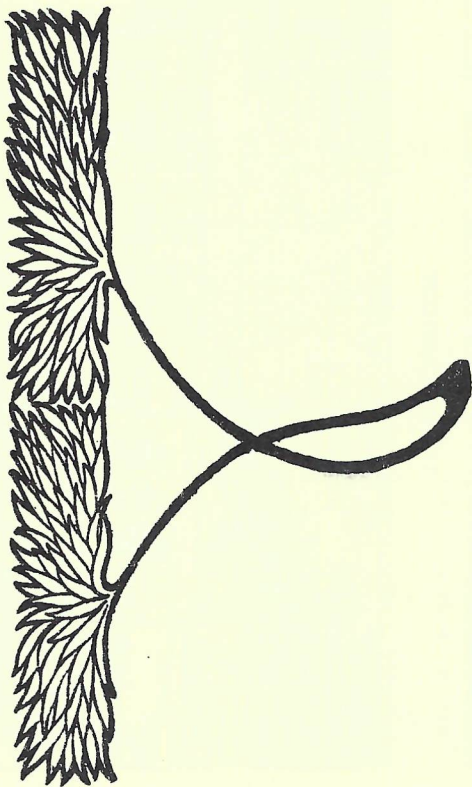


# IN THE BEGINNING.

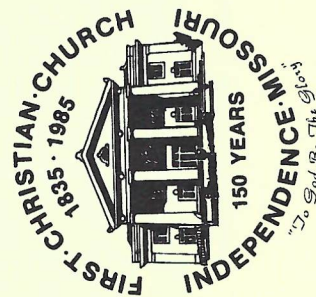
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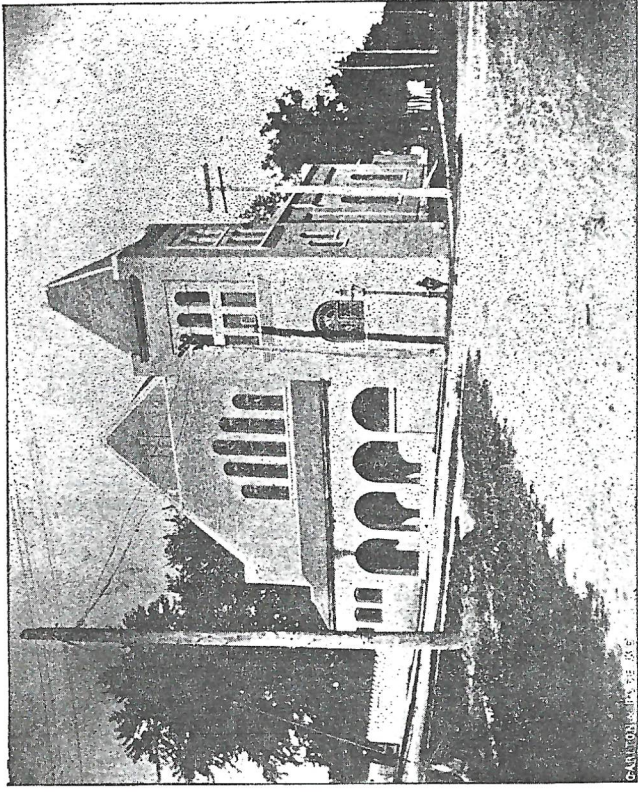
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A reprint of the address first  
given by George S. Bryant in 1904, now  
presented for the Sesquicentennial of

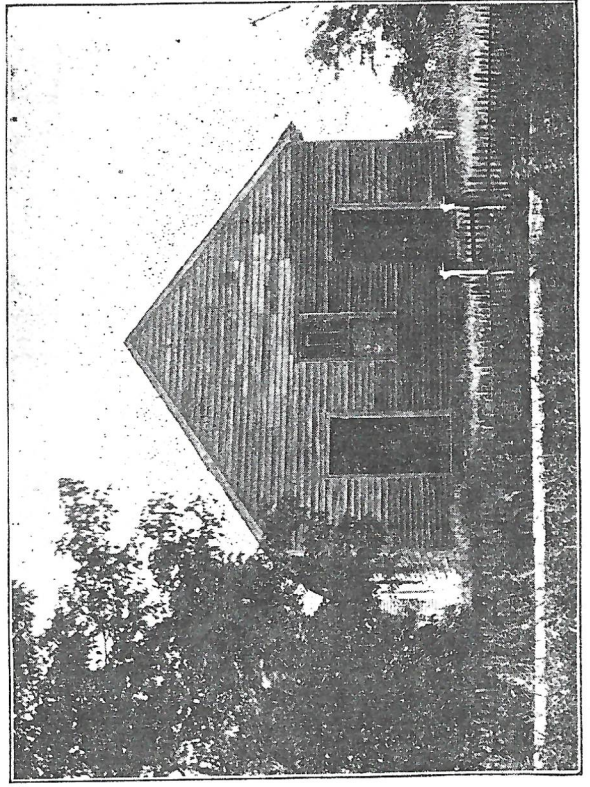
First Christian Church  
125 South Pleasant  
Independence, MO 64050  
July 6-7, 1985





