HISTORICAL DISCOURSE

BY

PROF. EDWARD P. SMITH
OF WORCESTER.

Mr. President, Citizens of Middlefield, Ladies and Gentlemen:

This occasion admits of but one theme. Its satisfactory treatment is difficult. To give in forty-five minutes an adequate review of what a town has been and done in a hundred years is a severe task. Selection is imperative. Good writing largely " consists in knowing what to leave in the ink-bottle." The merit of this address must, to a great extent, lie in knowing what to leave unsaid. Many facts and documents of interest, appropriate in a full history, must be omitted here. To traverse the wide field with the aid of existing records, and with all the help tradition can afford ; to read between the lines where acts alone appear, till in historic imagination the actors become visible and avow the motives of their deeds ; to harmonize conflicting oral accounts ; to give connection, form, and proportion to the materials gathered; to place the whole in just perspective, and animate it with warmth and color, so that the past may live again while you listen,— this is what your centennial orator should do. But I should indulge in a strange delusion, were I to suppose I could do all this in the fort-night that has been given me for the work I present you. Facts, not fancies; causes, not conjectures, are what you desire. But facts cannot be rightly interpreted apart from

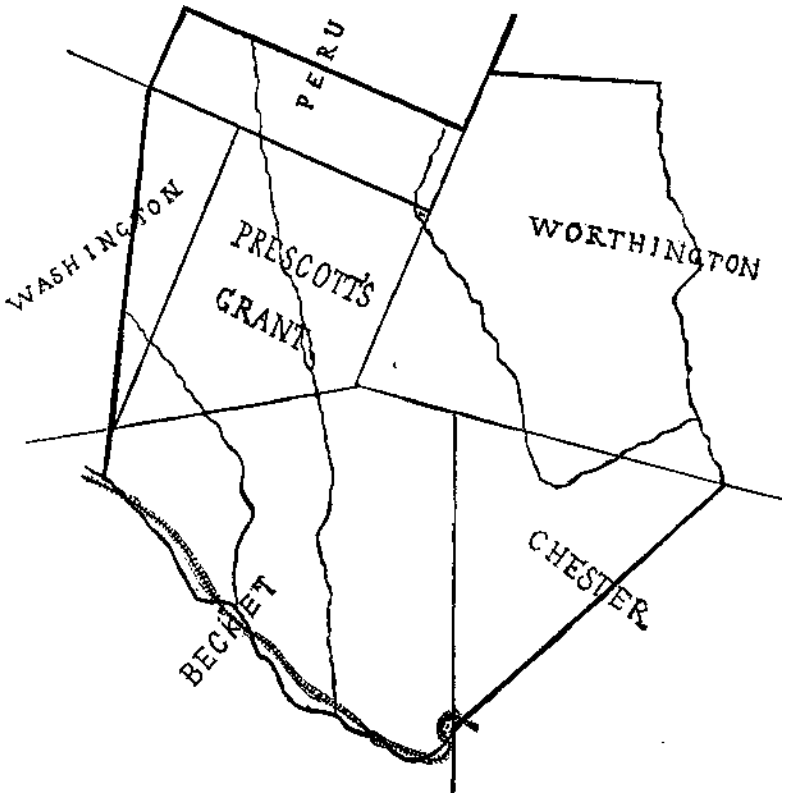
their causes, and of these the greatest are the actors. In dealing with records which omit quite as much truth as they contain, there is a subtle temptation to supply facts, invent hypotheses, and introduce actors from one's imagination. But the history of Middlefield for the century of its corporate existence is, as Prof. Park used to say of the doctrine of the Trinity, " a subject about which one must be careful not to know too much." I frankly confess at the outset to an infinitude of ignorance, and for whatever omissions, errors of fact or judgment, may occur, crave your kindly indulgence and your generous criticism, while I give you not what I would, but what I can. The defects in the work spring from my ignorance, not from my heart. That beats warmly with love for my native town and townsmen. Whatever my deficiencies for the honorable duty you have assigned me, I cannot deny such fitness as one may possess who was born and lived here till his majority, who has frequently revisited these familiar scenes, who, where'er he roams, whatever lands to see, turns fondly with untraveled heart to his native home, and in whose veins flows the blood of the Metcalfs, the Roots, and the Peases, the Annables, the Macks, the Churches, and the Smiths.

The centennial of Middlefield occurs later than that of her adjacent sister towns. Their limits had been fixed, their lands settled, before ever there was a thought of Middlefield. Middlefield was an afterthought; not a mistake, but one of those second thoughts which are best. After Deacon Mack for several years had on Sunday gone on foot six miles to Chester meeting-house, or, in the winter, with ox-sled had carried the members of his

own and other families thither and back, a Sabbath day's journey indeed ; and after he had many times travelled down into the valley of the western branch of the Westfield River and out of it, climbing a series of hills to reach the place of town-meeting in Becket ; and after his neighbors in the south part of Peru, the north-east corner of Becket, the north of Chester, and the southwest corner of Worthington, had labored under similar difficulties and inconveniences in reaching their religious and business centers, it was natural that their thoughts should be directed to some more excellent way of satisfying their needs. In the midst of these people so seriously incommoded were some even more destitute of privileges than they. The residents upon Prescott's Grant had no political center, for that Grant did not as yet form a part of any existing town. The necessities of the case, therefore, gave birth to the scheme of forming a new town, with Prescott's Grant as its nucleus, with such additions as the surrounding towns might give, and of securing its incorporation by the authority of the General Court. David Mack was the leader in the enterprise of organization. He undertook the work of a survey and of an application to the Legislature, with the agreement to pay his own expenses if the project should fail. The plan was successful; and on the izth of March, 1783, the act of incorporation was passed.

The new town was thus the result of a rearrangement of other townships. To this territory, central to them all and belonging about equally to Hampshire and Berkshire Counties, was appropriately given the name of Middlefield.

