


# A DISCOURSE,

EMBRACING THE

HISTORY OF THE BAPTIST CHURCH  
OF CHRIST IN HOMER, N. Y.,

FOR ABOUT

THIRTY YEARS FROM ITS COMMENCEMENT.



By REV. ALFRED BENNETT.



UTICA:

BENNETT, BACKUS, & HAWLEY, FRANKLIN SQUARE.

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☞ The following discourse needs no commendation from us. Its author wrote it, at the request of his brethren, and consented to its publication, because the churches before whom it was delivered desired him to do so. We trust it will find its way into all the families connected with the three congregations whose origin is here described, and be regarded by them as a precious memorial of the faithfulness and grace of Christ Jesus their Lord.

EDW. BRIGHT, JR.,

*Pastor of the Baptist Church, Homer.*

J. P. SIMMONS,

*Pastor of the Baptist Church, Cortlandville.*

W. G. DYE,

*Pastor of the Baptist Church, McGrawville.*

*Homer, July 20, 1844.*

## A DISCOURSE.

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“WE HAVE HEARD WITH OUR EARS, O GOD, OUR FATHERS HAVE TOLD US WHAT WORK THOU DIDST IN THEIR DAYS, IN TIMES OF OLD. HOW THOU DIDST DRIVE OUT THE HEATHEN, WITH THY HAND, AND PLANTED THEM, HOW THOU DIDST AFFLICT THE PEOPLE AND CAST THEM OUT. FOR THEY GOT NOT THE LAND IN POSSESSION BY THEIR OWN SWORD, NEITHER DID THEIR OWN ARM SAVE THEM, BUT THY RIGHT HAND AND THINE ARM, AND THE LIGHT OF THY COUNTENANCE, BECAUSE THOU HADST A FAVOR UNTO THEM.”—Psa. 44: 1—3.

THESE words were true to the letter in the history of the journeyings of the children of Israel from Egypt, and in their subsequent providential settlement in Canaan—the land of giants and Anakims.

But we propose to improve them to illustrate somewhat the history of God's dealings with this people from the settlement of the town of Homer, or more particularly in tracing the history of the *Baptist Church of Christ* in the town from its organization, for about thirty years.

For the better understanding of those least informed, it may be proper to say, that fifty years ago, this whole region of country was a dense unbroken forest. Mr. Joseph Beebee, and Rhoda his wife, were the first married couple that located in this township of ten miles square. This was in the summer of 1793. The following spring four or five families more moved in and made a permanent settlement. Being mostly religious people, meetings on the Sabbath for divine worship were commenced on their arrival, and ever

after maintained, which contributed much toward that order, and high sense of morals, which has ever characterized the inhabitants of the town. Meetings were attended in common by all, without denominational distinction, until the year 1801, when circumstances occurred which led the members of the Baptist denomination to make provision for the worship of God, as they religiously believed God required them to do.

On the third day of October in that year, (1801,) sixteen persons having become previously acquainted and united, were publicly recognized as a Baptist church of Jesus Christ. The council consisted of Rev. James Bacon, New Woodstock, Cazenovia, Rev. Nathan Baker, De Ruyter, with one lay brother, and Rev. Joseph Cornell, a missionary, providentially present. This was the first church of any denomination formed within the County of Cortland. The names of the constituent members were—males, John Keep, Joseph Beebee, Daniel Crandall, Peleg Babcock, Cornish Messenger, Roderick Beebee, and James H. Wheeler; females, Frances Keep, Rhoda Beebee, Submit Keep, Rhoda Miner, Martha Messenger, Mary Bishop, Susannah Crandall, Esther Wilcox, and Molly Wheeler. Males, seven; females, nine. Br. John Keep was appointed clerk of the church, which office he held for twenty-seven years, or until the church was divided. Br. Joseph Beebee was appointed Deacon.

For the better understanding of the dealings of God with this church, and to show that they attained to eminence and influence by His right hand, and His arm, and the light of His countenance, because he had a favor to them, we will divide the time we intend to embrace in this discourse on her history into three parts, each containing about ten years. The first portion we will call the period of her experience, or formation; the second, the period of her enlargement; and the third, the period of her changes.

The church was like a person forming a character, among surrounding and conflicting agencies, all of which had their

influence, more or less upon her. Or, like a child training up for future usefulness, under the care of a kind and affectionate, yet strong, thorough, and unbending teacher.

Among all the members of the church, we find no one who by long experience, and adapted talent, was prepared to lead the little band, and a worthy Br. Morse on whom they chiefly depended for council, died a little *before* the church was constituted, and Dea. Beebee died within seven months after the church was organized. Thus God seemed to defeat the councils of men, and blast the hopes, even of his dear children, but he led them in the right way, and guided them with the skillfulness of his hand, for in doing these things unto them he did not forsake them, but taught them to look to *him* for help, and to expect their salvation from *him*.