CAMERON'S DE BAY

THE NEW CHURCH.



THE OLD CHURCH IN 1885.

# IN THE BEGINNING.

An address read by Geo. S. Bryant at the 50th Anniversary of the occupancy of the present church building, 1835-1884-1904.

JACKSON County was organized, and the City of Independence was platted in 1827. Eight years after, the first Christian church organized itself. I take the following entry from the old records: "On the 4th day of July, 1835, thirty-five persons at Independence, Mo., organized themselves into a Church of Jesus Christ, agreeing to take the Book, known as the Bible, as their ONLY standard, guide, and directory, and rule in faith and conduct." This record does not state where they met, who presided, or who were elected officers, and this is also the only record for the year '35. It was the day of small beginning, and no one knew whereunto it would grow. To reach our day this band would have to pass through sixty-nine eventful years, and in the passing, among other things, witness the birth and rapid growth of Kansas City itself. When this church was organized the most that Independence could claim for itself was lots and woods, and springs. A few log cabins scattered here and there, with a central square for a seat of justice, but no building on it to take the place of its stately trees. There was a court house to be sure, but it was a log structure one story high with two rooms, located one block east of the square on Lexington and Lynn streets. The structure is still standing, though it now forms part of a residence. If this band of brethren had any house in which to worship, no mention is made of it this first year, but the next year or two references are made to the purchase of a lot, paying of notes, and repairing a house. Evidently the brethren were not long in securing a place of assembly. If you wish to see the character of this building, you can study it today on the corner of Lynn and Walnut. Lynn street being Court House street, seems to have been one of the principal thoroughfares in these early days. It runs north and south just in the rear of this building. But if they had no place of assembly, there was a fine compensation in the fact that there were two brethren who had hearts big enough to house the

world. These were Oliver Caldwell and James Smart. Their homes had open doors for the wandering Christian knights, and no man was ever turned away. Everything about those men said, and kept saying, "Come in! Come in and enjoy."

If one could tell the happenings in and about that old frame house over on Lynn street, he would know quite the whole history of the Christian Church in Independence in those early days. Its very construction gives an insight into the spirit of the times. It had two large front doors, one for men and one for women. These opened into the two aisles, which were separated by a row of benches. The women entered the right hand door, the men the left. They sat apart during the service. The elders generally occupied the front seats. They were men who knew how to divide the word; able to teach, and good enough to discipline. They were ordinarily men of good voice and could "start a tune" with as much precision as an organ. I can yet hear some of those full-voiced brethren starting a tune. They would begin with a low under-tone, apparently uncertain whether to go on or stop. You would scarcely know that any one was singing, but it would leak out by degrees, not only that the tune had been started, but that they were well on the way through the first line, increasing in volume as they went. What if the tune were pitched too high, there were those who could reach the height. If the men failed, the women came to the rescue. Young women noted for the sweetness of their voices, sang without the aid of timbrel or of harp. The pulpit was just within the doors and between them. All, on entering, had to face the early arrivals on being seated. Occasionally a man caparisoned with enormous spurs would stride up the aisles to the music of his rowels, and seek the rearmost seat, American tobacco juice marking the way of this American man. These were only part of the scenes incident to the arrival of these western worshippers. For though the more sedate easily gravitated to their places, and found them early, the younger set lingered about the door and made observations. To them there were some seats preferable to others. Just where that seat was was determined by where some one else was seated. They would enjoy the service better if within easy range of youthful glances, not intended for the common eye. There was no partition raised