To represent more vividly the way in which the township was formed, Miss Carrie E. Church has kindly made a map of Middlefield. Prescott's Grant, the nucleus of the town, appears as a large quadrilateral, containing more than a thousand acres in the north and west part of the town. Who the Prescott was to whom the grant was made is not known, further than that he must have been someone who had rendered military or other services to the State? That he was the Prescott who commanded at Bunker Hill is, indeed, possible; but, as the grant was probably made before the Revolutionary War, that supposition seems hardly tenable. Worthington, as the map shows, contributed the lion's share. The portion she gave was a natural one to convey to the new town, having the middle branch of the Westfield River for its eastern boundary and the line between Worthington and Chester for its southern. The southern boundary and the western boundary (which was also the eastern side of Prescott's Grant) meet a little to the southeast of the former residence of Mrs. Selden Root. The portion ceded by Chester consisted of the north part of the town, lying between the middle and the western branches of the



MAP OF MIDDLEFIELD

Westfield River. The line between the Chester and Becket portions meets the southern boundary of the Worthington cession at a point a little above the former residence of Mr. Asher Pease. The portion given by Becket was next in size to that ceded by Worthington, and extended from the Chester line, with the western branch of the Westfield River as its south-western boundary, to the point where Becket, Washington, and Prescott's Grant cornered. The gore given by Washington was apparently for symmetry rather than from any felt necessity such as existed in the other towns. Peru contributed a parallelogram from her southern border, embracing two sections of land. She did

not wish to disturb her already settled lines by the passage of a new one, and chose to remain symmetrical herself rather than to make Middlefield so. The center of the town, where we are now assembled, falls within the part ceded by Worthington.

Having noticed the way in which the township was composed, let us next glance at some of the sixty-eight families living in Middlefield at the time of its incorporation.

Ten years before, in 1773, Mr. Rhodes had settled in the Den, on the farm now owned by Clark B. Wright, and John Taggart on the Factory Stream, on land now covered by the reservoir. Little is known of either of these men, but they are said to have been the first settlers. This claim is challenged by both the Taylor and the McElwain families. Papers in the possession of the McElwain family indicate that their ancestor came here in 1771, but the actual date of settlement seems to have been much later. When we reach the Taylor claim, we touch solid ground. Samuel Taylor, great-grandfather of our well-known townsman Hiram Taylor, was the first settler on the hill, near the center, on land now owned by Matthew Smith. Mr. Taylor was one of the original settlers of Pittsfield in 1752. One day, while he was absent from home at work, Mrs. Taylor saw Indians coming toward the house. She caught her infant child Samuel in her arms, mounted the horse, and rode for her life. She escaped, and was soon rejoined by her husband. They abandoned Pittsfield, and came to the mountains, where there were no Indians. This must have been at

least as early as 1773. Mr. Taylor erected the first frame building in Middlefield, which stood till taken down a few years ago, by Byron Haskell.

The same year is also given as the date when David Mack purchased his place. In 1774 he came to the town, cleared two acres, sowed them to wheat, and built a log cabin preparatory to bringing his family. While thus engaged, he boarded with Mr. Taylor, worked for him two days in the week for his board, and the other four days upon his own land. In 1775, he removed with his family from Hebron, Conn. Mrs. Laura Root, the youngest of his thirteen children, now eighty-eight years of age, whose presence gives the day its crowning grace, says that when her father settled there were eight families in Middlefield. Beside the families of Rhodes, Taggart, and Taylor, already mentioned, the other families were probably those of a brother of Mr. Rhodes, of Enos and Thomas Blossom from the Cape, of Josiah Leonard, and of Aaron Eggleston.

From 1775, the date of David Mack's coming, till the incorporation of the town in 1783,— that is, during the Revolutionary War,— notwithstanding the civil commotions, hardy pioneers were pushing their way into the unsettled regions of the Green Mountain range, which were then to the people of the East and South the New West and North-west. In their zeal to secure homes, they did not forget their country's need. The following citizens of the territory of Middlefield were in the Revolutionary War, whether before or after their settlement is not known: Timothy McElwain, Lewis Taylor, John Smith, Elijah Churchill, Solomon Ingham, Erastus Ingham, Amasa Graves, and Thomas Durant.

Though settlers came from various sections, the greater number were from Connecticut. What fears of Indians or what conditions of their native towns impelled them to depart, what hopes of improved condition lured them to these then unbroken wilds, we do not know. Connecticut has been said to be a good State to emigrate from. Whatever the skepticism of our day may deny, tradition says Middlefield was a good place to emigrate to. We know the men who came from Connecticut were good men to emigrate to any region. David Mack was followed from Hebron by Malachi Loveland, Solomon Ingham, and Erastus Ingham, while his brother-in-law, Daniel Chapman, came from Glastonbury. From Colchester came John Newton, Benjamin Blush, and Joseph Blush. From Granby came the Aldermans; from Somers, the Meachams and Thomas Root, the ancestor of the numerous Roots; from Enfield, Dan Pease, with his father and his brothers; from East Windsor came Timothy McElwain and Timothy Allen who settled northeast of the center, side by side, and called the road passing their homes Windsor Street. The town of East Haddam alone furnished the families of Job Robbins, James Dickson, Matthew Smith, Calvin Smith, Uriah Church, William Church, John Spencer, Cyrus Cone, and Ebenezer Emmons.

Some came from other towns in Massachusetts. Of these, Samuel Jones, the Wrights, the Churchills, the Combses, came from Chester, the Graveses from Williamsburgh, John Ward from Shrewsbury, Thomas Durant and Thomas Ward from Boston, and John Metcalf from Herkimer County, N.Y. As the above list shows,

from Connecticut came the greater part of the best-known families whose history is so inseparably linked with that of the town, and whose descendants have from its beginning formed so large a part of the population of Middlefield.