We find by the records of the church, that they seemed in those days to walk softly before the Lord, and often met to seek of him a right way for themselves, and those who should come after them. Sometimes it was a meeting with fasting, for prayer and humiliation before God. Sometimes they met to inquire after the scriptural qualifications of officers in the church of God; and then again how every member ought to conduct toward each other, and toward the church, or, in other words, to learn the nature and bearing of the discipline in the house of God, and how it ought to be administered. Then again we find them assembled to understand the way the expenses of the church should be met, and they seemed happily and perfectly agreed in the scriptural method of equality as embraced in the articles of the church. The first effort made to raise money to support the gospel, and other necessary expenses of the church, was by an average laid on every member, and which amounted to seven dollars and two cents. The highest paid two dollars and thirty-six cents, and the lowest thirteen cents. Surely they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them.

We have already remarked that Br. Beebee, their first deacon, died soon after his appointment, subsequent to which Br. Prince Freeman, of Virgil, having united with the church, and having been called to officiate as deacon in a church before he came here, was cordially and promptly called to serve this church in that office, which he did with acceptance, until he was dismissed with others to form the church in Virgil.

In their early history there seems to have been a great destitution of the stated ministrations of the word and ordinances of the gospel among them. Mention is made of occasional sermons from Rev. Joseph Cornell, James Bacon, and P. P. Roots. An ordained minister by the name of Lesure, preached for them once in two months for a time, and Rev. Rufus Freeman was called to labor with the church once a month for a year. This comprises about all the ministerial labor they enjoyed, until it was permanently settled among them.

The individual who subsequently became the pastor of the church, emigrated to this town in the spring of 1803. In April, 1804, he united by letter with the church as a member. In the summer of 1805, he began to exercise his gift in the ministry of the gospel. In November of that year, we find the following record on the church book. "Took the minds of the brethren and sisters, as to Br. Bennett's public improvement in the doctrine of the gospel. After conferring on the subject, it was unanimously agreed by the church that he had a ministerial gift. Then voted that he have liberty to improve anywhere within the bounds of the church." In April, 1806, the following record is made; "Voted, that Br. Alfred Bennett have liberty to improve his gifts where God in his providence shall open a door."

In February, 1807, a resolution is on record, calling the above named person to ordination, which took place the 18th of June following. At the same meeting in February, which made arrangements for the ordination of a pastor, a vote is on record in the following words, "Voted, that Br.

Asa Bennett be on trial for a deacon." It appears that he united with the church by letter in 1806. In 1810, Br. Thomas Chollar united with the church by letter, and was soon after called to serve the church as deacon, but the date of his appointment is not found. During this period of her formation, the church evidently advanced in knowledge and correct understanding in the scriptures. The union and confidence, among her members, was increased. And her character for piety, and consistency of conduct, was improved before the world.

The increase and changes in her membership, during the first ten years, was as follows: added by baptism, 67; by letter, 55; dismissed by letter, 47; 7 were excluded, and 5 died. Of the number dismissed, twelve or fourteen were dismissed to form a church in Virgil, and seven or eight toward forming a church in Tully, now Scott. And of the number excluded, two were again restored. Another thing which exercised the feelings, tried the faith, and called forth the best judgment of the church in this time of her experience, was the place where the worship of God should be permanently located. During the first ten years, for the sake of convenience, or as an experiment, the meetings on Lord's day were holden a part of the time in Homer village, Cortland village, Port Watson, on East River near the poor house, and finally, it was, by mutual consent, settled on the road from Homer to Cortland, half a mile north of the old court house. Here by the energies of the denomination, a good meeting-house, fifty-two by thirty-six feet, with a gallery on three sides, was erected in the year 1811, and consecrated to the worship of God, in June, 1812. The sermon on the occasion was preached by the pastor, from Zeph. iii. 12, "*I will also leave in the midst of thee, an afflicted, and poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord.*" The benevolence of the gospel manifested itself in the church early, as another important element in the formation of her character. As early as 1808 the subject was before the church, and in 1811, we find it voted to encourage the ob-

ject by a contribution for that purpose, which has since been regularly repeated.

As early, also, as 1808, we find the church voting to meet on a given day, to improve in singing. Showing most clearly, that as they considered singing a part of divine worship, they felt the importance of having all the talent connected with that worship, so cultivated, as to engage understandingly in the service. And we were afterwards much indebted to one or two brethren, for their indefatigable efforts, to improve the science of sacred music, and elevate it toward what it has since become.

From 1811 to 1821, we call the period of the church's enlargement. For it was emphatically a season of revivals.

During the whole of this period, there was a kind and Christian friendship and intimacy of intercourse among saints, which was admirably calculated to give peace in society, and pleasure in the soul, while it led to mutual co-operation among Christians of all denominations, and secured public confidence in favor of religion. But as we are giving a consecutive history of the *church*, we must not be led off to give the history even of *revivals* as such.

The commencement of this period, found the church worshipping in the new meeting-house, which a sense of duty had impelled them to build, and which had brought them into debt about \$1,000, or nearly half the value of the house, without any means of payment. However, such was the abundant grace bestowed, that before the year closed the church had more than doubled her numbers, the debt was paid off, and the congregation large and respectable.

