

W A Pitts

"THE LITTLE BROWN CHURCH IN THE VALE": ITS
AUTHOR AND ITS INSPIRATION.

BY ISABELLA POWERS.

THE AUTHOR

"You might read his beautiful biography written in the hearts of his friends; and heart biographies are the only true ones we know." Certainly this is true of Dr. William Savage Pitts, who long will live in the memory of all whom he has striven to help either by his music or his profession. He is descended from New England ancestry. His grandfather came from Bristol, England, and served as a soldier under Burgoyne. His father was born in Massachusetts, and served as a soldier in the war of 1812. From his mother he received a trace of Scotch. Her native state was Connecticut.

Of these parents Dr. Pitts writes: "My parents were typical New England people, strictly brought up in Puritan ways, which was a dominant force in their characters. They were strong and vigorous and free of any deleterious taint physically. My father died at the age of 80 years. My mother at 85." Into the home of Charles Pitts and Polly Green (Smith) Pitts on August 18, 1830, there came a tiny bit of humanity, the eighth child in a family of nine, who was to become known throughout the world as the author of "The Little Brown Church in the Vale." From childhood his musical ability was evident. His mother was a sweet singer and had much literary ability so she encouraged these God-given talents in her son. "Music is God's best gift to man, the only art of heaven given to earth, the only art of earth that we take to heaven. But music, like all our gifts, is given as in the germ. It is for us to unfold and develop by instruction and cultivation." This "germ" developed day by day through his boyhood in crude attempts to write the sounds by devices of his own. At the age of nineteen he began the "cultivation" with J. C. Ide, a graduate of the Handel and

Hayden Society of Boston. His studies included thorough bass, harmony and counterpoint. Today the doctor is still a student and lover of the art which "makes us feel something of the glory and beauty of God."

At nineteen he came to Wisconsin, and at twenty he began teaching vocal and instrumental music. He taught singing schools and brass bands, composing the music for the bands.

At the age of twenty-nine he married Ann Eliza Warren, daughter of Asahel and Eliza Ann (Robinson) Warren at Union, Wisconsin. From this union there came five children. Two died in infancy. The three living are Alice M., William Stanley and Kate B.

In 1857 he visited Iowa, and stopping in Bradford, Chickasaw county, the beautiful scenery of the Cedar Valley proved the inspiration for the widely known song, "The Little Brown Church in the Vale," the church at Bradford.

In 1862 he removed to Fredericksburg, where he remained forty-four years. The writer well remembers the cordial hospitality of that Fredericksburg home where the "latch string" was out to the homesick girl of nineteen, who began her career as school ma'am in this same village.

The profession of doctor appealed to him, and in February of 1868 he graduated from Rush Medical College, and continued in active practice until October, 1906. He was a hard-worked, sympathetic country physician. He knew his patients, their histories, their strength and weakness, physical and mental, as perhaps no city physician can know his own, and withal he loved them. A quotation from Sarah Orne Jewett's "The Country Doctor" applies extremely well to the comfort Dr. Pitts took to the sick room. "There was something singularly self-reliant and composed about him; one felt that he was the wielder of great power over the enemies, disease and pain."

In August, 1886, his first wife died, and in September, 1887, he married Mrs. M. A. Grannis of Earlville, Iowa. In 1906 Dr. Pitts and wife moved to Clarion, Iowa, where Mrs. Pitts died, June, 1909. In October, 1909, Dr. Pitts went to Brooklyn, N. Y., to spend the "sunset days" with his son, William

Stanley, chief clerk of the Transportation War Department in the Army Building.

Dr. Pitts is a Master Mason. He joined Bradford Lodge No. 129 A. F. and A. M. in the year 1864 or 1865. He holds a membership now in Mt. Horeb Lodge A. F. and A. M. No. 333, at Fredericksburg. Of this he was a charter member.

Besides the songs Dr. Pitts has written a Biographical History of Fredericksburg Township, and for years has corresponded for newspapers. He was mayor of Fredericksburg for seven years and was school treasurer for twenty-six years.

His sterling qualities he inherited from his farmer father. These caused him to join the Baptist church in Fredericksburg in 1871. In 1906 he joined the Congregational church of Clarion, because he believed in having a church home. Now he is a member of the Dyker Heights Congregational church, Brooklyn, N. Y. In May of this year, 1915, this church honored him by making him the delegate to the General State Conference of Congregational churches.

