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THE SEVENTH ANNUAL SERMON
ON
FOREFATHERS' DAY.

“ See thou make all things according to the pattern that I showed to thee in the mount.”

EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS, viii. : 5.

THE SEVENTH ANNUAL SERMON PREACHED BEFORE
THE NEW ENGLAND SOCIETY IN THE CITY OF NEW
YORK IN ALL SOULS CHURCH, FOURTH AVENUE,
CORNER TWENTIETH STREET, ON FOREFATHERS'
DAY, SUNDAY, DECEMBER 16TH, 1906, BY THE REV-
EREND THOMAS R. SLICER, M. A., PASTOR OF THE
CHURCH.

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S E R M O N .

The text which gives direction to this sermon may be found in the Epistle to the Hebrews, viii., 5: Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle; "*See thou make all things according to the pattern that I showed to thee in the mount.*"

The incident is that Old Testament record, so familiar to each one of you, that he who would build the church in the desert must find its pattern in the heavens, that he would set up the place of worship for God's people must take its description and inspiration from the Being who is to be worshipped. And the thesis which naturally arises from this text for this occasion might be phrased as an exhortation to us that *we make our highest moment permanent and our clearest vision constant*, and that to establish anything that shall abide we must derive its proportion from the moment when we were nearest heaven. The vision of your ancestors was a divine vision. It came into the mind of Eng-

land that it might be realized on the shores of a new world. Its first and important element, "the pattern" that appeared to the mind of the thirteenth century in the beginning, was the pattern which we may call the fiery tracery in the human mind of the fierce consciousness of personal liberty; for the reign of the common people began when that first parliament was assembled in Westminster in 1265, which had been made possible by the struggle of Simon de Montfort. The thirteenth century, not the seventeenth, is the birth time of liberty, and Simon de Montfort's name history has agreed to place with that of Cromwell and the later heroes of the struggle for liberty, and from 1265 and that first parliament in Westminster the divine right of kings was not to be accepted but to be proved; it was no longer possible to state it without producing its guarantee. And the assembly of 1265 was the corollary of that main proposition, which has its statement in the pages of Magna Carta. Observe what has led from that time to this to the culmination, indeed, in the seventeenth century of these beginnings of New England history. There had been a steady shifting from the thirteenth century to the seventeenth of power from the weak hands of the Latins to the strong hands of the Saxons. It was not an accident, but part of the evolution of history that the English-speaking people, or their origins, should have had committed to them

the motive power of civilization, and I think a modern historian does not overstate the fact when he says the political history of the world was in the issues of the seventeenth century in England, and that if they had missed the solution then it is difficult to know how or where that failure should have been repaired. There was a further contribution throughout the wars of the continent and England in the threatened extinction of the great feudal nobility, and it is not an insignificant fact to observe that in the last quarter of the fifteenth century, when the first parliament of Henry VII. was convened, but twenty-nine Lay Peers could be brought together, "so tremendous had been the carnage and butchery of the heads of the feudal nobility." This had enriched the crown, but it had also strengthened the people, and as the crown grew rich by the lands that fell in, the people grew strong by the energies that were called out. It may be noted also that although Wycliffe's Bible, in the first part of the fourteenth century, had given the English-speaking people a great document which may be called the spiritual Magna Carta of their destiny, it was not till 1611, in the very period that precedes the settlement of the New England colonies that there came into the possession of the English-speaking people a copy of the scriptures in English that did not need to be re-translated into the speech of the common people; the so-

called King James's version that was not in all points exact was in all points admirable. It is one of the mysteries of literature to know how the English of the Stuarts should be so strong, coming from so weak a source. It has been said of the revision of the New Testament which is now used as based upon the authorized version, that the translators of King James's time did not know so much Greek as the revisers of our day, but that they knew more English ; and the criticism is well taken, I think. And this English Bible that lay upon the hearts of the Cromwell troopers became the guide, by its parallels of history, to the enthusiasm of the Puritan. It was easy for them to find parallels for their struggle in the struggle of Israel to establish a church in the wilderness ; it was easy to believe in the leadership of Moses, seeing they were following, with bleeding steps, leaders of their own. It was the inspiration of the Puritan theocracy. Then first in the history of the world since those days before our era in which the achievements of the Old Testament are recorded did men believe there might be a kingdom of which God would be King.