between the sexes as there was in the old brick school house. I have seen boys and girls send overhead messages across these spaces that never missed their mark, often with killing effect, messages that needed no "Marconi" system to interpret the delicate disturbance of the ether waves. Just in front of the pulpit, and under the very drippings of the sanctuary, was a bench, an old-fashioned bench—generally unoccupied, but intended for those who wished to come forward and make the good confession. From such humble place many a sin has been confessed, and many a start been made for a better life. Many a ladder with angels at the top found its resting place in such lowly beginnings. He who led the way to those benighted souls was busy always seeking a "Thus saith the Lord" for every step that was made. Why dwell upon these material surroundings? Windows without curtains, glass without stain, floors without carpets, seats without cushions, the whole interior without any of the gloss of modern life, brought the soul naked before its God—face to face with its own sins, and held it trembling there. Add to these undecorative features, women with sun-bonnets, girls with scoops, men with sombreros, and you have a partial picture of those early times.

These things happened in the ordinary, but there were extraordinary occasions. One of these was the "big meeting," preparations for which was made in advance. Chickens were slaughtered, the old-fashioned, rich-flavored, country-smoked ham was baked, the ever ready pie greeted your vision at every turn; and more than all, better than all, the hearts that dispensed these bounties were fuller than the tables on which they were loaded. Any one who has ever attended one of these big meetings will know that every soul brought its heart to the church, and left business and all else at home. Those were growing days, and life mounted quick and high; the young tree in early spring did not take on its foliage with more grace than did that simple life express itself. There was a general hand-shaking and greeting, which showed close kinship in the highest sense. There was a flow of soul, which was not checked by the social conventionalities of our day. When the hearts of the people became warmed up by those stirring exhortations of a Thomas M. Allen, or a John T. Johnson, or a Samuel Church, when the incoming of souls filled the

people with joy, it would have moved the hardest heart to hear a whole congregation join in the singing of

“Come, humble sinner, in whose breast

A thousand thoughts revolve,  
Come, with your guilt and fear oppressed,  
And make this last resolve.”

And all the while the people were singing, the preacher would be exhorting—making appeal after appeal until they reached the last verse:

“I cannot perish if I go,  
I am resolved to try;  
For if I stay away, I know  
I must forever die.”

Then this verse would be repeated perhaps again and again. When sinners began to move, one could easily note it by the increasing volume of song, hearts pouring themselves out in joy to see the prodigals return, and there would not be many dry eyes in the house. If among those that had come there were children, mothers could be seen sitting by their side, so glad were they that they had come forward to make the good confession.

Then came the baptizing. They did not believe in waiting. Rock creek,  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles west of town, was the place, whether winter or summer. If ice had to be cut, that did not cool the religious fervor. Who of the older boys here present does not remember the “old baptizing hole,” and many have been the individuals who have gone to the home of A. G. Oldham or Adam Hill, near by, to make a change of garments after the ordinance. Those old trees are grown up now, and many of them have been cut down, but there are few of them but can claim the honor of having been hitching places for horses, wagons or buggies of those who went to the baptizing. The opposite banks were generally lined with curious people. Baptism by immersion was a new thing in those days, and there were not wanting those who ridiculed the ancient ordinance and laughed at its practice.

What shall I now say of the songs that the old church sang? The very memory of them makes one think of that other passage: “Sing unto us one of the songs of Zion.” They sang spiritual songs. They sang the sentiment rather than the tune. They sang the spirit rather than the music. Oftentimes the music was

left to take care of itself. Mistakes in time, or a catch or quaver in the voice did not disgrace any one. It was not art; it was religion. Their singing was a happy illustration of what the apostle meant when he said: “Speaking to yourselves in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual songs, and making melody in your heart to the Lord.” If you would know how well those pioneers know the sentiment of these old songs, start one of them today, as you have done this morning, and note that nearly every old person in the house will join in the congregational singing, and do it without the aid of a book. Those songs form part of their mental fibre. Their lines are cut deep into their spiritual consciousness and—will they be erased at death? Those early Christians had, as we to-day, their favorite songs:

“All Hail the Power of Jesus Name.”

“How Firm a Foundation.”

“Oh! Thou Fount of Every Blessing.”

“Am I a Soldier of the Cross.”

“There is a Fountain.”

“Jesus, Lover of My Soul.”