In this revival there were eighteen husbands, with their wives, and thirteen whose companions were members before, making forty-nine heads of families, who were permanently settled in town, and respectable in society, converted to God, and brought into the church, many of whom remain at this present time as pillars in the house of God, but some have fallen asleep. Such was the feeling cultivated, the amount of intelligence possessed, the light of truth in which

duty was discovered, and the calmness, deliberation, integrity and decision with which they came forward and connected with the church, that there seemed no occasion for change, or even a desire to turn back again to the world. It is believed that for some one or two years after the close of the revival, there was not an instance of defection in any member, sufficient to call for even a reproof from the church. All that joined the church seemed to do it as a duty, and because they loved to obey Christ as the head of the church, and because they preferred the society of saints, to all other society in the world. Thus they made the church their *home*, and as all were ready to study the things that make for peace, and things whereby each could edify the other, the church was very peaceable, and the brethren and sisters were delighted to meet and greet each other as often at least as every Sabbath.

In those days the scripture was fulfilled in them, "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another and the Lord hearkened and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before him, *for them that feared the Lord and that thought upon his name.*" God did remember them, and blessed their souls, and prospered them in the work of their hands, "*and he gave them the land in possession because he had a favor unto them.*" The opportunities, time afforded, before, or between hours of divine worship on the Sabbath, were profitably spent, by an interchange of Christian feeling, and a kind inquiry after the state of the soul of the individual, or of the progress of the cause in their immediate neighborhood. Thus in some measure making each member responsible for the state of religious feeling among their neighbors. But this was not enough, the church as a body agreed to assemble at the meeting-house (when, at the time of which we are now speaking, there was not probably five members within one mile of it,) once in two weeks and spend half a day in prayer and social Christian conversation together as members of the same body, and partakers of the same rich grace. Thus every other Wednesday afternoon

was consecrated to God by the church voluntarily, and it is believed, that very few seasons passed without a meeting, for fifteen years, and generally a meeting of *comfort*, and often a *soul-refreshing time* to all present. These social conference meetings gave opportunity for the exercise of the various gifts in the church, which God has given that all may be edified and comforted. They served to bring out occasionally those pious and sage remarks which are "like apples of gold in pictures of silver."

We give a few specimens. On one occasion the conversation turned on the meaning and importance of our Lord's words, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me," and they replied, Lord when did we these things? A member said, How shall we understand when an act comes within the range of his approbation, how shall we know when we do a *good work*? A sister replied, I do not know, unless we can do the work and *forget* it. The righteous had done all their good works and forgot them, for they had done them out of love to *Christ*, but the wicked had done their's and remembered them, for they expected *pay* for them.

On one of those conference days, another sister addressed those present in the following strain: "Brethren and sisters, let us *trust God*. It is not so easy to trust the bare word of God, but it is our duty. He says, 'I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee,' and it ought to satisfy us. Now," she continued, "we can trust God with our barns full, cellars full, and hands full; but to trust him when destitute, when *want* presses, when no prospect of relief appears,—to trust him 'although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines, the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat, and the flocks shall be cut off from the folds, and there shall be no herd in the stalls,' to trust him thus *in religion*; this is what God requires of his children. And when Christ is enjoyed *alone*, and has no rival in our *heart*, and we live on him by *faith*, 'and eat his flesh, and drink his blood,' 'tis then we enjoy peace, this is health to the soul, *this is sweet living*."

A brother who was a large farmer, and yet was seldom absent from the Wednesday conference meeting, or *any week day meeting appointed by the church*, being asked how he could be so constant at meetings, replied, "These meetings were appointed by the church, and it is my duty to be here; I am bound to respect the claims of the church. It is presumed, said he, the church would not make an appointment unless it were important, and if it is important for the church to meet, it is necessary for me to be there as I am one of the church." May the spirit of the living God impress this truth, this important, this *immensely important* practical truth upon every church member's heart, that it may enlighten the conscience, and result in a punctual attendance on the appointments of the church.

These social seasons were of great advantage to the pastor, in making him acquainted with the state and condition of the church, so as to enable him to encourage the faint, strengthen the weak, direct the inquiring, restrain the rash, reclaim the wanderer, assist the strong, and as far as possible so divide the word, that each might have their portion in due season. It would be natural to expect gracious manifestations to follow such devotion, and faith, with much prayer for the Holy Spirit's influence, and we find God was pleased again to revive his work, and make the place of his feet glorious, while he walked in the midst of this golden candlestick.

In November, 1815, the truth ministered by the pastor, from Prov. 20:4, "*The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold, therefore shall he beg in harvest and have nothing*," though sown in weakness, was so blessed of God as to be the commencement of another season of refreshing which continued with undiminished and delightful interest more than a year in the church and congregation, bringing many excellent and efficient members into the church, whose prayers and piety are still useful to the world. There were very few days for more than twelve months, in which a meeting was not holden somewhere in the town for religious

worship. And during the whole summer, when meetings were held in the afternoon, so common was it for members of the church to attend, and even go miles to attend, that it became proverbial with the wicked, that there would be a scarcity of provisions that year, for Christians did not work half their time.

Afterwards, it was as proverbial with the brethren, that they had seldom if ever had better crops, or had them gathered in better season, or in better state, than they were that year, showing most clearly that those who trust in God, and do good, *dwelt in the land, and are fed.*

It seemed no burden then for people to congregate at the meeting-house on the Sabbath, from four to six miles distance, in various directions regularly. One female came eight miles on foot on the Sabbath to hear the gospel, give a reason of her hope to the church, and be baptized in obedience to Christ. When she was admonished by her neighbors for her presumption, she replied, I have gone as far as this, many a time, to serve the wicked one, and I am not afraid to trust *my* life in the hands of him, who gave his *life* to redeem my *soul* from everlasting death. One man and his wife took up a child in their arms, and *walked* four miles, to an evening conference, and returned home again the same night.