Observe how strangely the scene of their activities was held vacant for them until in the evolution of history there should be the survival of the fittest in the place prepared for them. Of course it is easy to read the providence of God after the event, but it is wise to understand the providence of God from

the event. Those roving savages of varied name and tribe had made the forest sound with their war-whoops and war-dances for centuries before these men of England came to Plymouth. Sebastian Cabot had coasted along these very shores six years after Columbus had landed upon his island. Verazano had seen and wished to land upon the coast in 1524, Goswold and Pring and Weymouth had skirted the shores of New England in that very year in which the group from Scrooby had crossed to Holland, the French had claimed, without power to keep, this Acadia in 1604, and Champlain had surveyed these lands in 1605, and on the Kenebec the Popham colony had settled in 1606, when the grant of that whole region was made to the North Virginia Company of Plymouth. The Plymouth Company itself made a fruitless venture in 1607, and John Smith's map had described pictorially, if not accurately, the New England lands in 1614.

But in 1620 a different story began. They no longer skirted the coast, but entered its harbor, driven, indeed, by a tempest whither they knew not. And how thoroughly they understood their business, how completely they had committed themselves to the hand from heaven, may be gathered from the fact that on the third of November, 1620, King James incorporated forty of his subjects as "The Council established at Plymouth, in the County of Devon, for the planting, ruling, ordering

and governing of New England in America," giving to them an area to control from the 40th to the 48th degree of north latitude and from the Atlantic to the Pacific, that this grant on paper waited but a month before it was made actual in the harbor of Plymouth. In December of that same year, the little group brought to the shore their vision of the divine government, the puritan theocracy. How well they set themselves to establish and make permanent that "pattern they had seen in the mount" of their vision may be gathered from the fact that in fourteen years they had determined to go their way without reference to what should happen upon the English soil. They were Englishmen, loyal, devoted, reminiscent of the mother country, but when in 1624 the Council surrendered its charter to the King and in turn claimed for twelve associate members of the Council the land which now makes the boundaries of a nation, and acts of legal eviction were resorted to to dislodge the colonists, they went on their way, however, quite oblivious of this new group of twelve real estate apostles, for the pattern of personal liberty was already establishing itself on the shores of this new world, and their liberty was placed in the keeping of religion. They had learned somewhere, what we do well to remember, that though "man has a body man is a spirit;" they had after some fashion acquired the habit of regarding themselves as of the company of immortals,

that they were souls in process of achieving history, not bodies drifting to some convenient location ; and they placed, as we find it so difficult to do, the emphasis of their history in the field of religion. They had made the prime discovery that every man finds God for himself. They had no quarrel, Pilgrim nor Puritan, with the doctrines from which they had separated themselves in their struggles in England ; they carried the body of belief with them which was held by those others, who sought to make them conform to the usages of a church of which they had been a part, but they had discovered that there is no conformity to which the spirit is unwilling that can give shape or color or character to the behaviour of life. They had discovered that when a man's interests are in one place and his convictions in another, he suffers a strange dislocation in trying to bring them together ; and the proof of their freedom in religion is seen in the fact that they did not establish themselves in terms of doctrine but in terms of covenant of purpose ; and those old covenants seen upon the First Church in Salem, and the First Church in Plymouth, and in other old towns, are as free of theology as they are full of purpose ; they are covenants to do, and be, and behave, and consort together upon the terms of a good life. So their dissent was not the dissent of intellectual accuracy striving against intellectual accuracy, but the desire that every man might be

left to find God for himself, and we do well to hear the old exhortation to this, "See thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount." For we take our religion too easily. We do not make it our first business in life; it is for us something added, something incidental, a kind of insurance against misadventure, a sort of first aid to the injured, an emergency provision. Not so with those out of whose loins you come. It was the business of life with them, and the gathering of sustenance, the establishment of family, the building of home, were but the incidents. And it were shameful to us if our building did not rise four-square with their thought, with the thought that we belong first, last, and always to the spiritual world. Bradford expressed this in terms repeated at Plymouth, stating that they were "The Lord's free people," and "joined themselves (by a Covenant of the Lord) into a church estate, in the fellowship of the gospel, to walk in all His ways, made known unto them, or to be made known to them, (according to their best endeavors,) whatsoever it should cost them, the Lord assisting them." There is some parenthetical phrasing, as though they would provide for emergencies, but the main purpose marches on free of dogmatic statement and definition, free of all but the main intention to a good life. And so it was that having reached the state in which they were heart-whole, having been able