But their names are of far less interest to us than their characters. These must be determined from their deeds. Wendell Phillips says a man never gets over the atmosphere of his birth. Some of these families, like the Macks and the McElwains, had their origin in Scotland; others, like the Smiths and the Roots, in England; and a few, like James Dickson, in Ireland. The peculiarities due to their diverse origin doubtless lingered about these families while in Connecticut, and even when settled in their newer homes in Middlefield. To state that they were from Connecticut is but another way of saying they were Puritans to the core. Their Puritan inheritance appears in the first town-meeting, held April 24, 1783, as soon as practicable after town officers had been chosen. What were the great needs of this infant town, those for which at that first meeting they appropriated money? Religion and education. Thirty pounds were voted for preaching and ten pounds for schooling. Provision was, indeed, made for the repair of roads and for the construction of new ones, and a committee was appointed to find the center of the town; but the center of the town was to be found because it was proposed to locate the church there, and roads were to be made and repaired, not simply to facilitate business and travel, but still more that church and school might be more easily reached.

These men were not perfect: they differed in judgment often and persistently, as the town records show. In their spirited debates on Church and State, they doubtless "fought like brothers." They had not yet mastered some principles of toleration that seem to us self-evident; and probably they sometimes thought they were doing God service, when it was plain to outsiders that they were bent on having their own wills. But, when all the charges which severe truth can make are entered, it must be conceded that these were heroic Christian men, who served their God and their generation, and who, however they might err in the means they used, had the great ends of intelligence and righteousness at heart.

At the side of each of these noble men stood a woman as worthy as he, the mother of the large, well-trained, and contented family that filled and blessed their home. She had given herself to her husband in his weakness to make him strong, and with him she bore the brunt of life's hard battle. If in the conflict he failed, she went down with him, and clung to him for all he had been and was and might still become. With him she rose and shared a twofold joy in a success which was the reward of their common perseverance and the token of their consolidated love. If he became a power in society, it was because he moved with the strength of two hearts combined. These fathers and mothers laid the foundations of a free and virtuous community so firmly that their work still stands, and their grateful children reverently arise to-day and call them blessed.

Foremost among these men stands David Mack, whose Christian character has been set forth in the tract " The Faithful Steward," and is fresh in the memories of many who hear my voice. I shall enter upon no eulogy of Deacon Mack. His record is before you, and it is beyond my power to add to or detract from it.

His prominence in the first half century of the town's history was due to his business, his wealth, his religion, and, above all, to his native force of character. He could not, of course, have accomplished what he did without the aid of others who were his peers in business talent, and perhaps his superiors in intelligence. Some things which did happen would never have occurred but for him. It was the Nemesis of his fate that some of his most strenuous efforts contributed to the success of enterprises he sought to stifle. He was undoubtedly more facile in conviction than in conciliation, but no sketch of Middlefield would be at all complete that should not assign him a conspicuous place. The man whose only property, on coming to Middlefield, was his farm, a poor horse, his axe, his wife and child, and who in his career as farmer and merchant amassed a fortune, and was, moreover, the cause that certain other men became wealthy, was a successful business man. He paid his debts promptly, and expected others to do the same. He showed his knowledge of the value of wealth by his use of it, and his great good sense by entirely settling his estate before his death. The man whose townsmen constantly elected him to offices of trust and honor was a public-spirited man. As has been said, he was the leader in organizing and incorporating the town. He was

not less active in securing preaching and schooling. These blessings he did not desire for others alone, but for himself as well. The man who in 1784 went to school with his own children and spelled in the same class with his six-years-old son was a wise man, for he understood at least his own ignorance. This is an amount of knowledge some never attain. The man of but six weeks' schooling previous to his marriage, whose mind so expanded that he became the friend and patron of learning, who gave Mary Lyon $500 for Mt. Holyoke Female Seminary at a time when it was not generally conceded that women could and should be educated, that they would be more womanly, more everything desirable, if they had education,— this man was a man of progress. The man in whose barn, kitchen, and large chambers town and church meetings were held for several years; who was constant in his attendance on worship, and sat for fifty-four years in the same pew in that meeting-house he had done so much to erect; who gave more than $18,000 in large sums to benevolent enterprises, and as much more in smaller offerings ; who by his contributions made himself a life-member of twelve benevolent societies, and at one time gave $1,000 to foreign missions; who left to the church and society he loved a fund of $3,000 for the support of the gospel in all coming time; whose interest and zeal in the religious welfare of his children and children's children were constant and successful, this man was surely a religious man.

That he was patriotic, his conduct at the time of Shays' insurrection shows. Middlefield's incorporation nearly

coincided with the close of the Revolutionary War. The return of peace found the nation burdened with heavy taxation, industry paralyzed, and trade, in the absence of aught that could with justice be called a currency, even more depressed. The people of Western Massachusetts, writhing under the pressure of public and private debts for which no means of payment existed, attributed to the government the evils from which they suffered, clamored for issues of paper money, and sought to stay the courts from granting writs to which they could not respond. Middlefield's sympathy with these unfortunate debtors is evident from this language in a call for a town meeting in November, 1786, to choose delegates to a county convention in Hadley for the following very necessary purposes: "To choose a committee to confer with committees from other counties on the pressing distressful condition of our public affairs. Secondly, to choose a committee to prepare a nervis petition to the Honorable General Assembly, with such justness, perspicuity, and suitable address as may not fail to be effective of our public relief."

The grievances, though greatly magnified, were real. This conference and petition were entirely lawful. When, however, under the lead of Day and Shays, insurgent plans were formed, and the attempt made to disperse the courts and arrest the enforcement of legal process altogether, insurrection had begun.