But the most remarkable revival probably ever enjoyed in this town, was in 1829, making that year signally interesting to many on account of the mercy of God to them and their friends. In December, 1819, there were some symptoms of another gracious work. The saints seemed more fervent in prayer, and there was a greater solemnity visible, in assemblies convened for public worship. There was also one instance of hopeful conversion, with one or two signal instances of reformation in backsliders. About the first of January, at a meeting called for an ecclesiastical council in the Presbyterian church, the work broke forth in a more visible manner, with great power, extending into different parts of the town, engaging the attention of all

classes in society. The brethren and sisters, like the church on the day of Pentecost, were with one accord again permitted to mingle their tears, prayers, sympathies, feelings, service, soul, time, talents, and all most heartily together, which they did and entered into the work with all their strength. There was very little secular labor performed for two or three months, and many devoted the whole of their time, to meetings and visiting from house to house; some went two and two through different parts of the town, calling on every family in their way, conversing and praying with them. The work that year, was remarkably distinguished for order, and deep solemnity; scarce a trait of enthusiasm was discovered.

It ought to be recorded to the honor of divine grace, that in many instances, prayer was most signally and speedily answered, whether it was offered for the comfort of a saint under peculiar trials, or for the conversion of sinners.

The congregations which met on the Sabbath, for worship, became very large, overflowing the house, and one instance is recollected, when the communicants at the Lord's supper, occupied nearly every seat on the lower floor, thus literally removing almost the whole congregation, either into the gallery, or out of the house.

It was peculiarly pleasant thus to meet and worship with the multitudes, that kept "holy day," and to be active in, or witness the administration of, the ordinances of God, to such members, *all* of whom seemed piously devoted to the cause, and many of whom were in youth—young men and maidens of talent, intelligence, and influence, from some of the first families in town. At the close of this ingathering, there were in the church, about one hundred members in an unmarried state, in all the bloom and health of life, looking forward to a long continuance on the earth, and consecrating that existence from its commencement, to the service of the living God, to whom of right it belonged. This was a sight over which angels in heaven might rejoice, and



over which saints on earth did rejoice, with joy unspeakable, and full of glory.

As a means of usefulness, they organized a juvenile missionary society, at the suggestion of the pastor, and in perfect accordance with the feelings of the church, which we are happy to say continues still to operate, having done much good, both in its contributions, which have been liberal, and also in calling forth the talents and wisdom of the members in reports, essays, speeches, prayers, and business meetings, which prepared them for subsequent usefulness in the places to which God called them.

Toward the close of this revival, and in the midst of the prosperity connected with the ingathering of its fruits, the Rev. Elnathan Walker died, aged 40 years. He was the devoted, worthy, and beloved pastor of the Presbyterian church. This event was followed in a few months by the death of Dea. Jacob Hobart, aged 43 years, an active and efficient officer in the same church. In the death of these men, and in the subsequent death of Dea. Asa Bennett, and Hon. John Keep, of the Baptist church, there was probably a greater loss of moral and religious influence sustained, than was ever suffered in this town, by the death of any other four individuals.

In 1820, Brn. Moses Curtis, and Oliver Stedman, were elected to serve the church as deacons. They were both added to the church by baptism. The former in 1812, the latter in 1817.

During this period of the church's enlargement, there were added by baptism, 333, and by letter, 107; 79 were dismissed by letter, 21 were excluded, and 22 died.

The third period, which we call the period of changes in the church, embraces the time from the close of 1821 to the autumn of 1832; the time when the pastor resigned his charge, as the servant, or overseer in the church. In the responsible labors of this office he had spent more than twenty-seven years of the most active and important part

of his life, amidst an affectionate and beloved people, but with what success will be better understood another day.

The first important change we will mention was by dismission, and removal. The foundation for this is seen in the amount of membership which we have noticed in youthful life. The spirit of emigration came over the church like an overwhelming flood, and carried away scores of our active and lovely young members, into other parts of the country. But it was pleasant to see them go forth armed with the spirit and power of the gospel, to meet the responsibilities of their duty, and buffet the adversities of life. Many of these are filling important places in Zion. A number of them are in the ministry, and two of them are laboring as missionaries among the heathen in eastern Asia.

Another change experienced in the church was by sickness and death, and this was a sore calamity, for some of the pillars of the church were removed. In the death of Br. Asa Bennett, the senior deacon, in 1825, and subsequently of Hon. John Keep, the church lost much of that talent and influence, on which she had been accustomed to rely for counsel, and stability, and which had done much for many years, in guiding her movements, especially in the various departments of discipline, and benevolent effort. Among the females, the death of Frances Keep, wife of Hon. John Keep, may be mentioned as a serious loss to the church. She had filled an important place, and exerted a rich benevolent influence, both at home and abroad, in her example, and by her counsel.

In connection with these events, and during the same season in which the senior deacon died, the pastor's health failed, and for seven months he was unable to preach one sermon in the church. God however heard prayer, and restored his health, and granted another season of revival in the midst of these years of affliction.