And a score of others, any one of which needs no book in the hand of the older members. They needed no instrument to help them worship. They questioned both the right and the propriety of using even the tuning fork to get the pitch. They preferred to sing high or low to introducing something for which they could not find Scripture warrant. They had agreed in the organization to use the Bible as their guide and they were following it to the letter. They went so far as to believe there was power in song. They may not have known that nations were led by it to action, but they *did* know that many a sinner was induced to return home by the outpouring of the heart in joyful psalms; that many a prodigal who had spent himself in music and riotous living was moved to return to his Father by the song of home. And today when we want to produce deep religious feeling we say, “Sing us one of the old songs.”

I sometimes wonder if the thick veil of custom, and years of artificial civilization had not come between us and our natural rights and enjoyments. I sometimes wonder if our love of art had not cheated us to some extent out of our religious sensibilities;

if the freshness of the morning had not disappeared by the gloss of the midday. The music and songs of our fathers were not elaborately ornate, but they were out of overflowing hearts and on themes mighty and weighty. They had spirit and force behind them and were productive of spirit and force. Great bodies were moved and swayed by song. The motion followed the song as the tides follow the moon.

In these big meetings this church has also been highly favored in the character of the brethren who have visited it or spoken from its pulpit. This list includes nearly all the prominent men of the early days, (I omit from the list some of the living,) and contains the warmest hearted as well as the longest headed of the organization. Of the pioneers, Jacob Creath, John Smith, (Raccoon); T. M. Allen, Love Jameson. It makes one's spirit glow yet to think of the warm exhortations of Old Tom Allen. I wonder if any of the boys or girls remember that paralyzed hand, and then what would you give to hear Bro. Jameson sing to us as he did of yore that beautiful song—we sing it frequently—of his own composition :

“Night, with ebon pinion,  
Brooded o'er the vale;

All around was silent

Save the night wind's wail,

When Christ, the man of sorrows,

In tears and sweat and blood

Prostrate in the Garden,

Raised His voice to God.”

He could make you feel the presence of that Man of sorrows, and lead you by his minor strains into the darkness and sadness of Gethsemane. We thought it a great day in the history of our little organization to have Bro. Sam Church, of St. Louis, visit us. Many are the hearts that he made to rejoice. He deserves a book, but we must pass him with a line, and be satisfied with calling the names of a few others—and these must be limited to the older brethren: Burnet, Hopson, Pendleton, Loos, McGarvey, Logan, Jones, Monser, Garrison, the Haleys. There are others young and old; but if the gospel can be preached by our people, have we not had a chance to hear it? And if our responsibility is in proportion to our opportunity, how can we meet it in the coming years?

On three occasions Alexander Campbell himself was here. I say *Campbell himself* because if ever there were Campbellites, they lived in those days. On his first visit, Mr. Campbell spent Sunday with the church, and on Monday he delivered an address to the people on education. He was as full of this subject as the sea is full of water. He believed in *Christian* education. On his second visit our little church was not large enough to accommodate the people, and the Cumberland Presbyterians gave us the use of their house—it was the best in the town. When the hour came for the service, Mr. Campbell was unable to fill the appointment. He was sick. As I recall the incident, the house was full to overflowing, and there were several ministers present, but none willing to take the sick man's place. Who do you think did it? Our own beloved Brother Procter, then a young man and just out of college, travelling at the time with Mr. Campbell. It was long before he came here to live. He preached at the request of Mr. Campbell, and the people were pleased with him then, as he pleased them to the end of his life. His third visit was about 1859. I was at Bethany College at the time, and there are no records of that year. An old letter written by one of the boys must take their place. This old letter reveals the coincidence of the visit with the death of James Smart, mentioned above, and one of the church's best friends and staunchest defenders, and probably one of the very men that Mr. Campbell came to see; for his visit was in the interest of education, and that cause had no better supporter than James Smart.

The style of preaching in those days was different from that of the present in some particulars. It dealt very largely in quotations of the word. The Bible was a well thumbed book. The very old set of preachers had not removed very far from the notion that coughing and hemming were ornaments of speech; and there were preachers who were recognized as having the “gospel sound.” I have heard them and, in my boyish days, confess to a strong liking for them. They were the drawing cards if it be not sacrilegious to use cards in describing them. Intellectual efforts were not so much in vogue; but “powerful sermons” was a term in frequent use. The Second of Acts was their camping ground.

“Their ordinary rate of speech  
In loftiness of sound was rich.”

A sermon that did not skin the sects lacked interest, and had power in proportion as it made the fur fly.