In this state of affairs, a requisition was sent to Captain David Mack to appear with a certain number of his men at Springfield, and join the State forces. He

drafted his men, gave orders for their appearance at his house the next morning, prepared to march. During the night, the company appointed new officers, declared for Shays, and in the morning surrounded and entered Captain Mack's house, and declared him prisoner. The loyal captain clearly saw the peril of the step that had been taken. To his utmost, he exhorted his men to abandon their course of folly and treason. His plea was in vain. As a prisoner, he requested a furlough of three days, which was granted. At their request, he wrote the furlough; and, having procured the signatures of the newly appointed officers, among whom were Samuel Jones, Eliakim Wardwell, and Mr. Meacham, he put the document in his pocket, hastened to Springfield, at once reported himself to General Shepard, to whom he exhibited his furlough. After examining it, General Shepard said: " Well, Captain Mack, as you have no men to fight with you, you may go home. We shall immediately attend to the men who have signed this paper." At that exciting period, the house of Samuel Jones, now owned by George Bell, was the head-quarters of the Shays men in this vicinity. There the Shays leaders were arrested, after Captain Mack's visit to Springfield, and lodged in Northampton jail. In their distress, they humbly and earnestly besought Captain Mack to use his influence in securing their release. He magnanimously exerted himself in their behalf, and secured their pardon.

When Shays' followers fled from Springfield after their repulse before the arsenal, one company gathered at the Bell place. The State forces, under General Tupper, surrounded the house. The men showed fight even after

their leader, Captain Luddington of Southampton, had yielded; but resistance was useless. Fifty-nine of them went from Middlefield prisoners of war. This was in January, 1787. In April following, this entry was made in the town records:

April to, 1787.

BERKSHIRE, SS.

Then personally appeared Solomon Ingham, and took and subscribed the oath of allegiance required by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, before Nathaniel Kingsley, Justice of Peace.*

Five others had taken this same oath in March, and fourteen more did so in June of that same year. This oath was to serve as a tonic to the loyalty of those who had engaged in Shays' insurrection; and it enforced the lesson that disgraceful event had taught, that the rebellion of a people against a government established by themselves is not justifiable even in extreme cases. Nothing more signally showed the inability of Congress under the Articles of Confederation to promote domestic tranquility. In less than four months from the surrender of the Shays men, at the Bell place in Middlefield, the Federal Convention had met at Philadelphia. At a meeting in December, 1787, "the town voted the Constitution of the United States to be good." Nothing

more forcibly makes us realize the distance that separates us from the first citizens than this vote of the town upon our national constitution, the votes given in successive years for John Hancock and Samuel Adams for Governors of Massachusetts, and the names of the electors who voted for the first presidents of the United States.

Middlefield was strongly Federal. A meeting was called July 13, 1812, "that the town may have an opportunity in a public manner to manifest their opinion concerning the late declaration of war by the government of the United States against Great Britain." The town voted the war inexpedient, with only seven dissenting votes. The well-known public sentiment of New England could scarcely permit any other result, but the seven who thought it right to stand by the government and patriotically voted so are worthy of mention: Matthew Smith, Esq., William Skinner, William Church, Green H. Church, Warren Church, Lieutenant Alexander Dickson, and Deacon John Newton. When, in 1814, Governor Strong called for troops, Major (afterward General) Mack, Lieutenant Matthew Smith, Captain Solomon Root, Abel Cheeseman, and probably others, went to the defense of Boston.

Middlefield was later as pronouncedly Whig in politics as she had previously been Federal. The anti-slavery movement found stanch and able supporters, who lived through denunciation and reproach to see the triumph of the principles for which they had contended. Middlefield became thoroughly Republican, and in the war for the Union was alert to every demand of the National

Government. She contributed freely of her money, her supplies, and her men. The war expenses paid were equal to $19 for every citizen of the town. Generous contributions were privately made for the various departments of patriotic work, and the ladies united in making clothing for the soldiers. The town furnished in all eighty-six men, a surplus of seven more than the government required. Of these, two were commissioned officers, and fifteen died in the service of their country.

The Congregational church was constituted Nov. 16, 1783. Even before its formation, a committee of seven was chosen to find the most convenient and proper place for the meeting-house to stand. The town accepted their report, " to stand on the main line between Mr. Joseph Blush's and Widow Ford's." For some unknown reason, the project seems to have slumbered till revived three years later; and, early in 1787, it was voted " to set it on the most convenient place nearest the center of the town on the public highway." For the next five years, the most prominent questions in the minds of the good people of Middlefield were the location, the size, the expense, the erection, the finishing, and the seating of that meeting-house. Not less than thirty town-meetings were held to settle these points. I do not suppose there was a single person in the town who did not want a meeting-house, and who did not consider the vote to set it in the most convenient place perfectly reasonable and wise.

But what was the most convenient place? Here was an opportunity for a difference of opinion, and it was not neglected. It is one of the mysteries still unsolved why the

building of a church edifice, which should be a work of union and peace, so often proves a signal for letting loose the waters of discord and strife. Doubtless there were then as now and in apostolic days men like Diotrephes who loved the pre-eminence, and who, lording it over God's heritage, were signally successful in translating the providences of God into the language of their own desires. Human nature even in the saints is very much the same in all ages. So great was the divergence in views that in November, 1787, the town chose Major David Mack, Lieutenant James Dickson, and Ensign Matthew Smith as a committee to apply to the General Court for a committee to fix the place for• the meetinghouse.

The records give no account of the action of *this* committee. To the taste of the Legislature, the titles this committee bore may have savored too strongly of the Church militant. That body was probably too much occupied with business resulting from Shays' insurrection to be zealous in appointing a committee to fix the site of a meeting-house for those who had actively engaged in that rebellion.

The town next voted "to have Deacon Jonathan Brewster of Worthington, Deacon Jesse Johnson of Chester, and Lieutenant Scott of Norwich, a committee to repair to the town and fix the spot of the meeting-house." There is no record of their action. They were probably wise enough not to serve.