In the autumn of 1825, God was graciously pleased to display his divine mercy, which greatly revived the church in the midst of discouragements, uniting and bringing up her

members again to holy action and successful effort, resulting in a great accession of numbers to the church, with perhaps as much talent and influence, as either of the former revivals.

But with the church containing nearly five hundred members, and the house of worship utterly unable to contain the people, that assembled from Sabbath to Sabbath for worship, another change became necessary, a change both painful and pleasant in anticipation, painful in view of the local separation of those who had for each other always cherished the kindest feelings; and pleasant, in the full expectation that it would conduce in its results to the abundant prosperity of the cause of God in the town.

The alteration contemplated, was nothing less than a permanent change in the location of the place of public worship, which had been so long endeared to the church, by long and precious revivals, and steady Christian fellowship. The subject was brought before the church, and kindly entertained by them, until by patient and thorough investigation, the whole ground was surveyed. And after a prayerful and deliberate examination of the whole subject, it was so amicably disposed of, as to meet the approbation of almost the whole church, and resulted in the planting of the worship of God permanently in Homer village, in Cortland village, and McGraw village, and a church was formed and located in the first and last of these mentioned places, leaving the mother church in the centre. The old meeting-house was abandoned, and three new ones built, one in each of the three villages, the least of which was as large as the old one, each of them ornamented with a steeple, and furnished with a bell, to note the hours of worship.

Each of the churches possessed sufficient talent and influence, to secure public confidence, and have prospered in such a manner, as no doubt to convince the most fearful ere this, that the thing was of God; and that the blessed God said, "enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thy habitation, spare not, lengthen thy cords, and

strengthen thy stakes, for thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left, and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited." "Fear not, for thou shalt not be ashamed, for thy maker is thy husband, the Lord of hosts is his name."

During this period of her changes, there were added to the church up to the division in 1827, about 122 by baptism, and fifty-two by letter, making in all added 174. In the same time there were dismissed about 120 by letter; 40 were excluded, and 18 died. Making the changes in the membership of the church, from her organization, up to the year 1827, as follows: added by baptism, 522; by letter, 214; total added, 736. About 200 were dismissed by letter; 68 were excluded, and 45 died. Leaving a total as near as we can now ascertain, of 423, which were ultimately embraced in the three churches, as above mentioned. It ought also to be remarked, that of the numbers excluded, a large proportion returned, and were restored to the fellowship of the church.

The pastor, after this important change in the body, continued his labors with the church in Homer village, up to the autumn of 1832, and was succeeded in the mother church in Cortland village, by Rev. Peleg Card, who was followed by Br. Alfred Gates. In the church at McGrawville, Br. Abner Sylvester labored for a time and was followed by the present pastor, Rev. W. G. Dye. The number of members in the churches at this time, (1844,) is as follows: McGraw village, 224; Cortland village, 291; Homer village, 300; total, 815.

Thus we have briefly surveyed the dealings of God with us as a people, and this short history of his goodness was due we thought, as a tribute of gratitude to his name, which we would leave with those who come after us, that *they* may tell it to the generations following, what their ears heard, *what their fathers told them, that God did in their days, in the times of old.*

The following reflections suggest themselves to the mind, as we review the foregoing history of God's dealings with this people, and the prosperity of the Baptist church of Jesus Christ in the town.

1st. We learn it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy. He is a sovereign, and doeth his pleasure in heaven above, and in the earth beneath. None hath a right to say unto him, why hast thou made me thus. But he might with the greatest propriety say to us, not for your sakes did I it, be it known unto you, but for my own name's sake. But be thou glad, and rejoice in that which I do, for behold I create Jerusalem a rejoicing, and her people a joy.

2. We find in this history of the church much encouragement to prayer. The Lord Jesus Christ is the Head of the church, having all power in heaven and earth in his hand, and he saith, that if two of you shall agree on earth, as touching anything they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." How encouraging. The church never met without Jesus Christ in the midst of it. Perhaps not a soul has been gathered into the kingdom of God in all the preceding revivals, but in answer to prayer—the prayer of faith—the agonizing prayer of the church of God, "*the mother of us all.*"

Some of you will bear me witness that prayer was made frequently and fervently in public, that God would enlarge the place of our tent, and cause the church to break forth on the right hand and on the left, and he has done it. The church may now say, even more than the patriarch Jacob did. She may say, with my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I am become three bands. In answer to prayer, God has also raised up men among us, and thrust them into the ministry as laborers together with him. We find the names of about twenty brethren called out of the church

into the ministry, more than half of whom were baptized by the pastor during the revivals above mentioned. In answer to prayer God granted his Holy Spirit, which preserved the union of the church, so that for the thirty years, and more, above named, there never was occasion to ask council of sister churches, to settle a difficulty, or aid us in carrying out our discipline.