Being librarian at New Hampton, Chickasaw county, Iowa, I asked Dr. Pitts for an autograph copy of the song,¹ then later for his story of the writing of the song. The former hangs on the wall of the reading room of our library together with Dr. Pitts' picture and that of "The Little Brown Church in the Vale." The story in Dr. Pitts' handwriting has been bound and, with the introduction also written by him preceding it, is given below:

STORY OF THE SONG.

In the Cedar river valley, at the old town of Bradford, stands a little storm-beaten church, known as the "Little Brown Church in the Vale." Beautiful in situation, surrounded by and embowered with natural oaks, frescoed with memories, hallowed by associations, immortalized in song and story, it stands a monitor proclaiming the heaven-born song, "Glory to God in the Highest, and, On Earth, Peace, Good Will Toward Men."

For nearly fifty years the bell in its low-set tower has broken the Sabbath day stillness, its vibrant tones starting the echoes from wooded vale and prairie, calling the old man and his descendants

¹See fac simile on opposite page.

to this house of worship dedicated to "Him who doeth all things well," there to listen to the great truths that lead one's feet in the paths of righteousness; there to sing the songs that warm the heart like a day in June.

The majority of the first worshippers at this church in the vale have gone out of life. The few who remain are walking near the line of the Borderland, catching glimpses, through faith, of that "Land O' the Leal," that home of the soul.

Where are the children—those boys and girls who began their Sabbath school work in this little church? They are scattered like leaves on the tide. We meet some of them now and then. They have passed the meridian mark in life. We notice the silver threads in their hair. Do they love that little church? Ask them. With a light on their face that is worth remembering, they say, "I shall never forget the dear place."

Dear little, storm-beaten church, we grieve to think that thou must molder and decay; that the time will come when thy form will no more cast a shadow, when birds will chant requiems above thy dust.

"No man is born into the world whose work
Is not born with him; there is always work
And tools to work withal for those who will;
The man who stands with arms akimbo set,
Until occasion tells him what to do,
And he who waits to have his task marked out,
Shall die and leave his mission unfulfilled."

In the writing of this little brochure, it will be consonant to acknowledge that I believe in inherent gifts, gifts implanted by the Creator for special work along definite lines, and that the general character of the individual to whom these gifts are given will be in consonance with the work to be done.

"What are the wild waves saying,
Sister, the whole day long,
That ever amid our playing
I hear but the same low song."

As a boy, I was like the boy who ever amid his playing heard but the same low song. In the lap of the waves of the blue Ontario underneath the low pine on the shore, in the grand old woods, by the fireside, on the prairies, where the shadows come and go, in the golden sunset, in the twilight hour, in the whispering winds, in the silent watches by night, in the every-day toils of life, a thread of words and music was ever spinning, spinning some low sweet song.

"In the hush of the valley of silence
 I dream all the songs that I sing,
 And the music floats down the dim valley
 'Till each finds a word for a wing.
 That to men, like the dove of the deluge,
 The message of peace they may bring.

"But far out on the deep there are billows
 That never shall break on the beach,
 And I have heard songs in the silence
 That never shall float into speech.
 And I have had dreams in the valley
 Too lofty for language to reach."

This period of poetical and musical incubation had its time, then this gift, this inherent gift, righted itself for tangible work. Then perfected songs came forth, fresh and vigorous, came forth as the waters that for years have worked their way through earth and rock-crevice, 'till at last they burst forth from their secret chambers into the outer world, clear, pure and sparkling for the use of man.

Now do you ask how I came to write the song, "The Little Brown Church in the Vale"? How I came to write the songs, "Little Fred," "The Isles Beyond the River," "The Old Musician and His Harp," "Ally Ray," "Nellie Wildwood," "Angels Took Her Home," "Lilly Bell," "Our Brave Boys In Blue," "Sabbath Bells," "Nellie is Sleeping by the Rill," "Bonnie Katie," "Jimmie is My Name," and others? They are the legitimate children born of poesy and song.

Prophecy is said to be a declaration of something to come. I remember, when still a boy, of trying to write music before I knew how to divide melodies into proper measures or understood the rules of harmony sufficiently to write out simple chords. I was struggling with a simple melody, trying to get it into shape, but could not, and, laying the paper down, I said to myself, "The day will come when my music will be sung around the world." The song, "The Little Brown Church in the Vale," has made good the prophecy.

In the summer of 1857 I visited the town of Bradford, Iowa, and spent a week or more there. It was then a veritable bee-hive, in the way of business.