After futile efforts to agree upon a site, during the next year the town voted in August, 1789, "to do something

concerning building a meeting-house, to raise $3,000 for the same, to agree to the report of the committee to set the church by a beech staddle on the height of land near Oliver Blush's," where Mrs. Newton at present resides.

The site thus arranged for, the town was at leisure to consider the bigness of the "meeting-house," and voted that it should be fifty-four by forty-two feet, with twenty-two feet posts. By this time another competing site had been found; and it was voted "to set the church on the height of land near Cyrus Cone's house." But the advocates of the site of the beech staddle were not thus to be silenced. They rallied, and in January, /79o, reconsidered all previous votes, and again voted the site of the beech staddle; and a committee of five was appointed " to go with the selectmen, and set a stake for the meeting-house at or near this place." Arrangements were now made with William Church for six shillings per day as master-workman, and with the other persons approved of as carpenters at five shillings per day; and, that there might be a definite understanding when the day began, it was voted "that the persons that work on the meeting-house shall be there by the sun one hour high in the morning." But the question of the site was again raised, and a meeting called June 3o, 1790, "to see which of the two places the town will direct the committee to set the meeting-house on, at the beech staddle, as hath been voted by the town, or on the rocks, as was agreed by the committee appointed for that purpose." It was voted "to set the meeting-house on the ledge south of Oliver Blush's, where the committee set the corners." This was decisive. The church was founded

on the rocks, and the beech staddle did not prevail against it.

The meeting-house was raised by general invitation, and the master-workman had " the liberty to pick the hands to go on the frame to do the work aloft." The remainder of the work necessary to complete the house was provided and paid for in piecemeal fashion. The covering and painting were thus arranged for by a committee; but in 1791, this committee having charge of the expense of the meeting-house was called to account by the town through its committee, James Dickson, Matthew Smith, and David Mack, appointed for this purpose. Mr. Pelton's painting and joiner work was voted unsatisfactory, and he was compelled to repaint and renail, and directed " to nail cleats on the roof where the snow drives through the same,"

Now came the question of seating the church. A committee of nine wrestled with this problem; but their report was rejected, and a new committee appointed, consisting of the trio, James Dickson, Matthew Smith, and David Mack, who seem to have been called in to cut Gordian knots. They were instructed to "dignify" the seats according to a compound ratio of the age and valuation of the persons to be seated. Five years of age were to be equal to It is evident that, by this " dignification,"— whatever that was,— age and wealth would have seats on the broad aisle. No settled order appears to have been followed in numbering the seats. It is probable that a third unnamed factor, influence, was quite as potent as either age or wealth in determining where people should sit. In

the record of the seats of the " divinely appointed heads," it is stated, "Wives are comprehended." The records also say, " The children to be seated shall be seated according to their parents' list, and the four seats about the galleries shall be for the benefit of those that perform the singing to sit in." For bachelors and spinsters no provision seems to have been made, unless the gift of song was considered an invariable accompaniment of single blessedness. The pulpit, a lofty structure at the west side of the church, reached by long flights of steps and surmounted by an octagonal, dome-shaped sounding-board without visible means of support, seemed at an immense distance from the people. From the square, unwarmed pews below, the hungry sheep looked up to be fed by their distant shepherd. The gambols of the sportive lambs in the pews in the galleries were kept within bounds by tithing-men.

The present house of worship of the Congregational church is that first meeting-house, turned ninety degrees, repaired, improved, and considerably remodeled. It is, therefore, one of the oldest buildings in the town. Around no other do so many associations cluster. For nearly thirty years after its erection, it was the only church in the town. For more than ninety years the gospel has been proclaimed from its pulpit. Within its walls nearly all who have lived in Middlefield have at some time, if not regularly, gathered. There the fathers met, discussed and decided affairs of Church and State. There, by actual management of their local interests they learned how to govern themselves wisely, and taught their sons to do the same. The walls of that church have echoed with stormy debate and rung with eloquent pleas for liberty. They have witnessed times

of revival and depression, they have looked down on many scenes of joy and of sorrow. While we treasure up precious memories of these in the inner temple of our hearts and see how God wrought through man's want of wisdom, may the review give us increased devotion to the duties before us. The God of the fathers will be with the children. " For this God is our God: he will be our guide even unto death."

Several ministers had officiated for brief periods before the completion of the church. Efforts had been made to settle more than one of them, but without success. Rev. Jonathan Nash, the first minister, was settled in October, 1792. The church was happily united in his settlement; and for nearly forty years this ministry continued with pleasant and helpful relations, till, at his own request, he was dismissed on account of age and infirmities, and his successor, Rev. Samuel Parker, was ordained the same day. The next pastor, Rev. John H. Bisbee, who, if there were such an officer, would be entitled to be the Bishop of the Congregational Churches in Western Massachusetts, is fortunately here to speak for himself, as is also his successor, Rev. Edward Clarke, whose voice we shall be so glad to hear. Rev. Moody Harrington and Rev. John Dodge have passed into the silent land. Rev. Lewis Bridgman would gladly be here, but distance forbids. Rev. Charles M. Pierce and Rev. Samuel Evans have been invited.

For over thirty years the Congregational church was the only one in the town. There were, however, individuals of other religious views from a very early period. By statute law all persons, of whatever religious sentiments, were

taxed to support the Congregational church of the standing order. Yet, only five years after the incorporation, Ebenezer Babcock's rates were abated from the time he joined the Baptist church in Chesterfield, three years before. But this vote proved a precedent. In 1790 a petition signed by fifteen tax-payers was presented to the town, stating that they attended upon the public instruction of Rev. Eleazer Rhodes, a public teacher of piety, religion, and morality, and of the Baptist persuasion, and requesting that the sums they had severally paid toward the support of public worship should be given to the minister of their choice. The town did not grant the petition. The persons whose rates were not thus abated seem to have been reluctant to pay their meetinghouse tax. James Dickson was chosen "an agent to make application to some able attorney for advice according to law with regard to those people that call themselves Baptists with regard to their minister and town rates." The vote by which Mr. Bab-cock's rates were abated was reconsidered. When a further effort was made "to see if the town would abate the rates of those that called themselves Baptists, or any part of them," this brief, expressive vote was passed, "not to abate the rates or allow any further time for the payment thereof." At the next town-meeting it was voted to hold the meetings in future at the meeting-house. Tradition says this was to identify town and church rates still more closely, and thus make them more binding upon the Baptists.

