

## CHAPTER XXX.

Episcopal Church and Society.

TRADITION is the only source, from which anything has been ascertained respecting the first rise of the Episcopal church in Norwich. From thence we learn that the first church of England men in the place were Thomas Grist and Edmund Gookin, who were "allowed as inhabitants" in 1726. They resided upon the town plot. Mr. Grist was born in 1700, and in 1721, married Ann Birchard. Mr. Gookin was about the same age.

The year 1722 is the date given to the existence of Episcopacy as an order, in Connecticut, though it was first introduced by the Rev. Mr. Muirson, a missionary from the "Society for propagating the Gospel in foreign parts," at Stratford, in 1706. An Episcopal church was established at New London, in 1725, principally through the exertions of the Rev. Matthew Graves, who may also be considered as the founder of the churches in Norwich and Hebron. This gentleman was a missionary from the "Society for promoting Christian Knowledge," formed at London in 1698. It is not known how his acquaintance with Mr. Grist of Norwich, commenced, but he frequently visited him. Gradually, and at first, privately, a little band of ten or a dozen persons were collected on such occasions, among whom the ordinances of the church were administered. In this part of the town they never had a regular minister or a house for worship, but the Gookin and Grist family, until their extinction during the present generation, were faithful and devoted adherents of the church. Mr. Grist himself lived to be very aged, his three daughters died unmarried, Anna in 1812, aged 88; Hannah in 1815, aged 86, and Molly, in 1824, aged 83. Anna, the last of the Gookin family in Norwich, was also a spinster, and died in 1810, aged 80. About the year 1732, the Rev. Ebenezer Punderson, a Congregational minister of Groton, declared for the Church of England, and crossed the Atlantic to be re-ordained. On his return, he organized a church in Norwich, Long Society, at the village of Poquetanuck, which has ever since existed, though it has always been small, and seldom able to support a pastor of its own. This church was formed about 1738. Mr. Punderson and Mr. Graves frequently preached at private houses in other parts of Norwich, and by degrees, a respectable society was gathered in Chelsea. A regular church organization took place about the year 1745. This infant church was founded and nourished by the united labors of Graves, Punderson and Seabury, of New London.

Jan. 7, 1746, a meeting was held at the Townhouse, to decide matters relative to the erection of an edifice "for the service of Almighty God, according to the Liturgie of the Church of England, as by law established."

*Rev. Mr. Punderson, Moderator.*

*Capt. Benajah Bushnell, Treasurer.*

*Capt. Isaac Clarke, ~  
Mr. Thomas Grist, Building Committee. Mr. Elisha Hide.*

Capt. Bushnell had previously presented ground for the site, "at the north-east end of Waweequa's Hill, near the Old Landing place," and a subscription was presented, which had been circulated, and contained eighty-seven names; the sum subscribed, £678. The greatest amount by one individual, was £50, by Andrew Galloway. The three gentlemen who formed the building committee subscribed £40 each. Mr. Punderson afterwards collected in Rhode Island, £138, and Capt. Bushnell in Boston, £178. All this was probably Old Tenor money, or Bills of Credit, of reduced value.

The land and the church, when erected, were conveyed by deed to the committee, in trust-

"For the use of the 'Society for propagating the Gospel in foreign parts,' and their successors forevermore, to be appropriated for an Episcopal church and church-yard for the benefit of an Episcopal minister and members of said church, and for no other use, intent or purpose whatsoever."

The consideration money was five shillings, and possession and seisin were given, by delivering to the Committee in the usual manner, "turf and twig."

In 1750, the church was in a condition to allow of public worship. The number of pew holders was twenty-eight. They built their own pews and held them as their proper estate. The first church officers were:-

Capt. Benajah Bushnell, } Wardens  
Capt. Joseph Tracy,     }  
Capt. Isaac Clarke,  
" Thomas Grist, Vestry men.  
" Daniel Hall,  
Elisha Hide, Clerk of the Church.  
Phineas Holden, Society Clerk.