The town did not win me as much as the path along the ridge leading to Greenwood. It was the month of June and all nature was at her loveliest.

The day that I arrived I walked to Greenwood. It was near the close of the day, as the sun was going down behind the trees along the Cedar river. The oak trees were in full leaf and the prairie flowers were in bloom.

Nature's carpet of green was on every side, making the landscape beautiful to look upon. Nearly every day I strolled along over the same path, sitting down now and then, looking about to more thoroughly enjoy the scenery.

The grove where the "Little Brown Church" now stands was an attractive and lovely spot. Never from that day to this has it faded from my memory. The valley where Bradford had nestled down was then, and ever has been, a lovely spot to me. Even now, as I rise to the crest of the hill one mile or so to the east of the town, I gaze with enraptured vision, my eyes sweeping the valley from the "Little Brown Church" to enchanted nook, "Greenwood."

After going back to Wisconsin, I wrote the words and music of the song, "The Little Brown Church in the Vale." I made no use of it in public in Wisconsin. In the spring of the year of 1862 I came to Iowa, to Fredericksburg. I brought the song in manuscript with me.

The winter of 1864, through the earnest solicitations of the music-loving people of Bradford, I went there to teach a class in vocal music. We met at the brick building called the "Academy." Rev. J. K. Nutting was one of the class. Near the close of the term we went one evening to the building now known as the "Little Brown Church." The building was enclosed, but not finished. We improvised seats with boards. It was there I sang the song, the "Little Brown Church in the Vale," for the first time in public.

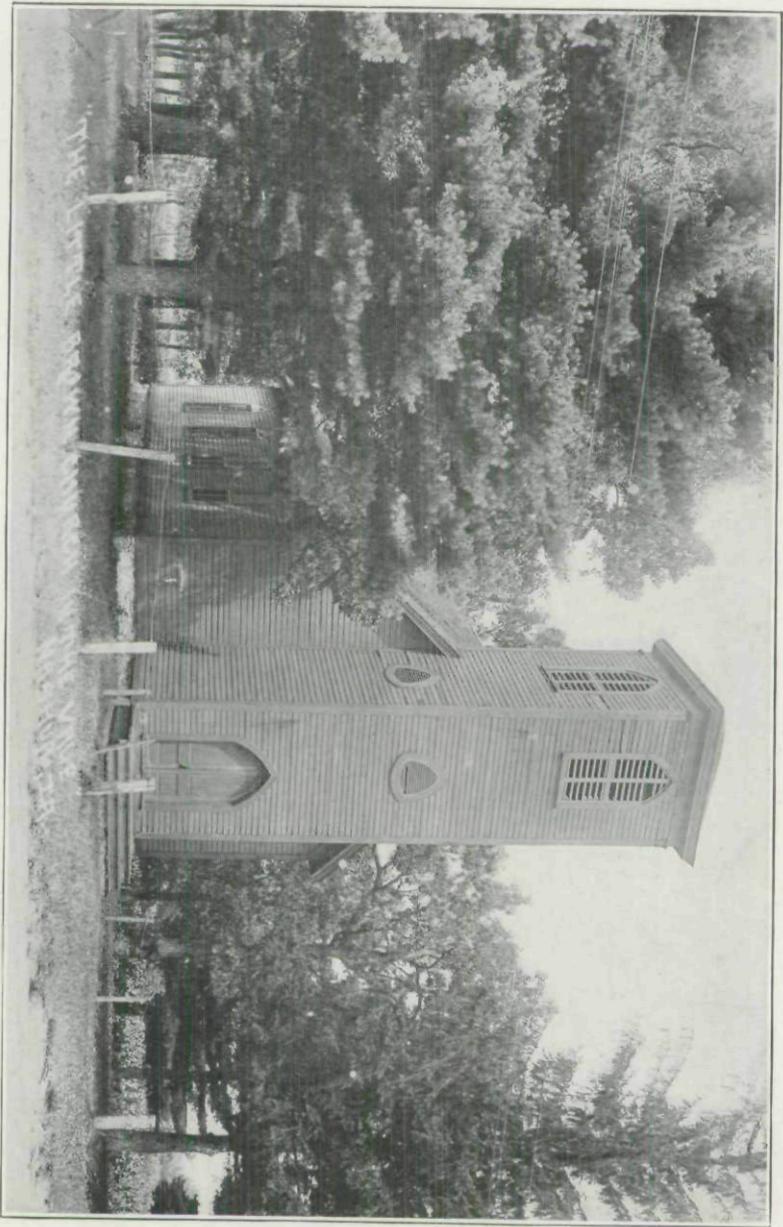
In the spring of 1865 I took the manuscript to Chicago and sold it to H. M. Higgins, on Randolph street.