It is probable that these votes had an effect different from what those who passed them intended. Priority, statute law, and the power were on the side of the

standing order; and, doubtless, they did not clearly distinguish between the preference for Baptist sentiments and the desire to escape taxation. The seizure and sale of his cow to pay church rates were ill adapted to persuade a Baptist to renew his loyalty to the standing order. The essential justice of the request for the abatement of the rates of those who were Baptists or Methodists is not questioned at this day. Their abatement would have increased the pecuniary burdens of the other members, but it would have disarmed the dissenters of all the power they gained by being put in the attitude of martyrs. A liberal policy would probably have left geography quietly to turn the scale in favor of the standing order. The Baptists paid the rates, but they felt that their enforced payment was a persecution. From the date of the passage of those votes, the formation of a Baptist church was only a question of time. In 1797 a Baptist church was formed in Hinsdale, and several from Middlefield joined it. Its pastor included this town in the field of his labors; and, three years later, meetings were held every third Sunday at the houses of the Baptist brethren in Middlefield. Not long afterward, those who could procure certificates of actual membership in another church, or in a society organized to support a church, were exempted from the tax to support the standing order. In 1816 a house of worship was erected for the Baptist church in Hinsdale. This strengthened the work there, and naturally led to the formation of a. Baptist church at Middlefield with twenty-nine members, and the erection of a house of worship in 1817. The larger freedom allowed to women in the Baptist meetings was a great aid to the new enterprise. Under the stimulating discourses of

able preachers, there was an accession of thirty members within two years after the formation of the church. The first pastor, Rev. Isaac Childs, helpless in this world's concerns, was a man of great spiritual power, and gave a fervor and zeal to the new church that long endured. His successor, Rev. Erastus Andrews, did not give his hearers strong meat; and those that were of full age hailed with joy the labors of Rev. Cullen Townsend, who was soon caught away by the Western fever. The ministry of Rev. Henry Archibald, the Scotchman, whose knowledge of the Bible was profound, was full of blessed results to his charge. His successor, Rev. Orson Spencer, was genial, popular, and deeply interested in education. His conversion to Mormonism astounded everybody. He made no effort to gain converts, nor did he state his views till fully formed. Then he resigned his charge, and the church undisturbed enjoyed for several years the ministrations of Rev. Foronda Bestor. The eccentric Homer Clark and the beloved Rev. Volney Church had each a short pastorate. During the ministry of Rev. Orlando B. Cunningham, a large number were added to the church. Rev. Lewis Holmes came at the close of the great revival of 1857-58; and his successor, the much-esteemed Rev. Joseph M. Rockwood, is now in the nineteenth year of his successful pastorate. Many revivals have occurred in connection with this church, and it has at all times been noted for the liberality with which it has aided the different objects of Christian benevolence.

At about the time the first Baptist meetings were held in Middlefield there began, in the south-east part of the town, another religious movement. Early in the century

the Methodists formed a class under the leadership of Mr. Falley and Mr. Cross. Mr. Falley subsequently removed to Fulton, N.Y., and there founded the flourishing Methodist seminary bearing his name. Thomas Ward, who had been a sea-captain, overcome with grief at the death of his wife, had, with Bible and hymn-book, gone forth from Boston, scarce knowing whither he went. Settling in Middlefield, he became an active Christian worker, conducting meetings in the absence of the preacher, and known far and wide as Father Ward. In his barn and in the Den school-house meetings were held by various circuit-riders, till at last a church was formed, which at length, with that at Washington and those at other places, formed the Middlefield and Washington circuit. The new ways and the unction of the Methodist preachers produced the same results in Middlefield as elsewhere. In this church, woman had even larger liberty than what was accorded her in the Baptist church; and a Miss Barnes is remembered as a preacher of uncommon fervor. Under the powerful preaching of Peter C. Oakley, Bradley Selleck, Cyrus Prindle, and others, there was an extensive revival, for several years, in this church. In 1827 a church building was erected in the Den, near the present residence of George W. Howe. In 1853 it was removed to the center, south of the town hall. The society lost by the change. The strong roots of its power were in the south-east of the town. It was needed there: its necessity at the center was not so obvious. A large number of deaths and removals occurring a few years later so weakened the society that services were discontinued, and the building was sold to the Congregational church for a chapel.

Middlefield has never lost the impulse that led the town, at its first meeting, to vote for schooling. While probably few, even of the hill-towns of Western Massachusetts, have retained a larger proportion of the Puritan stock, still fewer can show a higher standard of intelligence and morality among its inhabitants during the century. The stable structure of Middlefield's social life fias rested on the solid basis of a general education of all the citizens, almost as much as upon the corner-stone of a gospel ministry. At first there was probably but one school. Six years after the formation of the town, the selectmen were directed to divide the town into districts ; and, four years later, it was voted that every district should build its own school-house. ,24.0 were voted, £4o for each of the six districts ; and this sum was to be assessed upon each district, according to its polls and real estate.