3. We see how God does bless those that obey him, and helps those who help themselves. It is the liberal soul that is made fat, *and it is by liberal things they stand.* During the time we have been following the history of the Baptists in the ten mile square township of Homer, a part of which is now called Cortlandville, we find, *few and weak* as they were at the beginning, they expended somewhere about \$25,000 in preparing *for*, and in maintaining the worship of God. In this estimate we include the support of the gospel, and other incidental expenses of the church for nearly thirty years, together with the building of the four meeting houses above mentioned. And yet who does not see that this has been one of the most important means used for the enlargement of the church, that if this money had not been paid out, the denomination *would not, nay, could not*, have become what it is now. We will not now stop to estimate the amount of her contributions for different benevolent objects in the same time, although they were very respectable.

In view of all this may we not with much confidence reject that narrow-minded policy, that is continually objecting against affording a liberal support to the cause and worship of God, or that refuses to pay its equal share of expense in that cause in which a Saviour has led the way in making a sacrifice for us. We find God does not set the seal of his approbation to it, and generally sooner or later those who follow it, fall out with their brethren in the church, and wither up in their own souls.

4. In the light of the history of the church before us, we

learn another important fact, that the purity and peace of the church was greatly promoted by her independence.

She had from the first, as a *church espoused herself to one husband*, the Lord Jesus Christ. Accordingly she maintained her independence of character inviolate, refusing all connection with worldly confederacies, political associations, or, even moral societies, which could in any way bring her under the *control* of that *spirit*, or *policy*, wielded by *civilians as such*, so as in any manner, to lower down her dignity and spirituality, as connected with and belonging to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Her inflexible and religious attachment, to her Lord and Redeemer, as shown in her firm adherence to his word as her law book, and his example as her precedent, while it occasionally drew forth the reproach of the wicked and selfish, yet secured to her that respect and confidence from society, which showed clearly, that while her influence was felt, and her character revered, it was *love to God and her neighbor, manifesting itself in purity of motive and piety of action, which secured that public confidence, and for which she was respected and honored.*

While it was the manifest object, both of the church, and of its pastor, to discountenance worldly conversation, political debate, or any exciting subject, as far as possible, on the Sabbath, or at any time, so as to promote strife, or alienation of feeling between friends, and as far as possible, lead the body along on the highest low ground, and lowest high ground, and preserve an equanimity of spirit, and travel in the fellowship of the gospel, it pleased God to sustain the effort, and prosper the cause, and her example is left, as a beacon light to others, for their benefit and improvement.

5. The manifestations of divine mercy in this town during the first thirty years of its settlement, in which the church so signally shared, call for us to pause a moment before we conclude this subject, and reflect, *deliberately reflect.* We have not time, nor room now, to write the history, or give

the character of those revivals at full length, but we must be permitted to say, there was a most clear and glorious exhibition of the presence and power of God in them. The providence of God developed his purpose of mercy, and called forth human action. The agency of the church followed in the wake of divine influence. In all these precious seasons of ingathering to the church of God, *he led the way.* *He* put his own sheep *forth*, but he went *before* them, and it was their joy and pleasure *to follow him.* The agency of the Holy Spirit was signally manifest in preparing the saints for their duty, and delightful labor in those revival seasons, and in reproving sinners of their unbelief, and in quickening and raising them up, prepared to "*sit together in heavenly places, in Christ Jesus.*" The means employed under God, were prayer, the ministration of the gospel, and ordinances of God's house, and exhortations, both from experienced Christians, and young converts. All this was combined with united, extensive, Christian effort, put forth in visiting from house to house, connected with personal appeals, and fervent prayer, as far as practicable, in every family. The saints in addresses to the people, whether in the public exhibitions of the gospel, or in their social exhortations in the conference room, and family visits, did not approach them in a menacing tone, bearing down upon the impenitent, or backsliders, with a fault-finding, or, even commanding style, but with that penitent, subdued, humble, affectionate, and expostulating manner, which reached the heart through the understanding. Or, if it did not reach the heart at once, it convinced the judgment, that the appeal was made by a friend, and from the best of motives, while it was sustained by the most weighty reasons.

Instead of descending on the soul like an avalanche, carrying all before it with frowns and terror, the address seemed to come *up* with the breathings of a heart stationed near the cross, or throne of God, with melting accents, of kind entreaty, showing they were prompted by the Holy Spirit; so the proud sinner was reached, like Zacheus in the

tree, and called upon to *come down*, while the spirit and humble demeanor of the person who addressed him, presented a striking contrast to his own character, and seemed to challenge imitation.

By union of Christian effort, we do not mean any combination of influence by agreement, either among members of the same church, or of different churches, but a most hearty co-operation, among the people of God, in the work, *as the work of God*, or *as because it was the work of God*? In neither of those great revivals, mentioned in this discourse, it is not believed, the spirit or feeling to any great extent, prevailed, that it was a Baptist, or Presbyterian revival, or that the revival was among any denomination as such, but among the citizens of Homer, *as sinners against God*.