The church was dedicated in 1865, just about the time the song was given to the world. The song at once became immensely popular and spread itself over the world like a benediction from on high. It was not long before the church at Bradford, as it now stands, began to be known and called the "Little Brown Church in the Vale," the church of the song. It has been so called, and ever will be, until time shall level it with the dust. Even then the loved spot will be revered. The song was the "Little Brown Church," the church was painted brown.

Under the circumstances, what more natural than that the little church at Bradford, Iowa, painted brown and the song, "The Little Brown Church in the Vale," should be wedded and known as one and the same. Some people may try to rob the little church of its fame, but as long as it stands it will be known as "The Little Brown Church in the Vale."

HISTORY OF BRADFORD CHURCH.

"The Iowa Band has supplied for the country the romance of home missions." While this Congregational church is not the direct outgrowth of this band, it is the outgrowth of the same staunch character which believed in the church home, and believed in building it out of the pittance that came from long hours of hard labor, the lot of the pioneer.



Bradford Congregational Church, Bradford, Cedarburg County Iowa, known as "The Little Brown Church in the Vale,"
In which was first sung the famous song of that title.

The church was organized November 4, 1855, Rev. O. Littlefield being the first pastor.

Sanford Billings was elected the first clerk and held that office until his death in 1886.

The following were the constitution and articles of incorporation:

Constitution.

Art. 1st. This Society shall be called the First Congregational Ecclesiastical Society of Bradford and have perpetual succession.

Art. 2d. The Object of this Society shall be to maintain the institution of the Gospel in connection with the First Congregational Church of Bradford.

Art. 3d. Any person who is a regular attendant upon public worship and annually contribute to the society for the support of the Gospel shall become a member by Subscribing to the Constitution and by laws.

Art. 4th. The officers of the Society shall consist of a Clerk and three Trustees to be chosen annually. Two of the trustees shall be members of the Congregational Church.

Art. 5th. The officers shall be chosen by ballot at the annual meeting. Should a vacancy occur it can be filled at any regular meeting.

Art. 6th. The Clerk shall keep the records of the Society and call all meetings of the Society by giving at least ten days' notice and at the expiration of his term of office he shall deliver up the Books to his successors.

Art. 7th. The Trustees shall hold all the property of the Society both personal and real. In their Corporate name they can sue and be sued. They shall dispose of the income of the Society according to the vote of the Society. They shall regulate and order the renting of the pews and report the condition of the Society at each annual meeting and whenever called for by the Society.

Art. 8th. Annual Meeting shall be on the 2d Tuesday of January.

Art. 9th. At the request of any five members with reasons for the same the clerk shall call a special meeting giving the object for which the meeting is called in his notice.

Art. 10th. The basis of Union between the Church and Society shall be to this intent. The Society shall hold the property, receive the income and make all pecuniary engagements, appropriation and payments. In calling a pastor the Society and the Church shall act as concurrent bodies, a majority of each being necessary to constitute a call. The Church nominating and the Society confirming or rejecting the nomination.

Art. 11th. This Constitution may be altered or amended by a vote of two-thirds present at the annual meeting, provided the

notice of the proposed alteration or amendment has been given in writing at any previous meeting.

Articles of Incorporation.

Art. 1st. The undersigned, Orrin Humeston, Walter Smith, L. C. Smith, J. E. Smith, Elmore Smith, Wm. D. Pomroy, S. A. Eastman, E. N. Palmer, S. S. Thomas, C. D. Johnson, E. H. Haskell, and their associates, hereby form themselves into a body Corporate for religious purposes under the name of The First Congregational Ecclesiastical Society of Bradford.

Art. 2d. Said body Corporate shall have Perpetual Succession.

Art. 3d. Said body may sue and be sued by its corporate name.

Art. 4th. The private property of the Members of said Corporate body shall not be liable for its Corporate debts.

Art. 5th. Said Corporate body shall have power to make contracts, acquire and transfer property, possessing the same power in such respects as private individuals may enjoy.

Art. 6th. Said body Corporate shall have power to establish by-laws and make all rules and regulations deemed expedient for the management of their affairs in accordance with law and not incompatible with an honest purpose.