Later the number of districts was increased to eleven; and the management of its school affairs by each district was an important element in training the citizens to self-reliance, wise action, and quiet submission to self-imposed laws. In time, however, this individuality needed a check, and the district system was abolished. It produced better workers than co-workers. Schools were then established, where there were not only a schoolhouse and a teacher, but where there were also scholars in sufficient numbers to form a school. Able teachers have been employed, from the first. At intervals, select schools of a high grade have been maintained; while many persons have pursued their studies further at academies, seminaries, and colleges. Large numbers of men, in all walks of life, have gone from the Middlefield schools, achieving usefulness and fame on

the foundations there laid. A town which has produced such men as Ebenezer Emmons and Lyman Coleman, may well have a just pride in the successful efforts of the pioneers to lay deep and strong the foundations of education.

Middlefield has produced many men of eminent business talent. Among others that might well be mentioned are the Durants and the Newtons that went to Albany; Azariah Smith, who was a most eminent manufacturer and merchant in Manlius, N.Y. ; General David Mack, who was for many years a most successful merchant in Middlefield, and later removed to Amherst; his son, Samuel Mack, who was a merchant in St. Louis; Edmund Morgan, who, though not a native, first displayed in Middlefield that mercantile talent so fully developed in Cleveland; William F. Church, who organized Ohio's department of insurance, of which he was the commissioner for several years ; Russell M. Little, president of an insurance company at Glen's Falls, N.Y.; Franklin Smith, a merchant and manufacturer at Hazardville, Conn. ; J. Smith McElwain in the Parsons Paper Company at Holyoke,

and his brother Edwin McElwain, a well-known merchant in Springfield. Edward King, the author and noted journalist, a great-grandson of Calvin Smith, was born in Middlefield. Dr. Azariah Smith, the missionary to the Aintab Mission in Syria, and Dr. William M. Smith, Professor of Medical Chemistry, Syracuse University, were grandsons of Matthew Smith; and Andrew Dickson White, President of Cornell University, is a great-grandson of Lieutenant James Dickson. Many young ladies have studied at Mt. Holyoke

Female Seminary, several of whom have graduated. One has graduated from Oberlin. More than a dozen young men have taken a college course. Alvan Nash, Lyman Coleman, Samuel Bissell, Warren Little, Judson Smith, and Samuel Ingham became Congregational clergymen; William Crowell, a Baptist minister ; Eben Brown, Alexander Dickson, Russell M. Little, and John C. Martin, Methodist preachers. Two missionaries have gone from Middlefield: Samuel Ingham to the Dacotah Mission, where he died in the midst of a great work ; and Mary A. Rockwood, who went as a teacher in the Toungoo Mission in India, and fell a victim to her labors in that climate. Elisha Mack, son of David Mack, became a lawyer and a judge of excellent reputation ; and his nephew David studied law with him, but afterward became a successful teacher, commanding the highest esteem for his ability and his worth.

Middlefield has sent forth a goodly number of physicians. Besides Dr. Emmons, the distinguished naturalist, Asa Newton, Austin Church, Elbridge G. Wheeler, Jefferson Church, Henry Little, Milo Wing, Cooley Wing, James U. Church, Wright Barnes, Frank Whittemore, Clark Hamilton, Cynthia Smith, and James N. Dickson were all natives of Middlefield.

Of these, only two have practised in Middlefield: Dr. Wheeler, who, retiring from his ride in other towns, occasionally practises ; and Dr. James U. Church, the most popular physician that Middlefield ever had. His tragic and untimely death threw the town into consternation and gloom. Dr. Wright, Dr. Coleman, and Dr. Warren preceded

Dr. Church. Dr. Underwood was a contemporary of Dr. Warren and Dr. Church. To Dr. Church succeeded Dr. Edwin C. Bidwell, who enlisted and went into the Union Army as a surgeon. It was hoped he would be with us to-day, but he has sent a letter expressing his regrets and speaking of his experiences in the war. Middlefield has always been orthodox in her medical practice. No heretical homoeopathist has lifted up his voice against the dispensers of calomel, lobelia emetics, mandrake, morphine, and brandy.

The most general occupation in Middlefield has been farming, but various manufactures have been introduced. At one period the extensive soapstone quarries in the north-east part of the town were worked by a New York Company. The operations were abandoned in a few years, as the expenses of quarrying and transportation exceeded the returns. Saw-mills and grist-mills were built at an early period on the various streams that traverse the town. In the south part of the town, on the Tan Brook, was at one time an extensive tannery. John Metcalf, an early proprietor, was succeeded by Alexander Dickson. Addison Everett devised machinery for turning wooden bowls, which almost revolutionized the business in this country, and from which he might have derived a fortune, had not the secret of his invention been obtained in a more secret than legal manner. About 1790 a fulling mill was erected on the factory stream. This was bought about the beginning of the century by Amasa Blush, who later built a clothing mill for finishing custom work. In 1815 he erected a factory a little below the present residence of Mrs. William D. Blush. There his sons Oliver and William carried on the business for

many years. Uriah Church also built a clothing mill not far from 18 z o. In 1823 he built a factory, and a second larger one in 1848. In these mills Mr. Church and his sons, Sumner U. Church & Brothers, have manufactured immense quantities of woolen goods. The great flood in 1874 caused much destruction, but the reservoir has been substantially rebuilt. The great freshet of 1878 caused great damage to the roads, and so injured the works of the West Woolen Company that the proprietors decided not to rebuild.

In the first stage of farming the pioneers were felling the forests and carving out homes and farms. Hills apparently sterile, from which the wood had been burned in one season, would the next year produce any grain in ample measure. A few bushels of grain or flax-seed, a few cheeses, or a fattened steer, helped, in the absence of much currency, to square accounts in exchange for the merchant's groceries or wares. The amount of pasture land, relatively so large compared with the portion devoted to mowing and tilling, demonstrates what feature of agriculture has always been predominant in this town. It is grazing in its threefold forms of stock-raising, fattening cattle, and dairying. From these limits agriculture in Middlefield has never wandered widely with profit. Success has been found in their perfection rather than in the introduction of new forms of effort. The protective tariff which favored the wool manufacturer and the wool-grower gave a great impulse to the erection of woollen factories and to the raising of fine wool. Every farmer turned his attention to this industry. Ten thousand sheep were sometimes sheared here in a single year. The greatest

pains were taken to perfect the quality of the staple. Middlefield farmers were never more prosperous, never had more money, than in the thirty years devoted to wool-growing. The lower tariff on wool and the demands of the market for varied styles of woollen goods enabled and required the manufacturer to use cheaper and foreign grades of wool, and by degrees the sheep disappeared from the Middlefield pastures.