The broad principle seemed to prevail generally, and especially among the leading members of the Baptist and Presbyterian denominations, that they had much rather their neighbors should be *Christians*, even if they did not join the church with them, than remain impenitent, as they then were. Therefore they willingly gave their influence toward their conversion to God, leaving it to them afterwards, to unite with the church or denomination they should prefer. For the Bible was sufficient to direct them, and they all had a right to adopt it as their standard of orthodoxy. As a consequence, the weekly meetings for conference and prayer, were by mutual consent set up in school houses in different districts in town, and attended in common by all the neighbors, and by the pastors and leading brethren in both the Baptist and Presbyterian churches, nearly every night for months together, in such harmony, that a stranger might not have suspected they belonged to different denominations. The evenings were almost exclusively employed in fervent prayer to God for the influence of the Holy Spirit, conscious that his agency was indispensable, attended with most humble, and hearty confession of sin, and earnest, spirited appeals to the people for their eternal benefit in the name of Jesus Christ,

The preaching, in those revivals, was distinctly marked with that truth which vindicated God's government over his creatures, and charged the sinner with the guilt of violating his holy law. It was that kind of preaching which seemed more careful to please God, than to be approved of men; which showed the sinner that while his misery was the result of his own choice, his salvation and ultimate happiness depended entirely on God's choice. Of course it was his only hope, and indispensable duty to repent and believe the gospel, and look to God through the atonement of Christ for pardon and justification as an act of his *sovereign grace*.

Convictions for sin were deep and pungent, both in saints and sinners, and at times it was hard to know in which they excelled, for backsliders returned in *deed and in truth*, and not in word only. The conviction of the sinner arose at first from a sight of his life; he had done wrong, and he feared justice, and awfully trembled in view of hell, but soon saw his heart was worse, much worse, than his life had been, and was the seat of the difficulty, for it was enmity against God,—that the imaginations of the thoughts of the heart were evil, and had been evil continually, and therefore there was no hope but in the *mercy* of God. Truth led them to discover, that nothing but the righteousness of Christ imparted to them, could give them such a character as they needed for acceptance with God, or even to enjoy pleasure themselves. The length of time conviction for sin continued, varied from one day to three weeks. Generally from one to two weeks. It was not a common thing for a convicted sinner to find peace of mind in public meetings. Few, it is believed, dated their conversion in the conference room, or while others were praying with them. The greater number gained evidence of pardon from God, against whom they had sinned, while they were alone, in humble prayer, reading the Bible, or in silent meditation.

The prevailing exercises of the converted were love, joy, and peace. Love to God, as the sovereign of the world, to

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Christ, as the Saviour of sinners, to the Bible, the people, and service of God. The holy law of God, which was their chief trouble before, now afforded exquisite delight. That very law which they found to be unto death, was now adopted as the rule of life, as the only rule by which they desired to walk; and its statutes became their song. They would often say, "*Oh how love I thy law, it is my meditation all the day.*" But Christ, the blessed Christ, was the theme on which *all loved to dwell*. Each seemed to vie with the other in adoring, extolling, honoring, loving, and praising *Christ*. He seemed to occupy most of the thoughts and affections, and out of the abundance of the heart the mouth spoke. Christ formed the ground of encouragement, and constituted the chief argument in prayer. Christ crucified occupied a large place in all the exhortations and addresses, in which the saints gave vent to their feelings in the public assembly, and by which they sought to win back their fellow sinners from the paths of the destroyer.

We rejoice that there are this day some alive among us, and even now in this house, who can bear witness to the truth of the foregoing statements, and of these reflections, having had perfect knowledge of these things from the first. And we devoutly pray that the churches may continue in *the faith*, rooted and grounded in the truth, and cultivate such strong christian affection for each other, and the members of each body, among themselves, and towards their pastors, that the world will be constrained to say, these people *are the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ*, for, "*see how they love one another.*"

Finally, it is interesting to remember this day, that many of the dear people of God, who once lived among us, have matured for heaven, and gone home. Some of them were our partners, some of them were our parents, some of them were children, some of them our neighbors, and we have had their society, their example, their council, their prayers, but they are discharged from the war, have put off this mortal, and have out on immortality. How changed the scene!

"Once they were mourning here below,  
And wet their couch with tears,  
They wrestled hard, as we do now,  
With sins and doubts and fears."

But they have now passed beyond this dark vale, and sing, and shine, and walk, among the society of those made perfect, as pure as the best of that innumerable company, having been made kings and priests with God, and his Christ, their glorious Redeemer.

They have now entered into the rest that remains for the people of God, where *all* that love our Lord Jesus Christ, in *sincerity*, will shortly arrive, and where together they will forever behold the glory of God in the *face of Jesus Christ*. What a lovely mirror, for the saints. In it they will see reflected all the glory of their redemption, and will unite in laying their crowns at his feet, who saved them by his grace.

In view of this glory which they enjoy, and which will eternally entertain and delight them, think ye, any will ever regret the sacrifice of time, talents, or property, or even personal sacrifices, which they have made for him, in building up his kingdom here on earth, while he was preparing a place for them in heaven?

Dear brethren and sisters, in view of all this, let us be exhorted, and persuaded, to live in the fear of God—to seek the peace of the church—labor to promote her prosperity, and keep our garments unspotted from the world. And when the Saviour comes may we hear him say, "*Well done good and faithful servants, ye have been faithful over a few things, I will make you rulers over many things. Enter ye into the joy of your Lord.*" Amen, and Amen.

## A BRIEF SKETCH

OF THE LIFE AND CHARACTER OF DEA. ASA BENNETT, WILL BE READ WITH DEEP INTEREST IN CONNECTION WITH THE FOREGOING DISCOURSE.