In 1760, a subscription was raised for Mr. John Beardslee, "towards his inoculation and going to England for orders that he may preach in the churches of England, at Norwich and Groton." An engagement was at the same time entered into with him, to pay the annual sum of £33, towards his support, when he should become their minister, which he did in the spring of 1763. The number of male communicants in the Chelsea church was, at this time, about twenty.

The Groton church mentioned, is the one already alluded to in the village of Poquetannuck. That village lies at the head of a creek or cove, which runs out of the Thames about four miles below the Landing. It was early settled, being considered a fine location for fishing, building small sea-craft, and exporting wood and timber. It now contains about forty dwelling houses. A part of it lies in Groton, and it was within the bounds of that town that the Episcopal church was built. It has been generally dependent upon the Norwich church for the administration of the ordinances.

In 1767, alot of land was given for a Glebe by Mrs. Zerviah Bushnell, and conveyed by deed to the " Society for propagating the Gospel in foreign parts." A glebe house was built, but we soon afterwards lose sight of Mr. Beardslee. In 1768, an agreement was made with John Tyler, of Wallingford, Conn., by which £60 sterling money of Great Britain, was advanced to him, to defray the expenses of a voyage to England to receive ordination; he, on his part, engaging to return and officiate as their priest, at a salary of £30 per annum. The money was raised by subscription, and the list contains eighty names.

Mr. Tyler returned the next year, and became rector of the church. This gentleman had been educated in Congregationalism, but after embracing the doctrines of the Church of England, he prepared for holy orders, under the care of Dr. Johnson, of Stratford.

The persecution of the Episcopalians in our country during the revolutionary struggle, lies like a blot upon the bright shield of patriotism. Whether Tories or not, they were all suspected of tourism, and the clergy in an especial manner were obliged to endure a thousand little domestic harassings, alarming threats and destruction of property. Most of them were forbidden to officiate as priests, either publicly or privately, and their churches were shut up by order of the magistracy. The church in Chelsea was closed for three years, through fear of popular excitement. In 1774, a subscription had been taken up for a porch, steeple and bell, to be added to the church; but the project was suspended until 1780. No entry was made on the records of the church from April, 1776, to April, 1779. But it is remembered, that during this time, Mr. Tyler held divine service in his own house, and was never molested in the performance., He was perhaps treated with greater indulgence than others, on account of the well known benevolence of his character and the liberality of his sentiments. Family influence likewise was in his favor; his father-in-law, Isaac Tracy Esq., being deacon of the Congregational Church, and of unsuspected patriotism. Mr. Tyler was never once personally abused during the conflict, but he was frequently vexed with petty depredations upon his property. At one time, he was afraid to drink the water of his own well. The congregation at this period had dwindled to a very small number. Often the services were performed with an audience of not more than fifteen or twenty persons.

Whether the title of "Christ's Church in Chelsea", was held from the first is not known; the designation does not appear upon the records until 1785.

In 1790, a new church was built upon land given by Mr. Phineas Holden. This was conveyed by deed, not to the S. P. G. F. P. as the old one had been, but to Trustees, "for the use of the Protestant Episcopal Church of England."

One hundred and thirty pounds towards building the church were raised, besides subscriptions of labor. The building committee were-

Maj. Ebenezer Whiting,	Barzillai Davison,
Benajah Denison,	James Christie.

In 1791 the owners of the pews in the old church relinquished their rights, and here for the first time appear the names of persons now upon the stage of life, viz: Christopher Vail and Cushing Eells. The pews in the new church were sold at public auction, and the money applied to parochial uses. There were thirty purchasers to the pews, of whom not one now remains alive.

May 19, 1791, the new church was solemnly" dedicated to the worship of Almighty God according to the liturgy of the Church of England, accommodated to the civil constitution of these American States," by the R. R. Dr. Seabury, Bishop of Connecticut.