L. S. THOMAS,
J. E. SMITH,
L. C. SMITH,
C. D. JOHNSON,
E. H. HASKELL,
ELMORE SMITH,
S. A. EASTMAN,
W. SMITH,
ORRIN HUMESTON,
E. N. PALMER.²

The church building was begun in 1862 and was finished and dedicated December 29, 1864. Rev. J. K. Nutting built the church and was pastor for eight years, resigning in 1870. He has a record as a church builder and in his eighties built a "Little Brown Church in the Glade," at Crystal Springs, Florida.

This is his account of the work:³

In the year 1859, when I became the youthful Missionary Pastor of the weak but very interesting Congregational Church at Bradford, Chickasaw County, Iowa, the vast network of railways, which now furnishes ready transportation to almost every farm in Iowa, was

²A of Miscellaneous Records, County Recorder's office, Chickasaw County, Iowa. Filed for record December 7, 1859.

³Nutting's Two Little Brown Churches in Story and Song. 1914.

in its infancy. One line had reached as far inland as Iowa City—only to see the state capital quickly removed to its present normal location. Weak local companies had also made beginnings from various points on "The River;" but these had hardly more than reached the edge of the vast prairies which make up the now populous and wonderful empire called Iowa. In general, all transportation was dependent upon horses or oxen; in consequence, all interior commerce was heavily handicapped, except that which supplied the need of the constant influx of new settlers, who brought money, and who must have food and the other necessities.

Up to, and until in 1857, this sort of trade, with the sale of land, had induced boom conditions. Everybody had money, and many seemed to become wealthy.

Then, without warning, came the great financial crash of that year—an experience never to be forgotten by any one who passed through it. Money disappeared as by magic. Credit expired. We were thrown back upon mere barter—the clumsy method of half-civilized peoples. Many who had supposed themselves wealthy, now often found themselves hard pressed to obtain daily food.

The next year had been worse rather than better. Not only were the effects of the "crash" felt more than ever, but the season proved extremely unfavorable. Rain fell in torrents almost daily from January until July. Very little planting or sowing could be done, and what was sown brought almost nothing. Low ground became submerged, high land a mere sponge. Only here and there some small field, favorably situated, ripened a little early corn. I saw men trying to cultivate corn in which the weeds were higher than the corn. They had provided their horses with guards of leather for their breasts and fore-legs, because the great weeds had worn through their hides and formed dangerous sores.

There was no money to import supplies. If there had been, the undrained roads and the unbridged streams made transportation almost impossible. The staple living of most families was corn meal, with very poor, sour sorghum-syrup. In after years the mere mention of either would bring wry faces. To many, even shoes and stockings were a luxury not to be thought of. Men often wore "packs" of raw-hide, stripped from the hind-legs of butchered cattle, in lieu of boots. In the first year of my pastorate, I received from my people, in money, exactly four dollars—from a lady who had just come from the East.

Yet by that time there was no serious suffering. Crops in 1859 were good, and we lived well. My salary was paid in kind, as were also all fees and perquisites. I never desired any funeral fees, but when on one occasion, after a trip of fifteen miles, and a whole day with my team, I was presented with four large pumpkins as a fee I accepted them—the humor of it overcame reluctance. Wedding fees were paid in beans, in beef, or rarely, in apples, which had to

be wagoned from Missouri—we had none as yet in our part of Iowa. (There is still one bushel of such fruit due me—the wedding having been performed on credit.)

In making change, owing to the absence of small coin, we used to write the amount, "five cents," or "ten cents," on a scrap of paper, and sign the debtor's name. Merchants used pasteboard "coins," punched out with a gun-wad punch.

Yet, as I said, we lived well. My salary was paid in kind, at prices of which I could not complain. Wheat at thirty-six cents per bushel—mill close at hand. Best cuts beef, six cents per pound. Potatoes never more than twenty-five cents per bushel—after planting time in spring often given away. Other farm products on the same scale. In winter, pork, in the carcass, frozen, could sometimes be had at one cent per pound. A threatened thaw would generally overwhelm the parsonage with "spare-ribs." Many (I with the rest) had sugar-camps in the forest, and made our own sugar. Others raised sorghum.

We lived well. But how should we ever build a church, which, besides all that we could do in the way of labor or material, must cost at least a round thousand in cash?

That we greatly needed one, there was no question. We had never any permanent place of worship. A log-house, a lawyer's office, a hotel dining room, a school house far to one side; an abandoned store, without windows or door, and which had been occupied all winter by a flock of sheep; we thought of the labors of Hercules, and wished we had his river to turn through the room. But we got it fairly clean, and used it till the cold drove us out. And all these things made it more and more evident that WE MUST HAVE A CHURCH!