Asa Bennett was born in Mansfield, Ct., July 10, 1778, of reputable parents, and received a religious education, the effects of which were visible in youth, in his regard for the Sabbath, the worship of God, attention to the scriptures, obedience to parents, and in habits of sobriety and decorum.

In 1794, he became a hopeful subject of regenerating grace, but being deeply sensible of the depravity of his nature, and of his guilt and danger as a sinner before God, he long indulged fears that after all he might be mistaken. At length his views of the great work of redemption became clear, and he heartily embraced the disseminating doctrine of divine grace, taught in the gospel, as the only foundation upon which a sinner might rest his hopes of eternal life. He saw such a fulness in the Lord Jesus Christ, and such a suitableness in the provision of the gospel, for the salvation of lost men, that he gloried in the cross, and took a deep interest in having *Christ* and him crucified, preached unto the people. In March, 1800, he was baptized, and joined the Baptist church of Christ, in Hampton, Ct. From thence he removed his standing by letter, to the church of the same faith in Homer, with which he united Sept. 20, 1806. In February, 1807, he was elected by the church to serve them as a deacon, which duty he discharged to the last, to their abundant satisfaction, although he was not ordained to the office, until March 9, 1815.

Dea. Bennett's activity, integrity, zeal, piety, and usefulness, are well known, and appreciated, in the sphere in which he moved, and his circle was not very limited, and a few things perhaps, may here be said for the encouragement of others, who would live godly in Christ Jesus, and lay themselves out for the building up of the church of God.

His devotedness to the cause of religion was admirable. It was his maxim to "seek *first* the kingdom of God." The world could never turn him aside from the worship of God in his family,

and he was punctual to the appointments of the church at all times. He had no question to ask about its being *his* duty to go, if the *church* had made an appointment, he was a constituent part of that body and *must* be there, and there in *season*, whether the appointment was for public worship, discipline, conference, or prayer.

He was emphatically a peace-maker. If Satan was making a breach in the wall, or sowing discord among brethren, he was one of the first to stand in the gap, and make up the hedge, and allay the chafed feelings of the aggrieved, and reclaim the aggressor.

During those repeated and powerful revivals of religion in the town, between the years 1812 and 1820, in which time the church of which he was a member, increased from 68 members to 400, his zeal and activity were worthy the cause in which he was engaged. He devoted his time, frequently for weeks, and in one instance for three months together in visiting from house to house by day, exhorting and praying with the families, and attending conference or praying-meetings at evening, or otherwise laboring for the promotion and extension of the cause of Christ in the world. His gifts in exhortation and prayer, were far above a mediocrity, and contributed greatly toward the stirring up, and edifying the church, in the ordinary worship of God upon the Sabbath, as well as in times of revival. His happy talent in the government of the church, and his judicious and prudent course in the discipline thereof, contributed largely, under God, toward the promotion of that union which the church has so long enjoyed.

He took an interest in the benevolent operations of the day; the Foreign and Domestic Missionary Societies, received help from his labors and contributions. But the Bible cause seemed to lay nearest his heart, in this he spent much time and contributed liberally, often saying, the circulation of the scriptures was indispensable, in working that reformation in society, which is so desirable.

He was a man of robust constitution, of industrious habits, and was through life, laborious and healthful, until attacked by the disease of which he died. A sudden and heavy cold which he caught in February, 1823, that seated upon his lungs, terminated in a consumption, and ended his labors and his sorrows together, November 9, 1825, in the 48th year of his age.



During the first part of his sickness, he was held in suspense about the issue, at length becoming satisfied it was the will of God that he should die, he set his "house in order" with great deliberation, and arranged all his temporal concerns, even to the ceremonies of his funeral, and quietly waited for the time to come, when he should depart and be with the Lord. He often said to his friends, *my work is done*, I am waiting for death, and frequently said, I would not change places with you, or any person in the world. For months before he died, he wished to hear no conversation upon things earthly; he would say, I have done with these things, they afford me no entertainment; talk on death, judgment, heaven, eternity; these things I am approaching, and these are all important to me and others also.

To the pastor of the church, who had been for some months laid by from pulpit labors, through bodily indisposition, he said, my work is done, but I think God will yet raise you up for further usefulness in the church, and if you ever do get able to preach again, be *faithful* to God, and deal with souls in earnest, urge upon the people the necessity of *personal and practical holiness*.

At one time some of the youth of the church and congregation visited him, and spent some time in singing hymns, one of which was, "From whence doth this union arise," in the last stanza, the following words delighted him much, "And *all his bright glory shall see*." It was his favorite hymn; but it seemed new to him then, "I am," said he, going into that glory immediately—it is near—it does not seem to be at arms length, no, it is *here right before me!* The special savour of this lasted with him several days.

For some weeks before his death his voice was reduced to a whisper, and very little conversation was had with him, but his mind remained tranquil, and intently fixed upon the glory of that kingdom which is not of this world. When the last hour arrived he was perfectly sensible of his state, and seemed glad that his time had come to die, that he might go to rest.

He had previously requested Eld. T. Purinton, of Truxton, to preach his funeral sermon, with this injunction, *that he should preach Christ, and not Dea. Bennett*. With this request the Elder complied, and delivered on the occasion an appropriate and impressive discourse, from 1st Cor. i. 23—"We preach Christ crucified."