The raising of fine cattle now occupied the farmer's attention. The Durhams, introduced in 1842, were so improved that the town became famous for its thoroughbred, its fat, and its working cattle, a celebrity which, though in a less degree, it still retains. There is little question that at one time Middlefield had the finest cattle in the State. The extremely high prices of beef during the war caused the destruction of much fine stock, and gave an accelerated impulse to the pasturing and fattening of cattle for beef. At present, butter, eggs, maple sugar, hay, and young cattle are the most prominent articles the farmer has for sale. The establishment of the Highland Agricultural Society, whose formation and incorporation were due to the untiring energy of Matthew Smith, has in many ways been of service to agriculture.

The Boston and Albany Railroad, which skirts the south part of the town, increased greatly the population of the town during its construction. Had it passed up the factory stream, as was once proposed, instead of up the west branch of the Westfield River, it might perhaps have increased in many respects the prosperity of

Middlefield; but it would not probably have sufficed to arrest the tendency of the young men, the bone and sinew of the town, to seek their fortune elsewhere. The fertile fields of the West allured with their abundance, and cities attracted with their excitements and glare. Farming in Middlefield labors under some disadvantages, but none that courage, industry, and skill cannot overcome. The soil is strong and still responds generously to faithful culture.

But in a most important sense the great work of Middlefield has not been either agriculture or manufactures. Her best products, those by which she gains her fairest renown, for which there is an unfailing demand, are her sons and her daughters. Nowhere more than in Middlefield has there been a more profound apprehension of the immense difference between getting a living and living. This realization has laid a more constraining grasp upon the subtle springs of action than any questions of profit and loss. Middlefield's first effort has been to make, not money, but men. Thus has she earned her best title to immortality: —

" For manhood is the one immortal thing Beneath Time's changeful sky."

In the power that Middlefield shows of inspiring affection in her children lies the incontestable proof of the charm that invests this town. It is not merely that her scenery fascinates and her pure, bracing air invigorates : it is the kindly spirit of the mother, who never confounds publicity with worth, who supplants low

desires by ennobling tastes, and who is not so anxious that her children should do something great as that they should be something worthy and true. Even her adopted children feel the spell which Middlefield casts upon all who breathe her air and tread her hills. For some of them leave higher wages elsewhere to seek work in the mills here, because Middlefield to them is home. Not many years ago a Middlefield farmer, who might well have succeeded in business in more attractive fields, said: "There is not another such place in the world to bring up children in. I know of no place where general education and morality are higher."

Middlefield has declined in population, but her spirit is not broken nor her influence impaired. The spring from which so many refreshing streams have flowed to all parts of the earth gushes up abundantly still.

The influence of such towns in maintaining freedom will be even larger, it may be, in the future than in the past. We have not yet learned how to govern wisely our great cities ; and, if we ever do learn, it is not improbable we shall be taught by some one who has been trained in self-government in these hill-towns, Our city schools have too much machinery, too little vitality ; and it may be that the secret of putting the living spirit into the wheels of our educational system will be one day imparted by one to whom there first began in Middlefield schools the dawn of the intellectual life. If in the future this town could be only a nursery from which should be transplanted at fitting times the best growths it could produce, it would still do a work of inestimable importance. In this age of

steel and electricity, this era of vast opportunity, it is probable the interests of many of Middlefield's children would be promoted by going forth to other callings than those here pursued. But for success in those callings nothing can surpass the lessons in cheerful industry, the wise economy of a simple training, the muscle of energy and victory that may be gained here. The departure of such young men is a loss to the town, but a gain to the world, that needs them perhaps even more. In just this way Middlefield has given to the West and to our towns and cities some of the best blessings they have received,—men of industry, business talent, and order, men of education and piety, who, wherever they have gone, have laid the foundations or upheld the structure of all that is hopeful or good.

The necessities of this rough country and intractable soil are good necessities. There is something in life here that fosters the heroic, that tones up the whole will to energy and the whole soul to endurance. A softer climate and a more fruitful soil make men of a less triumphant energy. Men do well now as of old to "lift up their eyes unto the hills from whence cometh help."

The venerable forms of our fathers have been summoned before us. In an imperfect way, we have reviewed their characters and their labors. They were heroic spirits, but the world knew little of their heroism. Only here and there did their lives so blend with the current of public affairs as to become historic.

But what their work lost in width it gained in intensity. In the quiet, not the more showy, pursuits, their great life-work was done. Such pursuits flow in silence like the great forces of nature. The electric current, when still, goes through the world, uniting atom to atom and quickening the very life of our bodies. It grows historic when it thunders, but it tells of disturbance in the atmosphere, of interruption in its work. The spirits of our fathers were finely touched, and they had their fine issues, though they were not widely visible.

The effect of their lives was incalculably diffusive, though they were spent in deeds which had no great name on earth. The blessings we rejoice in to-day are almost wholly due to the humble but good men and women who, among these hills, faithfully and bravely lived a hidden life, and rest now in untitled graves. The wealth of the inheritance we enjoy is, under God's providence, but the legitimate result of the toils they endured, of the sacrifices they made, and of the blood they shed. We shall best reverence their memory by simple loyalty to truth and right. We shall most honor Middlefield, the mother of us all, by blessing her history with a future in harmony with her past.