Expecting such emergencies, I had made architecture part of my preparatory studies. I now drew plans, which were pronounced satisfactory, and began to "talk church" in good earnest. Some discouraged the attempt. "We haven't the first dollar to do it with," was their lament. But I showed them that we had the big forest close at hand, stone and lime within reach, and all the labor that would be needed. All that we lacked was courage and faith.

The courage and faith began to come. I have always been sorry that I did not keep memoranda of dates along then—but I did not. I only remember the order in which the several steps of our progress were made.

Mr. Joseph Bird gave us the first definite advance, by donating the village lots on which we built. His gift was promptly accepted, and a "bee" was called for, to quarry and deliver stone for the foundation. That accomplished, we all became for the nonce "free and accepted masons," for the building of the wall. Only one of us had ever laid stone—Brother Leander Smith had built stone fences. His work can yet be identified, at the rear of the building—as he

laid every stone "slanting," as he had done in laying stone fence. But all our work has stood firm for fifty years.

Mr. Joseph Bird again gave us a new start by offering us some of his fine rock-elm trees for sills. They were procured, hewn, and placed upon the walls. Alas—there they lay, for many long months.

The reasons for this I cannot quite recall, but I think it was due to the diversion of attention by the rolling thunders of coming war. For—how little we realized it—we were beginning the horrible four years of the Civil War. All else was for the time forgotten.

How patriotic we were! All men and boys—with very few exceptions—were for enlisting on the moment. A military company was formed, and we proceeded to learn the art of war. Only one person among us had any, even slight, knowledge of the manual of arms—the venerable Captain John Smith. How he had come by his title, I never knew—we supposed, by way of service in the War of 1812. At that time he was living near Malone, N. Y., and may have had some hand in the fighting on Lake Champlain. The Company chose him for drill-master. But when he gave the order "Shoulder-your firelocks!" the uproarious laughter with which the company responded so hurt the dear old man's feelings that he threw up the task, and the drill went no farther. A few weeks later, however, many of the same persons were enrolled in earnest, and marched away; and several of them gave their lives for their country. Able-bodied men became rare in our village and county, and only at the very last of the war was the draft resorted to, and then, only to raise two or three men to fill out our quota. Our local physician died, and all the other doctors in the county (I think) went to the war. I, perforce, became not only a spiritual adviser, but an authority as well in medicine. I watched with many a soldier returned from the front in dangerous illness, some of whom I buried. I sometimes dug graves, and then officiated at the burial; and twice I helped to make coffins.

I think it was the fall after our boys marched away, that Mr. Eastman, who always "raised the minister's salary," came to me with a sad countenance, to say that he had done his best, but that instead of being able to offer me the same (or more) for the coming year, the church must offer me fifty dollars less. This meant that while prices had already risen at least one-half, I must try to live on \$450 instead of \$500.

Here was certainly ground for serious thought. With an invalid wife, needing expensive help, and with reason to expect family expenses to increase naturally—I knew that not only had the cost of living risen one-half already, but that it would certainly rise higher and higher as long as the war should continue. Gold would continue to "go up," and by great strides. Yet I was asked to accept less salary than ever before.

(Looking back, I often wonder how it was that in those days we never spoke or thought of our paper money as falling in value—but always of gold as rising. Was this a trick of those in power, or did it merely happen?)

I finally asked my friend just one question: "Do the people really wish me to remain their pastor?"

"No question about that," was the reply. "And every one wishes we could raise your salary, instead of lowering it."

"In that case I will stay—on one condition—that you shall take hold with me—in spite of everything—to build our church."

To this he gladly assented. And not long after, I took him in my cutter to interview Mr. Watson, who owned a large tract of the best timber in the great forest adjoining the village. Mr. Watson was not a member of the church, but I felt sure, on account of certain circumstances connected with the illness and death of a beloved daughter of his, that he would feel kindly toward myself and the church.

At once, learning my errand—I seem to see him as he takes his axe, and plows through the deep snow, leading the way to the forest. And arrived there, instead of selecting a few trees for us, as I had modestly suggested, he eagerly marked enough of the very finest,—splendid red-oaks, straight as an arrow, and without a limb for (I should think) fifty feet up—enough to supply all the dimension-timber and rough boards for the whole church.