Ebenezer Whiting, *Warden*  
Ebenezer Huntington, *Warden*  
Jabez Huntington, *Society Clerk*

Mr. Tyler's salary was at this time £60, and in 1794 it was increased to £80. He had, moreover, liberty of absence every fourth Sunday, at Poquetannuck, and received a small stipend from the church there.

With the exception of the political jealousy during the Revolutionary contest, the Episcopalians and Congregationalists of Norwich have never exhibited any acrimony against each other. On the contrary, social intercourse has been generally maintained, irrespective of denominational bounds, and the two sects have in many instances interchanged civilities, in a truly courteous and Christian spirit.

At a very early period we find that the Episcopal Church employed the Congregational collector to collect Mr. Tyler's rates. Invitations have sometimes been cordially given to the Episcopalians to celebrate their festivals in the larger edifices of the Congregationalists, which have been cheerfully accepted; and in two instances at least, when the latter have been by sudden disasters deprived for a season of a place of worship, the doors of Christ's Church have been freely opened to them. One instance from the records may be given.

“At a legal meeting of the Episcopal Parish of Christ's Church, in Norwich, on Wednesday, Feb. 19, 1794, Thomas Mumford, Moderator,

Voted, that this meeting, taking into consideration that the Presbyterian church in this place, of which the Rev. Walter King is Pastor, are destitute of a convenient place in which to attend public worship, their meeting-house having been lately destroyed by fire, do consent to accommodate said Presbyterian society until Easter Monday, 1795, as follows: the Rev<sup>d</sup> John Tyler, our present pastor, to perform divine service one half the day on each Sabbath, and the Rev. Walter King, pastor of said Presbyterian congregation, to perform divine service the other half of said Sabbath, alternately performing on the first part of the day.”

For this kind and considerate courtesy, the obliged party passed a vote of acknowledgment and thanks, which was inserted upon the records of both societies. The offer was accepted, and this amicable arrangement lasted for three months.

Mr. Tyler died January 20, 1823, in the eighty-first year of his age. He was an interesting preacher; his voice sweet and solemn, and his eloquence persuasive. The benevolence of his heart was manifested in daily acts of courtesy and charity to those around him. He studied medicine in order to benefit the Poor, and to find out remedies for some of those peculiar diseases to which no common specifics seemed to apply. His pills, ointments, extracts, and syrups, obtained a great local celebrity. During the latter years of his life, he was so infirm as to need assistance in the performance of his functions. Mr. Clark was his colleague for three years, and Mr. Paddock the last year before his death.

Mr. Tyler was succeeded by the Rev. Seth B. Paddock who officiated as Rector until the summer of 1844. Salary \$800, together with interest on the sale of the Glebe house and lot, which was \$100 more.

Mr. Paddock, after resigning his rectorship, took charge of the Episcopal Academy, in Cheshire.

The Rev. William F. Morgan was consecrated Rector in September, 1844.

In 1828 a new church was erected; the old one having fallen into decay, and its dimensions becoming too limited for the increasing audience. The whole cost of the new edifice, together with the organ and furniture, was \$10,500. More than half of this was raised by voluntary contributions. The most liberal donors were Mr. Richard Adams and Mr. Jedediah Huntington. The former gave \$600 and the latter \$500. It stands a few rods west of the old church, between the middle and upper streets. It is built of stone, in the gothic style; its dimensions sixty-five feet by fifty-two. It was consecrated by the Rev. Thomas C. Brownell, the diocesan Bishop, July 29, 1829.

The deed of the Glebe house lot having been executed in favor of the S. P. G. F. P., it could not be alienated without taking some legal measures to obtain a title. A petition was therefore presented to the General Assembly, in 1835, who passed an act vesting the property in the Society.

Mr. Tyler is the only one who has died Rector of this church. His monumental stone bears this inscription:

“Here lies interred the earthly remains of the Rev. John Tyler, for fifty-four years Rector of Christ's Church, in this city. Having faithfully fulfilled his ministry, he was ready to be dissolved, and to be with Christ. His soul took its flight from this vale of misery January 20, 1823, in the eighty-first year of his age.”