The Sunday meeting, of course, included the celebration—they called it the *taking* of the Lord's supper. There rises before my vision no silver service. At first it was a plain pitcher and tumbler, such as the poorest man would not hesitate to touch. Later, between '36 and '40, Gov. Boggs, who lived in this town, presented the church with a glass service—a bottle with long neck and open mouth, and flattened faces made for the purpose. As Jesus had come to them in their lowliness, they were now carrying themselves to him in their appreciation. I think this service was in use when my father arrived in Independence. Before taking the supper, there was generally the preface of a few remarks or quotations calling the mind to holy reverie and meditation. All became silent. There was no laughing or talking. Sacilegious was a word more frequently used then than now. Whether the supper should be taken in joy or sadness might be a question now, but there was no question then. There was no smile accompanying its administration. This was not a noticeable thing then, but now it would attract attention—that after all the *white* brethren had been waited on, some one of the deacons would take both emblems in his hands and walk to the rear of the church and serve the servants. This supper being over, the announcements were made. "We will meet again tonight by early candle-light." The people were dismissed. The women waited at the stiles and block while the men brought the horses and vehicles from the hitching posts.

Were all the people good in those days? Was there no one with a weakness? Were all able to withstand every temptation? Oh! no. Men sinned, and so did women, and the record shows that the elders felt the heavy weight of their responsibility and did not fail to act. But they had to be careful in their proceedings, and not go beyond the word. There were some who were not only worldly, but they were worldly-wise, and began early to talk of having their liberty abridged. So the elders moved *slowly* but *surely*. They turned the pages of the old book and placed themselves on a "Thus saith the Lord" for their every act. In the eighteen years previous to entering into this building

there were fifteen or twenty exclusions. Some there were who fought; others drank too much; some swore; others gambled; some attended balls, others frequented horse races; some slandered, others danced; it was a sin to look at a dance even; some beat their wives, others failed to attend church. These all were confronted by an order from the church to appear before it and explain why their names should be longer retained on the church book. The reading of the records impresses one with the fact that the officers were men of great self-possession and deliberation.

I take this from the church record: First Saturday in August, 1845: On this day the congregation decided unanimously that the members shall not dance or attend balls, and that any thus acting shall be excluded if not penitent.

It cannot be told from the records how frequently the brethren were in the habit of assembling, but on November 1, 1845, it was resolved that they meet every Lord's day for "taking the Lord's supper and other worship." There must have been some indifference in this matter, for later on it is again resolved to do the same thing; but some dissented. Still it prevailed, and such was the custom when my father came to Independence in 1850. There is no mention made of a Sunday School.

Sunday! Sunday was Sunday in those days. It was the Lord's day. It was the children's longest day. One could easily distinguish it from all other days. If you had lived then, you would have thought that man was made for that day, and not the day made for man. Children could not play, *could not, must not* think of playing. Men could not work. It was esteemed a holy day. For a while there was no Sunday School, because they did not believe in it. They could find no scripture warrant for it. Where the Bible spoke, they spoke. Where it was silent they refused to act. But in the early '50's a good Sunday School was in operation. It was taught by *men* and *women*. I attended it. Also young men and young women attended it. It commenced early. The children were there; the parents were there, many of them as teachers. I say, again, it was managed and taught by most excellent men and women. It was long before the day of the International Lessons, and each teacher dispensed that part of the word that he saw fit. The lessons given did not direct the

ing years. How many has it summoned to a new life! How many has it tolled away from earth! It has called to prayer and praise, and when one of its flock has disappeared. "What a world of solemn thought its memory compels." The first day that the old bell hung in its new belfry, it called to life and death. The day of the dedication of the new church found many strangers in town. Some came to the circuit court, others to the dedication services. The day was bright and hot. In the morning all was well. There was no unusual service, but the people were glad. The new house seemed to have a welcome for all. After night fall and well along into the night, a cry of distress arose. Cholera had broken out, and in a few hours death had selected some of the brightest and purest of the church. The events of that night still throw their sad coloring over our body. I have not called to you the roll of those good men and true who took an active part in piloting the church through sunshine and through storm; of those faithful and worthy women who brought up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and were the strong support of the men engaged in warfare with wickedness in high places—most of whom have long since gone to their reward, but some of them still remain with us to attest that seed sown in new soil, and assiduously cultivated brings forth fruit to the end.