We went home rejoicing; and as soon as the news spread, Deacon Sanford Billings and his son-in-law, Mr. John Heald, mustered a force of choppers, and felled and cut to proper lengths the marked trees. Walter and Elmer Smith, sons of Captain John Smith, owned the saw-mill, at the edge of the woods. But their yard was so crowded already, that it was June before they could receive our trees. Then William Pomroy and I, with two yoke of oxen, drew the logs in, and they were sawn to order, free of all charge.

Soon the lumber was on the ground, and a fresh force of men, with Newton Palmer as foreman, quickly had the frame up and roughly inclosed. I remember that I was so foolish, when I saw the building up and roofed, that a lump came in my throat and my eyes got full. And so far we had not expended a single dollar of money—all had been freely given.

But now we were up against it, surely. All the rest of the needed material must be paid for in money, and at war prices; and must be wagoned from the River at McGregor, a distance of eighty miles. And while most of us now had some money, such as it was, the cost of living had so increased that we were really poorer than ever. We gave, to our power and beyond; but the aggregate made no show as compared with the need.

Was it mere chance? Just then I happened (?) to think of a certain famous divine and author, by name the Reverend Doctor

John Todd, at that time pastor of a very wealthy church at Pittsfield, Mass. Doctor Todd's first pastorate had been at Groton, my early home, and my parents and grandfather had been his loving friends and helpers. And his last public act (as I had been told) in closing his work there, had been to baptize me, the youngest of my father's twelve children. I remembered once hearing him, on a visit of his to his old parish, a wonderful sermon, full of word-pictures—I can never forget it.

I wrote him. I told him whose son I was, how much my parents had told me of him, and how he had put upon me the seal of baptism. The babe he had named was now himself a pastor, and—well, I told him what we were doing, how far we had gotten on, and the straits we were now in. Then I asked Our Father to give us "favor in the eyes of this man."

Very soon, I received a letter from him—I have it still—full of feeling, full of kind remembrance of my parents—and inclosing a check for one hundred and forty dollars—with a hint of more to follow. This money, he wrote, was "honey from white clover, very precious—the gift of the children of his Sunday School."

And so began a friendship between the famous doctor and the obscure backwoods preacher, which ended only with his death. And it came about, strangely, that in his last sickness he called me to care for him, and for many days and nights I had the privilege at least of showing him my love and gratitude.

Later than the first gift came others, and he helped us besides to secure aid from our Church Building Society, which was then in its infancy. And so we finished the building. And just then, being a delegate to the First National Council of our Church (at Boston, in 1865) the good doctor sent money to have my wife come with me.

We spent a delightful week at his home. He called together his friends, and in a beautiful little service, baptized my little daughter, as he had baptized myself more than thirty years before. Among many kindnesses, he suggested to his people that "there was an excellent place for a good bell," in our little church tower. Accordingly, Mr. Thomas Cole, then a wealthy manufacturer of paper collars, and "Catherine, his wife," (as the inscription reads on the bell,) sent me over to Meneely's famous bell foundry at Troy, N. Y., to select such a bell as I wished. There was then no church bell in Chickasaw County, and its coming was an event. It was rung almost continuously all the way from Dubuque until it reached its destination. It still hangs in its tower, and is beloved of all the country-side.

The Dedication.

This took place in December, 1864—the exact date is lost. In those days the dedication of a small country church was not a great

occasion. And, of course, none of us dreamed that our little church would ever become in any sense famous. The neighboring churches and ministers were invited, and the different parts were assigned.

But the day proved extremely unfavorable, and of those invited, only one minister was able to attend. This was Rev. D. N. Bordwell, then pastor at Charles City, about twelve miles up the Cedar River—the nearest important town. He preached the sermon, to a small audience. I think he also offered the Dedicatory Prayer. I have been able to find no record—probably the church clerk considered it a failure, of which the less said the better.

I continued as pastor about four years longer, during which not only my pastoral work went on happily, but I succeeded in establishing Bradford Academy, bringing with me on my return from New England, my nephew, Prof. W. P. Bennett, as its principal. Beginning in a small way, this school grew until the people provided for it a good brick building, in which it did a notable work for many years, elevating the standard of education in all the region, so that it is claimed that from no equal district in Iowa have so many young people obtained a college education. And the impetus so given has continued, though the competition of the free high schools in the end took away its constituency, as it had no endowment. The semi-centennial of the Academy was celebrated by its friends and alumni, in connection with that of the church, though it had long ceased to exist. I speak of it, because it grew out of the church.

