter the place to which this congregation will resort to hear the gospel—to praise God and to seek his blessing. Let it be only associated with sacred things. Permit it never to be occupied for purposes with which the worship of God has no connexion. Let it be the favored spot whither you will always resort for the cultivation of the fruits of the Spirit. And as long as you are able to keep your own habitations from dilapidation and ruin, never let this house wear the appearance of neglect. The neglect of the house of the Lord is always preceded by the neglect of the Lord of the house.

And let this house be the place of your habitual presence on the sabbath. You have erected it, and to-day dedicate it, to the service of God. From this pulpit the gospel, in its freeness and fulness, is to be preached: to benefit you, you must stately and regularly occupy these pews. Let this be your house. Let the regular worshippers here be a part of your family. Let your pew be like a chamber in your own private dwelling, furnished for the accommodation of yourselves and families. And when the word of life is here dispensed, see that your pew is occupied as regularly as is your seat at your own table. And come at all times with the heart of Lydia, to hear the word that may be spoken; and then every sabbath spent here—every sermon heard here—every service performed here, will tend to give you a meetness for that building of God, that house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

And our hearts dwell with rapturous joy on the thought, that from this pulpit the gospel will be preached—that edified hearers will hear the joyful invitations of mercy in these pews, long after we who are the actors and spectators in the solemn scenes of

this day have returned to the dust;—that the tear of penitence will here glisten in many an eye, when God has wiped away all tears from ours; that here many will draw around the Lord's table long after we have gone up to our reward, and taken our seats at the marriage supper of the Lamb.

We have but a word, in conclusion, to all who have contributed to the erection of this house, or aided in any way to bring it to completion. After Jacob had erected the stones which formed his pillow on that memorable night of his vision into a rude altar, and poured oil upon the top of it, and called the name of the place Beth-el, his very first subsequent act was the dedication of himself to God. He first dedicated the altar, and then himself. Is not this example worthy of your imitation? We dedicate this house at your request;—will you not now dedicate yourselves to God, to be living temples, meet for the indwelling of his Spirit? How deeply soever we may engrave the name of God upon these walls, or doors, or pillars, it will sooner or later be erased; for the hand of time will shake these pillars and lay this temple in ruins. But if that name is written upon your hearts, time will not erase it. Death will only render it the more legible. The smoke of consuming worlds cannot obscure it. And when the decisions of the last great day have sent the righteous and the wicked to their various allotments, like the jewels which stud the Redeemer's crown, it will shine the more resplendent as the years of eternity roll onward, and will secure to you for ever all that is comprehended in that immensely comprehensive word, SALVATION.

Upon these walls, and gates, and doors;—upon this pulpit, and these pews;—upon all of our hearts, may HOLINESS TO THE LORD be now written.