to focus their attention upon the real interests of life, they understood that, being the children of the living God, they were upon His errands in the world ; for this reason, though they believed in the "total depravity" of the race, they still provided for universal education. That is one of the beautiful inconsistencies that charm us in the reading of their rugged history, that though the race, in their belief, was corrupt to the core it was capable of development to the last degree, and not thirty years had passed before provision had begun to be made for the education of all the people. Surely the courage that had been required to believe in the fall of man was a courage that left something yet to believe in the rise of man. Their care for education was fundamental, a part of their liberty, a part of their religious inspiration. They had said in 1607-1608 they would "go into the Low Countries where they heard there was liberty for religion for all men ;" and when in 1620 they transferred their activities to the rugged coast that waited for them their view of liberty was unchanged, was to be brought into the achievement of that structure of which they had seen "the pattern" in their highest moments. It is said by their critics that they were narrow and vindictive and that they disregarded the consciences of other men. What is to be said for their own conscience ? The conscience of the man who owns it is the first consideration, and in that little group

where but five beside Brewster and Standish were left in the second year to bury the dead and tend the sick, in that little group of seven, with their invalids and starving people on their hands, there was already the fixed belief that the first business of a people is the conserving of its own autonomy. I have small patience with those philanthropists who love every country better than their own, whose "eyes are in the ends of the earth," and who are so far-sighted that they can see nothing that is at their feet. These colonists were narrow; they only had twenty-six acres in the second year; it did not require much vision to scan it all. It was not far afield they had to look for the glinting of the red-skins between the trees, or to the edge of the strand where they had uncovered "God's treasures in the sand," nor was it far to realize their own purpose, for they were heart-whole; they were not as the modern man, who does not know his opinions till he has taken account of stock. They knew what they knew; and they were learned men, many of them; those signatures on the deck of the Mayflower are not written with a steady hand, and are not all quite legible, but they are the signatures of the whole company down to those that were servants for the group, the signatures of the men who had conquered first in the name of conviction in England, had cultivated their principles in Holland, and then had mastered the perilous voyage and

were proceeding to claim a new world unabashed and unafraid ; their crystal hearts clear in purpose and undimmed in thinking became the jewel point on which was to turn the revolution of a new era in history. They persecuted the Quakers ? They drove Roger Williams into Rhode Island ? Why not ? They had one business in hand and that was to weed out of their own group everything inimical to its constituted integrity ; the land was wide, let the Society of Friends hold hands somewhere else, let Roger Williams found in Rhode Island a new settlement—and you mark that although he was received with cheerfulness by his Indian host he was not long there until he went from Providence to Newport to hold a controversy with an opposing Theologian. I have an idea that it is quite possible the Puritans, certainly the Pilgrims, regarded all controversy as an intrusion upon their purpose, that they knew exactly beyond any peradventure what they had started to do, and that they were enacting in microcosm the great business of a people in the macrocosm of this great eighty millions of to-day to create and enclose and fend off, and in absolute integrity to preserve the institutions they had started to establish. Then there is another thing to be remembered. Intense moral activity is always narrow ; it is the penalty of ethical passion that it shall burn its way through all opposition. It is the stroke of the narrow blade that gives it the pene-

trating power, and I doubt if anything was ever achieved that was associated in the beginning with any aspect of *lasser faire*. They corresponded with that simple and perhaps rather undignified verse which we sometimes quote :

“ A glorious thing is prudence, and they are useful friends,
 Who never make beginnings until they see the ends :
 But give us now and then a man, that we may make him king,
 Just to scorn the consequence and just to do the thing.”

And these people, whose forefathers you honor in your presence here, and in your thoughts to-night, had a business in hand that required haste and intensity and moral passion, and their mistakes were easier to forgive than the virtues of some other men. “Their desires,” says Bradford, “were set on the will of God, and to enjoy His ordinances, and they rested in Providence and knew whom they had believed.” Our slacker time is even unable to quote their texts correctly ; “I know in whom I have believed” is constantly said ; not so did they read it ; they said “We know *whom* we have believed,” and there is a celestial diameter between believing God and believing in God. Not only so. They had the prophetic instinct, an instinct that was cultivated and disciplined by the very ruggedness of their situation. I suppose that the cold of New England has had something to do with making New England reticence proverbial. It is not a tropical

climate, and fruits come up between the stones in the soil. It was a good answer the Maine man made to one who, coming from a Virginia or Maryland estate, and looking over this rugged land with the rocks cropping out of the soil, rocks with no showing in them of metal-bearing quality, said, "What do you raise here?" It was a good answer the rugged son of Maine made when he replied, "For one thing, we raise men." And the answer was quite sufficient, for it has the vindication of history. And if the training and discipline of savage and climate and unsympathetic soil did create a certain reserve of temper, a certain reticence of expression, a certain unresponsiveness to approach, it never dulled the edge of their initiative, nor turned back the spring of their purpose. And I ask you to remember, as sons of New England, when the reproach is made that you are not as my own Southern people are, spontaneous, responsive, easily kindled—I ask you to remember that an anthracite temperament, if difficult to kindle, makes a hot fire that lasts a long while. And remember also, in the review of your history, how, although the first vote that was ever cast in this country by an assembly against slavery was cast in 1688 by a little group of Quakers in Germantown, by which they sought to revenge themselves on the past and prove their love of liberty at the same time, it was not long before New England