How many of you can remember the faces or the names of Grant, Palmer, Hughes, Hockensmith, Swetnam, Caldwell, Smart, Stone, Hansbrough, Hansford, Collins, Botts, Haines, Hickman, Green, Parker, Eaton, Beatty, DeWeber, Sheley, Thompson, Pendleton, Crump, Thomas, Gray, Rogers, Lane, Strode, Christopher, Rogers, Scholl, Moore, Modie, Bryant, Johnson. Those that I have called are gone, but there remain with us those whose lives overlapped theirs and lived long with them. These are, Masters, Sea, Hughes, Beatty, Perry, Moore, Peacock, Cogswell, Rogers, Higgason, Flournoy, Campbell, Moore, Gregg, Massey, Forbis, Procter, and Sister Smart, the oldest living member of the church, becoming a member in 1840.

There are many more deserving mention, but no disparagement is meant to any name, when I say there was one who was with the body as one of its leaders for more than fifty round years.

children into righteous living so much as they did to bring them into the church. Sunday School training, and home training kept before the children an offended God and a Satan anxiously awaiting the arrival of every bad child. Then the preacher followed, and he held the vision upon a burning pit. I can yet see its lurid flames. They were high, and red, and hot. It was a broad road that led downward to it. The soul that entered there might plead in vain for the cooling drop of water. The pain was endless. If once the child entered there, goodbye to papa, to mama, and to God. When did any of you hear such a sermon? Those were days in which few things were done for children except at home, and there they were *raised*, they did not "*just grow up*." In church they sat on benches made for adults, sang songs without a childish sentiment and without the childish melody. The laugh was gone, the glee was gone, the joy was gone, but the little children loved to hear the old, old story, and their souls were tinted and colored by the Sun of Righteousness. This subject of the Sunday School should not be allowed to slip without mention of one of its most faithful and enthusiastic workers and supporters—John Burns. I hope these lines may find their way to him in his old age, that he may know his labor of love was not lost, and that, tho' he has been absent many years, his memory still abideth. Howsoever unpromising were those early days of the Sunday School, they were the pure beginnings of better things. Let us gladly await their fruit.

I find this Christian church in 1845 sending messengers to annual meetings, and state meetings, also helping to settle and harmonize when divisions had grown up in neighboring churches. It had a heart and a hand for the advancement of the cause.

Beginning in 1847, repeated efforts were made to sell the old house and build a new one. The old could not be sold, neither were subscriptions forthcoming to encourage the new enterprise. The <sup>houses</sup> were appointed, reported, and were discharged. The <sup>houses</sup> were not materialize until 1854, now half a hundred years. We meet to celebrate the event, but as only fourteen remain of those who were present at that dedication, so only the walls of that old house are left, the rest is new. But there is one thing that has remained the same in all the changes. The same old bell has never ceased to call. It has had but one voice in all the pass-



He was present at the birth of the children; saw them pass through youth to manhood, and when death called, he was again summoned to comfort and to strengthen. He saw the old church gradually disappear until he stood alone, witnessing the coming in of the new. When the dark days of the civil war came, he still stood, with a few others, at the helm guiding through stormy waves, and uneasy waters. Who is this man? I cannot say. When kings assume their crowns, they change their names.

This short account of the early days of this church would be very incomplete, did I not recognize those tall men standing in the forefront, preaching the word, teaching the people the way of life. But few churches, if any, can boast of a prouder roll. Men of rare excellence and warm hearts head the list; strong, scholarly logical men fill it in, while one who was thoroughly comprehensive of the spirit and genius of christianity closes it. There are very few of you that know the names of those who have nurtured this body in the past. To some of you many of the faces will be familiar when I call the name—but they have all gone to their reward. Listen to the roll-call, McBride, Gaines, Palmer, Lard, Miller, Henshall, O'Kane, Procter—the last of whom was with us for more than a third of a century. While he was burying one generation, he was replacing it with another strong and full of life. Start him where you would, you could trace the rays of his thought to the man—Christ Jesus. His was a religion of aspiration. Forgetting the past, he preached the doctrine of “pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” No man ever made a larger use of that sublimest of St. Paul’s utterance: “Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” He was one of the men to whom God granted a vision of his glory. He saw it in earth, air, ocean, sky; he saw it in flower, he saw it in the star, but most of all did he see it Christ and little children. Peace be to his ashes! Peace be to the ashes of all those who have labored, and toiled, and prayed that we might enjoy this days blessing and hopes.

“Beyond the stars that shine in glory  
Beyond the calm, sweet moon,  
Up the bright ladder saints have trod before thee  
You too must venture soon.”