By 1867 it had become evident that the hoped-for railway would not touch Bradford, but would build up the newer town of Nashua, about a mile and a half distant, on the main Cedar—Bradford lying on the Little Cedar, which there flowed through the same "vale." The old town had two possible mill-sites, one of which had long been in use. But Nashua had a larger water-privilege, on the main stream. After a pastorate of nearly nine years, I reluctantly resigned my charge. One of my latest acts was to assist in organizing a church at Nashua, where I had from the first also preached regularly. This church gradually absorbed the older organization.

Other pastors succeeded me at Bradford, but gradually the population decreased, until in the course of years the little church stood almost alone in the fields, and finally its sweet bell became silent, except when some old settler was to be buried from the church, or upon some extraordinary occasion.

It is remarkable that both men connected with this historical spot, Rev. J. K. Nutting, the builder, and Dr. W. S. Pitts, the author of the song, are both alive and both over "eighty years young." Both sent greetings to the jubilee celebration in June, 1914.

During the early life of the church the following pastors were leaders in the work, following Mr. Nutting: Rev. R. J. Williams, Rev. Alpheus Graves, Rev. J. M. Hudson, Rev. L. D. W. Boynton, Rev. T. J. Reed and Rev. N. L. Packard. Mr. Packard resigned in 1887, since which time no regular pastor has preached, although the pulpit has been supplied much of the time by the pastors of the Nashua Congregational church, which is only two miles away. A Sunday school has been maintained with the exception of very short intervals during all these years.

One by one the members of the church withdrew their memberships or went to their rewards until Mrs. Sanford Billings alone remained. She would never take her membership from this church, and her friends would laughingly say to her: "Why grandma, you are the Little Brown Church in the Vale." But in May of 1911 she, too, was crowned.

In June, 1913, the church took on new life and was again placed on the map of Congregational churches with a membership of thirty. It is now known as the Bradford Branch of the Nashua Congregational church.

In June, 1914, a jubilee celebration was held. Near the church had stood a building known as Bradford Academy. So the jubilee included a reunion of the former students, as well as the children of the old members and of the old constituency of the church. A large crowd came together, some thirteen different states being represented. People who had not met for forty years renewed old friendships.

An interesting program was carried out. Wednesday evening, June 10th, Supt. P. A. Johnson of Grinnell preached on the theme, "The Vitality, Fertility and Fruitfulness of the Church." Mrs. Rena Bowers gave some very interesting reminiscences. On the following day the church yard was the scene of the picnic dinner. This was followed by an address by J. F. Grawe, editor of the *Waverly Independent*, on "Influence of Old Academy Teachers." Mrs. Irving Fisher of Allison recounted the struggles of early days in connection with church and school. Hon. J. H. Trewin of Cedar Rapids, a student of early academy days, told of the influence which

had been exerted by the Academy, which though now past history, still lives in immortal influence.

In the evening Rev. Arthur Graves, a grandson of a former pastor of the church preached on "Making Christ King," and Dr. W. W. Gist, of Cedar Falls, closed the celebration by pointing out the opportunities which still open to this church in serving the religious interests of the community. The splendid music was furnished by the Nashua church.

The Lord passes on the blessings as well as the iniquities of the fathers unto the third and fourth generation, for the central figure in the activities of "The Little Brown Church" in this year of 1915, is James Manly Heald, the grandson of the first clerk, Sanford Billings, and the last member, Mrs. Sanford Billings.

SIGOURNEY—HOW PRONOUNCED.

The county seat of the adjoining county of Keokuk is the namesake of one of the most gifted of American women, and the common pronunciation as if it were spelled Si-gur-ney, placing the entire accent on the second syllable, has always sounded harsh and unpleasant. Wishing to correct this error, we recently addressed a note to Mrs. Sigourney in relation to the matter, intimating our impression that the accent should be entirely on the first syllable. The following is her answer:

Hartford, Conn., March 18th, 1858.

My Dear Sir:

In reply to yours of the 6th ult. with regard to the pronunciation of the name of Sigourney, I assure you that your own opinion and usage are right in placing the accent entirely on the *first* syllable. I have sometimes heard the stress of voice laid on the second, as you mention often occurs at the West, but it is incorrect.

With best wishes for the success of your periodical and the prosperity of your beautiful State, I am,

Respectfully yours,

L. H. S.

(From *Oskaloosa Herald*.)

Sigourney, Iowa, *Life in the West*, Feb. 17, 1859.

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.