learned the trick of it, and the fire of enthusiasm for liberty as for almost every other reform in this country, was kindled under the New England snows. Snow, when it lies upon the surface keeps warm the soil, feeds the roots of the coming harvest as it melts; and every enthusiasm that has burned well and long has had at least part of its fuel dug from under the New England snows.

Now, may I speak a word of exhortation, since we celebrate our traditions? Traditions are a background to throw the figure of the present into the foreground. And that is an unfortunate artist who paints his background so well that his figures melt into it. Fra Angelico painted his angels against a background of gold, but his angels were exceeding human; and there is a way of dealing with our traditions that coins them into the currency of the time, and there is a way which rehearses them until they become a creed as meaningless as any other, and he who knows his history at the expense of his activity has mistaken the virtues of his fathers for the performances of himself. Were they in earnest about the civic duties that awaited them? Before 1640 twenty thousand people had come into this land; they had a problem forced upon them by the frivolities to the north of them; Merrymount was not far to seek, and it was a different conception of liberty which Gorges and Brewster held. They were keen and hard, relentless and effective, and

their conception of their civic duty had no fluent lines but was angular and inflexible. Can we better that? Can we hold the great inheritance so lightly that because we are many we can abate the enthusiasm that moved them when they were few? Is it possible that being now eighty millions of a kaleidoscopic variety, so that in a single city of four millions it is like juxtaposition of contiguous tribes, is it possible that, being so many and various, we may better our inheritance of great purpose and claim each of us so small a pittance that it leaves us beggared of civic virtue? I know no word so sacred as the word "Society." The church gains its sanctity by being a segment cut out of society for a specific purpose. Society has been well defined as "an organism in which every cell has consciousness;" and the corollary of that proposition is inevitable; that the health of the tissue depends upon the health of the individual cell; and the civic problems of our time are met with a larger resource than our forefathers knew. Are they met with equal integrity and sacramental seriousness? The exhortation comes home to us to know whether we are the graves of God's mercies or whether we are to coin the principles of the past into the performances of to-day. The town meeting was as sacred in their thought as the church, and it was not a meaningless compliment when Emerson said of the elder Judge Hoar that "when he left the bench and sat down in

the town meeting honor came and sat down with him." And the New England towns which planted schools alongside of the churches and libraries alongside of the schools planted men over each who should be the best possible guarantee of their efficiency. I like to think of the time when no man could vote unless he was a communicant of the church. Such a condition would be impossible, even undesirable, now, but maybe it meant then that a man was dedicated to the common good. And I like to think of the time when they had to relax that bond and adopt their half-way covenant, or of the time when each man paid a percentage of his income for the maintenance of the church. It gave warrant to that witticism of Edward Everett Hale, when he said, replying to something Dr. Brooks said of Trinity Church: "Well, Dr. Brooks, you have built a nice chapel, don't call it a church; the congregational churches are the national church of America." Until the middle of the last century their maintenance was the warrant that they were part of the thought and interest of the community. These are pages of history turned. Can we better them? Can we place above the old obligation of a man to take the Lord's Supper before he takes his vote in hand a higher obligation, an obligation to feel that the vote itself is a sacrament? Against the relaxing of the bond, and saying that at least half the house must be represented in the

service of religion, can we not set a higher requirement? Can we not go further and say that marriage itself is a sacrament which binds to higher sanctities than the church can prescribe? When we speak of the ancient time when men's property was levied upon for support of the ministry of religion, can we not, now that that is passed and would be regarded as a tyranny, put a better thing in its place, and claim for the service of religion our entire selves? "See that thou make all things according to the pattern that I showed thee in the mount" is the command that the God whom he served sounded in the ears of the leader of God's people; and I would end as I begun, by the exhortation that we shall make our highest moments permanent, and our clearest vision constant, and that he who would build anything upon the earth shall find its inspiration in the moment when he was nearest heaven.

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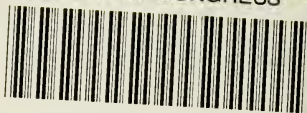
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